Task, Process and Relationship Conflict: Behavioral Differences in Dutch and Multicultural Agile Teams

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ABSTRACT,
In today's globalized world, organizations increasingly rely on multicultural teams, to bring in new perspectives and increase a team's effectiveness. However, some scholars suggested multicultural teams to also show a higher propensity for frequent conflicts. Whether a conflict then brings benefits or harm to a team's performance is often found to depend on the management of the conflict situation. Therefore, this thesis aims to obtain a better understanding of potential behavioral differences between monocultural and multicultural teams during said conflict situations. Specifically, four Dutch and five multicultural teams from a large Dutch financial organization, that adopted an Agile way of working, were analyzed for this research. The analysis was conducted using thematic, content, and microethnographic analysis methods on video recordings of multiple meetings per team. The team members' behavior during task, process and relationship conflicts were then assessed according to the duration of the conflict (i.e. micro-, meso-, or macro-conflicts), expressed emotionality, communication directness, and whether and how the conflicts were resolved. Findings show multicultural teams to experience more overall conflicts, and proportionally more task-related and fewer process-related conflicts. Moreover, multicultural teams exhibited higher levels of emotionality, which were proportionally more negative and less positive than emotionality expressed in monocultural teams. Lastly, resolving conflicts without the expression of a conclusion occurred more often in multicultural teams, and monocultural teams exhibited more clearly direct and clearly indirect confrontation styles. An additional analysis of the teams' psychological safety and perceived meeting effectiveness indicated an important role of psychological safety, mediating between conflict occurrences and meeting effectiveness. This study provides first indications for this mediating role's validity to translate from macro- to micro-conflicts. Further contributions include a contradiction of earlier findings for micro-conflict frequencies in relation to cultural diversity, as well as emphasizing the importance and effects of communication difficulties in multicultural teams.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, multicultural work teams are becoming increasingly important (Groves & Feyerherm, 2011). This is true for most multinational organizations as collaboration between regionally dispersed departments or other multicultural management teams has become imperative for "balancing global integration and local responsiveness" (Zander & Butler, 2010, p. 258). Such cross-cultural collaborations, however, also create new challenges within multicultural teams, compared to culturally homogeneous teams (Behfar, Kern, & Brett, 2006). Taking such potential challenges and conflict potential into account is especially important in self-managing teams that are organized according to the Agile management approach, as good collaboration and communication practices are key to team success (Lensges, Kloppenborg, & Forte, 2018).

However good the team members work together, conflict is an unavoidable effect of team collaboration (Chiang, 2013; Jehn, 1995). In contrast to early research about conflicts in work teams, conflict is not seen as exclusively negative anymore but is perceived as an enabler for creativity, innovative behavior or better decision making (Medina, Munduate, Dorado, Martínez, & Guerra, 2005). Besides team structure components, what is decisive in determining whether a conflict is beneficial or not is found to depend on the type of conflict. Jehn (1995) distinguished between task conflicts, which arise when group members disagree "about the content of the tasks being performed, including differences in viewpoints, ideas, and opinions" (Jehn, 1995, p. 258), and relationship conflicts, which arise from "interpersonal incompatibilities among group members, which typically includes tension, animosity, and annoyance among members within a group" (Jehn, 1995, p. 258). In a subsequent research, a third conflict type, namely process conflict, was identified, in which team members disagree "about assignments of duties or resources" (Jehn, 1997, p. 540).

The aforementioned types of conflicts can be influenced and defined by several factors, among which cultural heterogeneity, conflict duration, and emotionality can play a crucial role. With regard to group heterogeneity, for example, research has found that increased cultural diversity can boost the risk for emotional conflicts, as "people find it difficult to identify with (and easy to stereotype) those of a different race or tenure" (Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999, p. 20). The duration of the conflict situation is another factor that is important in defining the scope of a conflict. While most scholars previously focused on larger scale meso- or macro-conflicts, (Paletz, Schunn, & Kim, 2011) this research puts additional focus on considering the often overlooked micro-conflicts, which are mere minute-by-minute disagreements. Even though conflict situations with such short durations often cannot be recalled by participants (Paletz et al., 2011), this type of conflict is nevertheless suggested to have a significant effect on the team's performance (Paletz et al., 2011), making the observational study of micro-conflicts an important part in understanding intragroup conflicts. The last important factor is the experienced emotionality among the team members during the conflict. Conflicts have been found to predominantly give rise to negative emotions, which result in poorer performance (Jehn, 1997). However, the validity of such findings in the context of micro-conflicts has recently been contested, suggesting that micro-conflicts can often lack increased levels of emotionality (Paletz et al., 2011). Therefore, how a team copes with such conflicts might also depend on whether a team is culturally homogenous or heterogeneous, how long conflicts last as well as the level of experienced emotionality. Applied to this research project with a large Dutch financial organization, this means comparing Dutch monocultural teams with teams that also have non-Dutch representatives. Derived from this problem definition, the following research question was formulated:

What behavioral differences exist in situations of task conflict, process conflict, and relationship conflict between monocultural and multicultural Agile teams?

