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Conflict Management and Conflict Resolution in Multicultural Teams in
NGOs in Vienna: A Case Study Approach

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Abstract

Diese Masterarbeit untersucht Konfliktmanagement- und Lösungsstrategien innerhalb multikultureller NGOs mit Sitz in Wien. Sie befasst sich mit dem Verständnis darüber, wie diese Organisationen, welche mit diversen kulturellen Hintergründen und idealistischen Zielen arbeiten, Konflikte wahrnehmen, den Einfluss dieser Konflikte auf die Teamarbeit und deren Lösung. Der Fokus liegt auf den internen Strategien und der Rolle externer Unterstützung, sowie darauf, wie kulturelle Unterschiede die Dynamik von Konflikten beeinflussen. Der theoretische Teil der Arbeit beleuchtet verschiedene Methoden und Instrumente des Konfliktmanagements im Kontext multikultureller Teams in NGOs. Die Forschung basiert auf einem empirischen Ansatz, welcher semi-strukturierte Interviews mit Mitarbeitern und Führungskräften multikultureller NGOs sowie Experten, die auf Konfliktlösung in NGOs spezialisiert sind, umfasst. Die Studie untersucht dabei Praktiken des Konfliktmanagements, von NGOs angewandten Methoden und den Einfluss kultureller Unterschiede auf Konfliktodynamiken. Weiteres wird die Thematik von externer Beratung und Unterstützung bei der Bewältigung und Prävention von Konflikten aufgegriffen. Anthropologische Perspektiven unterstreichen die Bedeutung der kulturellen Kontextualisierung von Konflikten, indem sie Machtstrukturen und strukturelle Ungleichgewichte untersuchen. Die Arbeit zielt darauf ab, theoretische Konzepte mit praktischen Anwendungen zu verbinden und Empfehlungen zur Verbesserung von Konfliktmanagementpraktiken in multikulturellen NGOs zu geben.

This master's thesis examines conflict management and resolution strategies within multicultural NGOs based in Vienna. It addresses how these organizations operate with diverse cultural backgrounds and idealistic goals, while focusing on the emergence of conflicts, their impact on teamwork and their resolution. The research is grounded in an empirical approach, using semi-structured interviews with employees and managers from multicultural NGOs, as well as experts who specialize in conflict resolution within NGOs. The study examines conflict management practices employed by NGOs and the impact of cultural differences on conflict dynamics. It also assesses the effectiveness of external consulting and support addressing and mitigating conflicts. Anthropological perspectives emphasize the impact of cultural contextualization in conflicts, examining power structures and structural imbalances. The thesis aims to bridge theoretical concepts with practical applications, offering recommendations for enhancing conflict management practices in multicultural NGO settings.

Keywords: Conflict Management, Multicultural NGOs, Conflict Resolution, Empirical Study, Cultural Diversity, External Support, Conflict Prevention

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Introduction

"From a factual point of view, conflicts are merely indicators of a need for clarification and could provide an impetus for improvements". (Glasl)

NGOs are often perceived as conflict solvers, but what is the experience of working within an NGO, striving for the optimal and most effective utilization of all resources for a greater cause? How are conflicts resolved within these organizations? Moreover, how do these large organisations, operating internationally with an idealistic aim to effect change and safeguard the world, navigate their interactions?

Moreover, how do employees of these expansive organizations, which operate globally and driven by idealistic ambitions to improve and safeguard the world, interact with each other? How are individual needs and culture considered? How are communications and conflicts handled? What are the essential factors for ensuring cooperation and resolving conflicts within such extensive NGO networks to ensure efficient and constructive collaboration?

Globalization processes, encompassing global markets, migration, mass communication, and mass tourism, significantly influence social interactions between employees of companies. As organizations expand their presence internationally, there is a growing need to engage with diverse cultures and to adapt established leadership concepts, conflict management and communication to the multicultural environment. Furthermore, anthropological research highlights the importance of the cultural contextualization of conflicts, the analysis of power structures, the consideration of structural imbalances. This theoretical perspective provides a comprehensive framework for addressing the challenges, dynamics and solutions in the field of conflict management in NGOs. This means going beyond pure interactions and recognize the cultural contexts, meanings and symbolic dimensions of conflicts. The way in which conflicts are interpreted by the parties involved has a decisive impact on the dynamics and possible solutions. As this aspect hasn't been extensively explored in theory, it serves as the foundation for this master's thesis. The research question- What kinds of conflicts occur in multicultural teams in NGOs and how are these conflicts managed successfully? - along with relevant sub-questions, are addressed through a qualitative study employing semi-structured online and face-to-face interviews. To maximize the information content for both theory and practice, people with different experiences, cultural backgrounds and positions were selected from various international NGOs. The study is intended to provide a meaningful contribution to current and practical approaches to conflict management in international NGOs.

Relevance of the topic:

The question how disputes and conflicts emerge among different individuals, along with their effects, consequences, and opportunities, is of particular interest. Additionally, exploring how conflicts can be resolved in the most efficient and sensible manner, or understanding the outcomes if no solution is attained, is essential. Moreover, understanding the steps that facilitate conflict resolution and individual management of such situations is central.

Furthermore, I have attended university courses on conflict management and enjoy reading books on communication and conflict management. That is why I have also been called in by friends or colleagues to help resolve conflict situations. These experiences may have motivated me to delve deeper into this topic, to examine this aspect of work life from a scientific perspective. I am interested in understanding how individuals navigate the topic of conflict, whether through training or team conflict management strategies.

My interest in multicultural NGOs primarily lies in the fact that these organizations often combine a variety of cultural perspectives and values.

By taking a closer look at NGOs, I can gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics and challenges that multicultural organizations face. Researching this topic, I can contribute to improve the functioning of multicultural teams in NGOs, building bridges between different communities and nations and strengthening intercultural understanding. I am motivated by the challenge of analysing these complex processes and see it as an opportunity to contribute to research in this field.

Aim of this work

In order to close the gap that exists in research on conflict management in multicultural NGOs, theoretical approaches and practical case studies are presented in this paper.

The insights gained from theory and empirical evidence aim to provide individuals interested in non-governmental organizations, as well as those directly affected by conflicts, with an understanding of the nuances of conflict management and organizational communication in such contexts. In many companies, there is often a lack of constructive conflict management, either because there is no training for managers or because there has simply been no necessity in dealing with this topic. As a result, employees often feel unsettled and unsupported, which on one hand further worsens the working atmosphere and on the other hand negatively affects the authority of the manager. Without the introduction of appropriate measures regarding conflicts, escalations often occur.

The goal is to connect theoretical concepts with practical applications. Theoretical approaches can often only be implemented to a limited extent in real world situations and are therefore frequently of little value in active conflict management.

The results of the detailed analysis aim to help answer the research questions and provide recommendations for action. Additionally, this study will provide an overview of the effective conflict management measures for non-governmental organizations identified throughout the research process, along with highlighting the tools utilized by experts and interviewees in managerial positions. Furthermore, standard conflict management measures and steps, along with insights from external experts will be highlighted to clarify why intervention measures are relevant for success. This paper will focus exclusively on conflict management and internal conflicts in multicultural NGOs.

This paper aims to address the research questions by presenting methods for conflict management, prevention strategies, and the role of external consulting in multicultural teams in NGOs. It specifically examines how the cultural backgrounds of individuals within a team influence conflicts and conflict management within these organizations. The thesis offers an overview of the definitions, theories, and recommended strategies outlined in the literature. This comprehensive reflection serves to inform the empirical component of the thesis, which involves interviews with staff in multicultural NGOs. By considering theoretical aspects, the aim is to critically assess and interrogate them within the context of the empirical findings.

Outline, structure and approach of the thesis

This work is the result of several months of research. Initially, the focus was on start-ups, but it was shifted to NGOs due to a lack of willing interview partners in the start-up sector.

At the outset, an extensive literature research on the topic of conflict management was conducted, which was carried out using scientific sources, a variety of specialist literature, as well as journals and online sources. Relevant content was identified by scanning works and articles, and key sections were intensively studied accordingly.

The Master's thesis consists of five main sections, which form a coherent sequence. The main parts are framed by an introduction and a conclusion.

In the initial main section, the paper outlines typical conflict management steps and examines the potential for seeking external advice. It delves into the causes and various types of conflicts, as well as describes a typical conflict process, all aimed at addressing the research question. Given the inherent connection between conflict resolution and management, this

topic constitutes a relevant section in the first part of the paper. Further, this section also describes the different conflict styles, levels and types.

The second chapter focuses on conflict management and how to deal with conflict, as well as definitions of various conflict resolution strategies. The topic of external support is also explained, covering terms such as supervision, coaching and mediation.

Once the terminology has been defined in relation to the described methods, chapters three and four deal with the topics of culture and multicultural NGOs.

Subsequently, the framework conditions for research methods and procedures, the interviews and the evaluation of the research are discussed. Following this, the cases and interview partners are presented.

The research section comprises the largest part of this work, in which the results of the qualitative research are presented and the conducted interviews are analysed.

Afterwards the research findings and a summary of the results are presented. In this phase, the results are examined in more detail and the research questions are answered based on the theoretical and empirical findings.

The master's thesis concludes with a summary, which includes a final presentation of the most important contents of the thesis and an outlook on further research.

Theoretical foundation

In this section, the theoretical foundations of the topics of conflict management, culture and multicultural non-governmental organizations are presented in order to provide a basic understanding of the subject. Following this, an explanation of the current state of research on these topics is provided, from which the research questions addressed in this master's thesis are derived. Finally, the individual NGOs and coaches who were interviewed as part of the empirical study are briefly introduced. This chapter therefore aims to lay out a theoretical foundation that was the inspiration, support and launching point for the analysis of the collected data. This section of the thesis is structured in the following way: the first subchapter focuses on analysing literature that is relevant in anthropological discourses on conflict and in particular on conflict resolution and it also takes into consideration how to handle conflict. The other concepts explored in the second subchapter are those of conflict management as well as external support and communication. This is followed by a more in-depth section on culture which is relevant in anthropological discourses and multicultural NGOs. The last subchapter is directed towards the definition of NGOs.

This paper relies on various theories and existing terminology, incorporating definitions and concepts related to topics such as multiculturalism, conflict, mediation, and coaching.

Developing definitional, conceptual insights into the object of conflict

In order to enter the topic with a clear understanding of what needs to be researched, it is necessary to be supported by a body of literature, one that can also be later analysed in the light of the research results.

In this theoretical section of the thesis, various theories, methods, and instruments of conflict management will be explored in depth from a scientific standpoint. Given the vastness of the subject of conflict research, only a fraction can be illuminated here, with references provided accordingly. The focus of this theoretical section lies on conflict and conflict management within multicultural teams in NGOs. This includes literature on conflicts in general, conflicts within teams, and diverse conflict models and behaviours. The aim is to offer an overview and insight into existing theories and their practical application, as well as to examine which methods and tools are emphasized in theory. Of course, particular attention will be paid to those aspects that are also relevant in the context of empirical research.

Before looking at the different theoretical perspectives and the issues that have been discussed over the years, it is necessary to reflect on why anthropologists should approach this area of study, its relevance and how this discipline can contribute to conflict management.

Anthropology deals with the topic of conflict primarily in terms of peace research, border conflicts and cultural conflict, as in the book *Anthropology of Conflict*, where Eckert has compiled the different anthropological perspectives of conflict research in relation to Elwert's theses on conflict theory. Elwert's contribution holds particular relevance in anthropological perspectives on conflict. (Eckert 2004)

Another interesting approach is economic anthropology, which uses anthropological theories and practices to address the needs of organizations. In particular, it deals with organizational theory and culture and international business, especially international marketing, multicultural management and multicultural communication. In short, business anthropology is a practice-oriented academic discipline in which anthropologists apply anthropological theories and methods to identify and solve real-world business problems (Jordan 2013: 14).

Conflict - what is its purpose?

Over the years, numerous perspectives on conflict, varying in description and perception, have emerged across different streams, theories, and from notable personalities who have engaged with the subject. The term conflict has been defined numerous times in various settings and from different perspectives.

A closer look of how conflict has been perceived over the years reveals a constant evolution in the definition of what constitutes a conflict. Ultimately, this evolution has resulted in the persistence of several approaches running in parallel. Following this, some different definitions, approaches and the chronological evolution of conflict as documented in academic literature and by conflict researchers will be discussed in more detail.

However, it can be said that the topic of conflict is very complex and is still being researched further. In many cases, there is a search for a cause or definition, but often, a deeper exploration of the meaning of a conflict would prove more beneficial.

In general, dealing with conflict is part of being human and therefore an omnipresent aspect of socio-cultural and professional interaction. "Conflict and its management have been researched from different angles and disciplinary perspectives, e.g. psychology, behavioral sciences, sociology, communication, health sciences and anthropology. Despite the increasing number of concepts and definitions of conflict, there is no comprehensive definition of conflict and conflict theories in general" (Mayer and Louw 2012: 3).

Nonetheless, the currently most widely used definition is made by Friedrich Glasl. According to him a conflict is an interaction (at least two parties with different intentions to act) in which there are incompatibilities (the 'field of conflict') that are experienced as impairment (emotions due to unfulfilled needs or attempts to influence each other) (Glasl 2004: 17).

A conflict therefore involves opposing perception, imagination and thinking or in feeling or willing, which in turn leads to one party affecting another through their behaviour or at least making them feel they do.

It should be emphasized in this context that "not every expressed difference of opinion immediately constitutes a conflict. In most cases, we therefore only speak of a conflict when it is not possible to deal constructively with the opposing interests. In other words, from the point at which it becomes apparent that the necessary conflict (resolution) skills are lacking, in simple terms, the ability to balance or reconcile one's own needs with the needs of the other person" (Bartlakowski 2019, trans. d. author: 20).

This means "Conflict refers to a process of social interaction involving a struggle over claims to resources, power and status, beliefs, and other preferences and desires. Obviously the potential sources of conflict are almost infinite, and the objectives, scope, intensity, methods, number of participants, and outcomes, may also vary greatly. For this, conflict is a natural phenomenon in social relations, as natural as harmony. It is difficult to envision the attainment of positive social goals without it" (Appelbaum, Abdallah and Shapiro 1999: 63).

Interestingly, conflicts often arise from alleged "trivialities" (Schwarz 2010).

They often do not arise suddenly, rather 'this' conflict has existed before under a different name, so if the history of the conflict is given space, it is often easier to recognize it and its significance. (Schwarz 2010)

In most cases, they arise from opposing interests, blame, fears or a feeling of otherness between individuals or groups. Existing social norms, such as individual values or value concepts, the individual rules of coexistence or larger systems of rules in organizations and societies, often act as a buffer for the emergence of conflict. (De Dreu and Gelfand 2008).

Therefore, in many conflict situations, it is advantageous to ask about the reason for the conflict. Schwarz stresses that it is more important to ask about the meaning of conflicts than about their causes. According to him the focus lies in recognizing existing differences and make them usable by focusing on clarification, so further development can be carried out more easily (Schwarz 2012).

The purpose of conflict is often to differentiate between needs and circumstances and thus emphasizing individuality. A disagreement can reveal issues, views and facts, elements that might never have come to light without a conflict. Therefore, conflict can help groups and organizations to grow and develop identity. (Schwarz 2010) Many historical events and changes can be traced back to conflicts or the result of conflict-laden disputes, so their meaning can also be seen in processes of change.

Conflicts can begin "bottom-up" between individuals or employees and then escalate to higher management levels, or they can originate at higher management levels and spread "top-down" to the employees. (Bartlakowski 2019) The reason is that in principle, conflict within an organization is bound to happen. It arises from the boundaries inherent in any organizational structure, which create distinct groups that must compete for scarce resources. (Lewis, French and Steane 1997)

Conflict in organizations

Especially in teams or working groups, conflicts are often ignored, even though there is no doubt that team conflicts in the workplace reduce the performance of employees and often lead to a loss of motivation and even an increase in sickness-related absences. According to studies, on average up to 15% of daily working time is tied up in conflicts. From a perspective of management, the time spent is even estimated at around 40 % (Bartlakowski 2019). It is therefore beneficial for everyone involved that a conflict is promptly dealt with. Preventative measures such as regular meetings or addressing disagreements at an early stage exist, in order to eliminate ambiguities and irritations and thereby preventing conflicts or minimizing their scope. (Schwarz 2010)

Therefore, within the professional context, training and further education for managers as well as employees and teams in areas such as leadership, communication and resilience are increasingly demanded. Additionally, in cases where conflicts are perceived and identified, mediation for intrapersonal dispute resolution or team counseling is sought. (Bartlakowski 2019) This represents one of the aspects I would like to focus on in my research, as well as coaches and mediators who work with NGOs in relation to conflict and conflict resolution. External coaches or mediators are often hired to provide independent and impartial professional support in the event of a conflict.

In general, it is often observed that organizations avoid engaging in long-term processes to address the underlying causes of conflict. Instead, they tend to rely on conventional forms of intervention, which are either preventive, aimed at avoiding conflict, or curative, designed to resolve existing conflicts. Nevertheless, it is often overlooked that conflicts can sometimes create unity within a group or helps to overcome differences. They can be used to ensure that the differences that arise in the group's behaviour can be discussed and consequently worked on and help opening up to new ideas. (Bartlakowski 2019)

Conflict is part of being human and it is also an aspect of socio-cultural dynamics, often arising when individuals collaborate within smaller or larger groups. Such conflicts typically

emerge when some members advocate for maintaining the status quo while others seek change.

“Additionally, there is evidence that conflict can impact negatively on organizational productivity, and increase costs (Burton 1990). Despite these assertions, if constructively managed, conflict can contribute positively to job satisfaction, well-being (De Dreu et al. 2004: 15) and even stress reduction (Friedman et al. 2000). Organizational conflict management strategies involve the analysis of types of conflict, impact of conflict, and conflict resolution styles (Rahim 2002)” (Mayer, Louw, 2012: 3).

Conflicts that were either left unresolved, suppressed, or avoided in the past within large organizations, often through strategies like restructuring (such as dividing departments or reallocating responsibilities), may resurface unexpectedly at a later time. In a present conflict situation, conflict history research can therefore have a relieving role, as the disagreement may only be carried out as a proxy for certain structures, and understanding the situation can help to better accept and deal with a conflict. (Schwarz 2014) Furthermore, it is not uncommon that people who feel too restricted and oppressed in their needs eventually rebel against the oppressive (performance) system or authority (Schwarz 2010). Particularly in asymmetrical power relationships, those who are in a less advantageous position often memorize everything that is perceived to be unjust in a "soul account". If for some reason the balance of power changes (even if only briefly), it is usually the case that these noted events are settled first. Only then new patterns can be established. (Schwarz 2010)

Therefore, “it is assumed that cooperation is one of the most useful key concepts in reducing organizational conflict in a international context” (Mayer and Louw 2012: 3). In a root cause analysis, all factors that can influence team health and team performance should therefore be considered. During this, the right measures for team development/coaching can then be derived from a systemic perspective, which can ultimately contribute to maintaining, restoring or developing the well-being and resilience of the individual as well as the efficiency and performance of the team. (Bartlakowski 2019) In summary: "In most cases, the causes of team conflict are just as varied and complex as the conflicts themselves. They can be located at the management level, at the organizational level, at the immediate team or group level, but also at the individual level. All levels are interrelated and therefore influence each other and have a direct impact on the performance of a team" (Bartlakowski 2019: 22).

Cross-cultural, multicultural and transcultural conflict research has become increasingly important in light of the internationalization processes in various organizations and the rise of cosmopolitan thoughts and philosophies. Due to the greater potential for cross-cultural

conflict in the International work environment, culture and its effect on conflict and its management are gaining importance in organizational research, multicultural management and conflict management research (Mayer and Louw 2012). „ Focusing on cross-cultural conflict in organizational settings requires a theoretical approach to culture, cultural concepts and definitions, as well as cultural influences on inter-personal interaction, conflict and its management” (Mayer and Louw 2012: 4).

Conflict in Anthropology

Although some definitions of conflict have already been highlighted in the previous chapter, some of which might overlap with the following approaches, I would like to highlight the definition of the Ethnosociologist Gluckman, Gulliver and Nanda who agree on the perspective that conflict is an inherent aspect of social life, and society cannot be envisioned without it (Thakore 2013). Nevertheless, Ethnology also supports Freud’s idea, that conflict is an inborn human quality. Further he: “believed that violence is rooted in our basic nature as animals. Human conflict is inevitable not because it is part of social life, but for it is a biological fact lying within us all“ (Thakore 2013: 10). He stresses the genetic instance of social behaviour (Schellenberg 1996; Ardrey 1966 and Lorenz 1963), arguing and popularize that human violent behaviour is inherited (Thakore 2013).

On the other hand, social Darwinists focus on “the role of competition and conflict in all human societies. Taking the idea of the —survival of the fittest || as a basis, they analysed conflict as part of a universal struggle urged by inborn aggressive tendencies.” (Thakore 2013: 7) While “Marxian view conflict not only as built into the social system but also as the primary stimulus for social change (Seymour-Smith 1986: 51)” (Thakore 2013: 10).

Consequently, it can be stated that there are different approaches in anthropology and “even those who have challenged the innate nature of human aggression have taken different paths to treat the sources of conflict. Whether or not material ends are the final causes is another point of debate” (Thakore 2013: 10). However, another interesting and relevant definition is proposed by Georg Elwert. This is primarily because he has dealt with social order in connection with conflict. For Elwert, determining whether and when a conflict creates a destabilizing influence, or to what extent it fosters order, is regarded as an empirical question (Eckert 2004). He states: "Conflict is a social action based on the perception of partially incompatible interests or intentions of two or more people. The perception of incompatible interests does not necessarily have to be shared by both sides. Formulations of interests and intentions are necessarily culturally bound and can also be subject to interpretation within a culture" (Eckert 2004, trans. d. author: 26). With his conflict theory, Elwert aligns himself in a

tradition in which the conflict itself does not have to be explained. Rather, conflicts are perceived as a fundamental feature of every human interaction. Accordingly, conflicts can be relevant for social change, as they can stimulate and promote learning and selection processes. According to Elwert, what is particularly essential, is how conflict management is carried out, because conflicts significantly promote the development of social cohesion. (Eckert 2004) Furthermore, "the popular view that conflicts are motivated by emotions cannot be confirmed by anthropology. People react less to emotions than to assumed or perceived goals of action" (Eckert 2004, trans. d. author: 32). This means that a cool, calculated reaction to a conflict situation and not an emotional reaction represents a higher strategic quality. Nevertheless, the display of emotions can be decisive for the legitimization of action in a conflict situation. (Eckert 2004)

Although Evans-Pritchard has already established in his ethnological conflict theory that conflicts strengthen group identifications due to their dichotomizing tendencies. Elwert's theory goes even further, suggesting that conflict can not only produce groups, but also institutions that extend across groups. By this, he implies that conflicts in a society lead to overarching "system ties", and with these theses he situates himself within a theory of social differentiation (Eckert 2004).

With his comparative approach, Elwert poses the question of under which socio-structural conditions and with which consequences for the social order, what types become the dominant pattern of conflict resolution in a society. This further leads to the question whether these different forms are institutionalized, "which of these forms comes into play in which specific conflicts and between which particular conflict participants and how such conflict relationships change" (Eckert 2004, trans. d. author: 8).

Since: "all societies shape rules, including what kind of conflicts should result in what kind of resolution" (Eckert, 2004, trans. d. author: 8). In every society, individuals have several options for addressing conflicts. Elwert categorizes these into three modes of conflict resolution: procedure, avoidance, and violence. However, "destruction" holds a unique and special status within this framework (Eckert 2004).

Elwerts also points out the innovation potential of conflicts and emphasizes that his modes should not be viewed as a static model, but they are rather based on learning processes that can produce each of the types mentioned (Eckert 2004: 14). With his approach, Elwert distances himself from the interpretive approaches of a hermeneutic anthropology (Geertz), and attempts to identify the conditions under which people negotiate conflicts through different forms of conflict resolution and social comparison. Nevertheless, the distancing

from hermeneutics does not mean abstracting the forms of conflict resolution from their social context, as for Elwert, conflicts are still partially “embedded social action” (Eckert 2004: 15). Elwert defines embedding as “the ensemble of moral values, norms and institutionalized arrangements that limit certain types of action and at the same time make the result of this action calculable” (Eckert 2004, trans. d. author: 15).

Conflict – Styles, levels and types of conflict

At the beginning of this section, it should be emphasized that there are many different approaches to categorize conflicts. A rough distinction can be made between internal (mental) and external (social) conflicts. Nevertheless, a uniform typology of conflicts cannot be found in literature, despite many overlapping and merging works. (Glasl 2010; Jehle 2007; Duve 2003a). This is partly due to definitions which differ depending on classifications, scientific background or cultural background (Glasl 2010).

Some individual characterizations are explained in more detail in the following section. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that this only covers a part of possible types for conflicts, as authors can analyse, interpret, and understand the same conflict from a multitude of different perspectives (Glasl 2020). Therefore, the following section only focuses on different group-specific conflicts as well as conflict cultures, conflict types and conflict levels in order to provide a rough outline of the variety of approaches and ways of dealing with conflicts. These insights will largely represent the foundation for the subsequent research of this thesis.

Conflict Styles

Conflict styles are relevant because they represent an overall picture of a person's communication orientation towards conflict. They show how individuals handle and respond to conflict. While everyone has predominant conflict styles, one's conflict styles may change in relation to a particular situation. Conflicts are determined by cultural background, personality, individual constitution and the specific situation.

Many of the well-known approaches to defining conflict styles are based on the conflict style model according to Rahim (2002). This model is based on the two conceptual dimensions of caring for oneself and caring for others. On one hand, there is the degree to which people prioritize satisfying their own interests (Concern for self illustrates), and on the other hand, there is the degree to which people consider the interests of others (Concern for other represents).

Further this model merges these two dimensions and thereby forms five styles of dealing with interpersonal conflicts. Each of these styles represents one's own interests and needs in

relation to others. In the integrating style, both self-interest and concern for others are high, while in compromising, self-interest is moderate. Dominant style heavily prioritizes self and minimizes concern for others, whereas accommodating style entails low self-concern and high consideration for others. Lastly, in this model, avoidance involves minimal concern for both oneself and others. While this framework may encompass the majority of conflicts in Western society, it may not. “capture the full range of conflict management styles, at least not from an intercultural or interethnic perspective” (Ting-Toomey 2001, trans. d. author: 88).

However, it's important to recognize that these styles may be understood differently in various cultural contexts. While obedience and avoidance are often viewed negatively in Western literature, they are not universally perceived as such, particularly in Asian or Latin American societies. In these cultures, they are frequently employed to uphold harmony and relationships (Ting-Toomey 2001).

In this context, it should be noted that not all conflict theories consider avoidance as a viable conflict strategy. However, given that avoidance is the predominant approach to conflict resolution in certain cultures, it is crucial to recognize that if avoidance proves ineffective, it may lead to destructive outcomes. It is precisely for this reason that avoidance as a conflict strategy is rarely used as an institutionalized procedure. (Elwert 2004: 29)

Conflict types

This section focuses on the terminology increasingly used in literature and highlights some of the well-known conflict types. It should be noted that there are also different approaches to conflict types. Glasl summarizes conflict typologies according to the subject matter of the dispute, its appearance and the characteristics of the conflicting parties, thereby aiming to provide an overview of existing literature on the subject (Glasl 2010). He highlights in his book “Konfliktsmanagement” (Glasl 2020), that it is difficult to compare the existing typologies of conflicts or even to categorize them into a comprehensive system (Glasl 2020). Christian Duve made an attempt at a classification and defined the following 6 types: factual conflicts, value and principle conflicts, distribution conflicts, strategy conflicts and relationship conflicts (Duve 2003a: 16.)

The following **five types of conflict** which are described in more detail in the following section have been addressed, described and used by many authors. (Oachesu 2016; Löwer-Hirsch and West-Leuer 2016; Thakore 2013). Similar classifications can also be found in other works about the typology of conflicts in companies.

The five conflict types to be discussed include intra-personal, inter-personal, intra-group, inter-group conflict, and intra-organizational conflict. The abbreviation 'intra' denotes conflicts occurring within a person or group, while 'inter' refers to conflicts between individuals or groups.

In general, the more precisely one can identify the origin or nature of a conflict, the more effectively one can work towards a solution.

In this context, it is particularly relevant that in various companies, different types of conflict are more likely to occur depending on how conflicts are handled and thus anchored in the corporate culture. The company is usually well prepared for these anticipated types of conflict, whereas unexpected types of conflict can lead to disputes.

The first Conflict type is **Intrapersonal conflict** which only takes place in the mind of the individual. It often involves one's own values, principles, emotions, and topics that psychologically involve the individual's thoughts. (Oachesu 2016: 809; Löwer-Hirsch und West-Leuer 2016).

However, these internal conflicts can have profound effects on organizational functioning, as the individual experiences a clash between two incompatible tendencies within him, leading to frustration and internal strife (Thakore 2013).

This internal conflict can manifest in various forms, such as an approach-approach conflict, where a person must decide between two positive and equally appealing options.

Alternatively, in an avoidance-avoidance conflict, the person is faced with two options, both of which are perceived as negative and undesirable. The third form is approach-avoidance, where the “conflict occurs when a person must decide to do something that has both positive and negative consequences” (Thakore 2013: 8).

If the conflict between two individuals is called **interpersonal conflict**. These conflicts usually occur between two or more people due to their differences. These conflicts mostly show the interpersonal interaction in companies as they compete for a promotion or different leadership styles (Oachesu 2016: 810; Löwer-Hirsch und West-Leuer 2016; Thakore 2013: 8). Regardless of their profession, some people simply struggle to get along with one another due to different backgrounds, education and experiences, or perceptions of a situation, leading to interpersonal conflict. Similarly, conflict can stem not only from differing values and interests but also from power and status differences, often revolving around authority and status inconsistency (Thakore 2013).

The third type of conflict, which thematises the incompatibility and misunderstandings between individuals within the group, is called **intra-group conflict**. (Oachesu 2016)

These conflicts between individuals within a team are often divided into two types, the task conflict and the relationship conflict. A task conflict or substantive conflict mostly represents “a perception of disagreement between group members or individuals about the content of their decisions and contains different intellectual viewpoints, ideas and opinions” (Thakore 2013: 9). This type of conflict is also described as beneficial because it promotes diversity of opinion (Oachesu 2016).