Thus, the goal of this research is to explore behavioral differences between Dutch-only and multicultural Agile teams in situations of task conflict, process conflict and relationship conflict, using a variety of data collected from the sample teams. The analysis predominantly focuses on the vocal behaviors of the participants. However, other apparent non-verbal behaviors (e.g. body language) will be taken into account as well. Effects of cultural diversity on the teams' conflict behavior will then be analyzed using thematic analysis, content analysis and microethnographic analysis. Lastly, the findings will be discussed and put into perspective with the context of the existing literature.

This research aims to close a research gap, as it for the first time examines conflicts within monocultural and multicultural Agile teams considering both a macro-process as well as a micro-process perspective.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Below a review of existing literature about intragroup conflict and multicultural teams is provided.

2.1 Intragroup Conflict

As described in the Introduction, whether intragroup conflicts in work teams are beneficial or harmful has been subject to much disagreement and inconsistency in the past. However, it has been found that the effects of conflicts largely depend on the type of intragroup conflict (Jehn, 1995), as well as its duration (Paletz et al., 2011) and the emotionality levels experienced during the conflict situation (Jehn, 1997; Paletz et al., 2011). The existing literature regarding these concepts and their respective varying findings will therefore be reviewed below.

2.1.1 Relationship Conflict

In the current literature, there is wide consensus on the detrimental effect of relationship conflict on both a team's performance as well as its members' satisfaction (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jehn, 1995, 1997; Medina et al., 2005; O'Neill, Allen, & Hastings, 2013).

2.1.2 Process Conflict

Findings about the effects of process conflict on team performance are more divergent in the literature. Process conflict is defined as a "conflict about how task accomplishment should proceed in the work unit, who's responsible for what, and how things should be delegated" (Jehn, 1997, p. 540). Jehn (1997), who first introduced this type of conflict, presented a differentiated evaluation of the effects of process conflict on team performance, in which high levels of process conflict lead to decreased productivity and lower team member satisfaction. However, Jehn (1997) also pointed out that more moderate levels of process conflict lead to discussions about technical qualifications of team members which in turn increased the probability that "the most able person was assigned to the appropriate task" (Jehn, 1997, p. 548). A later study by Jehn and Mannix (2001), which found high performing teams to exhibit low, but toward the end increasing, levels of process conflict, supported this notion. However, such beneficial characteristics of process conflict were strongly contested in a recent meta-analysis by O'Neill et al. (2013), who found process conflict to show "the strongest negative relation with performance" (O'Neill et al., 2013, p. 252) among all conflict types. Hence, even though

process conflict is still a rather controversial concept, this research will further examine whether differences in process conflict frequencies between monocultural and multicultural Agile teams affect the teams' performance outcomes.

2.1.3 Task Conflict

The plurality and diversity of findings related to the effectiveness of task conflict is even greater than for process conflict. Jehn (1997) initially claimed a positive effect of moderate task conflict on team performance, as it was believed to increase "constructive criticism, careful evaluation of alternatives, and realistic questioning of members' ideas and opinions" (Jehn, 1997, p. 548). Furthermore, Jehn (1997, p. 532) argued that "groups use members' capabilities and prior knowledge better when the conflict is task-focused, rather than when conflict is absent or relationship-focused". This view was supported by Pelled et al. (1999, p. 22) who found task conflict to have a "positive association with cognitive task performance". Similarly, Jehn and Mannix (2001), who adopted a dynamic approach to studying intragroup conflict, found high performing teams to exhibit moderate levels of task conflict during the midpoint of the team interaction.

However, other studies could not find such significant relationships. Medina et al. (2005) reported task conflict to have no effect on an employee's desire to leave a job as well as no relation to an employee's affective behavior. Similarly, Tekleab, Quigley, and Tesluk (2009) could not find support for their initial hypothesis that task conflict in earlier stages would improve team cohesion later on. The influential meta-analysis by De Dreu and Weingart (2003) even reported a strong negative relationship between task conflict and team performance and satisfaction. Speculations about potential reasons for such neutral or negative correlations included the possible spillover of task conflict into relationship conflict (Tekleab et al., 2009), e.g. when critical statements were misinterpreted (Desivilya, Somech, & Lidgoster, 2010; Jehn & Mannix, 2001). Additionally, relationship conflict was hypothesized to intensify task conflict, as clashing personalities increase the likelihood to also disagree on goals or strategies (Tekleab et al., 2009).

Besides those studies that found a neutral or negative relationship between task conflict and performance, other studies have approached this complex relationship by looking at moderating factors to determine if and when task conflict may be beneficial. Bradley, Postlethwaite, Klotz, Hamdani, and Brown (2012) found the presence of psychological safety in the work team to have a moderating role in the relationship between task conflict and performance. In the presence of psychological safety, which is defined as a shared belief among team members that "the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking" (Edmondson, 1999, p. 354), task conflict was claimed to increase team performance (Bradley et al., 2012). This is in line with considerations from other studies, in which not only intragroup trust and respect was found in high performing teams (Jehn & Mannix, 2001), but trust was also believed to minimize the spillover of task conflict to relationship conflict (Tekleab et al., 2009) which was in turn related to an increase in psychological wellbeing (Medina et al., 2005). Hence, factors such as psychological safety, trust and respect have been identified as potential key moderators able to ameliorate the negative or neutral relationship between task conflict and different team outcomes.

2.1.4 Conflict Duration

Besides the type of intragroup conflict, research by Paletz et al. (2011) has also examined the different levels of conflict duration in relation to positive or negative team-related outcomes. They proposed to distinguish between micro-conflicts, meso-conflicts and macro-conflicts. Micro-conflicts refer to "fleeting, minute-by-minute disagreements" and are believed to have "slightly different characteristics and performance implications from macro-conflicts" (Paletz et al., 2011, p. 316), in the sense that they are less emotionally intense and more likely to be simple disagreements (Paletz et al., 2011). In contrast, meso-conflicts "are more drawn out, taking place over hours or several times over the course of a day" (Paletz et al., 2011, p. 315), while macro-conflicts are "long-standing disagreements", that last over multiple days (Paletz et al., 2011, p. 315). Paletz et al. (2011) suggested that the majority of studies on intragroup conflict, relying on self-reported data, mostly capture meso- or macro-conflicts, since these conflicts tend to be remembered longer than the short-lived micro-conflicts. They also argued that important aspects of conflicts are often expressed in behavior but might not be perceived as a conflict by the discussants. Indeed, the discussants might "downplay lively debates" (Paletz et al., 2011, p. 319) because of a lack of negative affect, but such "forgotten conflicts may have been very productive". This points out the need to analyze observational data instead of exclusively taking retrospective self-reports into account.

2.1.5 Emotionality

Apart from the type of conflict and its duration, Jehn (1997) found emotionality to be an important factor in the relationship between intragroup conflicts and group performance. Emotions can be short-lived expressions of positive or negative affect, expressed in verbal behavior, as well as facial expressions (Paletz et al., 2011). Regardless of which conflict type occurred, emotions were found to be predominantly negative and cause team members "to lose sight of the task and to focus, instead, on the negative affect" (Jehn, 1997, p. 549), which resulted in blaming and defensiveness. Paletz et al. (2011) found limited support for these findings in the context of micro-conflicts. Findings showed, that "longer micro-conflicts were more likely to be negative" (Paletz et al., 2011, p. 337) and positive emotionality was found to be extremely rare. Moreover, Paletz et al. (2011) suggested that the notion that conflicts predominantly result in negative emotionality might not translate from macro- to micro-conflicts. However, in general, Jehn (1997) found teams with higher levels of emotionality to report lower performance, again regardless of the type of conflict that occurred. Hence, this research will study whether these findings indeed also translate to Agile teams and whether emotionality levels differ between monocultural and culturally diverse teams.

2.2 Cultural Diversity

In the literature review conducted so far, the different types of intragroup conflict, levels of conflict duration as well as emotionality have been presented and linked to multiple team-related outcomes. However, a team's cultural diversity plays another crucial role in relation to various team outcomes and has been found to affect teamwork in a variety of both positive and negative ways.

The meta-analytical study by Stahl, Maznevski, Voigt, and Jonsen (2010), could indeed not find a direct relationship between cultural diversity and team performance. However, a more fine-grained explanation revealed that cultural diversity could lead to effects that entailed both potential process gains and process losses (Stahl et al., 2010). In particular, process gains came in the form of increased creativity and higher member satisfaction, while process losses entailed increased conflicts and lower social integration. Interestingly, Stahl et al. (2010) found a neutral effect of cultural diversity on the effectiveness of intragroup communication. Whether the presented process losses can be minimized and whether the benefits of the process gains can be realized is ultimately found to "depend on the team's

ability to manage the process" effectively (Stahl et al., 2010, p. 705).