The relationship conflict on the other hand describes a perception of interpersonal incompatibility and encompasses anger and hostility between individuals (Thakore 2013).

This type of conflict primarily revolves around individual values, personal or family norms, or personal preferences. These relationship conflicts are very personal for individuals and research has shown that such conflicts reduce the productivity and motivation of team members (Thakore 2013).

If the conflict extends beyond a single group to involve two or more groups, it is classified as an **inter-group conflict**, for example, a misunderstanding occurring between different teams within an organization. Just like other conflicts, these inter-group conflicts can be of content substantive and/or emotional underpinnings. Furthermore, there is a distinction between relationship conflict, task conflict and process conflict, which concerns groups' different approaches to a task, their methods and processes (Oachesu 2016). The main problem with these conflicts, which occur quite frequently in organizations, is that the coordination of tasks gets increasingly difficult. In various circumstances, individuals come together to form groups, given that organizations typically consist of individuals and groups. Achieving harmonious coexistence relies on the cooperation of all these groups and individuals (Thakore 2013).

Conflicts that occur within an organization are referred to as **Intra-Organizational conflicts**.

Intra-organizational conflicts are usually divided into four types. On one hand, a vertical conflict occurs between different levels within an organization, such as conflicts arising from the control exerted by superiors over subordinates. A horizontal conflict takes place at the same hierarchical level within an organization. The third conflict in this typology is the line-staff conflict, which relates to the relationship and values as well as handling between staff managers and line managers. Finally, there is role conflict, which occurs when an individual is expected to perform a certain set of behaviours or activities associated with their position. If the individual fails to meet these expectations or holds multiple roles with conflicting

demands, a conflict can arise. Even though all of these conflict types have distinctive characteristics, they can overlap as well. Organizational conflicts often involve interpersonal conflicts with colleagues or superiors or conflicts between groups within different areas of an organization. (Thakore 2013)

Inter- Organizational conflicts are conflicts that occur between two or more organizations. In this type of conflict, both parties feel that the other party is thwarting their goals. These are sometimes initiated through competitions, corporate takeovers, merges or acquisitions. This conflict type includes conflicts between two companies in the same industry, as well as a trade dispute between two or more countries (Thakore 2013).

Gerhard Schwarz's categorizes conflicts by the number of people involved in a conflict. With this approach he provides an introduction to the most common conflict topics that occur between couples, in groups, organizations or institutions. (Böhm 2012: 24) In the context of this thesis, only two should be highlighted: group conflict and the system conflict.

The group represents one of the oldest forms of cooperation and conflict resolution in history. This type of conflict encompasses not only subgroup conflicts but also territorial disputes (e.g., struggles for competencies and resources) and conflicts over rank or leadership. For clarification, if there are four people or more involved, it can be considered a group conflict. Furthermore, if the groups are larger than seven to a maximum of 14 members (workable or manageable group), they often tend to break down into smaller subgroups.

In contrast, systemic conflicts extend to a broader scope, including multicultural conflicts, which arise from communication between diverse cultures, and national conflicts, where one nation fails to acknowledge another's existence, and religious conflicts characterized by irreconcilable differences in religious worldviews. This form of conflict therefore refers to conflicts that are based on different thought systems, world views, scientific views/systems and political aspects. (Böhm 2012: 27)

Levels of conflict

However, there are also other categorizations of conflict as highlighted in “A model to deal with a conflict” by Schwarz. Schwarz identifies one reason for conflict that in stressful situations, rational thinking ability is switched off and primal instincts emerge. It revolves no longer just about the actual (conflict) matter but about justifying, fleeing and attacking. For Schwarz, it is typical in a conflict that rational chains of argument can no longer be formed or its process is no longer controlled by reason. (Schwarz 2010)

Lenz, Ellebracht and Osterhold (2007) also discuss this phenomenon in their work, distinguishing between the rational, emotional and instinctual brains. From their point of view, the parties involved are increasingly guided by emotions and instincts over the course of the conflict, hence, the possibilities for thinking and reacting are consequently limited. These considerations play a key role, especially in relation to the level of conflict and in the intensity of the conflict (Lenz, Ellebracht and Osterhold 2007). Furthermore, the way organizations deal with these conflicts has a significant impact on organizational culture (Löwer-Hirsch and West-Leuer 2016).

Stairs to the abyss

When interests and needs go unaddressed, conflicts tend to persist, often emerging gradually rather than immediately with full force, and then escalate progressively over time. Friedrich Glasl described these levels of conflict as “stairs to the abyss” (Glasl 2010). Kreuser expanded them further to include the level “no conflict” (Kreuser 2010).

The first escalation level is tension, which occurs when opinions and viewpoints differ in everyday situations, with each party insisting on its own opinion. (Glasl 2010) These communication disruptions lead to a hardening and tenseness between the two parties. While collaborating, the dynamic often swings back and forth between cooperation and competition. However, as time progresses, individuals may find their own viewpoints solidifying, and their personal victories growing in significance. (Kreuser 2010)

If left unresolved, this will lead to the second escalation stage (**debate**), where the actual issues in the conflict are lost and the focus is on the other's argumentation errors. As the conflict progresses, attempts are made to assert one's own position through arguments and by exploiting the

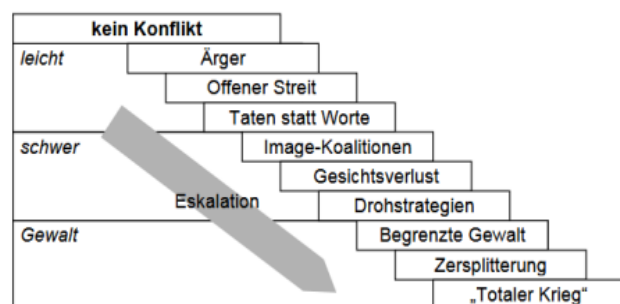


Figure 1: Kreuser 2010 :46

mental and moral insecurities of the other party. (Glasl 2000: 96) At this level, it's primarily about presenting one's own point of view in a persuasive manner and refuting the opposing party's perspective (Kreuser 2010).

Consequently, the third level of escalation, **actions instead of words**, arises from the endless debates and the picking apart of arguments, which ultimately leads to words no longer seem to be sufficient and actions seemingly being necessary, which is reflected through suspicion and mistrust in body language and non-verbal signals such as indifference and seemingly

increased self-confidence. At this escalation level, both parties expect the other party to give in and accept their opinion, which often leads to a stand-off. (Glasl 2010: 100)

At this stage of conflict, it is still possible to find solutions together or within a team, although external support might be helpful. At this stage of the conflict, the emphasis is on securing victory for one's own party.

As it revolves around one's own **Images and coalitions**, each party tends to attribute responsibility for the conflict and its progression to the other, while simultaneously defending their own reputation. At this stage of conflict, thinking is often characterized as dual, as there is a tendency to perceive situations in black-and-white terms, with distinctions made between what is deemed true and false. (Glasl 2010: 256) It is important to note that the initial issues increasingly fade into the background and the conflict becomes more emotional and verbal attacks focus more on the personal character (Duve 2003a).

The fifth level of conflict (**loss of face**) is about destroying the moral integrity and credibility of the opposing party. Previous behaviour is adapted to the new way of thinking of the conflicting parties and thus the entire personality is called into question. (Duve 2003a: 37; Glasl 2010: 267). At this point, one side often irritates and humiliates the other side to the point of emotional outbursts in public. These events are then frequently used and disseminated as evidence of mistreatment. These conflict behaviours and strategies are particularly noticeable in political election campaigns, where public media is used to present the opposing party in the worst possible light and thereby reduce credibility (Duve 2003a: 40).

At the escalation level, **threatening strategies**, intimidation is used to try to force the other side to give in. However, this is perceived as provocation, leading to reciprocal threatening manoeuvres. Due to the acute increase in willingness to use violence, there is hardly any space left to rethink action and reaction, which further leads to the conflict being driven more and more by emotions and irrational decisions increasing on both sides. (Glasl 2010: 277) Nevertheless, the conflict can still be resolved at this stage, as the threats are merely warnings, and neither party is inclined towards escalated violence. Thus, there remains room for negotiation to resolve the conflict.

In this phase of escalation known as "Limited Destruction," due to the entrenched positions, the only recourse is an uncompromising conflict resolution. Consequently, defeats suffered by the opposing party are construed as victories. (Duve 2003a)

Once the conflict reaches the point of **fragmentation**, the sole aim becomes the destruction of the opposing party. The factual points of contention at the beginning of the conflict are no longer relevant (Duve 2003a).

The main difference to the ninth escalation level is the fact that absolute force is not employed because the focus is still on achieving one's own victory, and there is apprehension about the potential consequences of one's own downfall. (Glasl 2010)

It should be highlighted that in the stages between “image and coalitions” and “fragmentation”, external support might still help. From the level; “loss of face” onward, a form of arbitration or power intervention is already necessary in many cases to end or change the course of the conflict. (Kreuser 2010; Löwer-Hirsch and West-Leuer 2017)

Finally, the only goal of the last level, together into the abyss, is to see the other party lose, even if this means the downfall of one's own existence (Duve, 2003a). At this point of escalation, the emotional satisfaction of pushing the other party into the abyss outweighs any material and immaterial costs of turning back (Glasl 2010).

In conclusion, the longer a conflict lasts, the more people are involved and the more emotional a conflict becomes. Furthermore, the further the conflict has escalated, the more difficult it gets to handle the conflict, since conflicts have their own dynamics and become increasingly unpredictable over the course of time. Hence, the escalation phases do not necessarily represent a progression. This means that some conflicts extend over several stages within a short period of time, others even skip one or two phases. (Kreuser 2010; Löwer-Hirsch und West-Leuer 2016)

However, merely knowing the stages of conflict is often insufficient. It is also necessary to be aware that conflicts can escalate if they remain untreated and develop freely. It is therefore important to recognize and deal with these early on. (Kreuser 2010)

Three phases of Win and loss

Related to the stages of conflict, there are also three phases of win and loss.

The first classification “Win-Win” refers to the first three stages. The goal of the conflicting parties is for their own party to win the conflict, but without the other party making a loss.

In the first three phases of the conflict, the relationship between the parties changes from a cooperative to a competitive climate of discussion.

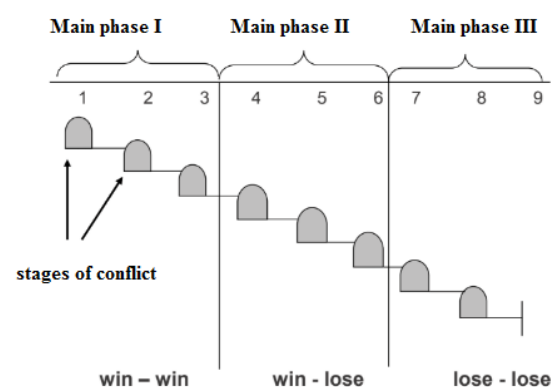


Figure 2 based on Glasl 2010 (three phases of win and loss)

In the “Win-Lose” phase (4th to 6th levels) it is assumed that your own party emerges from the conflict as a winner and your opponent as a loser. Everyone wants to assert their own point of view at the expense of others. The focus of the conflict phases is on competitive and victorious thinking. The last three levels are connected to the “lose-lose” phase, in which one's own damage is accepted as long as the opponent emerges as a loser. (Glasl 2002; Löwer-Hirsch and West-Leuer 2016)

Cold and hot conflicts

Additionally, there is often a distinction between cold conflicts (quiet and bitter) and hot conflicts (loud and highly emotional) (Kreuser 2010).

Conflicts usually show both hot and cold signs at the beginning and only in later phases does a clear classification develop. Hot conflicts include behaviour such as over activity, (explosive) persuasion, feeling of superiority, attack and defence. In cold conflicts, strategies such as standing still, swallowing emotions as well as mutual evasion and avoidance are used through new norms and procedures and increasingly indirect, hidden methods and sarcasm. (Glasl 2002)

Certainly, there are gradations and intensifications, right up to a complete explosion or paralysis of the situation. Several factors can determine whether a conflict manifests as a "hot" or "cold" conflict, on one hand, the personality structure of the core people (extroverted or introverted) or the individual's basic attitude and perception towards conflicts (these are pointless or they change and develop the situation). On the other hand, it can be connected with the general company structure or the change or perception of power relationships. (Kreuser 2010; Glasl 2002)

Causes of workplace conflict

Historically, hierarchy was invented /developed because loose groups do not cooperate voluntarily in a long term. While communication in groups, triangles and pairs still takes place directly, in hierarchical organizations the connection between the people involved is often controlled. (Böhm 2012)

Nevertheless, conflict is a regular aspect of everyday work life. Perceived as “incompatibility of interests, conflict is often caused by a misalignment of goals, motivations, or actions between two parties that can be real or only perceived to exist” (Kaushal 2006: 580). In general, it can be said that conflicts are seen as disruptive factors in the performance of employees, since they sometimes interrupt information channels and can have a negative effect on employee motivation. It can also occur in the form of a difference of opinion, harsh words or even in the form of direct action. (Enderli 2006)

Although conflict is often seen in a negative light, it can lead to both positive and negative results. Sadly, it is often seen as the primary cause of conflicts, negative emotions and wrong doing even though conflict mostly is necessary to Support crucial change. (Kaushal and Kwantes 2006)

According to Enderli (2006), these conflicts are particularly arising because employees feel unsettled, overwhelmed or frustrated by change processes in the company or that austerity measures in companies lead to a fight for resources. Furthermore, employees and managers also feel unable to cope with the ever-increasing pressure to perform and the internationalization of companies also leads to increased conflicts due to cultural differences. (Enderli 2006)

Fundamentally, it can be said that communication disorders are the predominant, most common and most obvious source of conflict in teams. This leads to a lack of trust, respect and different perceptions, which in turn results in misunderstandings, delays in the delivery of important components and non-compliance with instructions. Communication covers all aspects and cannot simply be fully dealt with by administrative procedures. Therefore, it is essential that project managers and teams cultivate strong communication skills to prevent and address conflicts. (Verma 1998)

Competitive pressure in particular changes the corporate hierarchy, resulting in an increased flattening of hierarchies, changes in management principles and the increased importance of work teams and project groups. It should be emphasized in this context that the more time is spent at work, the frequency of conflict tends to increase because different interests, preferences, values, morals, opinions, needs and even prejudices. Böhm emphasizes that if conflicts are resolved constructively, they can be viewed as “normal” in the workplace and contribute to the positive further development of groups. (Böhm 2012: 8)

Therefore “Conflict can take on any several different forms in an organisation, including interpersonal, intrapersonal, intergroup, intergroup and interorganisational conflicts” (Thakore 2013: 9).

Another study highlights that “the causes of intra-personal conflict can stem from organizational structure, division of work and duties, or task structure which may also play a role in conflicting goals, policies, and decisions within an organisation” (Riaz and Jamal 2022: 3).

More causes can be found in various researches in different contexts. This includes aspect such as “lack of resources, interdependencies, differences in organizational status, incongruent goals, more formalized and departmentalized structure, cultural orientations, lack

of coordination, incoherence, inequitable compensation, non-transparent rewards, scarce resources, and personality differences (Schermerhorn et al., 2010; Wang, 2010; Brooks, 2009; Cunliffe, 2008)” (Riaz and Jamal 2022: 4).

Depending on the type of conflict researched, the causes vary a little. When analysing interpersonal conflict, the causes seem more related “to organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover intentions, and real turnover. (...)

Furthermore it can be safely argued that interpersonal conflicts arise from social identity issues like prejudice towards out-group, feeling of superiority, and a hidden inclination of serving in-group at the expense of out-group(s) (De Dreu and Gelfand, 2008)” (Riaz and Jamal 2022: 4)

Additionally, Harold and Wood (2006) as well as Mayer (2000) describe five different sources for a conflict. Communication, whether it leads to understanding or misunderstanding, stands as one of the primary origins of conflict. Often, there is an assumption that what one communicates is universally understood, which sometimes is not the case. Therefore, conflicts also occur at different levels, but mostly escalate because the parties are under the impression that their communication was precise and understood, even though it actually wasn't. (Harold and Wood 2006; Mayer 2000)

Further, a big driver of conflicts are emotions as they can influence how people behave in conflicts. It is important to highlight that the energetic and emotional impact varies depending on whether it is the first conflict regarding a topic or the 5th to 10th conflict. Emotions can arise from interactions, circumstances, and past experiences and can be the source of energy in a conflict. Finally, while it is desirable and important to express and communicate one's emotions, it can be advantageous, particularly in conflict situations, to set them aside in a controlled environment, such as with the assistance of a mediator. (Mayer 2000; Harold and Wood 2006)

Furthermore, values play a significant role, delineating between what is right and wrong and embodying beliefs about what is important (Mayer 2000). These values are especially pertinent in conflicts where individuals feel that their values and way of life are directly threatened. In particular, it can be difficult to compromise when core beliefs are discussed. (Mayer 2000; Harold and Wood 2006) This is especially relevant in cultural settings. This is also linked to the fact that each person carries their own historical context and experiences into a conflict. Experiences and behavioural patterns can influence the course of a conflict and should be taken into account when resolving the conflict (Mayer 2000: 25). Finally, while structure can at times aid in conflict avoidance, it can also harbour a greater potential for

conflict. Other factors contributing to conflict may include limited workspace, inadequate equipment, or flawed decision-making processes. These external conditions are further compounded by their resistance to change at the individual level (Mayer 2000: 25). Further, conflicts are also economically relevant because the incorrect handling of conflicts in organizations leads to costs running into millions every year (Hayes 2008). “It remains a fair assumption that if an individual experiences conflict as destructive and dysfunctional, subsequent behavior will be adjusted correspondingly, and that such behavior will impact negatively on the individual’s wider sphere of influence” (Slabbert 2004: 85).

“A 2008 study by consulting firm CPP, Inc. examined how conflict is managed and the cost of everyday conflict. It turned out that every employee spends an average of one day a month dealing with conflict – and usually not very successfully” (Hayes 2008: 3).

However, it is not the conflict itself that poses the problem, but rather how individuals choose to address and manage the conflict. “Conflicts sometimes have the potential to break through rigid routines, but dealing with conflicts correctly and professionally is important” (Hayes 2008: 3). According to Glasl, “it is necessary for all people in a company to develop their ability to deal with conflicts, so that people are able to perceive conflict phenomena themselves as early as possible and know the means that contribute to clarifying these conflicts. Only when more people are capable of conflict can whole organizations achieve conflict resistance, which means the independent, constructive processing of differences, friction and tension” (Glasl 2000, trans. d. author: 9).

Conflict management

The fact that conflict has been perceived as an organizational phenomenon has caused conflict management to come into the focus of research. The scientific interest in management of cross-cultural teams has recently increased; both the comparative and the interactive aspects of conflict management between cultures are of importance for the functioning of an increasingly globalized world of work (Kazan 1993: 338).

Over the past decade, wide-ranging research on conflict management has spanned various disciplines, and the resulting research findings have been disseminated within academia.

In essence, conflict management includes all methods, tools, and techniques of dealing with conflict in terms of choosing the best alternative depending on a specific situation.

According to the dictionary “conflict management means the entirety of measures to resolve political, economic and personal conflicts that exist between different people” (Duden 2023, trans. d. author).

Butler states:” In the most basic sense, conflict management refers to any effort by a third party at preventing a conflict from getting worse “(Butler 2009: 2). Consequently, this definition assumes that a conflict already arose, and now that said conflict should somehow be contained, controlled, and possibly even ended. Thus, “conflict management is in equal measure realistic and optimistic, pragmatic and hopeful” (Butler 2009: 2). Therefore “corporations employ scores of professional conflict managers (often, but not exclusively, in human resources and personnel offices) to cope with conflictual relations among employees, or between employees and customers, clients, the media, or the public at large” (Butler 2009: 4).

In general, it can be said, that everyone has experienced conflict in personal or family relationships and therefore has experienced some kind of conflict management. As "conflict management is something that we, as social actors, engage in on a daily basis. Yet we often do so without much reflection as to what tools of conflict management we are using, and whether they are effective in light of the kinds of conflict we see or are involved in. This lack of reflection is to the detriment of the practice of conflict management. It limits the improvement of available means of conflict management and impairs our collective determination and understanding of what are the best (most effective) approaches for managing any particular case of conflict” (Butler 2009: 19).

Handling conflict encompasses a variety of strategies, ranging from internal to external approaches and involving individuals or groups of people. The following section briefly

explains some approaches that are often used to deal with conflict in companies. “It is still important to recognize that “no method can be used in an undifferentiated manner always and everywhere” (Glasl 2002: 313).

The life “within any type of organization is likely to stimulate comparisons, competition and conflicts between departments and individuals. Communication problems, which in most cases trigger underlying conflicts are multiple, even when it comes to internal communication “(Oachesu 2016: 811).

Further, it is generally assumed that conflicts between cultures are more difficult to resolve than conflicts within a culture. This is mostly due to the fact that in within-culture conflicts the conflicting parties can expect similarities in behavioural dispositions, values, and expectations, whereas in between-culture conflicts the parties involved cannot make such assumptions. (Ma et al. 2012)

The following section discusses the different styles about dealing with conflict, solving uncontrolled conflicts and how to avoid the escalation of conflicts and further, what external support is possible as each style has its own advantages and disadvantages. Conflict management is a crucial topic in professional environments, especially for managers or those in leadership roles. Therefore, conflict management is a skill that can be continually honed throughout one's life.

Dealing with conflict

Recognizing a conflict as such marks the first step towards instigating change. Engaging in a detailed analysis phase between the occurrence of the conflict and the search for a solution can lead to an improvement in the conflict behaviour of individuals, groups, and organizations.

It is important to persistently examine the perceptions, wishes and perspectives of those involved (Schwarz 2010). This analysis should not only focus on the obvious, i.e., the tip of the iceberg, but also delve into the aspects and underlying causes of conflict that may not be immediately apparent (Bartlakowski 2019) .

It is also advisable to take a meta-level approach as a method of analysis for processing and understanding the situation, as this can be helpful for the individual. This skill can be developed and practiced independently. It entails examining not only the content but also the process itself, which involves analysing not just the "what" but also the "how" in greater detail (Schwarz 2010).

While the aim of the analysis is to identify the "true" core of the conflict rather than merely addressing its surface manifestations, it can also be beneficial to initially address the

symptoms in order to alleviate tensions and subsequently address the underlying issues. It is important to recognize that conflict resolution only occurs when the core problem is identified and addressed. Otherwise, it won't be long before the same conflict reappears under a different name or with new symptoms. (Schwarz 2014)

Various factors influence how people deal with conflicts. For instance, the roles individuals hold (such as colleagues, boss, customer, etc.) are important, as well as the relationship between conflicting parties and the internal dynamics within the team or department. A manager, for example, thinks and feels differently than one in the role of an employee. (Schwarz 2010) At the same time, social positions, inherited or learned, imprints and patterns have an influence on the conflict style. "At the social level, the effects of cultural variables may influence the way a person approaches a social interaction, how s/he perceives the situation, and the manner in which s/he chooses to resolve this situation. At the same time, individual difference variables may also play a role in how a person responds to a conflict" (Kaushal 2006: 580).

Previous experiences with the other party in tense situations, as well as the presence of fundamental mutual trust, also significantly influence behaviour. The overall situation and past history must also be considered, including any previous conflicts related to the matter. In hierarchical settings, significant changes, resource availability, and options to exit the situation can all impact conflict behaviour. Another crucial factor influencing individual approaches is the consequences for the parties involved in the conflict. (Kreuser 2010) Particularly relevant are the individual significance of the conflict issue, previous personal experiences with conflicts in general, and the subjective assessment of the chances of resolution. Additionally, one's knowledge and experience of their own methods and capabilities for dealing with conflicts in a constructive manner, i.e., their "conflict style" (recurring personal conflict behaviour), also play a crucial role. (Kreuser 2010)

However, conflicts are the result of behaviour. It is an integral part of human life. Conflict management is primarily about "acquiring skills related to conflict resolution, self-awareness of conflict modes, conflict communication skills, and establishing a structure for managing conflict in the organizational environment" (Thakore 2013: 7).

Thakore (2013) explains that the basis for quick and efficient conflict resolution is the correct evaluation of the type of a conflict. Once identified, one can often resolve the conflict using the following strategies:

- Find a conflict discussion with the other person
- Analyze the cause of the conflict and evaluate the conflict objectively

- Show understanding for the perspective and feelings of the other person
- Reconsider your own perspective openly and honestly
- Develop targeted solutions and compromises
- Seek the help of a mediator to mediate between the parties to the conflict

In the following, some theoretical approaches to dealing with conflict found in research are outlined. For example Sternberg and Dobson (1987) in Kaushal (2006) have identified some strategies that are used to resolve conflict such as “economic action, physical force, wait and see, acceptance, stepping down, third party, undermining esteem, withholding, bargain/compromise, avoidance, giving in, manipulation, verbal force, prior history, confrontational discussion, mutual discussion, and separation as 17 specific conflict resolution strategies that people engage in when dealing with conflict “(Kaushal 2006: 580).

Additionally, Rahim and Bonoma (1979) have delineated similar styles of dealing with conflict, albeit with a focus on five specific ones: obliging, integrating, avoiding, dominating, and compromising (Kaushal 2006). Many of the theories and styles of dealing with conflict are similar and have foundations in each other.

Nevertheless, there are various approaches in the literature about the different conflict modes. The following section is based on the work of Schwarz (2013), Slabbert (2004) and Zauner & Simsa (1997) describing six ways how humans can deal with conflicts. Most conflicts can be traced back to these six basic models: Avoiding / Escape, Destruction, Cartellization, Delegation, Compromising, Consensus. The model applied and its frequency depend on the situation and the individuals involved.

Further in this context, Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann and their model stand out, featuring a specific questionnaire designed to assess a person's conflict type. When approaching a conflict, it is often important to assess the individual conflict styles of the people involved. This can sometimes be relevant in order to adapt the style of leadership to the situation or choose different forms of conflict management (praxisframework 2024).

The six basic methods for dealing with conflict mentioned by Gerhard Schwarz should help to ensure that the work performance of the parties involved (or sometimes just one of them) is not further impaired by the conflict. In most cases, diverse and creative solutions can be traced back to one of these basic patterns. (Schwarz 2014) Schwarz believes that the reason conflicts arise is that basic instincts such as flight or attack switch off the ability to think rationally in stressful situations (Schwarz 2014).

In the first scenario (**avoidance**), approaching the conflict involves reverting to the original instinctive behaviour pattern, wherein the problem is denied or simply not addressed, perhaps in anticipation of a better time or due to a certain fear of open conflict. Especially since the

feeling can arise that conflict situations can be resolved by fleeing, there may be a tendency to quickly escape a situation, where there are no losers and it is usually seen as safe and energy-saving. This resolves the conflict for a certain period of time because of the distance between the parties and the cause of the conflict. However, if this technique is persistently used, it becomes evident that the situation is not actually resolved, and the constant "escape" is unsatisfactory, preventing any further development because no learning process can take place. Scientists attribute depression and other psychosomatic illnesses to the repression or denial of conflicts. (Schwarz 2014)

When the option to escape is no longer viable in the conflict situation, a battle scenario emerges, characterized by the notion of fighting the opponent in order to escape, hence it is named **destruction**. A person pursues their own interests at the expense of another, utilizing all available resources to do so. (Schwarz 2014)

This approach offers a permanent resolution, but it is irreversible, leading to the loss of alternatives and potential long-term harm to development. This pattern is also evident throughout human history: when escape was not an option and the desire for survival was paramount, fights often aimed at eliminating the opponent (Schwarz 2014).

The third pattern is submission or subordination, a method that is still lived and used in many institutionalized hierarchical constellations. Essentially, during a conflict, the individual in the more central position is typically perceived to be correct in contrast to those in peripheral roles. Their position can be strengthened by laws, strength of arms, size or money. This type of conflict resolution is only possible if both parties acknowledge this power dynamic (even if it's sometimes coerced). In such a scenario, the "loser" remains alive, necessitating control to mitigate the risk of role reversal and renewed conflict, often achieved through manipulation or threats. (Schwarz, 2014) Social changes have led to the development of a new model of conflict resolution, namely cooperation between conflicting opponents through delegation. In this pattern, another person (excluded third party), who is not involved in the conflict, is given some important functions. On one hand, they serve as a mediator (such as a court or boss decision) between the parties, while on the other hand, they facilitate ongoing coordination and communication between the conflicting parties. Additionally, this person can provide an external perspective on the conflict, potentially elevating it to a higher level since they are not directly involved in the conflict themselves. (Schwarz 2014)

However, a disadvantage of this approach is that in most cases only a small degree of individual identification with the solution is possible, meaning that in a certain sense the conflicting parties have been deprived of their conflict competence. (Schwarz 2014)

The last two patterns are compromise and consensus. A compromise is a self-determining conflict resolution in which partial agreement can be achieved on a specific topic. Both parties have to give up some of their positions in order to reach a compromise.

If this agreement addresses significant or substantial aspects of the contentious content, it is considered a good compromise; otherwise, it is referred to as a "rotten" compromise. The real goal of compromise is therefore a consensus. (Schwarz 2014)

A consensus implies the existence of at least two contradictory claims or interests, both of which are deemed true or justified, and most importantly, these two are interdependent. A solution must be jointly reached because it cannot be unilaterally determined (Schwarz 2014). Therefore, a new solution that elevates the conflict to a new level, where resolution is possible and both parties can identify with the outcome, is necessary. However, this approach also means that finding a solution often requires a lot of time and energy and requires an increased change of perspective (Schwarz 2014).

Communication

When the topic of conflict arises, communication naturally becomes a focal point.

Communication shortcomings are often viewed as a root cause of conflict, and the following four mechanisms can be effectively employed to address this.

The first aspect is formal and informal/private communication within an organization, both of which are equally important for a good working atmosphere. It is particularly important for managers to be in constant communication with subordinates, in formal as well as in informal settings. (Oachesu 2016)

However, it is also important for employees to be able to express suggestions and complaints anonymously. Since feedback is essential for conflict prevention, providing precise information about the effect of one's own message is crucial for effective communication.