Cultural diversity within a group has been connected to the occurrence of conflict by multiple researchers (e.g. Behfar et al., 2006; Cheng, Chua, Morris, & Lee, 2012; Paletz, Sumer, & Miron-Spektor, 2018; Pelled et al., 1999). Paletz et al. (2018), who focused on micro-conflicts, found highly diverse teams to exhibit fewer conflicts. In contrast, most other studies connected increased cultural diversity to an increase in intragroup conflict (Cheng et al., 2012; Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999; Stahl et al., 2010), and found cultural diversity to pose challenges in utilizing individual team member's strengths while coping with "communication problems, language differences, varying work styles, and misunderstandings" (Behfar et al., 2006, p. 233).

2.2.1 Challenges in Multicultural Teams

Behfar et al. (2006) found that conflicts within multicultural teams were not only 'fairly different' from the conflicts within monocultural teams, but were also more complex and showed more serious consequences. Added complexity was, for example, a result of differences in the team members' cultural orientation that affect their "tolerance for uncertainty, cooperation, and confrontation of conflict" (Behfar et al., 2006, p. 234).

More specifically, challenges in multicultural teams were argued to be caused by a variety of intercultural differences. To get a better understanding of the potential causes of conflicts in multicultural teams, the most important intercultural differences will be discussed below.

Direct versus indirect confrontation: An important difference is the preference for direct versus indirect confrontation and open disagreements in teamwork. Similar to many other challenges in culturally diverse teams, this difference is attributed to an individual's cultural orientation on the individualistic versus collectivistic spectrum (see Hofstede & Bond, 1984, for a detailed explanation) and an individual's cultural orientation toward high- or low-context communication (Behfar et al., 2006). The level of context in communication indicates how much contextual and indirect information an individual assumes and takes into account in their communication (Gabelica & Popov, 2020). The preference for low-context communication is expressed in direct and explicit verbal messages, whereas the preference for high-context communication involves the interpretation of more indirect and implicit verbal as well as non-verbal (i.e. pauses, tone) messages. Similarly important in understanding a team's behavior in discussing conflicts is a culture's power distance (Hofstede & Bond, 1984). More egalitarian cultures prefer collaborative decision making and accept open challenging of opinions of superiors, whereas not respecting the chain of command can be perceived as the "most serious violation of respect" (Behfar et al., 2006, p. 242) in more power distant cultures. Furthermore, Challenges from intergroup differences in direct versus indirect confrontation have been found to escalate interpersonal tensions (Behfar et al., 2006), which might lead to team members focusing "more on the delivery of a message rather than the content of the message" (Behfar et al., 2006, p. 239).

However, the kind of behavior that is considered disrespectful or impolite differs across cultures as well. Different conversation styles such as differences in intonation can cause misunderstandings and misinterpretations of intent, causing incorrect perceptions of speakers being rude or condescending (Robles, 2013). One could expect such misunderstandings to lessen after the team members reach better familiarity with differing communication styles. However, according to Robles (2013) people regularly tend to choose to interpret one another negatively to negotiate social status and enact group boundaries.

Analytical versus holistic thinking: Another important intercultural difference is the preference for an analytical versus holistic cognitive style (Gabelica & Popov, 2020). Team members with a cultural preference for analytical thinking rely on logic and formal rules in their decision-making process, whereas more holistic thinkers "focus on relations among objects and the context in which objects reside" (Gabelica & Popov, 2020, p. 284). This difference might essentially result in different perceptions of the causality of a given issue, which in turn led to increased task conflicts and lower team performance (Gabelica & Popov, 2020). This is suggested to be mitigated if teams engage in "discussions where everyone externalizes his or her perception of the events and situations" (Gabelica & Popov, 2020, p. 284). Behfar et al. (2006) discussed the concept of varying approaches to decision making and problem-solving in a slightly different context. They distinguished between a culture's preference for detailed analyses and elaborate relationship building versus a preference for a more efficiency-focused approach, that is mostly relying on "numbers and 'hard facts'" (Behfar et al., 2006, p. 240). However, the resulting process conflicts "did not seem to escalate interpersonal tension" (Behfar et al., 2006, p. 240).

Time, urgency and pace: The third important intercultural difference is a perceptional difference of time, urgency and pace (Behfar et al., 2006). Gabelica and Popov (2020) discussed such issues more generally as differences in time orientation, distinguishing between long-term and short-term orientation (see Hofstede and Bond (1984) for a detailed explanation). Individuals with a more short-term focus are suggested to exhibit difficulty with long-term tasks and prefer to give or receive feedback immediately in the moment, rather than retrospectively reflecting on events (Gabelica & Popov, 2020). People with a more long-term orientation exhibit the opposite preference for devoting "more time to reflect on feedback content to make durable changes" (Gabelica & Popov, 2020, p. 276). Behfar et al. (2006, p. 241) reported similar challenges within multicultural teams, in which perceptions about "delivering 'on-time' versus 'late'" differed with a much larger gap than in monocultural teams. Large expectation discrepancies resulted in team members perceiving culturally distant colleagues as either holding unreasonable expectations or as working too slow, resulting in misunderstandings, anger, reputation losses (Behfar et al., 2006), and process conflicts (Gabelica & Popov, 2020).

Language proficiency: Lastly, the different levels of language proficiency among team members in the respective lingua franca creates further important challenges within multicultural teams. Behfar et al. (2006, p. 244) reported "negative reactions to accents" and "members equating lack of fluency with lack of intelligence", which "often lead to unfairness in practice". If team members communicated in their native language, they were not held back by language processing delays, which often granted them disproportionate amounts of credit for verbal contributions (Behfar et al., 2006) and less fluent members "were found to communicate fewer ideas and provide less detailed descriptions" (Peltokorpi, 2007, p. 79). This is suggested to distort the perception of the true competence of the team members, since non-fluent members with the most expert knowledge may experience difficulty utilizing and expressing their expertise (Brett, Behfar, & Kern, 2009). Language proficiency is therefore adding additional complexity in multicultural teamwork, since dealing with such unfair privilege and status was found to increase interpersonal tension and can enhance "the perception of distance between team members" (Behfar et al., 2006, p. 244). This notion is supported by Peltokorpi (2007, p. 78), who suggested that due to the language

barriers within multicultural teams, members might experience difficulty to "develop close and trusting relationships".

2.2.2 Cultural Diversity in Micro-Conflicts

As introduced earlier in this chapter, Paletz et al. (2018) studied the effects of cultural diversity on a team exhibiting conflicts and creative behavior, as well as the effects of occurring conflicts on the team's creativity. In contrast to the majority of the works on team conflicts, this study focused on micro-conflicts instead of the bigger scale meso- or macro-conflicts (see section 2.1 for a definition of micro-conflicts). Similar to the discussed literature in the section about *direct versus indirect confrontation*, the main indicator of cultural diversity in the study by Paletz et al. (2018) was an individual's collectivistic or individualistic cultural orientation where both the degree of diversity as well as the proportion of individualistic and collectivistic members in a team mattered (Paletz et al., 2018). Paletz et al. (2018) found teams with higher degrees of cultural diversity and relatively equal parts individualistic and collectivistic members to have fewer conflicts compared to teams with a majority of individualistic members. And, even when conflicts occurred, they were "less likely to focus on potential gains when experiencing micro-conflicts" (Paletz et al., 2018, p. 109). Similarly, highly diverse teams with mainly collectivistic members also tended to avoid conflicts but compared to the individualistic counterpart exhibited more creative behavior (Paletz et al., 2018). In general, regardless of the cultural diversity of a team, Paletz et al. (2011, p. 110) found micro-conflicts to be "beneficial for in-the-moment creativity". This is partly contradicting an additional finding, in which teams with high degrees of cultural diversity experienced fewer conflicts than monocultural teams and still exhibited more creative behavior (even though micro-conflicts were found to increase in-the-moment creativity). This indicates that cultural diversity can "promote creativity without requiring conflicts" (Paletz et al., 2018, p. 110). Thus, this finding suggests a more complex relationship between the occurrence of micro-conflicts, cultural diversity, and team-related performance outcomes, which will therefore be further examined in this research paper.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data Collection

Data for this research was collected during a larger scale research project at a large Dutch financial organization, conducted by the department of Change Management & Organizational Behavior (CMOB) at the University of Twente. The data includes transcribed video recordings of multiple one-hour meetings during one sprint for nine Agile teams respectively (officially Agile teams are referred to as 'Squads', but to avoid inter-theory confusion, they will be referred to as 'teams' throughout this paper). The recorded meetings include the Sprint Planning meeting at the beginning of the sprint, the Refinement meeting halfway through the sprint, and the Retrospective meeting at the end of the sprint.