Feedback ensures that the message or behaviour was correctly perceived. In this context, the third aspect, clear and concise communication, is especially important. This involves using simple, direct language that is appropriate and adapted to the person to whom it is addressed. It is also important to communicate messages as facts to reconcile contradictions and address different needs. (Oachesu 2016)

Non-violent Communication - Marshall B. Rosenberg

Another commonly used prevention and conflict resolution approach is non-violent communication (NVC) developed by Marshall B. Rosenberg. It centres around values and needs, emphasizing the use of empathetic language and improving the quality of relationships. It is particularly relevant to take responsibility for decisions and find solutions based on

mutual consideration and respect (Rosenberg 20). Usually referred to as a "process" or "language", the essence of NVC is found in honest expression and empathic listening using the four steps, although the method can just as easily be used non-verbally. (Rosenberg 2010: 25)

As a first step, the bare situations and facts are communicated without judgment. The second step is intended to put feelings and perceptions into words. The third step is intended to reveal one's own needs in relation to the situation. The fourth and final step of this method is to articulate expectations and interests towards the other person. (Rosenberg 2010) This method is intended to be able to express needs and interests as precisely and neutrally as possible (Malinowski and Lenz 2008). As a result, this method enables individuals to deal with conflicts independently, which can also serve as conflict prevention for future issues. (Schreyögg 2002)

External support

Finally, it should be emphasized at this point that it is always a possibility, especially in organizations, large teams and NGOs, to seek external support especially for conflict situations. There are many different experts for personal growth, workshops on leadership and conflict resolution, but the following section will focus on the three most popular options: Supervision, mediation and coaching.

Supervision

While supervision is mostly aimed at personal development and focuses on the emotional factors of systems, it involves personal reflection on work relationships and processes, it aims to give more attention to the organizational dimension to consider important organizational issues (Winter 2005: 210). It primarily involves self-reflection regarding the work situation. Often, there is no scheduled direction, but instead, an observational and exploratory role, this is particularly apparent in conflict situations where there may be no initial goal at the beginning (Schlegel 2003: 208).

Supervision often does not focus on conflict resolution but rather on preventative team development and clarification of interactions and roles within a team, while mediation is a method of conflict management and is therefore inextricably linked to the conflict (Winter 2005: 206).

Mediation

Mediation is a method of out-of-court conflict resolution that is used for disputes between two or more parties. A structured process is utilized by the mediator, who acts as an independent third party, which is particularly beneficial when mediating between hardened fronts.

It is equally important that the mediator has no decision-making authority, even if the process is solution- and future-oriented. (Duve 2003b und Glasl 2002)

This method of conflict resolution is usually only used when the positions of the parties to the dispute are already strongly entrenched and cooperative conflict resolution is impossible without the intervention of an independent authority (Schwarz 2010: 329).

Historically, this method can be traced back to various cultures, including Greek and Roman, but especially China and Japan. It was subsequently brought to America by immigrants where it was widely used. (Duve 2003b und Glasl 2002)

Coaching

Coaching, a widely recognized approach should also be mentioned. Despite extensive literature on the subject, there is no universally accepted definition for a coach. However, the term coaching comes from “coach”, a person who looked after athletes and brought them to peak performance. However, coaching also meant providing mental and psychological support to the competitors (Lippmann 2006; Stenzel 2010; Keil 2000). Leadership skills such as employee motivation, persuasion and flexibility were also relevant tools in this support. Nevertheless, an athlete has to perform themselves and a coach can only influence the athlete's preparation. Conversely, coaching in a work or conflict context, involved people have to act themselves (Schreyögg 2002).

In general, it can be summarized that coaching aims to improve existing processes through guided self-reflection and to promote the personal development and problem-solving skills of the individual (Schreyögg 2005). This method is often used in problem situations, stress, crises and conflicts in an internal company context. Conflict coaching therefore is ultimately defined by the activity and objective (Schreyögg 2005). Nevertheless, the investment and effort of conflict coaching in an internal context is only meaningful and successful if a learning effect for the organization can be achieved (Höher and Höher 2000).

Developing definitional, conceptual insights into the object of culture

Globalization and migration have changed the cultural composition (diversity of race, religion and ethnicity) around the world. This is also noticeable in organizations, companies and teams, which are becoming increasingly highly multicultural and multilingual. These cultural changes and differences can influence employee morale, job performance, categorization and stereotyping and can lead to conflicts due to differences in cultural norms and communication styles. Nevertheless, cultural diversity can also lead to advantages such as increased creativity and performance. The interconnectedness and interaction of different cultures can be mainly seen as the effect of globalisation. Yet, this does not mean that cultural differences are disappearing, rather, problems may lie “in the inability to recognise the presence and the force of the different cultures” (Kocak 2014: 64).

In this context, it is important to have adequate terminology and sensitivity of the topic. Therefore, this section focuses on the term culture and further explains why the term multicultural is used in contrast to the terms multicultural, transcultural and cross cultural

Culture in anthropology

Elwert already highlights in her text „how culture is defined depends on the eye of the beholder - does it belong to an anthropologist or a theater director - but the abundance of definitions also indicates how difficult it is to grasp the content of this term“ (Eckert, trans. d. author, 2004: 27). In essence, culture is mostly a shared system of learned behaviour patterns that are typical of the members of any given society (Kocak 2014). Culture is learned and transmitted from generation to generation, thereby cultivating a shared value system (Kocak 2014).

Nevertheless, as early as 1952, Kroeber and Kluckhohn showed how diverse cultures can be described. They collected and categorized over 160 different definitions of culture as part of a literature review. While in 1998, Herbig estimated the number of existing definitions of the concept of culture already at over 450 (Herbig 1998: 11). Thus, the topic of culture was researched, described and discussed in many theories on different levels. Further, “Considerable research has been done on topics peripherally related to multinational groups, resulting in a large body of literature on global organizational design (e.g. Bartlett and Ghoshal 1989), cross-cultural management (e.g. Redding 1992; Roberts and Boyacigiller 1984), cross-cultural interpersonal interaction (e.g. Gudykunst 1991), and heterogeneous task groups (e.g. Hoffman and Maier 1961; Triandis et al. 1965; Jackson 1992; Milliken and Martins 1996)” (Hambrick 1998: 40).

Even today, the term culture has not been clearly defined in theory, which is due to its diverse use. Instead, different definitions have been established that rely on individual priorities depending on the scientific discipline. However, most of these definitions have in common that culture is essentially described as a comprehensive value system that controls people's actions, partly through the conscious and partly through the subconscious (Engelen and Tohlen 2014).

In the context of multicultural issues, the definition by Helene Spencer-Oatey's (1999) is often used. She describes culture as: „the totality of attitudes, principles, assumptions, beliefs and values, behavioral norms and basic mindsets shared by a group, which influence the behavior of group members and by means of which they interpret the behavior of others“ (Eckert 2004, trans. d. author: 35).

In general, it can be said that the term culture stems from the Latin word ‘colere’: “to cultivate, to train” and was primarily used in an agricultural context “(Brousek 2008: 2). For many people, culture represents the framework by which a situation is interpreted, whether something is good/right or bad/wrong (Brousek 2008). Furthermore, according to Brousek, culture “shapes worldview, values and norms, beliefs, language and behaviour and is a determining factor in all patterns of thought and action that create identity on a community level” (Brousek 2008: 2). The American anthropologist Edward T. Hall, who is perceived the founder of intercultural communication in anthropological science, defines culture as a silent language that controls people without them being aware of it. Hall recognized that, in addition to language, culture-specific areas play an important role that are not initially consciously perceived. He called them “the hidden signals” (Brousek 2008: 4).. Hall linked the models of culture and communication, then stated that nonverbal communication must be understood to understand work culture (Brousek 2008).

Finally, Geert Hofstede, defines culture as “collective programming of the mind that distinguishes members of one group or category of people from another” (Brousek 2008: 2), meaning that these components of a culture are not innate but learned (Hofstede 1993: 18). Nevertheless, culture must be distinguished from human nature and the personality of an individual, i.e. character traits that are partly inherited but also partly learned. This means that in addition to unique personal experiences, the cultural background also shapes an individual's personality and the way in which certain feelings are expressed is culturally determined (Hofstede 1993). In connection with this approach, the visual model of the cultural iceberg by Hall (1977) was created. This once again visually illustrates that a large part of feeling and thinking lies below the surface of the water and is therefore not immediately visible. Rather,

only a small part of a culture, for example certain behaviours are visible and addressable. This aspect is particularly intriguing in the context of this work because when individuals from diverse backgrounds converge, their unique perceptions clash with differing customs, often resulting in interpersonal misunderstandings and conflicts. This is especially pronounced when there's a lack of reflection on one's own and others' worldviews and behaviour patterns. (Brousek 2008) In essence, culture serves to unite individuals within a group while simultaneously creating distance between people from different groups. "This creates the challenge of developing strategies that enable members of different "cultures" to communicate successfully with one another and to reflect on any conflicts that may arise and to transform them non-violently" (Brousek 2008: 3).

Hofstede- Cultural dimensions

To emphasize a clear affiliation with anthropology this master's thesis is based on the definition of culture according to the American Anthropologists and sociologists Clyde Kluckhohn. This also forms the basis for the extensive studies by the cultural researcher, Geert Hofstede (1980), professor of organizational anthropology and international management, as well as his student Fons Trompenaars, a social psychologist.

According to the anthropologist Kluckhohn: "Culture consists in patterned ways of thinking, feeling and reacting, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values"(Kluckhohn, 1951, quoted in Engelen and Tohlen 2014:18).

The results of Geert Hofstede's empirical studies are particularly relevant in cross-cultural research, in which he states that national cultures have a very significant influence on work-related values and attitudes. In this context, Hofstede identified his cultural five dimensions in which cultures differ from one another (Hofstede 2001).

These dual cultural dimensions are systematically collected, examined from a comparative cultural perspective and cultural differences are shown and quantitatively recorded (Lüsebrink 2016).

The first dimension is Power distance, which is defined as "the degree to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations in a country expect and accept the unequal distribution of power" (Hofstede 2001: 98). The power distance index (MDI) indicates how much tolerance or acceptance there is for differences in power and authority in a culture (Lüsebrink 2016)

The second dimension is **individualism /collectivism**. The associated individualism index shows the extent to which cultures value the individual, his or her personal responsibility and autonomy, over the group's pressures of a collective. Also relevant in this context is that verbal communication plays an important role, especially in individualistic cultures, while silence is considered abnormal or suspicious. In collectivist cultures, however, simply being together is sufficient (Lüsebrink 2016).

The third dimension is **masculinity/femininity**. Hofstede defines it as follows: "Masculinity stands for a society in which social gender roles are clearly defined: Men should be assertive, tough and concentrate on material success. Women, on the other hand, should be more modest, sensitive and concentrate on quality of life. Femininity stands for a society in which gender roles overlap, both men and women should be modest, sensitive and strive for quality of life." (Hofstede 2001: 297; Lüsebrink 2016: 28)

Avoidance of uncertainty is the fourth dimension, which refers to the "degree to which members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations" (Hofstede 2001: 161). Countries that have a high uncertainty avoidance index have a tendency for prejudice, rigidity, intolerance and the unacceptability of disordered situations than countries with a low uncertainty avoidance index and react to situations more tolerantly and more calmly. (Lüsebrink 2016)

Finally, the fifth dual cultural dimension is **long-term orientation/short-term orientation**. Hofstede defines it as follows: "Long-term orientation stands for the promotion of values such as endurance and thrift, which can be expected to achieve a threat in the future (East Asian societies). The opposite pole, the short-term orientation, however, stands for the promotion of values that are linked to the past and present, in particular respect for tradition, saving face and fulfilling social obligations (western industrialized countries" (Hofstede 2001: 359).

A special aspect about this method is that country-specific cultural profiles can be created based on these individual cultural dimensions for the analysis of intercultural communication situations. Nevertheless, it must also be emphasized at this point, Hofstede's methodological approach has been criticized many times, in particular, that the study group is only partially representative of the individual cultures examined (Lüsebrink 2016). Furthermore, Hofstede's premise of a relative homogeneity of national cultures ("homogeneity premise") is increasingly being called into question due to the multicultural nature of contemporary societies (Lüsebrink 2016). Nevertheless, Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions still "represent one of the most influential and ambitious attempts within multicultural research to capture cultural specifics and differences on the basis of value indices. As a result, his research

enabled him to work through the construct of national culture in a tangible and measurable way for the first time by entering the nations' responses on the scales of cultural dimensions and comparing them with each other, thus enabling the further development of this discipline” (Engelen & Tholen 2014: 5). As in addition to Hofstede, “E. T. Hall and Fons Trompenaars in particular have developed complementary and sometimes alternative approaches to recording and analyzing cultural values (or cultural standards)” (Lüsebrink 2016: 31).

Edward Twitchell Hall- Cultural dimensions & intercultural communication

The American anthropologist Edward T. Hall, who is preserved the founder of intercultural communication in anthropological science, approaches the topic in a completely different way. He defines culture as a silent language that controls people without them being aware of it. Hall recognized that, in addition to language, culture-specific areas play an important role that are not initially consciously perceived. He called them “the hidden signals.”

This is particularly thematized in his book “Understanding cultural differences” (Brousek 2008). A key idea relevant to business and the workplace is communication, which Hall also examines in his book "The Silent Language." He associated culture with communication, asserting that understanding nonverbal cues is crucial for comprehending the nuances of workplace culture. His work is relevant because, in addition to communication, his research focused on the intercultural nature of international companies. Among these, Hall includes the handling of space, time and communication. He also distinguishes between low-context and high-context cultures, referring to the degree of cultural context necessary for mutual understanding. This distinction is crucial for the process of cultural contact: low-context cultures are easier for outsiders to understand, while understanding certain behaviours and thought patterns in high-context cultures becomes increasingly difficult in a foreign context. (Brousek 2008)

In addition, as already emphasised, Hall in particular has dealt with the model of the cultural iceberg. However, the model of the cultural iceberg can be traced back to Osgood (1951), who distinguishes between the visible (percepta) and the non-visible (concepta) components of a culture and sees the percepta as the cause of the concepta (Brousek 2008). Likewise, the iceberg model is not the only model that was influenced by Osgood. Other works and models were inspired such as the "layer models", the three-level model of corporate culture by Schein, or the "cultural onion" by Hofstede and Trompenaars (Brousek 2008).

Fons Trompenaars - Cultural dimensions

The Dutch researcher and student of Hofstede, Trompenaars has developed further distinguishing features for cultural comparison. Based on the cultural dimensions as found in Hall he redefines the three main categories: relationships with people, attitude to time and attitude to space. Further he distinguishes seven cultural dimensions based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions. He establishes these dimensions based on surveys of 46,000 managers in different companies and different cultures conducted in the 1980s and 1990s, which he examined empirically. Since his dimensions are based on those of his teacher Hofstede, they have many overlaps in terms of content and names. (Lüsebrink 2016) Both incorporate individualism / collectivism. This dimension focuses on the different manifestations of individual or collective interests and decision-making patterns within a cultural community. The dual cultural standard of **universalism versus particularism** concerns the evaluation and validity of general rules, especially regulations and laws, i.e. universal and generally valid or particular, i.e. only valid in specific contexts. (Lüsebrink 2016)

According to Trompenaars, the distinction between "specific" and "diffuse" cultures refers to the separation of the private and public or professional spheres and the relationships that exist within them. In specific cultures there is a very strict separation between the areas while in diffuse cultures there are areas of overlap and mixtures between these areas.

Trompenaars defines acceptance of publicly expressed emotion in a culture with the opposition of **neutrality/ emotionality**. What is particularly relevant is how and when emotions are allowed to be expressed (Lüsebrink 2016). **Performance / origin** or status deals with the culture-specific assessment of the social status. A distinction is often made based on achievements, i.e. the status achieved in performance-oriented cultures, or characteristics such as social origin and title, age, class, gender, education, etc. (Lüsebrink 2016)

The relationship to **nature or environment** is another dimension of Trompenaars. This dimension it is about the culture-specific approach to nature or the importance of the external environment and thus the ecological awareness of a culture. A distinction can be made between cultures that believe that nature must submit to human needs, while others value respect for nature and the wish for creating a "favorable ecological balance". (Lüsebrink 2016) Finally, a dimension that has increasingly been taken up and discussed by other cultural anthropologists, it is the attitude towards **time or seriality vs. parallelism**. Trompenaars refers to the handling of time, the "culture-specific perception and assessment of punctuality, pace, rhythm as well as the respective status of the past, present and future in a society" (Lüsebrink 2016: 30). A distinction is made between sequential-oriented cultures in which a sequential view of time prevails, i.e. tasks are preferably completed successively, punctuality

is given great importance, while in synchronous-oriented cultures there is a much more flexible understanding of time, in which activities can be carried out at short notice and can be interrupted for the benefit of others. (Lüsebrink 2016)

Similarities between the models

In summary, some distinctions and differences can be noted in the models of Hall, Trompenaars and Hofstede.

Values and cultural standards are analysed from a culturally comparative perspective in the different theoretical approaches. Cultural differences such as typical patterns of perception, thinking, evaluating and acting are revealed. The knowledge and perception of cultural standards, as well as different languages and communication styles, are fundamental prerequisites for intercultural communication and interaction.

Conflicts or misunderstandings and problems can sometimes arise if the values that guide action (such as the understanding of time or the attitude towards authorities) are fundamentally different between the communication partners. (Lüsebrink 2016)

Lüsebrink notes in his work that the "studies by Hofstede and Hall prove that neighbouring cultures - such as France and Germany or Austria and Italy (Lavric 2002) - can have just as striking differences in values as cultures that are geographically far apart. Belonging to The same geopolitical cultural area (such as Western culture or Islamic culture) and the same language family (such as the Indo-European languages) in no way implies, as is often assumed, a broad agreement in symbolic systems and values." (Lüsebrink 2016: 32).

This is interesting because the results of cross-cultural value research largely contradict a cultural area-related interpretation of intercultural conflicts. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that the cultural comparative approach of Hofstede, Hall, Trompenaars, which is based on different studies of cultural standards, has been increasingly criticized. In particular, it is criticized as schematic and that the complexity of (post-)modern societies is neglected, as are the dynamics of intercultural communication. (Lüsebrink 2016)

Lüsebrink further emphasizes that "cultural standard theories and their results can, in fact, serve at best as knowledge-guiding hypotheses to explain observed behaviour and reactions" (Lüsebrink 2016: 30). Lüsebrink also cites Leenen in his work, emphasizing that cultural standards do not capture the behaviour of every single member of a cultural community (such as a nation), but rather describe expectations of cultural normality. Accordingly, individual people or cultural subgroups can sometimes differ significantly from such a frequency value. (Lüsebrink 2016)

Understanding of time

Looking at the three models side by side, one can see that the reference to the understanding of time is explicitly addressed in all three models. A clear parallel can be drawn between Hofstede's concepts of long-term orientation and short-term orientation and Trompenaars'

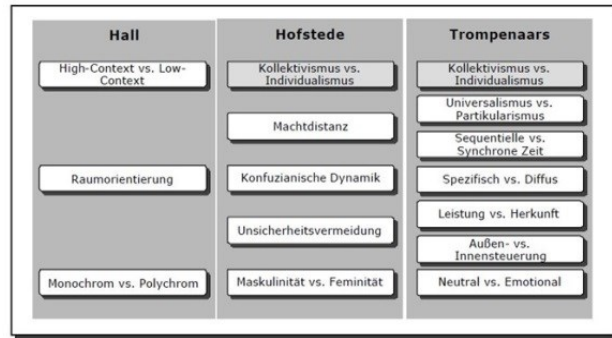


Figure 2 (Apfelthaler 1999:70)

conception of past, present and future thinking. Nevertheless, Trompenaars' concept of time is defined more precisely. While Hall's monochronic understanding of time has strong similarities in many areas with Trompenaars' sequential understanding of time, both terms (synchrony and polychrony) allow dynamics, variability and adaptability (Lüsebrink 2016).

Relationship

The topic of human relationships is relevant for both Hofstede (under the dimensions of femininity and collectivism) and Trompenaars (in collectivism and also in particularism and diffuseness). Similarly, parallels can be drawn between Hofstede's concept of power distance and Trompenaars' dimensions of performance vs. status in relations of the connection between those involved in business affairs, as both address the importance of the business relationship process (Lüsebrink 2016).

Communication

In the broadest sense, the aspect of communication can also be seen as a sub-area of the relationship level, but since it is particularly relevant for Hall, it should be discussed separately here. "Hall focuses on the communication level in three of the four dimensions of his cultural model (spatial understanding, high vs. low context, information speed). There is a relationship between the communication level and the relationship level in the sense that the type of communication defines the interpersonal relationship (Lüsebrink 2016).

Human-emotional level

This dimension is also discussed again by both Hofstede and Trompenaars.

For Trompenaars, the focus lies on whether emotions are permitted or prohibited. While for Hofstede, the focus is on the fact that "strong uncertainty avoidance", such as fears and insecurity, should be brought under control through structures and rules, while "weak uncertainty avoidance" is more likely to create space for acceptance and understanding (Lüsebrink 2016). The explanation of the term culture is followed in the next chapter by the presentation of multicultural, intercultural and cross cultural.

Definition of terms – interculturality, multiculturality, Cross-Cultural, transculturality, diversity

Increasing cultural diversity in the workplace has led to significant attention being paid to conflict management and intercultural sensitivity (Lüsebrink 2016).

Therefore, the individual terms interculturality, multiculturality, transculturality and diversity should be explained in more detail in the following section.

Multicultural

In general, multiculturalism is often understood as the coexistence of different cultures (in the anthropological sense) within a social system (DLF n.d, Accessed: 21.3.24). More specifically, this means that multiculturalism increasingly refers to the social structures of an organization or society. However, it is relevant that the different cultures do not merge, but rather exist side by side. (Ikud n.d, Accessed: 21.3.2024)

Deriving from the Latin term *multus*: “many, numerous,”, multicultural actually simply means that a group is made up of members of several cultures (Bolten 2007: 22).

In this context, however, it should be mentioned that the term "multicultural" was only introduced in the USA in 1941 and the term "multicultural society" in Canada in 1964 and 1965, so it is a relatively new concept (Lüsebrink 2016).

Transcultural

In general, the term transcultural in the broadest sense expresses an open understanding of culture that is not based on clearly defined cultural boundaries (DLF n.d, Accessed: 21.3.24).

„In contrast to interculturality and multiculturalism, the concept of transculturality assumes that cultures are not homogeneous, clearly distinguishable units, but are increasingly networked and mixed, especially as a result of globalization” (Ikud n.d, Accessed: 21.3.2024).

Transculturality describes all phenomena and processes of cultural border crossing, which enables the development of clearly delimited individual cultures into a global culture.

(Lüsebrink 2016)

Interculturality

In the 1980s, the first ideas about the concept of interculturality in education emerged in Germany. Today, many different scientific disciplines deal with intercultural research questions (Sinner 2011).

In general, interculturality is understood as the interaction between two or more cultures, where mutual influences occur despite cultural differences (Ikud n.d, Accessed: 21.3.2024). It is relevant, however, that this is a process that essentially relates to the dynamics of the coexistence of members of different living environments and to their relationships with one

another and their interactions with one another.(Ikud n.d, Accessed: 21.3.2024; Bolten 2007: 22) The Latin term "inter," meaning "between," further clarifies that the focus is primarily on interactions between people from different cultures (Bolten 2007: 22; Brousek 2008: 4) it is very much about the process of exchange and mutual understanding (Ikud n.d, Accessed: 21.3.2024). Therefore intercultural is often used in connection with competence, as someone has intercultural competence, meaning that they are aware of their own culture, but can muster a understanding of foreign cultures (Bolten 2007).

These processes are about creating a completely new reality, a coexistence in which all aspects such as culture, age difference, level of popularity, hierarchy differences have an influence, an encounter in which a common behaviour is found within a few seconds, which cannot always be predicted in advance (Bolten 2007: 22).

Multicultural Teams & Management

Due to increasing globalization, more and more companies are becoming international.

“On one hand, this globalised business environment provides organisations with unparalleled opportunities, whereas on the other hand, it also offers tremendous challenges due to a higher level of complexity, which results from conditions of multiplicity, ambiguity, and interdependence. Within many organisations, there can be seen increased multiculturalism and thus increased interaction between employees of different cultures” (Kocak 2014: 70). It is also more likely for working teams to include people from other countries and cultures. Dealing with conflicts, workload and team setting or hierarchies, is handled differently in various cultures. This has to be considered when a conflict needs to be solved in an international team (Baranowski 2006; Schneider and Hirt 2007).

An increasingly relevant competence is the understanding of foreign cultural negotiation and communication patterns in everyday work life. Engelen and Tohlen in particular have contributed to the emergence and development of multicultural management as a scientific discipline (Engelen and Tholen 2014). While a few years ago immigrant workers were often still expected to adapt, today everyone involved in culturally mixed work groups is expected to have high multicultural skills, for which a lot of employees are generally not prepared. Leading these teams presents a challenge due to the foreign cultural patterns of leadership, motivation and performance behaviour, all the while high-quality products and services must be provided on time. A mutual understanding and acceptance of other experiences and values is therefore essential (Baranowski 2006).

According to Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (2012), this requires group members to adapt to cultural relativism. This means above all that individuals inform themselves

comprehensively about the respective cultural differences and not make hasty judgments about other cultures or impose their own views and values (Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars 2012).

However, this requires sufficient time resources to ensure that the team members get to know each other. At the same time it is an advantage if international employees have a certain multicultural competence. Clearly, a group's composition of multicultural teams creates certain opportunities and challenges. In this way, different perspectives, complementary characteristics and different ways of thinking of all employees can contribute to a solution to a problem and prevent the danger of uniform groupthink (Engelen and Tholen 2014). Over time, through long-term collaboration in multicultural teams, the members often develop an understanding of other ways of thinking and thus increasingly become more tolerant of other cultures. The members learn from and with each other, leading to continuous development within the team. This openness and diversity are also reflected in their work. For this reason, the innovation potential in international teams is often high (Engelen and Tholen 2014). According to Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (2012), this is crucial for a company to remain competitive.

Conflict and goal between-culture

Nevertheless, especially in multicultural groups, there is often distrust or dislike of other people or cultures as well as stereotypical ways of thinking, which can then lead to differences of opinion and conflict. The issue of communication problems as a conflict trigger should be particularly highlighted, as international collaboration often involves speaking a foreign language, which means that different language levels can prevail within the teams. These linguistic differences in particular can lead to misunderstandings and negatively affect trust and cooperation in the group. Nevertheless, the geographical distance and the different time zones or time delay can also lead to complications for international teams (Engelen and Tholen 2014). Brousek emphasizes in his work that raising awareness of cultural differences and conflict management strategies can be particularly relevant for multicultural settings. (Brousek 2008: 55). Mainly, the problem arises from the fact that each individual unknowingly perceives their own way of dealing with conflict as "normal", meaning that: Although someone from the European Union might expect to encounter differences when interacting with people from Asia, they might not expect similar challenges when engaging with individuals from other EU countries or, for example, the USA. (Kaushal and Kwantes 2006: 30) Ohbuchi, Fukushima and Tedeschi highlight in their work: "It is generally believed that between-culture conflicts are more difficult to resolve than within-culture conflicts.

Although people involved in within culture conflicts can assume similarities in behavioral dispositions, values, and expectations, people involved in between-culture conflicts cannot make such assumptions and hence have difficulty in adjusting their behavior toward adversaries” (Ohbuchi, Fukushima and Tedeschi 1999: 251). According to Zauner and Simsa (1997), it can be stated that different groups can live peacefully together all over the world, as not every mixture of cultures leads to conflicts. However, it can be observed that conflicts emerge whenever one group perceives an out-group as a threat to their security or identity (Zauner and Simsa 1997).

NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation

In general, NGOs are organizations, i.e. groups and associations, which carry out their work independently of state funding and are particularly committed to society, the environment or socio-political goals. It is also important to note that non-governmental organizations do not pursue a direct profit goal and are independent of state funds and instructions. “The World Bank defines NGOs as 'private organizations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services, or undertake community development' Others define NGOs by what they are not, especially in relation to government and private business and industry” (Aall 2013: 124).

NGOs can be assigned to the civil sector, but this is not to be equated with NGOs, as the forms and types of organisation found in the civil sector are too broad for this, as not every association and initiative is an NGO. Nevertheless, it is relevant to note that there are different companies, NGOs, and business who thematically overlap and that the distinctions between are not quite so sharp. It is important that the functioning of NGOs can only be understood if they are recognised as a multi-level process (Stickler 2005). In addition, it should be emphasized that NGOs are called; Nichtregierungsorganisation" (NRO) in German and are often registered as associations (e.V.), non-profit limited liability company (GmbH) or private foundations in German-speaking countries. (academics 2023, Accessed: 17.1.2024)

This term Non-governmental organization (NGO) is a so-called negative term and describes that the Organisations is foremost financed through donations. Thereby showing that the content, definitions and topics of NGOs are not so easy to grasp (Stickler 2005).

NGOs have different focus areas and purposes, for example promoting climate protection, supporting children in poorer countries and providing humanitarian aid during and after disasters as well as environmental protection or monument conservation, human rights as well as art and culture, disaster relief or youth and elderly care.

For the purposes of this study, NGOs are defined as “private, self-governing, non-profit institutions dedicated to alleviating human suffering, promoting education, economic development, health, environmental protection, human rights, and conflict resolution, and encouraging the establishment of democratic institutions and civil society” (Aall. 2013, p. 25). There are countless non-governmental organizations worldwide. According to Statista, more than 23,000 foundations were counted in Germany alone in 2019. There are also numerous associations and limited liability companies that pursue charitable purposes. (academics 2023, Accessed: 17.1.2024). Many larger NGOs operate globally, because, alongside state institutions, they represent an important pillar in development cooperation (academics 2023, Accessed: 17.1.2024). It is also interesting to note that NGOs raise their voices in various policy areas. These include the environment and human rights with a focus on improving social and environmental standards; other policy areas include peace, women, world order and development (Stickler 2005). These political and idealistic tendencies are often important when people volunteer for NGOs. While serving a good cause, many also fulfil their personal needs such as: the feeling of belonging; the chance to convince others of their own ideas and concepts; the search for a meaningful task that gives life meaning; self-realization; variety and balance in the job; sociability; recognition and reputation; but also, the acting out of needs for dominance, power or superiority. Nevertheless, in our time, the basic human need for belonging and an “emotional home” is often what can only be realized in the circle of “like-minded people” (academics 2023, Accessed: 17.1.2024). This also explains why many international NGOs operate with different nationalities. Management is usually provided in the country of origin and operational staff positions are filled by local employees. It is often important to involve locals in order to come into contact with indigenous groups. Nevertheless it is also necessary that local groups work with international NGOs, otherwise they would not be able to attract international attention and would not receive as much funding and support. (Aall 2013)

Finally, it is relevant to point out that if an NGO wants to survive beyond its founding generation, it must repeatedly facilitate processes of intergenerational and intercultural dialogue and learning between people. This is due to the fact that NGOs bring together people from different countries, age cohorts and different areas of expertise who have been shaped differently by their social and historical experiences. This results in challenges and opportunities, as these previous experiences have a major influence on individual commitment and the associated motives and expectations regarding working in NGOs (Wintergerst 2010).