3.2 Sample

The sample entails nine Agile teams with a total of 71 individual members, of which 16 (22,5%) were women and 51 (71,8%) were men (4 members did not provide their gender information). The average age of the participating team members was 39,28 with ages ranging from 22 to 65. Furthermore, the sample entails 44 members (62%) of Dutch nationality, seven Indian members, two English (GB), two German, two Polish as well as one member each of Belgian (Flemish), Armenian, Peruvian, Hungarian, Spanish, Slovakian, Thai, Brazilian, and Russian nationality. The remaining five members did not provide information about their nationality or most fluent language. Of the participating members, the average reported time that members have worked with Agile management methods in the past was 3,57 years, with the vast majority (89%) having worked 'Agile' for at least one year.

As a common feature of Agile teams, the participating members had diverse functional backgrounds, enabling a (relatively) independent execution of the project (Larman & Vodde, 2009). Moreover, the Agile approach is designed to accommodate and efficiently manage occurring changes rather than planning everything upfront (Dikert, Paasivaara, & Lassenius, 2016). To accommodate such responsiveness, Agile teams work in "a series of short 'sprints' with frequent user feedback and daily progress updates" (Birkinshaw, 2018, p. 40).

To classify multicultural teams, the definition by Tirmizi (2008) was used. According to the author, multicultural teams are determined as "a collection of individuals with different cultural backgrounds, who are interdependent in their tasks, [and] who share responsibility for outcomes […]"(Tirmizi, 2008, p. 5). Applied to this research, every Agile team with at least three different cultural backgrounds represented among the team members was considered multicultural. Primary indicator of the cultural background was the reported nationality of the team members, which was collected in a self-reported survey. Result of this sampling procedure were four monocultural teams (hereafter referred to as teams A, B, C, and D) and five multicultural teams (hereafter referred to as teams 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5). Special additional arrangements in determining their level of cultural diversity were made for team 1 and team 4. For team 1, information about the members' nationality could not be collected. For this reason, the reported most fluent language was used to derive an individual's cultural background. In the case of team 12, only two different nationalities were present (Indian and Dutch). However, since the seven individual Indian members reported a total of three different most fluent languages, a special arrangement was decided upon. Taking into account the diversity of cultures in different regions in the exceptionally large Indian country (Panda & Gupta, 2004), it was decided to assess the individual's cultural background with a combination of the nationality as well as the most fluent language. After these exceptions both team 1 and team 4 were considered multicultural.

3.3 Measures

3.3.1 Conflict Level

At the beginning of this research project, the videos were coded using a behavioral coding scheme earlier developed by the research team at CMOB. To explore the differences between Dutch-only and multicultural Agile teams, several defined verbal behaviors from that coding scheme were used as triggers for detecting potential conflict situations. These behaviors were: 'Giving negative feedback', 'Disagreeing', 'Correcting', and 'Defending own position'. These specific behaviors have been selected since they all constitute some form of criticism (e.g. disagreeing with somebody's opinion, giving somebody negative feedback about his/her performance, etc.), which might call into question and threaten people's face and sociality rights (Spencer-Oatey & Xing, 2008). Hence, they are very likely to cause conflicts, especially in multicultural settings (Culpeper, Marti, Mei, Nevala, & Schauer, 2010; Paletz et al., 2011).

Furthermore, to assess the level of a respective conflict (micro-, meso- or macro-conflict), the proposed coding scheme by Paletz et al. (2011, see p. 348-349 for the complete coding scheme) will be used. Here, a conflict is defined as any form of disagreement between two or more team members and the duration of the conflict (or its reoccurrence) then decides whether it is a micro-, meso- or macro-conflict.

3.3.2 Conflict Type

To measure the conflict type of the detected conflicts, the definitions provided by Jehn (1997, see p. 542) and Behfar, Mannix, Peterson, and Trochim (2011) will be used (see section 2.1 for the definitions).

3.3.3 Emotionality

To measure the positivity or negativity of the emotionality during a conflict situation, the definitions provided by Paletz et al. (2011) were used (see Paletz et al., 2011, pp. 331-332, for all definitions). Further examples by Jehn (1997), who provided field notes portraying conflict situations with negative emotionality, were used during the coding process. As suggested by Paletz et al. (2011) all observations focused on participants' verbal expressions as well as body language, facial expressions, vocal tones and general gestures.

Similarly based on the operationalization of Paletz et al. (2011), the intensity of the expressed emotions was coded by assessing the intensity level on a Likert scale. For this research, a three-point Likert scale was used, where the researcher coded the emotionality intensity of the relevant situations as either high, medium, or low (a more detailed explanation of the emotional intensities can be found in the appendix [9.1]).