Scientific framework & state of research

An initial literature review showed that multicultural teams are complex constructs that have sparked the research interest of scientists across disciplines over the years. Hence, the literature search deliberately aimed to identify publications from various disciplines. However, the combination of conflict and multicultural teams and NGOs has received rather little attention, research and specialist texts on similar topics are also included. The publications analysed are predominantly, but not exclusively, from the social sciences and economics, but also from psychology, as well as practice-oriented literature and instructions for action. Both empirical and theoretical/conceptual publications in German and English were included. In order to identify research-relevant literature, both the anthropology library and the library of the University of Vienna were consulted, as well as leading specialist journals, publishers and online databases such as Google Scholar. In addition, literature from selected works was researched on the basis of a snowball system. As more and more research has been published on multicultural/intercultural teams and conflict management since the late 1990s/early 2000s, the research includes publications of the last 15-20 years. Nevertheless particularly relevant or frequently referenced earlier literature is also taken into account in the theoretical part of this work. The systematic search via various channels was carried out using English and German search terms.

The search terms such as: multicultural team, intercultural mediation, conflict management, NGOs, teams in NGOs, conflict, cultural terms (intercultural, cross-cultural, multicultural, global etc.), as well as conflict management (personnel management, conflict resolution and management) were used in different combinations in the search as these are often not clearly differentiated in the literature. As part of the research, an attempt was made to take all terms into account in order to reduce the risk of not including relevant literature.

Finally, from the found literature, works were selected that deal either with intercultural/multicultural teams or conflict management in companies and conflict management in NGOs in particular. When reviewing the researched literature, it became apparent that only a very small number of publications exist in which conflict management in multicultural teams in NGOs are addressed. In the following, some of these studies, research and specialist texts will be briefly summarized and explained in more detail to clarify why this master's thesis is relevant in terms of research and covers a rather unexplored topic.

Therefore, this work will include a section that addresses theoretical research on the topic and another section that briefly presents various research and studies, detailing their content, methodology, and results.

In general, it can be said that a large body of literature on multicultural teamwork and cooperation in organizations has emerged in the last thirty years. As mentioned the majority of empirical studies on multicultural problem areas date from the last 15-20 years.

Nevertheless, one well known study on this topic was carried out by Hofstede in the late 1960s and early 1970s. "Culture's Consequences" is based on the quantitative study in the IBM Group. In the course of this, Hofstede surveyed more than 116,000 employees of IBM subsidiaries in 72 countries in the periods 1967-69 and 1971-73. His aim was to identify cultural differences. (Hofstede 2001: 34) The result of his research was a four-dimensional cultural model, which he and his research colleagues successively expanded over the course of conducting further studies into a five- and later a six-dimensional model. However, it should be noted that at that time, cooperation and the management of different corporate locations was relevant, but not multicultural teamwork, hence Hofstede transferred his comparative cultural results to organizations, but only dealt with management and corporate culture in an international group. (Hofstede 2001).

In addition to the prominent research by Hofstede (1980), other comparative cultural studies that also produced multidimensional cultural models were carried out by Kluckhohn and Stroedbeck (1961), Hall (1966) and Schwartz (1994), as well as the very comprehensive GLOBE study by House et al. (2004). The Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness Research Program (GLOBE) study conducted in the 1990s can be described as the largest cultural research (House and Javidan 2004). Over a period of ten years, a total of around 17,400 managers from 951 companies (telecommunications, finance and food industries) based in 59 countries with 62 cultures were surveyed by around 170 researchers on how they assess the actual and target characteristics of certain values within their company and their society (House and Javidan 2004). Secondly, the participants were asked to assess whether the leadership characteristics and behaviours presented can define a manager's success or failure. In the final phase of the research project, the researchers focused on investigating the leadership behaviour of CEOs (House and Javidan 2004).

The study was carried out with the aim of deepening the current state of research on multicultural management and the development of an guide for multicultural encounters and is a large long-term research program that was carried out worldwide in several phases over a period of 20 years with the aim of investigating the relationship between national culture and

leadership. It is notable that the GLOBE study describes both social and organizational culture based on cultural dimensions (House and Javidan 2004).

In addition, it should be highlighted that in the 1980s there was a shift in economic anthropology towards the concept of culture. As a result, "anthropologists including Lucy Suchman, Elizabeth Briody, Melissa Cefkin, and Genevieve Bell were employed by major concerns, including General Motors, Xerox, Nissan, and Intel, to leverage their ethnographic expertise in addressing business challenges and issues" (Jordan 2013: 14).

Another well-known anthropologist should be briefly mentioned here. Appadurai's work on globalization emphasizes the complexity of transnationality and should therefore not be ignored in the analysis of conflicts in global NGOs. Appadurai emphasizes the complexity and diversity of global interdependencies and cultural interactions and views it as necessary to critically reflect on power structures, cultural differences and transnational dynamics with historical awareness (Oberbeck and Schweigstill 2024).

Before discussing some articles and works that have carried out their own research, it should be mentioned that there are many recommendations for action, roadmaps and tool books based on theoretical-conceptual explanations of other research, especially in the context of conflict management but also intercultural competences.

In her work, Baranowskis (2006), provides recommendations for the development of intercultural competencies based on practical approaches and case studies. Hence, possible ways of dealing with intercultural sensitive situations or cultural diversity are explained and demonstrated, since intercultural teams often face challenges in conflict management due to different cultural backgrounds and communication styles. Thus Annette Baranowski emphasizes that effective conflict management requires intercultural competence. (Baranowski 2006)

Similarly, the book Intercultural Communication by Lüsebrink (2016) deals with the topics of interculturality, intercultural communication, intercultural learning and intercultural competence. The book deals with questions, methods and subject areas of intercultural communication from an interdisciplinary perspective. Not only the current references, but also the diverse historical dimensions of intercultural processes are addressed and illustrated (Lüsebrink 2016).

While Baranowski's work focuses on intercultural competencies and Lüsebrink's on intercultural communication, Schneider and Hirt (2007) focus on multicultural management. They highlight relevant aspects, challenges and strategies for effective leadership in an increasingly diverse work environment and provide practical advice to help managers. With

the help of case studies, they show how to understand and successfully navigate cultural differences. The book offers a comprehensive insight into the topics of globalization and its effects on cultural imprints as well as into the various disciplinary approaches and cultural concepts such as national, ethnic and diaspora cultures. Concepts such as world views, values and norms as well as various cultural theories are discussed.

The work also provides an overview of cultural theories and pragmatic models for capturing cultural characteristics. It also deals with the topics of organizational and corporate culture and with situations and functions in which cultural influences and differences become particularly apparent, such as foreign assignments of employees, intercultural negotiation and cooperation in multicultural teams (Schneider and Hirt 2007).

An earlier work by Riaz in collaboration with Junaid (2010) is a theoretical work focusing on the different types, causes, costs and consequences of conflict in the workplace.

They pay particular attention to the four levels, intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup and intergroup, in relation to various organizational phenomena. The results also show that external expertise such as legal fees, but also the loss of qualified employees, inefficient restructuring, health costs and costs due to loss of time are particularly relevant in relation to the costs of conflicts. In addition, the cost of conflict to customers, to employee or to the organization is addressed. Riaz & Junaid "concluded that workplace conflict is neither altogether bad nor beneficial, rather its nature, the parties involved, circumstances, and other related variables determine whether it is productive or counterproductive" (Riaz and Junaid 2010: 25).

Furthermore, Busch (2016) wrote a paper titled "Does Conflict Mediation Research Keep Track with Cultural Theory?", in which he explored the connection between conflict mediation research and cultural theory approaches. This theory-based qualitative content analysis deals with several relevant texts and studies and shows "that authors tend to base their studies on those cultural understandings that already confirm their prior assumptions about the nature of intercultural conflict management and mediation" (Busch 2016: 182).

Two main conclusions have emerged from this study. First, there is an increasing recognition of the impact that cultures have in work life, which confirms the central role of culture in mediation. This has led to the development of more differentiated models aimed at precisely identifying the role of culture in conflict resolution. Secondly, despite these advances, there remains a persistent attachment to the idea of mediation across cultural boundaries without fully addressing potential limitations. However, the paper concludes by emphasizing that the present study is based on a relatively small sample size and that further studies will

increasingly focus on cross-cultural communication research and the influence of culture on conflict mediation (Busch 2016).

Finally, the work by Ma, Lee and Yu (2008) "Ten years of conflict management studies: themes, concepts and relationships" should be mentioned. It is a summary of various studies and texts on the earlier examination of the topic of conflict management. This work provides a theoretical overview of the initial work on this topic. In doing so, the thesis provides a comprehensive overview of research in the field of "conflict management and of the intellectual structure of conflict management studies and the key themes, concepts and their relationships in conflict management literature. Citation and co-citation analyses as well as social network analyses were used to trace the development path of conflict management research. The work is based on 556 journal articles published between 1997 and 2006" (Ma, Lee and Yu 2008: 240). Therefore, the paper provides a broad overview of the state of research.

Studies

In the following, a brief overview on studies will be given in order to be able to recognise the meaning of this paper and research project. Although Hofstede's work is still relevant today, it should be noted that in the 1990s many studies were still conducted under laboratory conditions, however, this has decreased significantly in the last decade. The more recent trend is to conduct interviews and field studies on multicultural groups in organizations, usually market-oriented companies.

There is particularly frequent research that focuses on different locations of a company or on specific cultural constellations, such as Podsiadlowski (2002) on German-Southeast Asian companies. Similarly, in the early 1990s, Morrill conducted research using field research, network analysis and interviews as well as participant observation to investigate conflict management between company managers (Jordan 2012).

Many articles on cross-culture or multicultural research are focussing on international organizations (Yu and Chen 2008; Stahl and Maznevsk 2021).

Yu and Chen - 2008

Therefore, one of the earlier relevant works is the study by Yu and Chen (2008). They highlight that they are one of the first to investigate the two concepts conflict management and intercultural sensitivity together. The study is focusing on intercultural sensitivity and conflict management styles in a hypothetical cross-cultural organizational setting, analysing the results from 253 participants (Yu and Chen 2008).

The study shows that there are moderate relationships between the two concepts and the respective dimensions. In addition, it shows that a person's sensitivity to cultural differences is a relevant factor for approaching conflict resolution, and the study mentions that these results are consistent with related studies. Furthermore, it is emphasized that the results reinforce the findings that interculturality sensitive individuals are "more effective in intercultural interactions".

Yu and Chen (2008) emphasize that conflict management is a complex issue and that many different factors could influence a person's choice of conflict strategies. (Yu and Chen 2008)

Boedeker -2012

A work from 2012 by Boedeker deals with working in multicultural teams, although it focuses on a culturally specific constellation of German companies with locations in Mexico. The empirical study conducted a total of 20 interviews in Mexico with German and Mexican colleagues, about half of which were conducted with the new team where production had not yet started as day-to-day business and 6 interviews at the traditional location in Mexico City. In addition, an interview was conducted with a Mexican employee in Germany. Furthermore, two ten-minute sequences of qualitative observation were carried out at one location. The results of the study compare aspects such as team interaction, communication, cooperation, conflict management, individual level and supportive measures, as well as some others. (Boedeker 2012) What is special about this work is that it is one of the few that focuses on this cultural constellation and illuminates both the German and Mexican perspectives in a multifaceted way. A relevant highlight is the exceptionally high level of commitment of Mexican employees in the workplace, which is particularly emphasized by the German interviewees. (Boedeker 2012)

Katz und Flynn - 2013

The pilot Study by Katz and Flynn (2013) provides insights into the design of conflict management systems and strategies in the workplace. It was conducted in Broward County, Florida, to examine the awareness, perception, and utilization of conflict management systems and strategies by workplace leaders and managers. The research team used a qualitative and quantitative mixed design for data gathering (Katz and Flynn 2013: 399). The results of the study were gathered from a cross-section of public, private, and nonprofit organizations as well as employee surveys from nonprofit organizations in Broward County ranging in size from twenty to over two thousand employees. Twenty-five interviews were conducted with senior executives and other high-level managers on topics such as organizational conflict, current state of problems and disputes, techniques for managing and resolving conflict,

conflict management training, and impact of conflict on productivity and efficiency of participants and subordinates. The results show that it is primarily the lack of a clear definition of the problem, but at the same time the lack of integrated conflict management systems that is a concern in most organizations and the dissatisfaction with outdated complaints systems that makes it difficult to resolve them. Additionally, Katz and Flynn note in their summary of findings from the geographically limited sample that there is little awareness of how conflict affects an organization's performance and finances and the relevance of leadership style and organizational culture in this context. (Katz and Flynn 2013) „The findings of this pilot study do not support the optimistic claims of scholars and practitioners that workplace conflict management systems and approaches are widely used, at least in Broward County. There is instead an overwhelming reliance on traditional practices of dealing or not dealing with conflict through executive denial, managerial avoidance, formal grievances, and litigation or threats of it” (Katz und Flynn 2013: 406).

Fajen- 2017

The work of Fajen (2017) focuses on the management of multicultural virtual teams. The main focus, however, is on the virtual aspect. In her work, she emphasizes that a trend towards working independently of time and place in a team of experts is becoming more and more prevalent, as this is not only attractive for employees but also opens up numerous new perspectives from a company's perspective. The empirical study conducted 42 interviews with 12 different multicultural virtual teams. 12 interviews were conducted with managers and 30 with team members, with the interviewees belonging to 19 different national cultures and working in 15 different countries on a total of 5 continents. In her work, Fajen attempts to capture leadership behaviour from the perspective of both managers (self-perception) and team members (external perception). (Fajen 2018) The results of the empirical study show that leadership is possible without the permanent physical presence of a manager at the location, but that a multicultural virtual team consisting of specialists still needs a manager. Furthermore, the summary of the work emphasizes that the need for leadership does not decrease, but rather increases in multicultural virtual teams with a high degree of complexity. At the same time, "the comprehensive investigation of virtual leadership has not only produced findings for multicultural virtual leadership research, but also key results for multicultural virtual communication, trust and motivation research" (Fajen 2018, trans. d. author: 363).

Wagner - 2018

One work that deals with the topic of conflicts in international companies is from 2018 by Wagner. The focus of the work lies in the fundamental understanding of international organizations and the effects of internationalization of the working world, virtuality and multicultural of communication and communication conflicts as well as associated conflicts in the everyday life of international companies. The study consists of a three-part empirical research process consisting of expert interviews (HR managers in international companies and 9 organizational consultants), an online survey (105 HR managers and 40 organizational consultants) and an expert workshop (5 organizational consultants) (Wagner 2018).

The results show that most conflicts in day-to-day business life are most frequently caused by cultural differences in communication behaviour or by organizational structures, strategies and (company/management) leadership. Another mentioned aspect is the change process. However, virtual, mediated communication and collaboration (spatial and temporal distances) are not perceived to be as relevant for conflicts (Wagner 2018)..

However, the conclusion of results deals extensively with the topic of communication and discusses it further. In the course of this, it is underlined that the use of new technologies in particular can lead to technical problems, whereby virtual communication can have a conflict-intensifying effect. Additionally, the experts emphasize that culture is reflected in communication, i.e. that there are cultural differences in communication behaviour that lead to conflicts. In summary, Wagner emphasizes that the qualitative and quantitative parts of the study on conflicts in international companies show comparable and complementary findings (Wagner 2018).

Riaz & Jamal - 2022

One of the most recent studies on the topic is by Riaz and Jamal (2022) entitled: "Workplace Conflict in NGOs-Causes and Management Strategies", which focuses on analysing workplace conflict and various causes of conflict in this specific context. The authors detail the specific challenges NGOs face when it comes to managing conflict.

These include internal conflicts between employees, conflicts with external partners or target groups and structural conflicts due to organizational changes or a shortage of resources.

The case study uses a qualitative methodology of data collection unit and data analysis unit to uncover the causal relationship between phenomena. The study consists of 11 semi-structured interviews with 4 women and 7 men, where 2 of the interviewees belong to international NGOs, 4 to national NGOs and 5 to local NGOs (Riaz and Jamal 2022). The work provides a broad analysis of the various factors that can lead to conflict in NGOs, such as differing interests and goals, communication problems, power imbalances and cultural differences. It

also examines the potential impact of conflict on the effectiveness and success of NGOs and on the well-being of the staff (Riaz and Jamal 2022). Finally, the paper deals with strategies for conflict resolution, whereby three strategies were identified, firstly, the ability of a manager to listen to the situation, explain it and look for a solution, which should be accepted. Failure to do so may result in a change of tasks or roles or the involvement of a senior manager. The second strategy revolves around calming and normalizing the situation between the conflicting parties and finding an agreeable solution. In the third strategy, the supervisor only observes the communication patterns and tries to resolve the misunderstandings and ambiguities between the conflicting parties in case of a conflict. Finally, Riaz and Jamal (2022) emphasize in their work: "There is a lack of research on workplace conflict in NGOs in terms of studying its emergence, as the focus is on business and the public sector, but not on the social sector." (Riaz and Jamal 2022: 16)

In conclusion, in the course of the literature search and analysis it was already apparent that the results of the field research are only comparable with each other to a limited extent. This is in particular due to the methodological diversity, the different use of quantitative and qualitative interviews, observation, experimentation, document analysis and many other methods. In addition, these methods are often used in different combinations in the research. Furthermore, many studies are theoretically based on older research or were conducted under laboratory conditions. At the same time, the specific topics of the individual studies and research are also very different and unique, both in terms of the study group and the nationality or culture. In summary, it can be said that despite the studies on multicultural teams that have emerged over the last two decades, there is still a need for more research in this context. However, there are often only briefly formulated suggestions and concrete measures on how intercultural teamwork can be supported through preventive, external support or intervening measures. Nevertheless, the online research and analysis of the literature in this thesis reveals an astonishingly large range of training, coaching, mediation and workshops with a growing amount of literature on the subject of conflict management, conflict handling and intercultural teamwork, which is largely disconnected from the concrete empirical findings. This is one of the reasons why this paper also tries to focus on how to deal with conflict as well as proposes and handling suggestions.

Aim of the master's thesis and research questions - topic definition

The previous explanations show how important it is to focus on the multicultural teams in the context of NGOs and that good conflict management is an important topic in this context, which is why this particular issue is addressed in the following empirical study.

Based on these theoretical works and studies, the aim of this thesis is to present methods, conflict management, prevention methods and external advice on conflict management in multicultural teams in NGOs, and furthermore, to show what influence the culture and background of individuals in a team has on conflicts and conflict management in multicultural NGOs.

Another aim of this work is to combine theory and practice, as theoretical approaches are often only limited in their practical applications and therefore of minimal use in everyday conflict management. In addition to the theoretical analysis, this paper will focus exclusively on conflict management and conflicts in multicultural NGOs and the perception and experience of the interviewees.

In the subsequent qualitative research, exemplary possibilities of constructive conflict management will be shown.

Relevance of this work

When it comes to conflict and conflict management, many are concerned with research on leadership, but not as intensively with the individual experiences of each team member.

As shown above, there is a lack of qualitative field studies that holistically explore the social process of conflict management in multicultural teams in NGOs. Particularly focus lies on the impact of the conflict behaviour and multiculturalism within the team, along with the viewpoints of both managers and team members concerning conflict and its resolution.

This thesis focuses on examining various aspects of conflict management in multicultural teams in NGO, which are of both theoretical and practical of value.

What is different is that this work does not focus on conflicts between NGOs or on conflict/crisis situations in which the NGOs are involved and help to resolve, but rather on the experiences of individual employees and internal conflict management. More specifically, more research has been done on the conflict resolution tasks of NGOs in crisis than on the internal handling of interculturality and conflict management in the team. In addition, no specific Austrian studies on this topic could be found in my research, although more research is being carried out in Asian countries or focusing on a specific company. In particular, the aspect of culture should be taken into account, as different experiences, expectations and

behavioural patterns collide, especially in the context of NGO and are therefore often overlooked or neglected in the context of the great cause and idealistic work.

Research questions

Accordingly, the following research questions, including sub-questions, are derived on the basis of the theoretical foundations outlined above and the present state of research in order to present the concept of conflict management in multicultural teams in NGOs as comprehensively as possible. Therefore, this master's thesis deals with the following main research question:

What kinds of conflicts occur in multicultural teams in NGOs and how are these conflicts managed successfully?

The primary question will be explored, discussed and answered through the following sub-questions.

- 1. How are conflict defined and the ability to deal with conflict perceived?**
- 2. What kinds of conflicts occur in multicultural NGOs and how do conflicts impact communication and team work?**
- 3. What measures and strategies are used to deal with conflicts in multicultural NGOs? Are external support (mediation, coaching or training) or conflict prevention procedures used in this context?**
- 4. How are cooperation and coordination within multicultural teams in NGOs perceived and what measures are observed (viewed) as effective in dealing with cultural differences?**

These research questions open up space for a comprehensive analysis of various aspects, including cultural diversity, leadership dynamics within NGOs, the impact of globalization and the specific challenges of managing conflict in different social contexts. It aims to explore the interactions between these factors and how they affect conflict prevention and resolution.

Methods and Research Design

(Empirical research model)

This chapter deals with the empirical research model that is applied in the context of the master thesis. It deals with the research design and the selection of the sample as well as the choice of the survey method and the conduct of the study. Finally, the data collection and analysis will be discussed.

In order to enable a qualitative analysis, different non-governmental organizations were interviewed regarding their conflict management. The research questions are addressed through the analysis of conducted interviews, expert insights, and the theoretical framework. The aim of this thesis is to determine which methods, preventions and processes contribute to the conflict management in the context of multicultural team in NGOs, as well as whether there are certain components that are essential elements for the resolution of conflicts in the multicultural NGO context.

Research Design

Given the specific focus on multicultural NGOs and its direct practical implications, this research project may be classified within the realm of application-oriented research. Furthermore, the subject of this research is multi-layered and complex, which is why a qualitative research approach was intentionally chosen. Through careful planning and the implementation of semistructured interviews, the goal is to approach the topic as openly as possible and to collect highly productive data based on individual cases (Döring and Bortz 2016). The collected data material was transcribed, coded and systematically interpreted in order to answer the research questions of this master thesis. Additionally, it is important to consider one's own influence on respondents, as well as the limitations of the study. On one hand, the fact that the data was collected solely in Vienna may restrict the generalizability of the study's findings. Moreover, each multicultural team in NGO varies in characteristics (such as cultures represented, types of conflicts, and management styles). On the other hand, it is crucial to recognize that not all multicultural teams in NGOs necessarily experience certain conflicts. In the following, this chapter will discuss how the sample of the present study was collected and the characteristics of the interviewees.

Choice of methods

To make reliable, comprehensible, and objective conclusions about the research subject for this master's thesis, it is crucial to determine the methodological approach in advance. The data was collected using semistructured interviews. In these interviews, a conscious effort was made to create a situation resembling an open conversation while using a thematic guideline based on the research question (Mayring 2002). The interviews combined predetermined questions with opportunities for the interviewees to share their stories. Before conducting the interviews, it was necessary to acquire a thorough understanding of the research subject to effectively implement the problem into the guidelines.

Study and data collection

For the data collection, several multicultural NGOs were contacted via e-mail and telephone to inquire about their willingness to participate in the study and to arrange an appointment for the interview. During these initial contacts, details about the research project, methodology, and study design were clarified. Furthermore, the confidentiality agreements were discussed, as well as permission was asked to record and further process the interview in order to eliminate possible data protection concerns of the interview partners (Döring and Bortz 2016). Once the interview was accepted, participants were provided with a written declaration of consent regarding data protection regulations, along with a general information sheet about the research project and details about the interview, including the date, place, and time. Additionally, participants received a thank-you message for their participation. Before the start of each interview, the functionality of the technology and the recording quality were tested to ensure that subsequent interviews were conducted efficiently (Kruse 2014). The interviews were conducted either in person or via Zoom. Efforts were made to minimize the prominence of the recording to avoid influencing the interviewees' statements and to maintain as natural a conversation flow as possible (Flick et al. 2000). The interviews began with the interviewer expressing gratitude for the interviewee's time and participation. The previously signed consent form was verbally confirmed and discussed, followed by an introduction to the interview's agenda and topic. Towards the end, the interviewee was invited to bring up any additional topics they wished to discuss. Finally, the interviews concluded with another expression of gratitude and a farewell.

The data collection took place from November 2023 to February 2024. A total of seven (one is not used) interviews were conducted with various NGO employees. Additionally, five interviews were conducted with various experts/coaches.

Interview guide:

Interviews are effective tools for collecting information about conflict behaviour, opinions, and personal characteristics. Unlike surveys, interviews allow researchers to gather more detailed data. Additionally, direct contact facilitates understanding of the content through questioning and background information, while also enabling the observation and recording of non-verbal signals from the conversation partners. However, interviews also require more resources and carry the risk of result distortion due to the interview situation. (Döring and Bortz 2016). Nonetheless, a scientific interview was deliberately chosen as the data collection method for this master's thesis.

The three different types of interviews generally used and known are unstructured, structured and semi-structured interviews. (Sommer and Sommer 2002: 113-116)

The chosen method for this research is the semi-structured interview, which combines elements of both unstructured and structured interviews. An interview guide served as a partially standardized instrument, providing the flexibility to ask the same questions to all respondents while allowing the interviewer to ask into in-depth information and avoid being constrained by a fixed question order. This ensures that all aspects of interest to the research subject are addressed and in-depth questions offer the chance to include unexpected content in theory building, thus ensuring an optimal approach to the research object (Döring Bortz 2016). On the other hand, this interview format also allows for individual adaptations to the prevailing situation and the respective responses of the interviewees (Kruse, 2014). Still, one disadvantage of this method is that it can lead to a lack of consistency and increases the risk of interviewer bias (Sommer and Sommer 2002: 115).

Based on the literature and online research two different guidelines have been created: one for employees and one for experts. The employee guideline comprises open questions (Döring and Bortz 2016) aimed at exploring various aspects such as cultural background, conflict behaviour, experience with conflict management, language barriers, methods of seeking conflict support, recent changes, and more. The Interview Guidelines for various interviewees share certain common questions, such as those regarding the respondent's current job/position, their definition of conflict, and their experiences with conflict. The expert interviews are designed for individuals with specialized expertise in the topic. Therefore, the primary focus is not solely on the interviewee themselves, but rather on their perspectives and knowledge regarding conflict management and multicultural conflicts (Bernard 2002).

While creating the interview guidelines, special attention was paid to formulating the in an open-ended and narrative-generating way This was done to ensure a smooth narrative flow

and to encourage the interviewee to address aspects relevant to the research topic on their own accord. Furthermore, it was important that no difficult-to-understand, closed or suggestive questions were asked. Towards the end, maintenance questions were asked in order to be able to give an impulse for further conversation if necessary. The conclusion of the interview guidelines was designed to allow the interview partner to address any additional aspects that may not have been covered during the conversation (Helfferich 2009).

The interview guide was divided thematically into six sections:

1. General background questions about the person and their position and experience with multicultural teams
2. Questions about the NGO in general and the definition of conflict
3. Questions about conflict handling and conflict resolution approaches
4. Questions about communication
5. Questions about a positive conflict culture/feedback culture and conflict management
6. Questions on multicultural cooperation in the NGO and interpersonal interactions.

(The full Guideline can be found in the appendix, for further details.)

Transcription of the data material

After the research was conducted, the collected data material was stored categorically and anonymised (Döring and Bortz 2016).

All interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees, and subsequently transcribed. The transcription was done manually with the support of simple tools in order to save resources. Particular emphasis was placed on passages that appeared relevant to the research question. After the verbatim transcription of the data material, it was again compared with the original audio recordings in order to correct errors and inaccuracies. Special care was taken to anonymize the data, ensuring that no inferences could be made about the individuals from the material, thus adhering to data protection regulations (Helfferich 2009).

Preparation and evaluation procedures- Qualitative content analysis

After transcription, the data material underwent qualitative content analysis according to Mayring's approach (2015). This method includes not only defining and characterizing the material but also its analysis, presentation of results, and application of quality criteria. This method ensures the research meets scientific standards and allows for the procedure's traceability and verifiability by third parties. The main aim of the analysis is a reduction in the complexity of the material.

The analysis aims to reduce the complexity of the material by assessing it based on pre-defined criteria and establishing a category system (Mayring 2015).

For this research, a combined method of deductive and inductive approaches was employed. Deductive main categories were created, derived from both theoretical foundations and research questions. Additionally, a category was designated to collect relevant information that did not fit into the pre-defined categories.

Subsequently, the materials from this "residual category" is condensed in to the essential statements and in the sense of the summarizing content analysis new categories are formed (Mayring 2015). Consequently, the data material underwent comprehensive processing, with content-bearing coding units systematically identified and allocated to deductive main categories. Various codes were generated from the transcript, as per Mayring's approach (2015), including conflict experience, cultural habits, people involved, own behavior, reasons for conflict, motivations, financial situation, social circumstances, and personal experiences. The definition of the units of analysis was then followed by a stepwise summary content analysis, according to Mayring (2015).

With this approach according to Mayring (2015), it was possible to achieve the most comprehensive understanding of the contents and their interrelationships, thus enabling a continuous approach to the research object. The strength of content analysis compared to other processes lies in the development of a process model that breaks down the analysis into predetermined steps (Mayring 2015).

Following the categorization, the results were compiled and interpreted with respect to the master's thesis question. Finally, it is important to emphasize that this study will not provide generalizable results, but rather provide an insight into conflict management in multicultural NGOs and show experts' views on the topic and the way they work with conflicts.

Results of the qualitative interview study

This chapter presents the results obtained from the empirical research. In the first section, the interview partners of the NGOs and coaches interviewed are presented, followed by the respective results and answers as well as relevant categories in the second section.

Sample

In order to collect the necessary data for the Research, different multicultural NGOs and Experts for conflict management located in Vienna were contacted. As regards the selection of these different attractions, three key factors played an important role. People are employed in the NGOs, with different cultural background and the multicultural NGOs are located in Vienna and have more than 15 employs. In addition, an attempt was made to involve people of different genders and ages in the selection.

Nevertheless, since it is not only about the multicultural NGOs or their employees, but also about the experts in this field, to evaluate wide-ranging experiences. Likewise, the coaches were also selected based on criteria, in this context the focus was that they had experience working with conflict and / or inter-/multicultural/international teams and in the best case had worked in these contexts within NGOs. Furthermore it is necessary to defined expert for this research, an Expert we call people who works with multicultural Teams or NGOs in regards of conflict management and/ or as a coach or mediator for conflict Situations with Teams.

The selection was based on these criteria's but also on availability and willingness to participate. Six of the eleven interviews were conducted in English, while five were conducted in German. Thus, the findings of this study cannot be generalized but can give an insight on conflict management in multicultural NGOs in Vienna as well as give an outlook on how experts view the topic and work with conflicts.

Interview participants- NGO employees:

In this master's thesis, the research questions are to be answered by means of an empirical study based on examples of NGOS employees and coaches. As already highlighted work addressed two different target groups in Vienna:

- on the one hand for employees in multicultural NGOs, in the international office or for employees who lead multicultural teams or are members/leaders in culturally mixed teams.
- on the other hand, with technical experts on the subject of conflict management, conflict resolution and coaching or mediation in multicultural NGOs and teams.

In the following, these interview partners are briefly introduced. The interviewees with whom this master's thesis is conducted come from various NGOs with different focuses and partner offices around the world. Due to the small sample size, in order to ensure the anonymization of the individual interview partners the names of the NGOs where they work are not mentioned and sometimes the field of activity of the NGO is changed. For the purpose of anonymization, all seemingly relevant personal information is removed from the research data. Nevertheless, each person is described individually even if the person's name is changed. In contrast, in the expert interviews, all interviewees gave permission to be mentioned by their full name and their field of expertise is described in more detail.

Furthermore, the anonymization steps carried out during transcription do not replace a final assessment of all the available material. The assessment of characteristics as sensitive or as relating to individuals only emerges in the overall view of the work, this has been taken in account.

Tatiana

Tatiana works in an NGO, where she focuses on gender equality and inclusion. Tatiana mainly manages and coordinates her small yet very diverse team of 7 people. They work on changes within the organisation and try to understand how to make the organisational environment more inclusive and how to make people feel more welcome and supported at their workplace. They also try to create a bigger sense of belonging, as they are a part of a bigger team in the NGO, which is spread around the world. Tatiana and her team are focusing on different work packages with the goal of the initiative, to make the workplace more inclusive, as the organisation has a lot of diversity by having around 1000 employees from multiple nationalities backgrounds.

Finn

Finn is working in an international non-governmental organization in a position of strategy development and cultural analysis to facilitate positive and lasting change in the NGO. Finns job means first and foremost talking to people, engaging with as many people in the organisation as possible at different levels, locations and areas, to get the best possible picture of how people experience the current and past state of the NGO. Finn already has experience with cultural diversity, having worked in various countries before joining this NGO.

Birgit

Birgit is the head of her diverse department, responsible for organizational learning, development, and change management, as well as strategy development, culture, and strategy implementation for both the national and global parts of the organization. Her work primarily

focuses on the international level, where she, along with her team supporting individuals from more than seven nations/ethnicities, develops concepts for team building, team development, and collaboration.

Sara

Sara works as an international programme manager. Her job is to facilitate and manage missions of a team. For each of the missions Sara organizes 3-4 people, who vary from over 11 different countries and arranges the destination of the mission, then coordinates travel arrangements, prepares the schedule and handles all the partnerships with local NGOs. Further she also facilitates the annual meetings, preparatory week and the final briefing of each mission.

Melissa

Melissa is the head of her department in the international office of her NGO, which operates throughout Europe and internationally. Melissa is responsible for the quality, education, and standards of the employees. Additionally, she organizes various events within the context of education and oversees the certification of the workers. In her department, Melissa also manages some international workshops hosted by the NGO. Her international team consists of 20-30 individuals, with the majority coming from Europe and some from the Middle East. However, the NGO collaborates with international teams and have partner organizations, branch offices, in other countries worldwide.

Olivia

Olivia is the head of the research and learning department in the international office and her main job is coordinating the international office and the 11 country offices around Europe and in the Middle East. Her department focuses on the general structure and purpose of the NGO as well as to make sure that all the different country offices align with to the overall mission statement of the NGO. The main task is to take of her department is to take care of the evaluation of some projects, with multi-cultural teams, with the employees coming from different countries that the NGO has ongoing, or also evaluation of projects, that involved different country offices along with other projects that happen only at the head quarter.

Information NGO employees – to cite

Interview date	Name	Citation
dez.2023	Sara	Sara, 2023
dez.2023	Melissa	Melissa,2023
dez.2023	Olivia	Olivia, 2023
nov.2023	Finn	Finn, 2023
nov.2023	Birgit	Birgit, 2023
oct.2023	Tatjana	Tatjana, 2023

Interview Results – NGO-employees

Conflict Descriptions and definitions

The interviewees most frequently stated that conflict has an impact on work, cooperation and communication. Melissa defines conflicts as: „eine offen ausgetragen, nicht ganz offen ausgetragene Spannungen zwischen Teammitgliedern, dass kann natürlich von Eskalation null bis unendlich sein, kommt auch auf den Charakter drauf an.“ (Melissa 2023)

The interviewees agree that a conflict is identified when it either escalates gradually over time or reaches a point of significant escalation, requiring intervention and support from higher-level leaders to facilitate progress. This is particularly crucial if the conflict also affects the organization's work.

Emergence of conflicts:

This section includes those statements that the respondents see as an influence or reason for a conflict in multicultural teams. The main focus is on the participants' own experience on how and on what topics conflicts arise in the NGO, with sub-questions on topics such as work phases, career ladder, team, division of labour and which situations are particularly conflict-laden.

Most of the respondents stated that a conflict often arises from unclear positions, processes and development in the NGO but also from an ambiguity on roles, tasks and responsibilities. This might be related to the dynamics of the NGO, growth of different departments or at periods of change. If there is too much uncertainty within a team or among individuals, this can lead to uncertainty, anxiety and demotivation, sometimes causing entire teams to question the course of the organization. That is why it is important that in the process new structures and new strategies are established clearly in how the team works together.

Furthermore, the fact that the NGOs are growing and thereby changing means that different expectations and experiences come together, as some employees were part of the NGO from the very beginning in the pioneering phase, while others only became part of the team as it grew and expanded, and thus entered a completely different structure. This can cause conflicts because founding members perceive it as difficult to leave the responsibilities they feel for the cause to others. **Birgit** explains in this context, that due to new positions and changes as well as upcoming changes, new people hold positions but the internal expertise for this is still carried by someone else, which creates unclear processes. (Birgit 2023) The problem is therefore that sometimes the necessary expertise is not passed on or people do not have the knowledge that the job requires, so that people sometimes get too much or too little involved in the tasks. Furthermore sometimes people are not correctly consulted and involved or are

overly involved in issues due to a lack of clarity about someone's expertise and decision-making powers. This can also lead to the issue that people do not understand the hierarchies and the internal rules therefore addressing the wrong person or date decisions without going through the management of a department. **Sara** further highlights that there is a certain patronization towards some topics due to the passion of the older employees. Therefore, it is difficult for other employees to obtain comprehensive expertise, which can lead to conflicts about distribution of duties. What is seen as particularly problematic in this context is that they sometimes also demand supremacy, i.e. the mandate over funding applications and decisions, and this certainly harbours a certain potential for conflict.

As far as financial support and funding is concerned, there are different methods and procedures in the NGOs. Sometimes the application for funding is clearly organized by an internal committee, which decides which department, idea or campaign receives funding after the application and justification, which leads to fewer conflicts in these cases. On the other hand, if individual departments simply send applications to a funding organisation and thus apply for funds without consulting the others within the NGO, other departments therefore might feel left out. Finally, Finn mentions in his interview that there are usually certain incidents that lead to conflict, caused by problems concerning trust, connectedness, values, or internal cultural norms and standards that are expected from one of the two entities or individuals involved.

Career ladder

Another relevant topic regarding conflicts is the employees position in the NGO, salary and promotion opportunities in a company, but it should be noted that in NGOs this topic is relatively minor in terms of conflict. The interview partners agree that working in an NGO primarily relates to the fulfilling and interest aspect and that people who work in NGOs do not necessarily have strong needs for advancement in the career ladder. Tatiana emphasizes that her colleagues are much more concerned about being in a good position to make a difference in the world and drive change. In the course of the interview, she explains that she finds it particularly pleasant that there is enough space and positions for women in her NGO, that there is no feeling that one has to elbow around to get one of the few positions for women, she emphasizes that there is even a women's network that meets regularly and exchanges ideas and concepts. Nevertheless Tatiana emphasises in her interview that it is important to ensure that employees are satisfied with what they are doing and feel that the tasks they are given actually match their skills and background. Otherwise, if they are only asked to do boring print work, they will feel dissatisfied in the long run.

One aspect that is also discussed in connection with career opportunities in NGOs is that when new positions are created, they are not always immediately assigned internally but rather advertised publicly, leading to more competition. Moreover, departments are often quite small, with numerous management roles occupied by young managers. Consequently, change typically only occurs in the events such as maternity leave. Since many individuals work in the NGO sector due to idealistic motives, resulting in few departures arising from dissatisfaction.

Nonetheless, some interviewees emphasized that if there are individuals who try to climb the career ladder because they are new to the NGO or are very ambitious in terms of their careers, this leads to unrest and conflicts with superiors.

In connection with the topic of position, career and trust as well as collegiality, Melissa emphasizes in her interview that salary schemes are communicated relatively openly, which leads to mutual trust and less conflict between positions and responsibilities because one can categorize oneself in comparison with the others.

Leadership & Hierarchies

Another aspect that has been discussed in several interviews is the leader of the team and the influence they have on the entire team's attitude and interaction: It can be summarized that the line manager or rather the leader of the team plays an important role in influencing how people act and talk to each other. Furthermore, the manager is also there to give others space and support so that they can talk to each other and understand the different dynamics and needs of their colleagues. The tasks of a manager therefore includes to remain open when a conflict arises between two people, to talk to both parties and try to convey both perspectives as well as finding a solution despite the different cultural backgrounds, characters and temperaments and the way one deals with conflict. Therefore, several interviewees agree that it is relevant to have good structures, responsibilities, processes and procedures in place, which enable fluid collaboration to take place.

One reason for conflicts mentioned in the interviews is international hierarchy, since the main office in Vienna holds the decision-making power over the offices of various countries. Birgit states in her interview, that strategic decisions, slogans and campaigns are often developed and decided in the international office. The main obstacle in this regard is that the countries are often just informed about decisions. Unfortunately cultural differences and country contexts are often overlooked. As a result, slogans or campaigns in other countries do not have the same impact due to linguistic and cultural differences in the approach to problems, which can lead to tensions between the international office and other countries. However,

since the country offices are often located in different continents, it is not always easy to involve them in decisions, especially when several different continents are involved. Finally, some interviews also highlight the significant cultural differences between individuals who have solely worked in NGOs and those who come from corporate backgrounds (traditional business world, typically in large companies). Those from corporate backgrounds tend to confront conflicts more willingly, whereas older NGO workers are more inclined to avoid addressing conflicts.

Communication & Information in the NGO

This section includes those statements made by the respondents that relate specifically to communication within the multicultural teams, i.e. how communication takes place, the way feedback is given as well as how information is passed on and distributed within the NGO. Communication within the team harbours the potential for conflict but also opportunities for prevention. In this context, the interviewees particularly mention how important it is to use a uniform language in order to provide a good framework for communication for everyone, even if the language level is not uniform. Furthermore, it is emphasized several times how important politeness, transparency and honesty are in the NGO.

A prominent topic that was discussed more intensively by many interviewees is information management, which means that all employees are provided with all the information they need in a timely manner and that any questions that arose can be clarified.

Just as information goes from top to bottom, decisions must of course be approved the other way around. Experiences vary as to how quickly information is received and decision are made, depending on the position and NGO. If one has just a few superiors or is in a leadership/management position, decision-making is often perceived as quick and straightforward. The interview participants agree that different channels and different ways are used individually depending on the information, its relevance and classification: “So there are different canals through, which the information, is passed so there is a formal and informal and the gossip as well. Formally we have regular check in meetings, also a monthly international Jour fixe this is an information meeting for the whole office, where every department gets a little bit of information on each department and the management share the main information” (Olivia 2023: pers. comm.).

However, this also indicates that information flow does not always move strictly from top to bottom. The dissemination of information can also be influenced by the department head. Some leaders maintain an open, horizontal relationship with their subordinates, sharing a broader range of information. In contrast, others adopt a more hierarchical approach, sharing

only what they deem necessary. This selective sharing might not always align with what their subordinates need to know for effective functioning.

Furthermore, several interviewees have highlighted an issue of communication and information flow between people or departments. Specifically, references are made to the exchange of information and sharing of knowledge from different projects between departments.

To conclude: "one problem in the Organisation is the fact that communication doesn't really run very smoothly through levels, in in my experience, which puts the leaders of teams in and sometimes difficult position, because members in the team, they expect clarity." (Finn 2023: pers. comm.) Nevertheless, everyone agrees in most cases that gossip travels the fastest.

Regarding the topic of feedback, several of the interview partners stated that it should be expressed constructively, nevertheless feedback is still often misunderstood. At the same time, some also note that they also have an appraisal talk with their head of department on various topics. These appraisal talks may concern questions about the office, the workload, the head of department or any kind of reflection about team as this is clarified as a space for feedback in both directions.

Moreover, from Brigit's point of view, anonymous surveys can be useful as these can be answered incognito and then evaluated. According to her, there is a 76% response rate, which means that managers can get a comprehensive overview of topics, problems and needs of employees. She also emphasizes that, according to her observations, there is no strong feedback culture in her NGO. She explains that the atmosphere in meetings must also be suitable for feedback and that it depends strongly on the line managers and managers, how and whether feedback is given. Most interviewees, who are not in a leadership role, agree that department heads or CEOs usually a proficient at giving feedback.

Additionally, several interviewees highlighted the importance of actively seeking feedback and encouraging open discussions, especially on issues related to diversity and ethnicity within the NGO. Given the wide range of perspectives, individuals may unintentionally make remarks that could be hurtful without recognizing their impact. Therefore, fostering an environment of openness and being prepared to offer apologies when necessary is important.

Cultural aspects of conflicts

The cultural differences section contains all the statements made by the interviewees on the extent to which the individuals' approaches to perception of work and team dynamics, conflict behaviour in a multicultural team differ from one another, as well as if the NGO consults experts to address issues related to cultural diversity and if different cultural holidays taken

into account when planning work.

The interviewees agree that a higher degree of attention and sensitivity is necessary in multicultural teams in order to gain a deeper understanding of the respective behaviours and motivations of others. In this context, **Finn** explains in his interview that at the beginning of his job in the NGO he conducted some interviews with the employees. It was particularly noticeable that cultural differences influence the way people work. Finn further explains in his interview that “culture is in everything, in communication, it's in leadership, it's in how people give and get feedback, it's in how people experience the workplace and how success is celebrated in, how people learn from their mistakes, cultures is everything.” It is often not so important which culture someone belongs to, but rather whether steps are taken to question privileges and differences. In this context, it is primarily mentioned that in multicultural teams there is an increased diversity of characters, ways of thinking, information and levels of experience, which is primarily due to cultural differences. In this context it is relevant to provide space for the group or individual to discuss their concerns.

Above all, the (lack of) understanding of other cultures is seen as an omnipresent challenge. Differences in working methods and morals, communication styles, customs and regulations as well as the understanding of humour, sarcasm and manners are also cited as hurdles. Not only are there cultural differences in work and team dynamics, but also in the hierarchy, as in some cultures the relationship within the work teams is perceived as more horizontal than vertical. In these cases, it is easier to receive and give feedback from superiors, as well as to have an open conversation in which someone can and should express their opinion. At some stages of collaboration, conflicts can be beneficial because it might strengthen the solidarity between team members. Change can lead to growth or can break up a team. The collaboration of a multicultural team is also influenced by geographical distance and the associated different time zones. Therefore, NGOs with multicultural teams need to agree on common working methods and communication, which entails a certain level of coordination.

Olivia states; “I have that feeling that, somehow, there's a cultural difference in how people work” (Olivia 2023: pers. comm.). She particularly noted that in different countries there are different prayer days and holidays that need to be taken into account when planning projects, she highlights that it is important to always take all these differences into consideration, so that everyone has the right to work comfortably.

The topic of religious holidays is also addressed in this context. Melissa notes that in her NGO and team they are already so well-acquainted that they already take in to account each other's religious holidays. Other employees state that they generally check when Ramadan,

Easter and other public holidays take place and then they organize the work accordingly. As in some countries this would severely disrupt work on site, work abroad will be postponed. At the same time, the topic of punctuality was raised in several interviews and seen as a potential conflict topic, since there are countries and cultural contexts where punctuality is very important and valued, and then there are others where it even seems a bit strange if someone is always on time.

Additionally, an interview partner addresses political and historical influences which can be seen in many different aspects, including different values, local regulations and cultural characteristics. However, Sara particularly notices that some aspects are related to the type of resilience that people have in the face of traumatic experiences, because in some mission teams, there are people from conflict-ridden countries such as Palestine. In this context, she became aware that these team members have unfortunately had more traumatic experiences in their lives and in cases where they encounter a crisis environment again, it is far more emotional for these people than for others. This can lead to conflict due to others not recognizing that someone needs more time to process a situation in an crisis environment causing them to even relive a trauma.

Language

In addition to cultural differences, language barriers and the associated misunderstandings are cited as a challenge in multicultural teams. This applies to both written and telephone contact, even if the team agrees to communicate in one language, in most cases English. This is due to different language levels, a lack of foreign language skills, strong accents, unclear expressions or phrases and translation errors. In this context, it is particularly emphasized that the joint workshops and training sessions help with mutual understanding but also with the way of communicating in the team, decisions, plans as well as communicating with HR and other departments.

Another relevant point regarding language is the way of communicating. Several interviewees noted clear differences, in particular that their organizations are very Austrian in some respects, as an efficient communication style is not always perceived as positive. Especially “colleagues in the US office or the Latin American office, the southern countries they are entirely different in their communication style” (Finn 2023: pers. comm.). He further emphasizes that some cultures allocate a considerable portion of their communication, including emails, to asking about the recipient’s well-being, weekend activities, and future plans. These cultures also tend to write longer emails, offering more detailed information on both personal and professional topics. Additionally, it's noteworthy that some offices respond

more promptly in the digital realm than others. Consequently, there are significant differences in email communication practices across countries, including response rates, reply times, the use of polite expressions, and the degree of personal interest shown towards communication partners. These practices are perceived quite differently in various countries.

In addition to the topic of language, one interviewee also mentioned that she found it remarkable that everyone in the team had a similar communication style in her NGO due to the facilitation training, in which the trainer also moderated some of their work processes. This means that everyone in the team and office who is with the same trainer has developed a common facilitation language and a certain common linguistic expression, which helps to understand what someone, wants to express or what approaches are being pursued.

Potential for conflict due to cultural differences

In regards to conflicts, it can also be noted that the potential for conflict can be higher in multicultural teams due to the cultural differences, which should be taken into account by the manager and when dealing with each other. Above all, it can be perceived that different nationalities influence conflict avoidance, rather than conflict behaviour itself, depending on whether and how long people wait to address conflicts, if they are avoided at all costs or if they are used to exchange opinions. In this context, the interviewees also mentioned that there are cultures in which harmony and collectivism are valued more. For people of this group, conflict is not something that is addressed directly and openly, they try to resolve it over time. People who come from Asia, Southeast Asia, are cited as an example. Thus, several interviewees remarked that, due to the composition of their staff, their conflicts tend to be cold conflicts that simply live on in some way. Their focus remains on keeping the peace, as harmony is valued more and it is therefore important not to let the situation escalate further. In more individualistic cultures such as the Netherlands or the Scandinavian countries, more direct communication is valued, as people are more willing to address the problem openly, solve it collectively and talk about it. It is also more likely to approach people if a withdrawal is noticed in conversation, strange remarks are made or the behaviour towards each other has changed - here the focus is on addressing it and confronting each other with the perception and this experience. „So yes there's obviously in a difference in how conflict is dealt, manage across cultures” (Fin, 2023: pers. comm.).

In this context, Tatiana also emphasizes that it is important to be aware of one's own conflict behaviour. “I definitely believe that culture plays a huge role and at the same time, that it's everyone's responsibility, to find their way of navigating through conflict, based on their culture and their personality and the work environment they have to work in” (Tatiana 2023:

pers. comm.).

In contrast to the previous argument Sara mentions in her interview that from her perspective. “cultural diversity opens up more strategies on how to solve a conflict, rather than really causing them” (Sara 2023: pers. comm.).

Dealing with conflict

This part summarizes statements made by respondents that relate to how conflicts are dealt with in the NGOs, how they are handled, what conflict prevention and conflict resolution strategies are used, furthermore, if coaches or mediators are involved in the conflict management measures or what organizational framework conditions are in place in the NGOs that enable or support a multicultural team.

The interviewees state that the ability to deal with conflict is generally present on several levels, namely on the communicative and personal level as well as the emotional level. In particular, separating personal emotions from the conflict, therefore not taking everything personally but trying to remain on a professional level, is emphasized by several people. In connection with this, Olivia comments that „some people are really good with these things and it has to do a lot with their leadership skills as well, people who are being coached on management, conflict resolution, you can really see the difference, they can really manage things differently” (Olivia 2023: pers. comm.).

Accordingly, the ability to deal with conflict is not naturally present in people, but can be developed over time with support. Another relevant aspect that was repeatedly mentioned in the interviews is the willingness to resolve the conflict, to be able to talk about the differences and not simply see it as a way of belittling someone. Sometimes it is necessary for a conflict to be addressed by someone first in order to be able to deal with it at all, instead of things being settled in the background through intrigue or insults.

Standard process for conflict

There are various experiences and perceptions of the individual interview partners in this category. However, all interviewees agree that, to their knowledge, there is no specific standard procedure for dealing with conflicts in their NGO. Several interviewees emphasized, however, that when a conflict becomes more intense, leaders or management are often called in to clarify the situation.. Furthermore, the HR department is often referred to as being responsible for conflict management and dealing with conflicts.

Something that has already been mentioned in other contexts and has also been emphasized here again by several Interviewees is that people in NGOs tend to be too polite, hence conflicts are not easily addressed. Conflicts are only addressed when the psychological strain

becomes intense, and even then, the approach is often indirect. This is because NGOs frequently prioritize maintaining a positive atmosphere and tend to avoid conflict whenever possible.

Olivia refers to it as “the elephant in the room, so sometimes it really has to be voiced out, but this is really the last resource, when you cannot find any other way of doing things nicely“ (Olivia 2023: pers. comm.). Therefore, when conflicts are brought up, especially in formal meetings rather than informal settings, there is a risk they could escalate and feel personal. To manage this, concrete and official meetings are often held to discuss what is not working, why some are dissatisfied, and how the situation can be improved for everyone. These meetings aim to resolve conflicts collaboratively. Even though conflicts are generally not addressed directly, many teams have individuals who prefer to discuss problems as they arise and discuss them openly, even if this approach makes others feel somewhat attacked. The interviewees discussed several approaches and general handling of tension, disagreement and conflict in their respective teams. In particular, it is recommended to listen carefully when dealing with conflicts to actively address it.

Furthermore, some interviewees highlight that their NGO offers online e-learning platforms with various modules and information on processes. These platforms provide courses on topics such as leadership training, conflict resolution strategies, identifying conflict types (whether cold or hot), effective conflict management, and communication skills. Additionally, they offer information on where to get further support.

In this context, it is relevant to mention that the corporate strategy often serves as the overarching framework guiding the work of managers and their multicultural teams within the organization. In addition to the corporate strategy, there are other corporate guidelines for collaboration that were also named as significant by the interviewees. This includes the use of a common language, typically English, during meetings and in broader contexts. At the same time it is stated that joint workshops, training courses and team building sessions help to create a common way of working. In this context, Melissa emphasizes in her interview that adopting familiar meeting procedures from joint facilitation training is beneficial. This includes practices like beginning meetings with a brief check-in and ending with a check-out. According to the interviewee, this particularly helps to shape mutual understanding.

Nevertheless, it is also emphasised several times that there is also the possibility of getting external support if necessary. Melissa stresses: „(...)wirklich schwierige Konflikte, da wird dann schon den Coach auch herangezogen oder eben auch unser facilitation-Trainer, der auch

Coach ist, ist in solche Situationen schon auch beteiligt, wenn es wirklich um heftigere Konflikte geht“ (Melissa 2023: pers. comm.).

Coaches

The interviewees were asked what workshops, training and coaching for leadership, communication and conflict trainings are offered by the NGOs.

Several of the interviewees have already been coached themselves or at least know that this possibility exists within their NGO. While some NGOs have been using coaching and mediation for a long time, other interviewees have only recently gained experience with it, but describe it as an enriching and positive experience.

One interviewee described that she had a coaching system in their NGO, where she received coaching sessions over several months, as did some other department heads. These sessions primarily focused on leadership style, conflict resolution, and collaboration with partner organizations. After the 7-15 sessions, a joint group meeting was held with the other department heads to share the experience and know-how. Melissa states that this experience has strengthened their understanding of each other enormously.

In general, it was highlighted in several interviews that it is increasingly common for the management, the upper management in particular, to have coaching sessions on a regular basis. The involvement of a coach is seen as particularly helpful by several people, since support in case of a conflict or change in position can be provided easily and efficiently. In some cases, the entire NGO is supervised by a coaching organization or a coach who has in-depth knowledge of the organization and its international partner organizations. This arrangement offers several advantages, particularly in conflict resolution, as the employees are already familiar with the coach's style. This is viewed as positive as it brings in a certain consistency, because especially when there is tension or conflicts, a neutral position in between the parties is helpful as the coach can moderate neutrally and initiate things that would perhaps be a little more sensitive if they were dealt with internally. In several interviews, the positive experience with external support, such as coaches or mediation, and also how open the organizations and employees are to external support are highlighted.

Additionally, Tatiana explains that in her NGO, the organizational development section in the HR department, is responsible for structural and organizational aspects, is very open to work with coaches for the entire programmatic area. She also explains that her NGO has recently started an initiative for psychological support. Finn highlights in his interview the importance of conducting regular retrospectives following conflict mediation sessions and workshops facilitated by a neutral party. These retrospectives allow for assessing whether noticeable

progress has been made, such as changes in behaviour among the participants. He emphasizes that this follow-up process should not be a one-off occurrence, as without ongoing monitoring, the effects are not sustained in the long term.

Workshops and Meetings

In several interviews, the topic of Facilitation-Training and workshops regarding leadership, communication and conflict was discussed as well. Most interviewees noted that they have access to specific leadership and facilitation training aimed at conflict resolution, as well as occasional external training sessions on conflict management. However, one interviewee mentioned that, in her five years with the NGO, she had not encountered specific training dedicated solely to conflict management, though leadership and facilitation training did somewhat address conflict-related issues.

Another interviewee described a different situation within her NGO department, where workshops on non-violent communication, conflict management, change management, and feedback methods are regularly offered. In connection with this the interviewees highlight that regular meetings and jour fix are essential for developing a sense of connection and understanding among team members. In this way, managers can pursue a consistent strategy and clarify any questions from their employees, thereby increasing mutual understanding. Regular communication within the multicultural team is therefore a decisive factor in establishing and maintaining understanding.

Different NGOs adopt various approaches to regular meetings, the frequency of the meetings depending on the people attending, whether they consist of teams, the head of departments or the entire office meets with management. Additionally, the topics discussed in these meetings are also relevant and may vary depending on the organization's priorities and objectives.

Several interviewees mentioned that their organizations hold a global office meeting once a month which is open to all colleagues and is meant to share all the decisions, news and updates.

Expert for culture diversity

However, conflict management workshops are not exclusively held or offered for managers. They also address inclusion and cultural awareness. While there is a growing recognition of cultural differences, the need for inclusion in the workplace remains a critical discussion point.

The interviewees mention varying experiences and opinions, particularly in regard to external consultants on the subject of cultural diversity. Some emphasize that their NGO has enlisted the services of external consultants, either for a specific period or as an ongoing arrangement.

These consultants are tasked with conducting assessments of diversity and inclusion within the organization, helping to establish initiatives, and evaluating areas where improvements are needed. This external perspective is valuable as it can be challenging to identify shortcomings from within the organization. Further, many NGOs created a position on this topic and built up internal resources, for example a specific DIA position or a specific working group. Finn also highlights that his NGO has established various working groups (LGBTQIA networks, a woman's network, parents network and a new inclusive Culture Club and within those networks). These groups have received positive feedback for being informative, helpful, and unifying. Sometimes there's a single group dedicated to diversity and inclusion, while in other cases, multiple groups focus on different topics. Participants voluntarily come together to share experiences and discuss matters related to inclusion and diversity. Most of the sessions are conducted online and are accessible for all members of the to bring colleagues together, allowing them to share their experiences related to inclusion and diversity in the workplace. They offer a safe space where participants can express concerns or ask questions that they might not feel comfortable sharing otherwise.

Team on Mission

Furthermore, it should be emphasized that in some NGOs there are teams that go on missions. In such cases the head of mission and the employees tend to be more aware of the importance of diversity, inclusion and cultural differences in the field. Consequently, cultural diversity training is increasingly being requested and carried out. Nevertheless, the interviewee highlights that it would be beneficial to invest more energy and time into these topics and workshops.