3.3.4 Psychological Safety

Team members' perception of psychological safety was measured after every meeting using a three-item survey scale based on Edmondson (1999) and Detert and Burris (2007). Appendix 9.2 describes all items as well as the Cronbach's alpha.

3.3.5 Meeting Effectiveness

Team members' perception of meeting effectiveness was similarly measured after every meeting using a four-item survey scale based on Rogelberg, Leach, Warr, and Burnfield (2006). Appendix 9.2 describes all items as well as the Cronbach's alpha.

3.4 Data Analysis

Thematic and Content Analyses: Thematic analysis based on the approach described in the "6-phase guide by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 79) as well as content analysis were performed to identify relevant thematic behavioral differences between monocultural and multicultural teams in conflict situations. This analysis has been selected as it can provide a flexible yet detailed and complex account of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). More specifically, an abductive approach (see Dubois & Gadde, 2002) was adopted when analyzing the data set to allow for a rich description and exploration of the data. This approach combines deductive methodologies, which use existing theory to code and analyze the data, with an inductive approach, where the researcher inductively identifies patterns (i.e. themes) in the data.

The analysis process started with initial readings of the transcripts and viewings of the video recordings of all relevant meeting situations, where a potential conflict was detected using the aforementioned behavioral triggers. To obtain a better understanding of the situation's context, all observations of triggered situations included one minute before and one minute after the potential conflict occurred (see Paletz et al., 2018, for a similar approach). After reviewing the respective situations, a conflict was marked if a clear disagreement occurred, as is described in the coding scheme by Paletz et al. (2011). During these initial observations of the conflict situations, potential patterns that differentiated monocultural and multicultural teams were noted. These initial ideas were then elaborated in the second phase to generate a set of initial codes, which would subsequently enable the search for possible themes. However, in contrast to the purely inductive process described by Braun and Clarke (2006), the codes that were generated in phase two of this research were to a large extent deductively created from the presented literature about the conflict level (see 3.3.1), conflict type (see 3.3.2) and emotionality during conflicts (see 3.3.3). Besides these deductive codes, the observed patterns in the video recordings suggested the importance of other behavioral differences between monocultural and multicultural teams. These differences were then included as inductively derived additional codes to better represent the behavioral differences between the two kinds of Agile teams (see 4.1 for the added inductive codes). After the generation of the codes, a frequency analysis, as used in content analyses, was used to identify whether the frequency with which the codes occurred differed depending on the cultural diversity of the teams. The observable patterns that resulted from such frequency differences then lead to the identification of themes that describe behavioral differences between multicultural and monocultural Agile teams.

Microethnographic Analysis: To illustrate these differences in behavior, additional microethnographic analyses were performed on a selection of conflict situations. A microethnographic analysis refers to the "careful analysis of 'small' moments of human activity", in which attention is both on "the participants' talk […] and their embodied behaviors […]" (LeBaron, 2008, p. 1). The analysis was performed using both the transcriptions of the team meetings as well as the video recordings, as they better capture subtle details of interactions and make it possible to "attend to both vocal and visible phenomena" (LeBaron, 2008, p. 3) of the interaction dynamics.

To aid the interpretation of the findings, measurements of the individuals' psychological safety as well as the individuals' perception of the effectiveness of the meetings were used to examine potential differences between multicultural and culturally diverse teams as well as compare psychological safety and meeting effectiveness to conflict frequencies.

4. RESULTS

In this section, the results from the inductive part of the code generation process from the thematic analysis are reported. The results of the thematic analysis are then documented through content analysis by using frequency analyses of the behavioral codes, comparing multicultural and monocultural teams. Subsequently, anecdotal evidence will be provided in the form of microethnographic findings that illustrate and back up the thematic differences between the two types of teams. Finally, the survey results for psychological safety and meeting effectiveness will be reported as an additional supplement for the subsequent interpretation of the results.

In total, the chosen trigger behaviors appeared 706 times throughout all teams and meetings. During the analysis process, all situations, in which at least one trigger behavior was coded, were reviewed. Generally, the researcher started the observation of the relevant situations one minute before the coded trigger behavior, leading up to the potential conflict situation, as well as one minute after the conflict had ended (see 3.4 for further explanation). After reviewing all situations that included trigger behaviors, 55 situations were classified as conflicts (see 3.3.1 for the definition of a conflict). To account for potential researcher biases during the subsequent coding process, a second coder additionally coded all meetings from team 2 and 3. An intercoder reliability analysis resulted in a percentage of agreement of 93,9% and a Cohen's Kappa coefficient of 0,865. After discussing the differently coded situations, all disagreements could be resolved, concluding a final version of the coded behaviors.