On these missions, teams work together intensively, sometimes participating in joint international campaigns and traveling together for several weeks. This intensive collaboration can lead to more complex conflicts than those typically encountered in everyday office life. Sara stresses the importance of time management, punctuality, well-functioning equipment, appropriate vehicle sizes, and considerations regarding different stress levels, perceived effort, and individual rest needs in this context. Conflicts often arise from disrespected boundaries or unmet needs. To prevent conflicts, several special measures are employed, including private calls to superiors, intensive preparation during the week before the mission, having a support person on site, and conducting a final meeting. Additionally, team members are given the opportunity to provide feedback, either personally or anonymously, to leadership after the mission.

Digital

A reason for overall the change, the interviewees report that both NGOs and teamwork are in a state of transition due to globalization. According to the respondents, after the COVID-19 pandemic there is an increase in virtual communication and teamwork. This shift required improvements in IT equipment and skills within the teams, enabling productive online collaboration and the use of various tools such as whiteboards and shared documents during meetings and presentations. The decisive factor in this is ensuring that the deployment and use of these tools are adapted to international cooperation and uniformly understood by all team members, and subsequently to use of these digital tools and systems to support multicultural teams in terms of collaboration, communication, task organization and project management by creating transparency for all parties involved.

Proposals for dealing with conflict and cultural differences when working together

This section summarizes statements made by the interviewees that relate to supportive measures, strategies, processes and procedures that can be conducive to good cooperation and a positive working day in a multicultural team. They also stated on the best approaches to managing cultural differences, fostering mutual understanding, and collaborating effectively in multicultural teams. The interviewees highlight that good communication and good relationships with colleagues as well as a common goal are perceived as important aspects. Listening, respect and openness are most frequently cited as essential goals and necessities that are expected of everyone in a multicultural team, but a sense of responsibility, transparent communication and trust are also cited as vital. However, not all statements were general. Specific suggestions were made on how to address conflicts and handle conflict situations. Many emphasize the importance of genuinely showing interest in others' cultures, perspectives, and concerns. They suggest avoiding assumptions and instead articulating how a statement made them feel, while also exploring constructive solutions together. Moreover, time is regarded as an important element, allowing individuals to step back, regain clarity, evaluate what's not working, and express their thoughts. The significance of self-reflection and personal development is also stressed, as they promote the understanding that one's perspective is not the only valid one. Furthermore, it is recognized that conflicts are influenced not just by the dynamics between people, but also by personal traumas and past experiences. Additionally, bringing in a third party to mediate or guide a de-escalation process can be instrumental in effectively resolving conflicts. Additionally, language plays a crucial role, as emphasized previously. Having a common language or access to translators can alleviate concerns about expression and

misunderstanding. Open communication without fear of consequences is vital to prevent tensions from escalating into conflicts. Addressing issues early on and establishing boundaries can help manage potential conflicts before they arise.

Tatiana notes from her experience that conflicts in the office are situational and she typically allows individuals to handle their conflicts independently until they seek or express a need for assistance. She views her colleagues as capable adults who can address issues autonomously. Olivia emphasized in her interview that it can also be beneficial to look at the history of the conflict, understanding its evolution, origins, and any previous misunderstandings that may have contributed to its development.

Sara highlighted that conflicts can sometimes serve as opportunities to address repressed issues and channel energy towards finding solutions. The interviewees collectively agree that when handled effectively, conflicts can strengthen collaboration, foster trust and respect, and even cultivate relationships with other departments or individuals. They emphasised that communication, how conflicts are managed, and the mutual trust and respect among team members. Therefore, conflicts can serve as valuable opportunities for learning, growth, and improvement for all parties involved.

The interviews unanimously underscore the importance of prevention, especially in NGOs where diverse working cultures and mentalities converge, presenting ample potential for conflict. Recognizing conflict triggers and implementing preventive measures are deemed crucial, including raising awareness, fostering safe spaces for exchange among colleagues. This includes raising awareness and creating safe spaces for colleagues to exchange ideas, contribute, and value their cultural perspectives. Investing in topics such as Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DIA) and multicultural communication is essential. On an individual level, traits like an open mind, openness, and respect for other perspectives are emphasized. It is important to acknowledge that there are various ways people approach topics and that embracing these differences can be enriching.

Interview participants- Coaches.

Mag. Paul Bischofberger

Paul Bischofberger has been self-employed for over 20 years as a communication trainer and systemic organizational consultant and coach with a focus on team building and conflict management. Although he is not a mediator but rather sees himself as a conflict consultant. In this context, he has founded a company together with a psychotherapist called - die Konfliktberater. His work primarily revolves around moderating strategy workshops, facilitating team development sessions, organizing various project retreats, and providing management coaching. Additionally, he specializes in conflict resolution, whether it involves conflicts between individual team members, conflicts between different teams within an organization, or conflicts between different companies. His perspective on conflict is influenced by his training with Fritz Simon, particularly in the field of systemic consulting and systemic therapy.

Dr. Mag. Christiane Erten

Christiane Erten has been a freelance trainer in the fields of behavioural sciences, social competence, intercultural management and training since 1995. She also works in the field of team building regarding intercultural training and is a university assistant and research assistant at the Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU Wien). Her teaching and research focuses on intercultural/comparative management, intercultural training and human resource management, women in management, organizational development, group dynamics and team development.

Additionally, she offers individual coaching focusing in preparing individuals for international assignments within intercultural environments. Additionally, she manages an SME (KMU) in the field of noise protection, with a branch located in Hungary, providing her with first-hand insights into intercultural matters in the workplace.

Mag. Karin Norek-Frank MA

Karin Norek-Frank is a certified systemic coach as well as a certified hypnosystemic coach and consultant, management executive coach, intercultural coach, team coach and management consultant. Her company KN Training & Coaching is active in various industries as well as non-profit organizations and leading teams. She is a lecturer at educational institutions in the context of multicultural management and international management since the late 90s.

She is not working as a mediator but supports teams in individual coaching who are going on international assignments or with people who want to integrate people with different

multicultural backgrounds into their team. Her work primarily involves offering support and coaching for individuals undertaking new tasks and assuming additional responsibilities. This includes reflecting on one's own leadership style and role, examining stress behaviour, and enhancing problem-solving skills to prevent stress and burnout. Additionally, she provides support in navigating workplace conflicts.

Mag. Wolfgang Steger

Wolfgang Steger is coach, trainer and consultant at FUTURE. His focus lies in leveraging conflicts as opportunities to move forward stuck situations, developing mission statements, shaping development processes and inspiring management teams with the power of potential that lies in collaborative efforts. His work concentrates on dealing with current professional and personal issues, recognizing necessary changes, helping to tackle them and inspiring management teams. With a focus on corporate cultures, leadership, coaching of individuals and team, he offers conflict meditation, conflict resolution and conflict management. With his extensive background as a coach, trainer, and consultant over numerous years, he brings a wealth of experience to his work. He holds the title of master coach and has served as a trainer and instructor for 25 years.

Mag. Martin Stübinger

Martin Stübinger has been working as a coach since 2018 and is a certified life and social counsellor, systemic constellation facilitator and supervisor with a focus on coaching employees and managers in companies, organizations and NGOs (including conflict coaching). He also offers individual and team supervision in the NGO sector. He has worked extensively with multicultural organizations and has operated in multicultural organizations. In addition, he has been working full-time in the NGO/non-profit sector for more than 16 years (including Amnesty International Austria, Austrian Red Cross, Austrian Research Foundation for International Development).

Information Coaches- to cite

Interview date	Name	Citation	Info link
Mai 2023	Mag. Paul Bischofberger	Bischofberger, 2023	https://www.team-manufaktur.at/ueber-uns/ https://www.diekonfliktberater.at/ueber-uns/ https://www.future.at/team/trainer/wolfgang-steger/
April 2023	Mag. Wolfgang Steger	Steger, 2023	https://www.future.at/team/trainer/wolfgang-steger/
Mai 2023	Dr. Mag. Christiane Erten	Erten 2023	https://www.future.at/team/trainer/wolfgang-steger/
Mai 2023	Mag. Karin Norek-Frank MA	Norek-Frank, 2023	https://www.future.at/team/trainer/wolfgang-steger/
January 2024	Mag. Martin Stübinger	Stübinger, 2024	https://www.future.at/team/trainer/wolfgang-steger/

Interview Results –Coaches

Conflict descriptions and definitions

This section summarizes all the statements made by the coaches regarding their definitions of conflict. They commonly defined conflict as having repercussions on work, collaboration, and communication, underscoring the importance of involving individuals in resolving conflicts.

Mr. Steger elaborated on conflict existing across various levels and escalation stages, highlighting its omnipresence in human life. He therefore defines conflict as: „einen Anstoß etwas zu entwickeln, das der Entwicklung bedarf oder etwas in Ordnung zu bringen, das in Unordnung geraten ist“ (Steger 2023: pers. comm.). He further highlights that once individuals initiate problem-solving or organizing the situation, it ceases to be a genuine conflict. He interprets conflict as serving life, as it signifies ongoing development, a principle applicable to teams as well. He underscores that claims of having no conflicts raise a degree of caution for him. To him, the absence of conflict is not the focus, rather, it is the manner in which conflicts are managed and transformed into productive outcomes that matter.

For Mr. Bischofsberger a conflict arises when two or more parties are involved, which could involve two individuals or several people.. He stresses that these two parties represent points of view that negate each other and states that these parties must harbour a desire to prevail rather than seeking mutual resolution. Emotions overpowering rationality also signal conflict according to his definition.

In contrast, Mr. Stübinger mentions in his interview that he prefers to apply a specific definition in his workshops, one that he has created by synthesizing multiple existing definitions. He points out that, although conflicts inevitably involve two individuals, the key factor is how each person interprets and evaluates the situation or interaction: “also Konflikte ist nicht einfach Konflikt sondern Konflikt ist aus meiner Sicht eine Kategorie, in die ich ein Phänomen einordne” (Stübinger 2024: pers. comm.). Furthermore, if an interaction that is perceived as emotionally stressful and/or objectively unacceptable by at least one side indicates, that this indicates a conflict. Finally, it is relevant for Mr. Stübinger that the situation, i.e. the conflict, is characterized by the aspect of incompatibility of behaviours, interests, goals, assumptions or attitudes. He further distinguishes in the levels of conflict, clarifying that it differs whether it is a conflict within a person, i.e. an internal conflict, a so-called intrapersonal conflict or a conflict between people, which would be an interpersonal conflict, or a conflict between groups or organizations.

Ms. Norek-Frank, on the other hand, sees conflict as the simple confrontation of different interests in the broadest sense. She often references Glasl's definition of conflict in workshops

or as a basis for reflection in conflict management.

Ms. Erten also emphasizes that she likes to reference Glasl's work, especially because he focuses on conflict resolution. She utilizes his framework to determine on which level a conflict takes place, if the conflict is on the factual level, the relationship level or if it is a power issue.

In addition, both agree that Schulz von Thun is also a relevant personality in this context. Ms. Erten states: „wenn man lange genug in diesen Bereichen ist, gibt es sehr wenig wirklich neue Dinge sondern vieles von den Klassikern wird auch neu aufgekocht, neu gelevelt und so weiter ja also natürlich gibt es Dinge zu berücksichtigen und Veränderungen zu integrieren“ (Erten 2023: pers. comm.).

In his interview, Mr. Stübinger also delves into the concept of conflict management skills. He highlights: „ich halte nicht viel davon und zwar aus dem Grund, dass ist sozusagen schon eine Wertung beinhaltet. So zusagen es gibt Leute die Konfliktfähig sind und andere sind nicht und für mich ist das ein Pauschalierung die wenig hilfreich ist um einen Konflikt zu lösen“ (Stübinger 2024: pers. comm.).

In this context, Mr. Bischofsberger clarifies that the ability to deal with conflict primarily pertains to the way in which criticism is expressed and also how criticism is accepted. He emphasizes the importance of his clients learning to express criticism effectively so that it can be received constructively.

Emergence of conflicts / Reasons for Conflict:

This category encompasses the statements made by the coaches regarding the emergence of conflicts in multicultural teams. It focuses on the reasons behind conflicts for which the coaches are consulted. The discussions revolve around topics such as work phases, career advancement, teamwork, division of labour, and situations that are particularly prone to conflict.

Mr. Stübinger emphasizes that individual biographies play a significant role in conflict emergence, as people bring their unique backgrounds into various situations, regardless of whether they are multicultural environments, NGOs, companies, or universities. He asserts that interpersonal triggers are universal, capable of inducing conflict in any context. He specifies that basically anything that causes stress, a feeling of powerlessness or helplessness can be a cause of conflict. In addition, he notes that in the context of NGOs, conflict can also be connected to the fact: „dass es wenig Geld gibt, wenig Förderung und die müssen aufgeteilt werden und verschiedene Teams oder es gibt aber bei einer Organisation einen Spendeneinbruch, wie tut man damit und wo kürzt man und so weiter“ (Stübinger 2024: pers.

comm.).

Mr. Steger stresses that, in his experience, the specific topics themselves are not necessarily the primary drivers of conflict, as conflicts can manifest regardless of the subject matter.

However, he acknowledges that certain issues, such as resources and finances, often serve as common triggers for conflict, particularly when initial plans or implementations face challenges. Another conflict factor he mentions is the disagreement within management, how the NGO or company is run and how conflicts and interactions are communicated and dealt with. (Steger 2023: pers. comm.)

Mr. Bischofsberger emphasizes that few conflicts arise when the members of a team have a reasonably good relationship with each other. Conversely, if individuals do not have a strong rapport, conflicts can arise more easily over minor issues. He further highlights that conflicts in the work context are particularly provoked when the employer fails to provide clarity. He states that conflicts are less likely to occur when employees have a clear understanding of their responsibilities, processes, and boundaries. Conflicts tend to arise when individuals perceive interference from others in their designated areas of responsibility.

In her discussion, Ms. Erten highlights the topic of generational differences as a significant factor contributing to conflicts. She observes disparities in gender distribution regarding childcare responsibilities and discrepancies in prioritization between family obligations and professional demands, such as meeting deadlines. The COVID-19 pandemic in particular has intensified these differences, especially when individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds are involved. Additionally, Ms. Erten identifies challenges arising from remote work and language barriers. For instance, conducting specialist discussions solely in English can lead to misunderstandings. She also addresses the differing perception of willingness to work and the work pacing, noting that some individuals adhere to traditional processes and regulations, while others, particularly younger employees, advocate for simpler or innovative processes.

Leadership

The topic of different leadership, motivation and performance patterns was also discussed, considering whether these are culturally influenced and their potential impact on team conflicts.

In this context, Ms. Norek-Frank emphasizes the importance of examining the individual circumstances and the specific dynamics within a team when considering conflicts related to leadership styles. She states „da braucht man auch gar nicht irgendwie jetzt große Interkulturalität hineinbringen, wenn wir uns einfach schaut in einem in rein Österreichisch zusammengesetzten Team, ich mein der Führungsstil hat einen großen Einfluss darauf wie

die Konfliktkultur in einem Team ist also bin ich noch gar nicht bei irgendwelchen anderen Faktoren wie Kultur“ (Norek-Frank 2023: pers. comm.). She also suggests that conflicts may be linked to the various phases of team development, including norming, forming, and performing. On the other hand, she states, in her experience, high turnover rates in a company may indicate an authoritarian management style, which can lead to conflicts as employees tend to tolerate it less and eventually leave the organization.

Mr. Bischofsberger offers a different perspective, explaining in his interview „wenn man jetzt so ganz grob unterscheidet zwischen, einem sehr autoritären Stil oder am anderen Ende der Skale Laissez-faire Führungsstil, da würde ich mich gar nicht sagen trauen das der eine Stil mehr oder weniger Konflikte provoziert wie der andere“ (Bischofsberger 2023: pers. comm.). He highlights that with an authoritarian management style; conflicts may not be as visible and are often resolved discreetly, whereas with a laissez-faire management style they tend to be more apparent. However, he emphasizes that the resolution and handling of conflicts still play a crucial role regardless of the management style.

In his interview, Mr. Stübinger provides an example of an Austrian company that was bought by an American group, which resulted in different management style and approach to handling matters. This resulted in employees feeling uneasy due to the shift in management style towards a more top-down approach. He also discusses a scenario where Austrian employees expressed dissatisfaction with the communication and decision-making processes of German managers in a newly established branch. (Stübinger 2024: pers. comm.)

Impact of a conflict on the team

This section deals with the impacts a conflict can have on the people involved as well as team relationships, productivity and whether there is a perceptible correlation in terms of improvement or deterioration.

Mr. Steger elaborates that based on his work experience, conflicts and team relationships are intertwined, often requiring simultaneous resolution. He notes that when conflicts are effectively addressed, relationships within the team typically improve. Additionally, Mr. Steger suggests that conflicts within the team are often rooted in issues within processes and workflows. Consequently, resolving disputes can lead to enhanced team structure, communication, and overall process efficiency. (Steger 2023: pers. comm.)

Likewise, Mr. Bischofsberger explains that he is typically called in for conflicts that have already escalated to a significant extent, resulting in substantial energy being diverted from day-to-day business to the conflict itself. From his experience, de-escalating the conflict leads to a noticeable shift: the focus returns to actual work, processes run more smoothly, and

sickness rates usually drop sharply. However, he cautions that despite these seemingly positive effects, it's important to remember that the conflict initially caused disruption and damaged relationships in the process. (Bischofsberger 2023: pers. comm.)

Potential for conflict due to cultural differences

This section discusses the cultural differences in the perception of work and team dynamics as well as how conflicts are resolved.

In this context, Mr. Stübinger explains that there are countless aspects on which cultural differences can be identified, such as which topics are addressed and which are avoided, as well as differing views on work-life balance. One topic that Mr. Stübinger addresses in particular is the matter of parental leave, especially in the non-profit sector. Increasingly, fathers are taking parental leave and sharing childcare responsibilities equally with their partners. Mr. Stübinger also mentions the varying perceptions of authority, noting that people from different cultural backgrounds may interact with authority figures differently. This can be evident in how managers are discussed in supervision sessions. In connection with this, Mr. Steger also addresses the relevance of corporate culture in his interview, which can change as a result of a company sale, change of location or sometimes a change of management alone. He describes: "ein andere Chef und sofort ist die Kultur eine andere und zwar massiv, massive eine andere und die Konflikte werden ganz anders gelöst, Kultur hat ganz viele Aspekte einer davon ist natürlich die sage ich jetzt mal aus welchem Land, aus welcher Tradition ist man da geprägt" (Steger 2023: pers. comm.).

With regard to conflict behaviour, Mr. Stübinger explains that while there are many personal differences, he often observes a strong emphasis on honour among men from regions such as Asia Minor, the Middle East, South Asia, and particularly the Arab world. In these cultural contexts, honour is highly significant in the workplace. If someone's honour is perceived to be attacked or questioned, the situation can escalate dramatically, leading to a severe reaction. This reaction can manifest in various ways, including a complete refusal to engage in conversation or an outburst of aggression and raised voices. Nevertheless, Mr. Stübinger points out that such reactions are often considered entirely acceptable and understandable within their own cultural contexts. For instance, while refusing to talk might be viewed as completely appropriate in some cultures, it might be perceived as childish and unacceptable in an Austrian company. Conflicts can also arise when cultural norms clash, such as when one person refrains from mentioning something out of respect, while another person feels compelled to speak out in the name of honesty. Moreover, respect, fairness, and values play a crucial role in intercultural interactions, particularly when it comes to honesty and integrity.

Furthermore, Mr. Stübinger points out in his interview that while experts are occasionally brought in to provide cultural input, this practice is not as frequent as it should be. In his view, there is still significant room for improvement in incorporating cultural expertise to better manage and understand conflicts in multicultural teams.

Mr. Steger emphasizes that there are clearly cultural differences on many levels, he notes that there are already cultural differences between Germans and Austrians as well as within Austria. These differences can stem from personality, but also to a certain extent in the cultural imprint through school systems, training systems or corporate culture, they are really. In this context, Mr. Steger provides an example of a company with over 1000 employees who work internationally, where he encountered a team within this company experiencing conflicts. Despite all team members being from Austria and Germany, the conflict had escalated to the point where employees were actively obstructing each other's work.

In addition, Mr. Steger also addresses the factor of time perception and timing, explaining that, for example, someone from Afghanistan or Syrian has a different understanding of time than someone from Austria: „also wenn bei uns steht der Bus kommt um 11:28 Uhr ist relativ wahrscheinlich das der Bus um 11:28 Uhr kommt. Während die es gewohnt sind das wenn steht der Bus kommt um 11:28 Uhr dann wird der irgendwann einmal zwischen 11 Uhr und 15 Uhr kommen und einfach diese Einstellung, ist anders, und das ist schon in der Schweiz anders, also ich hab immer wieder in der Schweiz auch gearbeitet aber da gibt's natürlich auch kulturell schon andere Dinge, Sachen die einfach, anders sind,, (Steger 2023: pers. comm.).

In this context, Mr. Bischofsberger points out in his interview that, particularly when he collaborates with globally active companies, even if not directly involved as mediator or coach,, the employees tell him that: „Mitarbeiterinnen aus Indien, es unglaublich schwierig ist Themen wirklich auf den Tisch zu bekommen, du kannst machen was du willst, du wirst nie wirklich, wenn irgendwas nicht passt, müssen sie wirklich hören was nicht passt, das machen die einfach nicht, ist nicht Teil ihrer Kultur offenbar“ (Bischofsberger 2023: pers. comm.).

In this context, Ms. Norek-Frank emphasizes the importance of clearly defining the boundaries and distances between managers and employees. From her experience, she highlights that this has been a significant intercultural challenge. Ms. Norek-Frank states: „im Non-Profitbereich ein kleines Team und eine japanische Führungskraft die nur geringfügig älter war als die Mitarbeiterinnen und da hat es einfach extrem Konflikte gegeben, weil die haben sich ein erwartet mit der Führungskraft zusammenzuwachsen und ein bisschen auch privat zu sprechen und ein bisschen einen partizipativen Führungsstil und gerade mit Japan

Senioritätsprinzip ist es einfach gar nicht angesagt und also insofern war das einfach nicht möglich. Also zur Erklärung, ich habe begonnen zuerst mit der Führungskraft zu sprechen, habe dann die Teammitglieder kennengelernt und sowohl die Erklärungen in beide Richtungen sind sowohl wohlwollend aufgenommen worden aber da war es schon zu spät,, (Norek-Frank 2023: pers. comm.).

Ms. Erten, agrees with the argument and explains that especially with regard to Japan, there is sometimes a misconception among people coming from the West that people from Asian countries, i.e. people from collectivist cultures, are team-oriented. However, she emphasizes that this is not always the case, and employers need to consider how individuals can effectively collaborate as a team. Regarding communication, she highlights the significance of recognizing that what may be perceived as open and honest in one culture may be seen as aggressive by individuals from other cultures.

Information where Austrians may feel it is important to be open is then perceived by the other side as unpleasant or as a loss of face, which is why consideration and understanding are important. Additionally, she emphasizes the importance of not deriving stereotypes from Howle's or Hofstede's models, or confirming existing stereotypes based on them, but instead evaluating each situation individually.

Dealing with conflict

This category summarizes statements made by the coaches that relate to how conflicts are dealt with and what conflict prevention and conflict resolution strategies they are using in NGOs. It examines whether companies have existing steps and measures in place to resolve conflicts and whether they involve coaches, mediators, or training workshops in their conflict management efforts.

In this context, Mr. Bischofsberger outlines his standard procedure, which involves engaging with all parties involved in the conflict, including those on who are only marginally involved. He consistently asks all parties involved about their perception of the likelihood of peacefully resolving the conflict. He initiates discussions to gauge the potential for resolving the conflict amicably, asking each individual about their willingness to seek a peaceful resolution and what actions they can take to facilitate this process. He emphasizes the importance of a minimum level of commitment from all involved parties. If this commitment is lacking, he believes it is necessary to communicate this honestly to the manager or client, as further intervention may be futile.

Further Mr. Bischofsberger and Mr. Stübinger assume that probably 95% of conflicts are typically resolved through managerial intervention, either by encouraging the parties involved

to find a resolution or by actively supporting them in reaching a solution together. In most situations where coaches and mediators are involved, the manager has either not dealt with the conflict or has dealt with it far too late by conducting employee counselling, looking for solutions or taking preventive measures. In situations lacking a formal process, Mr. Stübinger clarifies that conflicts may be prolonged due to unofficial, personal discussions involving two or three parties. The consideration of bringing in a coach or mediator typically arises only at a later stage. From the coaches' point of view, it is therefore very helpful if there is a clear procedure in the company in the event of a conflict. When such procedures are in place, it is acknowledged that the involvement of coaches can be beneficial, facilitating constructive discussions and outlining a clear course of action. These companies sometimes offer their employees supervision, as it is often called in the NGO sector. In his role as a coach, Mr. Stübinger sees his primary task in conflict situations as aiding individuals in managing the situation, offering alternative viewpoints, and helping them to restore their own ability to act. Mr. Steger explains in his interview that he tends to be invited by companies that already have a certain awareness and ability with regard to conflicts. He explains that in the instances where he is called upon, it is common for individuals directly involved, as well as those on the sidelines or in superior positions, to see the value in involving coaches. (Steger 2023: pers. comm.)

Measures in the event of conflict

The interviews with the coaches delved into the effectiveness of various conflict resolution measures and strategies. The measures discussed by the coaches, which they, in their experience, perceived as particularly helpful or which they used more frequently, are discussed below. However, it is important to note that conflict resolution is highly contextual, and the effectiveness of these measures depends on the specifics of each situation.

In the interview, Mr. Bischofsberger emphasizes that it is often helpful to ensure that everyone involved understands that they are all merely reacting parties. This means everyone tries to legitimize their own behaviour with the behaviour of others. He finds it beneficial to encourage individuals to consider the situation from the perspective of the other party.

However, this step requires a minimum level of willingness to actually resolve the conflict and prevent emotions from escalating. Additionally, he highlights the value of refocusing on what unites the team amidst conflict. Mr. Bischofsberger stresses the impracticality of terminating employees in a competitive job market from an entrepreneurial standpoint. He argues that replacing a seasoned employee with a new hire leads to significant costs, particularly for those well-versed in organizational processes and customer relations.

Moreover, conflicts frequently arise from debates over better ideas and procedures, often unfolding on a deeply personal level. Mr. Bischofsberger suggests that it would be advantageous to assess the root cause of conflicts within the team, department, or company, as they might present opportunities for growth and development.

Ms. Norek-Frank considers measures taken in advance to be particularly relevant in her work context, especially when internal company issues such as conflicts or shortcomings can be addressed at staff meetings. It may then be requested or discussed that the manager intervenes in the situation or mediates between the parties. She notes that spatial separation, a commonly attempted measure, typically proves ineffective in resolving conflicts based on her experience. Ms. Erten emphasizes the importance of taking action, noting that even the initiation of conflict resolution measures is a positive step. In her experience, many companies and NGOs tend to neglect or ignore conflicts, allowing tensions to escalate further. She observes that conflicts often transition from the power or factual level to the relationship level, attributing this shift to a lack of conflict management training among managers. She states: „ich glaub es ist viel Raum nach oben, früher anzusetzen jeden Mitarbeiter Mitarbeiterin ein bisschen in dem Bereich zu schulen und dann die Empathie der Führungskräften auch zu fördern und dann rechtzeitig Mediatoren zurufen würde ich mal sagen“ (Erten 2023: pers. comm.).

Models that are used

Related to the topic of conflict resolution are the models and methods used by coaches and mediators. Some have already been mentioned in other chapters and are not listed again here, but Mr. Stübinger in particular presented some models in his interview which he likes to use in his sessions. On one hand, he references Galtung's conflict triangle, while on the other, he discusses the iceberg model, which has different variations based on Sigmund Freud. This model visually represents the observable versus the less perceptible, including aspects that are not consciously recognized or of which individuals may not even be aware.

In addition, he also mentions the conflict levels according to Glasl and the conflict strategies according to Thomas Kilmann, who differentiates between 5 strategies. Furthermore, Mr. Stübinger has also added the topics of delegating and taking advantage of support. He clarifies that the essence of these strategies lies in highlighting the acceptance of seeking support.

He also mentions Erik Berne's transactional analysis, which primarily focuses on one's mindset when entering a conflict. This model aims to differentiate between behaviour and the individual.

In his interview, Mr. Steger also refers to a triangular model which refers to three types of conflict, namely inner conflict, relationship/social conflicts and structural conflicts: „wenn zum Beispiel im Unternehmen, mit 3 Vorstände wenn die miteinander, es muss gar nicht einen Konflikt haben aber wenn die unterschiedliche Anschauen haben, unterschiedliche Werte, unterschiedliche Kulturen vielleicht auch vertreten, ist es spürbar wenn man jetzt sehr Hierarchisch denkt weiter unten im Unternehmen und das sind Konflikte, die kann man selten so ganz direkt bearbeiten als Betroffener und trotzdem haben die große Wirkung und es ist wichtig auch mit denen umzugehen, weil sie sich häufig auch gar nicht vermeiden lassen, weil es halt auch unterschiedliche Interessen gibt oder Notwendigkeiten gibt und Konflikte, Lösung von Konflikt hat ja viel damit zu tun, unterschiedliche Interessen, unterschiedliche Vorstellungen auch zusammenzubringen“ (Steger 2023: pers. comm.).

Further Mr. Stübinger points out several advantages in resolving conflicts. Firstly, work efficiency improves because, as he explains, when two individuals are in conflict, they are less likely to seek advice or help from each other. This can impede workflow or cause disruptions, leading to the loss of valuable information within the company or team.

Resolving conflicts improves work processes, reduces absenteeism by fostering a more comfortable work environment, thereby enhancing employees' ability to manage stress. This, in turn, saves money and boosts productivity. (Stübinger 2024: pers. comm.)

External support

This section is primarily concerned with the aspect of when external support is brought into the NGO. What are the perspectives of the coaches interviewed regarding the steps taken before their involvement, and at what stage of escalation, according to Glasl, do conflicts typically reach when they are called to intervene? Moreover, when do coaches believe that their full involvement may no longer be beneficial, or in what circumstances would they withdraw support from a conflict situation?

In general terms, all experts agree that external support is frequently enlisted too late in the process. Mr. Stübinger elaborates that based on Glasl's escalation levels, he finds himself typically called in only from level 4 or 5, indicating situations that are already considerably tense or entirely out of control. „Also erst dann wenn es weh tut und nicht dann wenn man merkt, da ist was, weil da glauben viele es besteht noch kein Handlungsbedarf“ (Stübinger 2024: pers. comm.) In his opinion, this is particularly the case when managers lack the necessary skills or when there is a management vacuum in a certain area or a lack of clarity in terms of framework conditions, targets, etc.

When decisions are delegated to individuals other than the manager, they often act as potential catalysts for conflict, potentially evolving into ongoing issues over time. This is particularly the case when decisions are entrusted to those without the necessary qualifications or authority, thereby turning a structural conflict into a personal one, often reducing it to that level. However, Mr. Steger notes that when conflicts are managed with objectivity, the personal elements tend to subside.

In his interview, Mr. Steger also points out that while managing conflicts becomes increasingly difficult starting from stage 7 of Glasl's conflict model, it becomes particularly challenging at stage 8, where power is the only effective means of managing the conflict. Unfortunately, this often results in separation. By the time conflicts reach the stage of "together into the abyss," resolution becomes nearly impossible. In this context, he stresses the importance of conflict prevention, arguing that although conflicts may arise repeatedly, it's crucial for teams to be developed and equipped to address and resolve conflicts quickly, ideally at an early stage.

He therefore concludes by emphasizing that his task as a coach is to not only get involved when the conflict is already at stage 3-5, but to support people in developing the skills and perhaps also a system that enables them to deal with these conflicts themselves as quickly as possible and preventing them from escalating. (Steger 2023: pers. comm.)

Furthermore, for Mr. Steger, there are 3 levels that are used in conflict management: one level is the use of power, the second level is rules and laws and the third level is negotiation. Good conflict management is about good interaction between all three levels. (Steger 2023: pers. comm.)

Mr. Bischofsberger describes another aspect of why coaches are only brought in so late in conflicts. He suggests that conflicts often start with two individuals obstructing each other, leading to a prolonged back-and-forth without resolution. Eventually, communication breaks down to the point where the parties no longer engage directly but only talk about each other or communicate indirectly through a shared leader. Hence, there is a significant absence of direct discussions, resulting in assumptions and expectations being raised among colleagues on both sides, leading to various insinuations. During this phase, little action is taken for an extended period, often with the attitude that the parties involved are adults who should resolve their issues themselves. If it becomes evident that the situation will not resolve on its own, by that time, it has often escalated to a severe level. At this point, coaches and mediators are called in to address a conflict that has already escalated considerably.

The situation becomes especially challenging when there is a conflict between a manager and

an employee, as it requires intervention from higher-level management. However, there's often even greater reluctance to address such conflicts at that level.

In the interviews, the coaches were questioned about whether external support is universally beneficial or if there are instances, individuals, configurations, or subjects where it might be detrimental to address the situation, and a resolution of the conflict through managerial decisions would be preferable.

Mr. Stübinger clearly the importance of achieving clarity in conflict resolution. Conflict resolution can involve gaining clarity about the conflict or reaching an agreement regarding its content. In a sense, it serves as a clarification to reach agreement on a meta-level, such as acknowledging that the conflict cannot be resolved in its current form. He highlights that: „grundsätzlich Mediation und Coaching immer hilfreich sind, es kommt drauf an was das Ziel ist, mehr Klarheit bringt es auf jeden Fall, das ist meine Erfahrung,, (Stübinger 2024: pers. comm.).

Another issue that was raised in all interviews is the acceptance of the involvement of external coaches in NGOs and teams. The decision to use internal resources versus external ones often depends heavily on the individuals or organizations involved.

Mr. Stübinger observes a spectrum of attitudes in this regard during his work. While some clients are completely receptive and appreciative of external support, others perceive this assistance as the least desirable option.: “ich habe mal eine Mitarbeiterin der Firma hier gehabt, sie hat gesagt, weil ich gefragt habe was ist das Schlimmste was passieren könnte und Sie hat gesagt, das Schlimmste ist dass ich hier sitzen muss“ (Stübinger 2024 : pers. comm.). He further explains that these feelings that mediation or coaching is a kind of punishment are often culturally influenced. In cultures where discussions about emotions are scarce or where conflicts are inherently challenging, the prospect of mediation can indeed induce significant stress among the parties involved.

Indeed, conflict coaching can pose a psychological burden for certain individuals, especially those who are more avoidant by nature. Having to engage in direct contact, confrontation, or exchange with the other party can be particularly challenging for them.

Mr. Bischofsberger agrees with Mr. Stübinger that there exists a spectrum of attitudes towards conflict coaching. Some companies may not see any advantage in it, while others are highly positive and view it as a valuable support in resolving conflicts. He considers this behaviour to be particularly rooted in how every individual has experienced, learned and perceived conflicts and conflict resolution as children, adolescents and adults. The same applies to the personal experiences people have had with external coaches and mediators. In this context he

states: „Meine Güte sind ja nicht alle Coaches total super und es gelingt ja auch nicht immer alles gut und wenn ich dann halt eben an so ein Prozess beteiligt war und der voll gegen die Wand gefahren dann werde ich beim nächsten Mal wahrscheinlich nicht sagen super Sache“ (Bischofsberger 2023: pers. comm.).

Proposals for dealing with conflict and cultural differences when working together

In the following, special focus is placed on the coaches' suggestions on how best to deal with conflict and what preventative measures can be helpful in teams. Their suggestions emphasize the importance of addressing conflicts promptly and working towards resolution.

Additionally, they highlight the significance of understanding and navigating cultural differences in collaborative environments.

Mr. Stübinger advocates for the implementation of anonymous individual coaching as a proactive measure to address conflicts within teams. He emphasizes the importance of offering coaching as a standard practice rather than waiting for conflicts to escalate, since people may be reluctant to seek out coaching themselves, so providing it as a proactive measure ensures that support is readily available when needed. Self-reflection plays a crucial role in diffusing the emotionality and pressure within a conflict situation. Individuals can identify their own contributions to the conflict and find ways to prevent similar situations from escalating in the future. Moreover, fostering a sense of unity and a shared understanding of goals and values within the team or company can significantly reduce the likelihood of conflicts arising. Mr. Stübinger emphasizes the importance of promoting community through activities such as team building and reflection on values and purpose development. On the other hand, he addresses the topic of personal development, because coaching gives employees and managers the opportunity to learn something about themselves, about their own needs and feelings and how to deal with other people.

Mr. Steger and Mr. Bischofsberger emphasize that newly formed teams, especially in NGOs, have the opportunity to establish a specific culture right from the beginning, as NGOs are often initiated by small teams. They advocate for a culture where team members feel empowered to make mistakes and openly discuss them, knowing that they will be addressed constructively. Additionally, they emphasize the distinction between critiquing ideas or content and criticizing individuals personally. Just like Mr. Bischofsberger, Mr. Stübinger also note in their interviews that it is important to establish an appreciative respectful feedback and error culture. Specifically, he highlights the need to clarify how feedback is given, how mistakes are addressed, and how individuals are treated in the process.

In this context, it is essential to prioritize the early establishment of a mutual dialogue culture, as conflicts are an inherent aspect of such an environment. This process of cultivating a culture of communication begins from the very start—shaping how people engage with one another, the subjects they choose to address, the topics they avoid, and the manner in which information is transmitted.

In her interview, Ms. Erten mentions the subsequent reflection of conflict situations as being particularly relevant, highlighting that time pressure often takes precedence in everyday work. She notes that people often make the mistake of postponing or avoiding dealing with conflicts due to time constraints. However, she suggests that many conflicts could be resolved through quick initial steps if addressed promptly, thus clarifying future interactions.

Finally, the experts discussed the best ways for managing cultural differences when collaborating.

Mr. Stübinger states :“Wir alle haben eine Kultur und zwar eine national, ethnische so größeres gesellschaftliche Kultur in der wir aufgewachsen sind, aber auch eine familiäre Kultur.“ (Stübinger 2024: pers. comm.) The experts emphasized the importance of respecting and appreciating the individual values of each employee while ensuring that the team maintains a common understanding of values. They noted that a shared understanding of values does not arise automatically but requires effort and collaboration.

In this context, Mr. Steger says that conflict escalation levels have their own dynamic, with conflicts tending to perpetuate once they begin. Therefore, involving a coach or mediator earlier in the process can make resolution easier. He identifies conflicts deep-rooted over years as especially challenging to resolve. Mr. Steger advocates for proactive support, suggesting the establishment of a framework with agreed-upon rules and a trusted individual who has built rapport with all involved parties. (Steger 2023: pers. comm.)

Interpretation of the results

In this section, the results presented in the previous chapter are interpreted, placed in a theoretical context and used to answer the research questions of this master's thesis.

The first section elaborates on how conflict is defined and how the ability to deal with conflict is perceived. Special focus was placed on individual experiences, perceptions and known definitions in order to present as comprehensive a picture as possible.

The second section then deals with the different conflicts that are perceived in multicultural teams in NGOs and how they influence communication and work. In the course of this, the main reasons why conflicts can arise and which topics are perceived as particularly problematic by the interviewees are emphasized and placed in relation to the theory. The third research question then deals with the different measures and ways of dealing with conflict, focusing primarily on topics such as the standard process for conflicts, but also on topics such as leadership, coaching and mediation as well as meetings and workshops. The fourth section deals with the topic of collaboration between multicultural teams, as this topic is becoming increasingly relevant due to globalization, technologization and change.

In addition, the topics of external support and recommendations for action regarding conflicts in multicultural teams in NGOs are also addressed in the last two sections.

Finally, there is a brief outlook on newly emerging issues and the need for further research on the topic of conflict management in multicultural teams.

Answering the first research question:

How are conflict defined and the ability to deal with conflict perceived?

To address the first research question, which focuses on how conflict and the concept of conflict skills are defined and perceived, the interviewees were initially asked about their personal experiences, perceptions, and familiar definitions that helped them in identifying conflicts within themselves or among team members. They were also asked about what can be identified as conflict resolution skills or skills that are noticeable in the collaboration.

The importance of defining conflict is apparent in both theoretical discussions and the interviewees' remarks, as there are clear differences in how conflict is understood.

In conflict scenarios, however, mutual understanding and effective resolution often depend on forming a common definition or, at the very least, recognizing each other's interpretation.

Therefore, the aspects described by the interviewees as conflict definition or conflict ability are listed below and placed in context with the theory and models. The reasons given by the interviewees show parallels with the theoretical foundations, as will be shown below.

First of all, it can be said that the definitions of the interview partners both overlap and differentiate. For example, several interviewees agree that conflict is linked to emotions and that it affects several people. In particular, some interviewees also note the fact that it has a negative impact on work and communication within the team. If the situation does not resolve by itself, the interviewees state that it is a conflict and that management positions should be involved or external support is needed to ease the situation. "by conflict we mean situations by which is not possible to find an agreement and are blocking, the flow of productive and efficient work" (Tatiana 2023: pers. comm.).

Similarly, the work of De Dreu et al. (2004) highlights that conflict has a negative impact on organizational productivity and also increases costs. However, De Dreu et al. (2004) emphasizes that when a conflict is managed constructively, it has a positive impact on job satisfaction, well-being and even stress reduction. In general, the theory repeatedly emphasizes that conflict is seen as part of being human, which can always occur when smaller or larger groups work together. This is also highlighted by Elwert's conflict theory, which states that a conflict itself does not have to be explained, rather it is perceived as a fundamental feature of every human interaction. (Eckert 2004)

Moreover, the interviewees describe conflict as a situation where diverse interests and perspectives clash, resulting in the common cause of working towards shared ideals and goals being often overlooked. Furthermore, the interviewees mention the aspect of loss of trust resulting from conflicts. They note that conflicts often arise from specific incidents, and if these issues are not addressed, mistrust can develop towards individuals or entire departments/teams. Schwarz (2010) also addresses this aspect precisely, emphasizing that conflicts often seem to arise from alleged trivialities. However, he also observes that conflicts do not simply arise suddenly; rather, there has often been a preceding conflict under a different name before.

Further, Schwarz (2010) notes in his work that certain topics, perspectives, and issues are only brought to light and addressed in the course of a conflict, which may otherwise have remained unacknowledged. Accordingly, a conflict can contribute to the further development of groups and organizations, as it often triggers a change process. (Schwarz 2010) One of the interviewed coaches highlighted that a positive outcome of conflict can be the growth of teams or individuals, stressing that conflict is merely another dimension of interpersonal interaction. With regard to definitions of conflict, two of the coaches stated that they particularly liked to use Glasl's definition in workshops or as a foundation for reflection, especially because, in their opinion, it focuses on conflict resolution. This definition was also

addressed in this thesis in the chapter about conflict, as Glas's work provides relevant guidance with regard to conflict management. Specifically, the conflict levels, which are occasionally utilized in workshops for self-assessment and guidance for employees, were highlighted. Similarly, these levels are referenced and applied in coaching sessions to determine the escalation level. Likewise, a widely referenced work is the theory and methodology put forth by Schwarz (2010), which emphasizes the significance of conflicts in defining needs and life circumstances, thereby contributing to the development of individuality.

Definitions from interviews?

Ability to deal with conflict

Finally, the ability to deal with conflict was also discussed in more detail during the interviews. In this context, one expert specifically expressed his perspective on conflict resolution, emphasizing that he views this term as an assessment of team members' skills. He believes it is a broad generalization that offers little practical assistance in resolving conflicts. Some NGO interviewees perceive this differently, identifying skills such as maintaining a professional level and not taking things personally. Many also see it in capable leadership, the ability to deal well with conflict, especially those who have received coaching in this context. Especially valued is the ability to listen to all sides and understand the entire situation. However, they agree that the ability to handle conflict depends on all parties involved and their circumstances. They also highlight that conflict resolution skills can be developed over time. It is also emphasized that accepting feedback and criticism is essential, as is the openness to address issues directly rather than talking behind someone's back..

An expert similarly explains in his interview that the ability to handle conflict primarily involves how criticism is expressed and accepted. Additionally, in his opinion, the willingness to engage in conflict depends strongly on the personality and socialization of a person. Consequently, some individuals may shy away from conflict, while others are always eager to express their opinions and engage in it. Nevertheless, the willingness to engage in conflict is also linked to organizational culture. Similarly, Hayes (2008) explains in his work that conflict itself is not the problem, but rather how to deal with it professionally and correctly. Glasl (2000) shares a similar perspective, emphasizing the importance of recognizing conflict phenomena and understanding the methods that facilitate conflict resolution, thereby developing effective conflict management skills. He emphasizes, only when people are capable of conflict then an entire organization can become capable of conflict.

Answering the second research question:

What kinds of conflicts occur in multicultural teams in NGOs and how do conflicts impact communication and team work?

To address the second research question regarding the types of conflicts that arise in multicultural teams in NGOs and their impact on communication and workflow, the interviewees were specifically questioned about these dimensions. Various questions were asked about the team's day-to-day work, communication and career opportunities, as well as the feedback culture and how people interact with each other within the team. Specifically, they were asked about topics that they perceived as prone to conflicts within the NGO or team. Various aspects were highlighted, particularly concerning the triggers of conflicts, encompassing behaviours and internal topics within the NGO identified by both experts and interviewees as potential sources of conflict in multicultural teams. The main focus is based on the participants' own experience regarding the nature and topics of conflicts that arise in the NGO.

The majority of respondents indicated that conflict frequently arises from vague positions, processes, and organizational development within the NGO. Additionally, they noted that conflicts arise due to unclear roles, tasks, and responsibilities, particularly during periods of organizational change, along with cases of miscommunication. Similarly, an early work on conflict management by Verma (1998) emphasizes that communication breakdowns are the predominant, most common and most obvious source of conflict in teams. This then leads to a lack of trust, respect and different perceptions of a situation, which in turn results in inefficient teamwork and performance.

In later works (Schermerhorn et al., 2010; Wang, 2010; Brooks, 2009; Cunliffe, 2008) further aspects are stated, such as, “lack of resources, interdependencies, differences in organizational status, incongruent goals, cultural orientations, lack of coordination, incoherence, inequitable compensation, non-transparent rewards, scarce resources, and personality differences” (Riaz and Jamal 2022: 4).

In the following, some aspects that were mentioned several times during the interviews are discussed in more detail.

Responsibility

The interviewees pointed out the aspect of responsibility and accountability, emphasizing the discrepancy between who is assigned responsibility and who actually feels responsible.

According to the interviewees from the NGOs, this is due to the rapid growth of these organizations, with new departments and positions constantly being created. Responsibilities

and tasks previously handled by other internal persons are being redistributed. Additionally, they highlighted the importance of future planning, clarity in development, and division of labour. If these aspects are not addressed in a timely manner, conflicts can arise within the team during transition phases. In connection with this, conflicts can also emerge when new and old employees work together, and new structures and processes are implemented simultaneously. This is particularly challenging for NGO employees who have been with the organization since the beginning and are accustomed to more familiar structures. Mayer (2000) discusses this in a similar way, noting that while structure can help avoid conflict, it also has the potential to create conflict, especially if there is a poor decision-making process, insufficient equipment, or if the work situation and structure are stressful for employees (Mayer 2000: 25).

The interviewees stated that tensions can also arise when knowledge is not adequately transferred or when newly restructured positions lack the necessary expertise. This situation can create problems within the hierarchy and decision-making processes because the right individuals are not involved, or the wrong individuals are consulted. Consequently, disappointment and disputes may occur, particularly as founding members and long-term employees often feel they possess greater expertise regarding the NGO's core issues than newer employees hired specifically for those topics. This perceived disparity can lead to conflicts concerning responsibility and decision-making power. In this context, Enderli (2006) states that employees and managers often feel unable to cope with the constantly increasing pressure to perform. The additional internationalization of companies is also leading to increasing conflicts due to cultural differences in the work context.

Finances

According to Enderli (2006), conflicts arise not only because employees feel unsettled, overwhelmed or frustrated by change processes in the company, but also because austerity measures in the company lead to a fight for resources. On the other hand, in comparison to the theory, the interviewees do not see the aspect of finances as particularly important. Instead, they view procedures for funds applications as a source of conflict. Conflicts are more likely to arise if this process is not hierarchical or logically organized than if it is clearly structured. Nonetheless, conflicts can also emerge when funding needs to be divided or there is a drop in donations, indicating that resource conflicts are indeed an issue in the NGO sector. Moreover, conflicts hold economic significance, as emphasized by Hayes (2008) in his research, where he points out that mismanaging conflict within organizations can result in costs amounting to millions of dollars annually.

Career ladder

A topic which has been emphasised several times in the interviews is the relatively low level of conflict and competition in terms of professional development and career in NGOs. Much more emphasis is placed on being in a position where one feels they can create the most input and change to support the bigger picture. However, there is also little turnover in these positions, as roles are often filled based on interests and knowledge. Employees in NGOs typically work for idealistic reasons, and few leave due to dissatisfaction. Despite this, conflicts can arise when new, ambitious employees seek rapid career advancement, leading to tensions with superiors and within the team. Similarly, the works of Rahim (2015); Riaz and Junaid (2012), state that the causes of intrapersonal conflicts can lie in the organizational structure, the division of work or the task structure, which can result in contradictory goals, strategies and decisions within the organization. Thakore (2013) states that conflicts in an organization can involve various issues and people, covering all types of conflicts such as interpersonal, intrapersonal, intergroup, intergroup and interorganizational conflicts represented in companies.

One interviewee highlighted the importance of employees and team members feeling supported and satisfied with their roles, ensuring that tasks align with their skills and background. Chronic under- or over-challenge can also lead to conflicts. Böhm (2012) adopts a similar approach in his research, highlighting that competitive pressure, in particular, alters corporate hierarchies, influences management principles, and can result in a flattening of hierarchies. This shift underscores the growing importance of work teams and project groups. According to Böhm (2012), an increase in the frequency of conflicts can occur particularly when working hours increase while at the same time different interests, preferences, values, opinions and needs clash, sometimes due to cultural differences.

Leadership

Another topic that is addressed frequently in connection with the emergence of conflicts is the topic of leadership and clarity about responsibilities and processes, especially when areas of responsibility overlap or are not clearly separated. However, leadership in particular, has a significant influence on conflict behaviour within a team. The supervisor or team leader plays an important role in influencing behaviour and interaction, provides support and helps in understanding the different dynamics and needs of team-colleagues. If the manager fails to fulfil this role effectively, it can lead to conflicts.

Additionally, the issue of international hierarchy is also often addressed, as the decision-making power of the main office over the various country offices, can lead to conflicts. Strategies, slogans, and campaigns are developed and decided at the international office level,

but their national implementation often overlooks cultural differences, country contexts, and language barriers. A similar issue arises when NGOs work with partner organizations, as different ideas, expectations, and focus points can clash.

Expert interviews also emphasize that conflicts and misunderstandings can occur when companies are taken over, new national departments are opened, management styles differ, or management is outsourced due to structural changes. Challenges often arise from communication styles, decision-making processes, involvement in key activities, valued priorities, and consideration of personal needs.

The interviewees also describe that the development of team spirit and effective conflict management have a positive effect on understanding within the multicultural team.

Work ethic

Another aspect contributing to conflicts can be significant differences in work ethic or a lack of common interests, which can result in distance between team members. Conflicts can also arise between people of different generations or with varying levels of willingness and pace of work, as well as different adherence to procedures and regulations. Additional potential issues include the prioritization between family responsibilities and meeting deadlines, the overall perception of tasks, the perception of one's profession, and self-image within the professional context. Similarly, language barriers or the use of a foreign language can lead to misunderstandings, particularly when presenting results as a team, formulating emails, or conducting technical chats in one language.

In the context of this thesis, the cultural aspect is particularly noteworthy in the context of conflict emergence. In this context, the work ethic and the understanding of hierarchy and management, as well as work-life balance or the role one has in professional life, are particularly relevant for teamwork and the emergence of conflict. An aspect that emerged in several interviews is the theme of honour and respect in relation to culture, which holds particular significance within hierarchical contexts and during communication. This aspect is relevant not only in communication but also in how reactions and conflicts unfold, often escalating to extreme proportions. However, this perception of proportionality and reaction is strongly culturally dependent and this in turn can lead to misunderstandings if there is a seemingly unfounded refusal to talk. Similarly, conflicts may arise either from addressing a topic, problem, or behaviour with honesty, or from avoiding it due to cultural reasons.

Mayer (2000) takes a similar approach, emphasising that the distinction between right and wrong and the belief in what is important are particularly relevant in conflicts, as individuals may feel their values and beliefs are directly attacked. Harolds & Wood (2006) also note that

finding a compromise is particularly challenging when discussions involve core beliefs. According to Mayer (2000), the perception of a situation is often linked to the person's own cultural and historical context, and that the individual's own experiences and behavioural patterns can influence the course of the conflict.

Differences in the perception and management of time can also lead to conflicts, as punctuality concepts vary across cultural backgrounds. While Hofstede's models can provide guidance, it is essential not to derive stereotypes but to evaluate each situation individually. In conclusion, conflicts often do not need a specific topic to arise. Components such as stress, feelings of powerlessness, and helplessness can trigger conflicts regardless of the specific issues at hand.

Communication and work flow

With regard to the second part of the research question, how do conflict impact communication and work flow, this section focuses on team structure, manner in which information is shared and the way feedback is provided in multicultural teams in NGOs. Communication within the team is examined for its potential to trigger conflicts as well as opportunities for conflict prevention. Another significant point discussed by many interviewees is information management and the speed of decision-making. This aspect and the experiences associated with it vary greatly depending on the individuals' positions within the organization. Interview participants agree that different channels and methods are used for different types of information, depending on its relevance or classification. Information flow from top to bottom depends significantly on the leadership style of department heads, whether it is a more open and horizontal relationship or a hierarchical one. Additionally, decisions must be approved in a manner consistent with the NGO's structure, which can either prevent or provoke conflict. The type of communication and leadership can, on one hand, prevent conflict but can also lead to more conflicts, depending on the situation. In general, it can be observed that gossip spreads the fastest.

Another aspect connected to the topic of information flow is the unwillingness of people or departments to pass on information or knowledge from different projects or communication. This reluctance often stems from a previous conflict or an involuntary restructuring, leading to miscommunication and tensions.

Feedback is another relevant topic in connection with communication within an NGO or a team. Many interviewees emphasized that feedback should be constructive, but it is often misunderstood, not given meaningfully, or not given at all. While feedback is frequently requested, finding the right time, situation, or words can be challenging. Furthermore, face-to-

face feedback can be very personal, hence, some prefer anonymous surveys or appraisal interviews as a space for feedback in both directions. Nevertheless, many highlight that feedback is often associated with criticism or problems, and positive feedback is often not acknowledged as such.

Nevertheless, most interviewees not in leadership roles agreed that department heads or the CEO are usually very adept at giving feedback. This proficiency is attributed to their efforts to find an appropriate time for feedback, create a relaxed and trustworthy environment, and often undergo coaching to prepare for such situations.

Nonetheless, it is still important to create opportunities for giving feedback, especially regarding diversity and ethnicity issues within the NGO. This approach helps in understanding, addressing conflicts, and being open to reflection and apologies.

Expert interviews revealed that conflict impacts team relationships and the individuals involved. There is a consensus that conflict resolution and team relationships are interrelated well-resolved conflicts generally lead to better relationships, and good relationships reduce conflicts. Often, what appears to be conflict within the team may actually be problems in processes and workflows. However, unresolved conflicts channel a lot of energy into the conflict rather than day-to-day business, which can be detrimental to the NGO. On the other hand, de-escalated conflicts can positively affect work performance and team processes and reduce sickness rates. Despite this, it is important to remember that conflicts have occurred, potentially damaging relationships, trust, and interactions. Therefore, prevention measures and good conflict management are deemed more effective by experts.

As previously emphasized, Mayer (2000) and Harolds & Wood (2006) stress that communication, whether understood or misunderstood, serves as the primary source of conflict. This is because there's often an assumption that what is said is universally understood, which is not always the case. This is why conflicts occur on different levels, but mostly conflicts escalate "because the parties assume that their communication was correct and clear, which was not the case" (Mayer 2000: 20).

Answering the third research question:

What measures and strategies are used to deal with conflicts in multicultural NGOs? Are external support (mediation, coaching or training) or conflict prevention procedures used in this context?

To identify existing measures and strategies for handling conflicts, the interviewees were asked about standard conflict procedures, specific conflict resolution measures and strategies, as well as methods for conflict prevention and the potential involvement of coaches or mediators. Additionally, they were questioned whether the NGO provides training on conflict resolution/management and its target audience.

Given the multitude of approaches and perspectives on conflict and conflict management, comparing interviewee responses with established theories is complex. Therefore, the interviewees' statements are evaluated against widely recognized measures.

The interviews covered several topics related to conflict resolution, such as establishing a standard conflict resolution process, leadership dynamics, the role of coaching, expectations regarding external support, and the effectiveness of meetings and workshops. The interviews revealed that there is no standard procedure for handling conflicts within NGOs. Typically, when conflicts escalate, leaders, HR departments, or management become involved to address the situation. This involvement often leads to meetings aimed at mediating the conflict. Butler states: "In the most basic sense, conflict management refers to any effort by a third party at preventing a conflict from getting worse" (Butler 2009: 2).

In the context of NGOs, conflict resolution may sometimes be overlooked due to a strong emphasis on maintaining positive emotions and a good mood within the organization. When conflicts do arise, they are often addressed in meetings, with a focus on understanding the situation rather than assigning blame. During the interviews, there was a discussion about the general practices and measures used to identify and address conflicts. The most commonly mentioned approach was recognizing when something is wrong, listening attentively, and considering various methods and approaches for managing the conflict.

Schwarz (2014) also emphasizes this approach in his work, noting the importance to find the "true" core of the conflict and not just deal with its manifestations, although it may be beneficial to initially address the symptoms of a conflict to mitigate immediate tensions, and then address the underlying issues. He states that a conflict is only resolved when the core of the problem is dealt with, otherwise the same conflict will recur under a different name or new symptoms (Schwarz 2014).

Regarding concrete steps in conflict resolution theory, Thakore's work provides valuable insights, in which it is explained that the basis for a quick and efficient conflict resolution is

the correct assessment of the nature of the conflict. The conflict can then be resolved using the following strategies: One important aspect is to openly and honestly consider ones' own perspective and, in doing so, to show understanding for the other person's perspective and feelings. Further, analysing the cause of the conflict and objectively assessing it is also highlighted as a possible strategy. Developing targeted solutions and compromises is mentioned as a beneficial strategy, as is engaging in a conflict discussion directly with the other party or seeking the assistance of a mediator to facilitate resolution between conflicting parties. These strategies are just a few examples of possible approaches, other theorists and works offer additional methods, often with overlapping principles that build upon one another.

In the interviews it was further emphasized by the NGO employees that some of the NGOs have online platforms where various modules and information on processes can be found and courses on topics such as conflict and communication can be taken. On these online platforms, some NGOs also offer information on leadership training and conflict resolution strategies, what conflict types there are, whether the conflict is cold or hot how best to deal with it, etc. as well as information on where to get support.

Similarly, Kreuser (2010) emphasizes the importance of understanding the individual significance of conflict topics and one's own past experiences with conflicts. This involves recognizing one's personal conflict style, including recurring patterns of behaviour, as well as those of other participants. By doing so, individuals can subjectively evaluate the potential for conflict resolution, drawing upon their knowledge and experience to identify helpful methods and strategies for addressing conflicts. (Kreuser 2010)

Some interviewees also mentioned that it is particularly helpful in the context of multicultural teams to use a common language, to attend workshops, training courses and team building sessions together in order to create a unified approach to working.

In the course of this, joint and familiar meeting procedures can be implemented, such as beginning with a brief check-in and concluding with a check-out. This approach may foster mutual understanding and provide an additional opportunity to address relevant issues.

In connection with this, it is important for managers to provide good structures, clear allocation of responsibilities and tasks and process flows in order to prevent conflicts. These measures not only serve to prevent conflicts but also provide clear guidelines for resolution in the event of disputes. Another key aspect repeatedly emphasized in the interviews is the importance of employing a common language when team members speak different languages. This practice creates a solid framework for communication, ensuring that everyone can

participate effectively. However, it's worth noting that challenges may still arise due to variations in language proficiency among team members.

These statements in turn correspond to the theoretical approach according to Oachesu (2015). The author emphasizes that communication shortcomings are often seen as a reason for a conflict as well. Especially feedback is essential for conflict prevention, which is also confirmed in the interviews. Furthermore, Oachesu (2015) stressed that clear and concise communication, simple, direct language that is appropriate/ adapted to the person to whom it is addressed, is essential. Another commonly used prevention and conflict resolution approach mentioned in the interviews is non-violent communication (NVC) developed by Marshall B. Rosenberg.

Moreover, interviewees stress the importance of regular meetings and fixed schedules to foster a sense of connection and mutual understanding within teams. Some NGOS hold global office meeting which is open to all colleagues where all decisions, news and updates are shared, which strengthens team cohesion. Additionally, some NGOs extend their meeting practices beyond their local offices, involving partner offices in other countries to address common issues and resolve conflicts that may arise.

These meetings or workshops sometimes address how to tackle problems in a concrete and constructive way, different leadership qualities, what it means to be a strong leader, how to deal with conflicts and how to resolve them together, how to be honest with each other, how to grow together, how easily conflicts arise due to distance and communication and how to improve communication between offices.

In his work, Schwarz (2010) underlines several factors, including the roles individuals occupy (colleagues, boss, customer, etc.), the manner in which conflicts are addressed, and the relationships between conflicting parties, as well as the internal dynamics within teams or departments. He suggests that a different mindset, approach, and behaviour may be appropriate depending on one's role (Schwarz 2010). Regarding meetings, interviewees also discussed the topic of facilitation training and workshops on leadership, communication and conflict. Most of the interviewees agree that specific leadership training and external training can contribute to conflict resolution.

However, it was noted that not all NGOs offer workshops or training on these topics, despite their perceived usefulness.

Nevertheless, online resources and e-learning courses addressing topics such as non-violent communication, conflict management, change management, and feedback are readily accessible to the entire organization. Additionally, there are specific online courses tailored

for managers. In addition, other NGOs note that there are regular training courses as well as coaching sessions on conflict management and communication techniques.

Moreover, the rise of international business relationships, the establishment of new business locations, and the relocation of company activities abroad highlight the importance of transnational cooperation. This underscores the establishment of international communication and multicultural teams, transcending geographical borders and face-to-face interactions.

Consequently, both companies and the nature of cooperation are changing. NGOs are confronted with digitalization in the same way as other companies, virtual communication and meetings in the teams are increasing, hence, cultural awareness in multicultural teams is becoming increasingly important.

Especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a significant improvement in IT equipment and skills among teams, enabling more effective collaboration online. Some NGOs have even implemented IT environments and workshops to familiarize team members with various tools and facilitate seamless online collaboration.

External support

The second part of the research question, concerning external support, was thoroughly explored in all interviews. This encompassed the acceptance and utilization of mediation and coaching within organizations, as well as the circumstances under which coaches are engaged in resolving conflicts. Additionally, coaches were asked about their preferred conflict resolution measures and the prevention models they deemed relevant in this context. In organizations, particularly in large teams and NGOs, external support can be enlisted, especially in conflict situations. There are numerous experts specializing in personal growth, as well as workshops focusing on leadership and conflict resolution.

The perspective on external support from coaches varies widely, with some teams or individuals being receptive and appreciative, while others view it negatively as a form of punishment. This divergence in attitude may be influenced by cultural factors, as cultures that are less open about discussing feelings or find conflict resolution challenging may perceive external support as particularly stressful.

At the same time, the perception of external support can be influenced by personal experiences with external coaches or mediators, but also how people experienced, learned and perceived conflict and conflict resolution as children, adolescents and adults.

In this research context, it was revealed that several interviewees had prior experience with coaching or were aware of its availability within their NGO. However, they noted that

coaching sessions were not always related to conflict situations but often focused on topics of their choice, utilizing various methods depending on the coach.

This is also reflected in theory, Schreyögg emphasizes that coaching primarily tries to improve existing processes through guided self-reflection and to promote the personal development and problem-solving skills of the individual. However, coaching in a business context is primarily used for stress, crises and conflict situations. (Schreyögg 2005)

In addition, it is increasingly common for management, especially senior management, to regularly participate in such coaching sessions dealing with executive, management and conflict resolution coaching.

Accordingly, coaching is seen as beneficial by numerous people, as support can be provided easily and efficiently in the event of a conflict or a change of position. This is particularly due to the fact that in some cases the entire NGO is supervised by one particular coaching organization or a coach. Consequently, they possess an in-depth understanding of the organization and are familiar with international partner organizations. This can prove advantageous, particularly in conflict monitoring and support.

In several interviews, the positive experiences with external support, such as coaches or mediation, as well as the openness of organizations and employees to external support are emphasized.

However, the interviewees mention the importance of regular retrospectives in order to gauge progress, improvement or change. They emphasize that conflict mediation sessions and workshops should not be one-time events, rather, the process should be sustained over time with the guidance of a neutral moderator. This allows everyone to adjust and work at their own pace, ensuring effective adaptation and ongoing development.

Some experts point out that there are NGOs or companies that already have processes that can be built on. This process often involves a moderated discussion with a manager, HR or another supervisor, focusing on identifying solutions or taking preventative measures.

In situations where there is no established process, conflicts can escalate due to unofficial, personal discussions involving two or three parties. In such cases, the involvement of a coach or mediator may only occur relatively late in the conflict resolution process. Overall, the consensus among experts is that a basic level of willingness from all parties involved is essential; without it, attempting to resolve the conflict may prove futile. If this willingness is lacking, the coach should communicate with the manager or client that further efforts to resolve the conflict may be unproductive. One possible standard process involves speaking with everyone affected, occasionally even individuals with marginal involvement, and

specifically inquiring about their outlook on resolving the conflict positively. Furthermore, it is highlighted that during the conflict resolution process, it is essential to help individuals overcome feelings of interdependence and helplessness. This involves collaborating with a coach to develop strategies for addressing the situation and considering various perspectives. Nonetheless, experts agree that they are often hired by companies with a pre-existing awareness and capability in handling conflicts. Additionally, individuals directly or tangentially involved, including supervisors, often perceive the involvement of a coach as beneficial.

When external support is unavailable and internal measures for conflict resolution are lacking, dismissal is frequently perceived as the sole solution to conflicts. Despite the potential for conflict resolution to be more advantageous from a business standpoint, particularly in an employee-driven market where replacing a skilled individual is both time-consuming and costly, the option of dismissal is frequently chosen.

Conflict measures and models

This section highlights the conflict measures and models favoured by coaches in the context of conflicts. It underscores the importance not only of managing conflicts within NGOs but also of determining which steps are particularly effective from the perspective of experts. A helpful measure in addressing conflicts within companies is to highlight and emphasize the common ground between the parties involved. Experts perceive spatial separation, rather than managerial intervention or mediation between the parties, as a less effective measure, although it is often attempted before seeking external support. Nonetheless, all experts agree that it is advisable to address conflicts promptly and internally. From their experience, conflicts often escalate from factual or power-based issues to relational issues, a trend they attribute partly to the lack of conflict resolution training among managers.

The experts frequently cite Glasl's conflict levels framework and definition of conflict as methods they frequently utilize or prefer in their practice. Additionally, they mention the iceberg model, based on Sigmund Freud's work, which exists in various versions.

Furthermore, the conflict strategies according to Thomas and Kilmann are discussed, with Mr. Stübinger himself adding two additional levels/topics: delegating and accepting support. Other lesser-known models and method are also mentioned. However, their effectiveness varies depending on the nature of the conflict and the individuals involved, hence no generalization can be made about which model is the best in all situations.

Nonetheless, one expert suggests, a preparatory meeting with the coach or mediator can be arranged before employing a model. In this session, the involved parties can individually

reflect on and discuss their roles in the conflict, laying the groundwork for more effective conflict resolution.

Glasl (2002) emphasizes in his work that the mediator has no decision-making authority and follows a structured process to help mediate between two or more parties, as an independent third party between tense fronts.

In addition, the interviewees mention that external support is often involved at a late stage, i.e. when the situation is actually already quite intensified or has escalated completely.

Furthermore, the interviewees state that it should not be forgotten that 90 % to 95 % of conflicts in everyday life or in a professional context are resolved by individuals themselves. Only those conflicts that appear challenging to resolve are typically identified as such.

Therefore it is important that managers are trained to recognize conflicts at an early stage, in particular to look at the overall factors and not to blame a conflict on individual or cultural differences. In addition, one expert noted that even if an impartial mediator or coach is brought into a conflict, the conflict is often already so far developed that the only way to resolve or separate the parties is through the use of power.

This underscores why conflict prevention holds such significance for coaches and why training, workshops, or team-building activities are highlighted as effective preventive measures. When teams are well-developed and equipped to handle conflict, they can resolve issues more readily and at an early stage. However, it is essential to acknowledge that no single method can be universally applied in all situations without differentiation (Glasl 2002).

Answering the fourth research question:

How are cooperation and coordination within multicultural teams in NGOs perceived and what measures are observed (viewed) as effective in dealing with cultural differences?

Finally, the interviewees were asked how cooperation and work coordination in multicultural teams in the NGOs takes place and how cultural differences are dealt with in order to answer the fourth research question of this master's thesis on the basis of the results.

The interviewees generally emphasize that the ability to communicate and deal with each other is influenced by cultural differences and should be taken into account by managers, in particular, how conflicts are typically avoided or how long it takes to address conflict issues.

The majority of interviewees noted that due to the cultural composition of their team members, predominantly cold conflicts occur in their companies. Nevertheless, Kocak (2014) emphasizes in his work that it is becoming more and more likely to work in teams with people from other countries and cultures due to a globalized business environment.

In individualistic cultures like the Netherlands or Scandinavian countries, there's a preference for direct communication, with a willingness to openly address and solve problems together. Conversely, in cultures like Asia or Brazil, where harmony and collectivism hold more value, conflicts or problems may not be addressed as directly or openly.

These observations in turn align with the theoretical framework according to Hofstede (2001) and his cultural dimension, where he attributes different behaviours to different societies. Therefore, a certain degree of sensitivity and experience is required regarding multicultural exchanges to opt for an approach that leads to constructive conversation and rather than conflict.

Engelen and Tholen (2014) already emphasized that sufficient time resources are needed to ensure that the team members get to know each other. They note that a group's composition of multicultural teams presents certain opportunities and challenges, emphasizing that the varied perspectives and thinking styles among employees can enhance problem-solving and prevent uniform groupthink.

Similar to the interview partners, Engelen and Tholen (2014) note that through long-term cooperation in multicultural teams, members can develop an understanding of different thinking patterns over time and thus become increasingly tolerant towards other cultures. Kocak (2014) describes this similarly emphasizes that cultural differences have an impact on employee morale, work performance and stereotyping and lead to conflicts due to different cultural norms and communication styles. At the same time, however, he also notes that cultural diversity can yield benefits such as increased creativity and performance.

The interviewees highlight that the primary objective of the teams is to comprehend the behaviors and motivations of others within their specific contexts. It is particularly important how much effort individuals invest in comprehending cultural differences and being receptive to others' viewpoints. The focus is not solely on an individual's cultural background but rather on their willingness to explore differences and establish a common ground for collaboration. Multicultural teams provide a greater diversity of characters, ways of thinking, information and levels of experience due to cultural influences which can lead to conflicts. In such context, creating a space for group and individual reflection can be beneficial. Without a designated timeframe or platform for addressing needs and concerns, conflicts may arise more easily. Navigating cultural differences and conflicts also relies on the personalities within the group, including whether individuals are inclined to withdraw or openly discuss what concerns them. This is also described in the works of Baranowski (2006) and Schneider and Hirt (2007). They emphasize that especially in a context of conflict, the workload and team

setting or hierarchies is handled differently in cultures.

Engelen and Tholen (2014) also address the increasing relevance of understanding foreign cultural negotiation and communication patterns as well as multicultural competence in everyday working life.

Similarly, all team members make an effort to consider religious holidays. Moreover, given the diversity of prayer days and public holidays across different countries, it is crucial to incorporate these into project planning to ensure everyone has the opportunity to work comfortably. Furthermore, cultural differences are an ever-present challenge in NGOs and teams, encompassing differences such as working methods and morals, communication styles, customs and rules as well as interpretation of humour, sarcasm and manners. These differences extend beyond work practices and team interactions, also manifesting in leadership styles, as in certain cultures, the team dynamics and leadership relationships may be characterized by horizontal or vertical hierarchies.

Likewise, different cultures have distinct ways of dealing with power, processes and bureaucracy. However, despite these variations, some interviewees highlighted a notable sense of unity within NGOs. This cohesion often stems from shared values, work ethics, and a common ideological foundation among team members.

The issue of geographical distance and the accompanying time zone differences emerged as a significant factor affecting work dynamics. Therefore common working methods, communication and a certain degree of coordination are necessary for good cooperation. Regarding scheduling, interviewees highlighted efforts to accommodate participants across different time zones when arranging meetings, emphasizing the importance of convenience for all involved.

Moreover, the topic of punctuality was raised particularly in several interviews as a potential source of conflict. In certain countries and cultural contexts, punctuality is highly valued and appreciated, while in others, arriving on time or too early may be perceived as unusual or even rude.

However, culture presents a multifaceted challenge. While some interviewees perceive distinct cultural behaviours in communication, leadership, feedback delivery, and workplace experiences, others argue that individual personality plays a significant role, with cultural background being just one of many contributing factors.

Language differences pose a significant challenge in multicultural teams, leading to misunderstandings, especially in written and verbal communication, even when the team opts to communicate in a common language like English. These challenges stem from varying

language proficiency levels, limited foreign language skills, distinct accents, ambiguous expressions, and translation errors.

However, not only different language levels are relevant but also the way in which communication takes place. Some countries use and appreciate efficient communication, while others prioritize detailed explanations and extensive questioning regarding work tasks. Generally, significant differences exist in email communication, including response rates, the time taken for replies, the usage of polite phrases, and the level of personal interest in the communication partner across various countries. In the end, the merging of diverse life realities within all teams and across the entire NGO due to cultural differences can result in clashes of priorities, overlooked matters, or issues left unaddressed in day-to-day work. It should be noted that having a common coach or trainer can be beneficial, as it allows for the development of a shared language, communication style, and understanding. This helps to minimize misunderstandings and facilitates smoother collaboration among team members. The interviewees were questioned about their experiences with consulting experts on cultural differences in intercultural contexts, and whether such experts are sought to provide guidance and suggestions for dealing with cultural diversity. While there is generally an acknowledgment of cultural differences and the importance of inclusion, there are varied experiences and opinions among the interviewees, particularly regarding the involvement of external consultants specializing in cultural diversity. Some mention the occasional engagement of experts or the provision of workshops tailored for managers on integration and cultural topics. However, according to their perspectives, there is still significant room for improvement in this regard.

Some respondents highlight that external consultants were hired in their NGO for a certain period of time to conduct a diversity and inclusion assessment within the organization and to assist in establishing an initiative. Subsequently, but also independently of this, some NGOs have established new positions and internal resources focusing on cultural matters in recent years. In addition or as part of this initiative, separate working groups like the DIA network, LGBTQIA network, women's network, parents' network, or inclusive culture club have been established. These groups are generally perceived as informative, supportive, and cohesive. Their voluntary nature allows individuals to convene, exchange experiences, and gain insights into asserting their rights as members of minorities within the organization.

Recommendations for action

This section summarizes some of the problem-solving approaches, supportive measures and strategies, processes and procedures mentioned in the interviews that can be conducive to good cooperation and a positive working day in a multicultural team.

The main implications of the empirical study include recommendations for NGOs as well as for team leaders and managers. These recommendations aim to address a research gap and offer assistance in conflict management within multicultural teams in NGOs. The qualitative interview study highlights the importance of conflict prevention, particularly in newly formed teams, to avoid recurring conflicts. Trust, respect and openness, good communication but also a sense of responsibility and a good relationship with colleagues as well as a common mission statement for multicultural teams are most frequently mentioned as essential goals and necessities.

The results of the qualitative interview study underscore the importance for NGOs to recognize that conflict prevention and management within multicultural teams significantly impact the working atmosphere and efficiency of cooperation. It highlights the primary responsibility of management and those in leadership roles to establish suitable framework conditions and take appropriate actions to address conflicts, including seeking external support when necessary.

This involves providing all relevant information and communication tools, along with concrete support in case of conflicts. It also entails selecting and deploying trained team members, particularly managers, who have received training in conflict management, intercultural cooperation, and team-building workshops.

In the course of the interviews, participants often offered recommendations for handling conflicts and misunderstandings. One initial step in resolving a misunderstanding could involve seeking clarification about the situation, asking what was meant precisely.

Alternatively, expressing the emotions triggered by an interaction can open a pathway to jointly identifying constructive solutions or preventing similar situations in the future.

In this context, it is suggested that having designated time and space for addressing issues can be beneficial. Additionally, interviewees stress the importance of demonstrating genuine interest in individuals, cultures, perspectives, and problems. Furthermore, they emphasize the usefulness of establishing common protocols, procedures, and practices within a team or across the entire NGO.

Additionally, it was suggested that having a leader or mediator to facilitate communication between conflicting parties and ensure a de-escalation approach can be beneficial. In line with this, one interviewee emphasizes the importance of establishing clarity regarding the common

goals, ideals, and values of the parties involved to strengthen the sense of unity. When there is a shared sense of direction, it becomes easier to navigate toward a resolution for the conflict, as expressed by one of the interviewees.

The experts in particular emphasize the importance of promoting the community through team building, values reflection or by developing a purpose together. Additionally, they view anonymous one-on-one coaching and individual coaching, offered as a general practice rather than solely in response to conflict, as valuable support in the work context. Particularly in conflict situations, guided self-reflection can help alleviate emotions and pressure from the situation. Moreover, the significance of personal development, especially for managers and in interactions with others, is highlighted in this context. Further, the experts particularly stress the importance of establishing a collaborative culture from the very beginning, especially in NGOs, which are frequently established and founded by a small team.

Newly formed teams have the opportunity to establish constructive approaches for handling errors, conflicts, or problems, while also cultivating an appreciative, respectful feedback, and error culture.

All interviewees emphasized the importance of recognizing that there are multiple perspectives, not just one's own, and being open to honest and understanding communication. Understanding each other is crucial, especially in situations with language barriers or heightened emotions. In such cases, employing translators can support communication, ensuring that everyone can express themselves effectively and minimize misunderstandings. Moreover, if conflicts are left unaddressed, they tend to escalate and develop their own dynamic, as discussed by Glasl (2010) in his stages of conflict escalation. Therefore, it is crucial to address conflicts early on or involve a coach or mediator. Conflicts that have become habitual over time pose particular challenges and are often resistant to change. In such cases, examining the history of the conflict, understanding how it originated, and identifying any misunderstandings that occurred beforehand can be helpful.

Reflecting on conflict situations afterwards can be beneficial to develop possible preventative measures for similar situations. This is relevant because in everyday work life, the priority is on completing projects under time pressure, while colleagues typically remain unchanged even after addressing a conflict.

However, conflict can serve as an opportunity to confront repressed issues, address concerns, and harness the energy to find solutions. When conflicts remain unaddressed within a team, it not only affects the team's morale negatively but also disrupts workflow and teamwork

deteriorates. As dissatisfaction increases, proactive ideas and motivation decline. However, resolving conflicts collaboratively can foster a sense of shared strength within the team. Experts and managers highlight the importance of prevention, especially in NGOs where the convergence of diverse working cultures and mentalities can often lead to conflict. Strategies include raising awareness, creating safe spaces for colleagues where they can exchange ideas and contribute and value their cultural perspective, investing in topics such as DIA and multicultural communication as well as external support. From an individual standpoint, the emphasis lies on traits like open-mindedness, receptivity to alternative viewpoints, respect for diverse perspectives, and the recognition of the different ways topics can be approached globally. It's underscored that this diversity can indeed enrich experiences. In this context, it is also important for respondents to actively assess how communication unfolds within the organization and how individuals within the organization handle conflicts, communication and punctuality as well as meeting styles and emails. Misunderstandings and non-standard behaviour can readily escalate into conflicts. Other common argument are the moderation of meetings and frequent check-ins, fostering thorough preparation and cross-departmental, international acquaintanceship, thereby promoting a shared organizational identity. In conclusion, it is advisable to appoint experienced managers with multicultural competence to lead multicultural teams. Their knowledge in navigating the complexities of culturally diverse team dynamics proves invaluable in effectively steering teams towards success.

Open and newly arising issues

Although the analysis has been comprehensive, some aspects remain open or have newly emerged during the research. These topics will be further explored in the following section. As already mentioned, this qualitative study was conducted with a number of multicultural NGOs. Accordingly, the question remains open as to how conflict management is approached in other multicultural NGOs or teams and what practical experiences are gained from it. To gather this information, additional quantitative studies may be valuable. These studies could involve larger samples and explore additional questions, thereby either confirming, refuting, or deepening the findings obtained in this research. Additionally, longer participatory observations within multicultural NGOs could offer particularly interesting insights.

Furthermore, this empirical research focused on measures, handling and experiences related to conflicts and conflict management. At this point, it remains unclear whether conflicts typically arise "bottom-up" between individuals and then escalate to higher levels of the organization, or whether they originate at the management level and subsequently cascade "top-down".

This question could be the subject of further studies in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of conflict management. Similarly, further research could explore how guidelines and practical instructions, along with an increased emphasis on conflict management and self-help, might influence organizational change.

Furthermore, future research could examine different cultural models and their relevance to intercultural NGOs or companies. This could include analyzing factors such as multicultural employees' tendencies towards authority, conflict avoidance, or how active they are, and exploring potential blind spots in leadership approaches. Additional cross-disciplinary research or detailed studies such as the present work would help NGOs and managers of multicultural teams to fulfil their responsibilities. Such efforts are not only scientifically significant but also hold practical relevance. Many of the findings outlined in this study suggest that our future will be increasingly global and multicultural. Therefore, these impulses should be further investigated in order to prepare for future trends and issues.

Conclusion

This master's thesis examined the topic of conflict management in multicultural teams in NGOs. The aim was to examine the ways in which employees manage their conflicts by conducting personal semi-structured interviews with both NGO personnel experts in the field. Current economic, social and technological globalization is driving organizations towards a more international focus, underscoring the growing significance of cross-cultural engagement. Hence, this work holds anthropological significance, considering the diversity of cultural practices and social systems traditionally explored in anthropology. Within the NGO context, it involves recognizing the varied socio-cultural norms, values, and lifestyles of the communities engaged with by these organizations. Conflicts often originate from cultural misunderstandings or different idea of resources utilization, power relations and development concepts. However, the limitations of prior research become apparent here, as there is still a lack of concrete recommendations on how to best organize multicultural cooperation in practice.

Therefore the research question of this work was: “What kinds of conflicts occur in multicultural teams in NGOs and how are these conflicts managed successfully?”

Above all, this research has illustrated that culturally determined preferences for conflict resolution methods exist, alongside differing expectations regarding how conflicts should be addressed. Therefore, understanding the impact of intercultural diversity on collaboration and conflict resolution processes in teams is a crucial factor for team success and organizational effectiveness. In addition, it was discovered that unresolved conflicts in NGOs are often viewed as destructive, as they disrupt organizational goals. Nonetheless, experts highlight that minimal or absent conflict can also diminish innovation and creativity over time, resulting in stagnation.

It should also be recognized that conflict resolution in teams or work groups is sometimes overlooked, despite the clear evidence that active team conflicts in the workplace can reduce employee performance and frequently result in decreased motivation, and even increased rates of absence due to sickness. The focal point of this master's thesis lies in the interpretation of conflicts by the involved parties, alongside the relevant measures and potential solutions. The aim of this master's thesis is to reveal how conflict management is implemented in multicultural teams in NGOs. The perspectives and experiences of the experts were also included. To achieve this, the theoretical foundations were initially outlined, establishing a fundamental understanding of culture, conflict, and conflict management through the

presentation of relevant theories, measures, positions, and key dimensions. Following this, an overview of the existing research was provided, and four research questions were derived to guide this master's thesis. Subsequently, the experiences, achievements, and challenges encountered by the interviewees regarding conflict management in multicultural teams within NGOs were presented. To obtain comprehensive data on individual cases, a qualitative study employing semi-structured interviews was conducted in either German or English, based on the interviewee's preference. During the analysis of these interviews, key aspects such as responsibility, finances, leadership qualities, work ethic, and communication were first identified. It was observed that conflict resolution measures and preventive strategies within an NGO, along with the expertise of the manager and clearly defined areas of responsibility, emerged as crucial factors in managing conflicts within multicultural teams. The potential of diversity primarily lies in joint development of solutions and the diverse range of approaches. However, cultural misunderstandings and varying expectations present challenges for multicultural teams.

Consequently, it was demonstrated which measures and recommendations for action the interviewees and experts consider relevant in this context. Hence, it can be concluded that the four research questions were addressed, thus achieving the objective of this master's thesis.

This master's thesis therefore presents significant findings relevant to both theory and practice. Additionally, it highlights other aspects that could be explored in future studies to gain a deeper understanding of the topic.

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Figure 2 – Page 24

based on Glasl (three phases of win and loss)

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Appendix

Interview Guide - expert

Instruction in the beginning:

Before we begin the interview, I would like to thank you again for taking the time to have an interview with me. I also want to briefly clarify the framework conditions: today's interview will be recorded for my own use and will not be shared with third parties. Parts of it will be mentioned in my master's thesis, and these will also be anonymized unless you wish to be specifically mentioned. I have already sent you a data protection declaration in advance via email, which we can discuss again if needed.

To explain in advance, as I already mentioned in my email, my research focuses particularly on conflict management and conflict resolution strategies in multicultural NGOs and teams within companies. I am especially interested in the intercultural aspects of conflicts in NGOs. The aim of my work is to determine how conflict management is defined and implemented in multicultural NGOs.

At the beginning of the interview, we will briefly talk about you and your experiences as a coach and mediator, and then about the emergence, handling, and experiences with conflict. If you do not wish to answer a question, please feel free to let me know, and we will move on to another question.

1. Personal experience with conflict

- How long have you been working as a coach and what special experiences/training do you have in conflict management?
- Which clients, companies, NGOs, or teams do you mainly work with? What work experience have you already had with multicultural teams?
- How would you describe/define "conflict"?
- For you, what is the difference between an argument and a conflict?
- How would you explain/define "conflict management"?

2 Emergence of conflicts

- What conflict issues, in your experience, occur most frequently in multicultural NGOs or teams?
 - What, in your experience, are the main triggers and influencing factors for the emergence of conflicts?
 - Referring to Glasl's escalation levels, at which conflict stage do you work most frequently?

3 Handling conflict

- What conflict management measures/solutions strategies exist in intercultural NGOs before mediation or coaching is used, and what is perceived as helpful or hindering in this regard?
 - Are training sessions on conflict management offered in NGOs? Do you offer training on this topic?

4 Cultural aspects on Conflict

- From your work experience, would you say that there are cultural differences in how work is viewed and team dynamics?
- In your view, can culture-related differences in conflict behaviour be identified?
 - In your view, to what extent are individuals able to reframe, ignore, modify the influence of prior cultural experiences, practices in a conflict situation?
- Are NGOs aware of foreign cultural leadership, motivation, and performance patterns, and do these influence conflicts?

5 Impact

- What impact would you say a team conflict has on the people involved and the overall team relationship and productivity in the team in multicultural NGOs?

6 Advantages and disadvantages

- In your view, what benefits do employers and employees derive from offering conflict management, coaching or mediation?
 - How do you estimate the acceptance of conflict mediation as a constructive conflict resolution method among NGOs? What is your own opinion about it?

7 Conclusio

- Is there a topic or an opinion you would like to address that has not yet been addressed?
- I would like to thank you again for your time.
- May I contact you again by mail with any further or additional questions?

Interview Guide – NGO employee

Instruction in the beginning:

Essentially the same introduction as in the interview guide for the experts

1. Personal experience with conflict

- What is your job/position in this NGO?
- What work and team experience have you already had with multicultural teams?
- How would you describe/define “conflict”?
- For you, what is the difference between an argument and a conflict?
- In your opinion, how does the ability to deal with conflict manifest itself?

2. Emergence of conflicts

- Which conflict issues arise most frequently in your experience at your NGO or team?
 - What conflicts are there particularly in connection with work phases? E.g. resources, bottlenecks in existing equipment, positions, research funding, ownership of ideas, etc.
 - Is there strong competition for positions and responsibilities (leadership positions) in your NGO?
 - How easy is it to work with other people or teams in the NGO and coordinate the work?
 - How and how quickly is information regarding new results, decision-making processes, etc. communicated within the team?
- Which situations are particularly conflict-ridden and or lead to escalation of conflicts?

3. Handling conflict

- How is conflict usually handled in your NGO?
 - How much is discussed within the teams?
 - Are new ideas supported and encouraged?
 - Is criticism or feedback voiced?
- What conflict management measures/conflict resolution strategies are in place at your NGO before mediation or coaching is used, what is perceived as beneficial or obstructive in this regard?
 - Which conflict resolution measures make particular sense from your experience?
 - From your experience, what is the best conflict prevention?
- Do you offer training courses on conflict management at the NGO and for whom?
- If so how do NGO employees get to mediation/conflict management?
 - How is the acceptance and uptake for mediation in your NGO?
- - How does your NGO deal with conflicts that have escalated?

4. Cultural aspects on Conflict

- -From your work experience, would you say that there are cultural differences in how work is viewed and team dynamics?
- In your view, can culture-related differences in conflict behaviour be identified?

- In your view, to what extent are individuals able to reframe, ignore, modify the influence of prior cultural experiences, practices in a conflict situation?
- Is your NGO aware of foreign cultural patterns of leadership, motivation and performance, and do these have an influence on the way work is handled and distributed?
- What role do employees' own and others' cultural perceptions play in dealing with internal team conflicts?
- Are experts consulted in your NGO to address issues related to cultural diversity?
- Do you respect different cultural holidays when planning your work schedule and or even celebrate them?
- What do you think is the best way to deal with cultural differences and to understand and work with each other?

5. Impact

- What impact would you say a team conflict has on the people involved and the overall team relationship and productivity in the team in your NGO?

6. Advantages and disadvantages

- In your view, what benefits do employers and employees derive from offering conflict management, coaching and mediation?
 - How do you estimate the acceptance of conflict mediation as a constructive conflict resolution method among NGOs? What is your own opinion about it?

7. Conclusio

- Is there a topic or an opinion you would like to address that has not yet been addressed?
- I would like to thank you again for your time.
- May I contact you again by mail with any further or additional questions?