4.1 Inductive Codes

The additional inductive code generation (as described in 4.3) lead to the addition of two new codes as well as an additional sub-code within the emotionality category. The newly added codes classify if and how a conflict was resolved and to what degree indirect or direct confrontation styles were used. Moreover, the added sub-code classifies the exhibited emotionality *after* the conflict situation ended. These new codes are now described below.

4.1.1 Resolving Conflicts

While measuring whether and how a conflict has or has not been resolved is perhaps not so novel in the existing literature (see e.g. Paletz et al., 2011), this code was not part of the initial deductive code set, since current operationalizations could not fully describe the observed behavioral differences (see e.g. Behfar et al., 2011; Jehn, 1997), and was therefore added during the subsequent inductive code generation process. More specifically, four different types of resolving have been inductively identified, which led to the generation of the following codes:

1. *Resolved (agreeing)*: when a conflict was resolved, and the involved parties could find a mutual agreement in the conflict matter.
2. *Resolved (giving in)*: when a conflict was resolved, however, not as a result of a mutual agreement, but rather as a result of reluctantly giving in to another party's opinion.
3. *Resolved without expressed conclusion:* when conflicts were apparently resolved, however, no clear expression of a conclusion (e.g. agreement or giving in) was made.
4. *Not resolved*: All other situations, in which conflicts could not be resolved, fell under this code. This included situations were parties simply could not agree, but where it was clear that the conflict would need to be resumed later on (e.g. a third party interrupts the discussing parties, urging them to solve the conflict later).

4.1.2 Direct and Indirect Confrontation

While this code is inspired by the reviewed literature about cultural differences in direct versus indirect confrontation preferences, it is indeed a result of an inductive process while observing the video recordings. While oftentimes a participant's cultural orientation is derived from his/her nationality or a self-reported survey, the analysis of the team meetings revealed that communication style differences were very perceivable as well. To differentiate between conflict situations with varying confrontation styles, the following codes were generated:

1. *Direct confrontation*: when discussants clearly used direct confrontation styles such as very openly and directly disagreeing with another team member.
2. *Neutral confrontation*: when the discussants used neither clearly direct nor clearly indirect confrontation styles.
3. *Indirect confrontation*: when disagreements were expressed and phrased in a clearly indirect way, such as situations in which it is apparent that a team member disagrees with another's opinion but expresses the disagreement in a passive and indirect way (e.g. disagreeing by saying "I don't know, maybe we shouldn't…" instead of openly saying "no, this is wrong").

4.1.3 Post Hoc Emotionality

Albeit stemming from the deductive theme *Emotionality*, it was noted during the inductive analysis process that the positivity or negativity during a conflict was not consistently the same as the expressed emotionality *right after* the conflict occurred (up to one minute after the resolution). Therefore, the following codes were generated as an addition to the deductive emotionality codes:

1. *Post hoc positive emotionality*: when positive emotions were expressed after a conflict ended.
2. *Post hoc neutral emotionality*: when expressed emotions after a conflict were neither clearly positive nor clearly negative, this code was used.
3. *Post hoc negative emotionality*: when negative emotions were expressed after a conflict ended.

4.2 Thematic findings

The analysis of the created codes resulted in four meaningful themes that distinguish the behavior of teams with exclusively Dutch members from teams with multiple members of varying cultural backgrounds. These themes and their respective anecdotal evidence from the frequency analyses of the earlier introduced codes as well as the ethnographic analyses for specific excerpts are subsequently explained in more detail. The tables presented below generally provide information about how often the respective conflict attribute occurs as a percentage of all conflicts occurring in the respective team type, rather than absolute numbers of the frequency of the occurrences. Since there were more multicultural teams than monocultural teams, this avoids misinterpretation of absolute differences of conflict occurrences. Similarly, as overall conflict frequencies differ between the two team types, comparing absolute frequencies of sub-categories such as the occurrence of a specific conflict type, would not enable a comparison of the probability of such sub-categories to occur *in case of* a conflict situation.

4.2.1 Theme 1: Number of Conflicts

The most prominent finding of this thematic analysis is the tendency of Agile teams with a higher cultural diversity to experience more conflicts than teams with exclusively Dutch members.

Table 1. Average Number of Conflicts

	Monocultural Teams	**Multicultural Teams**
Task conflict (%)	63,2%	80,6%
Process conflict (%)	36,8%	19,4%
Relationship conflict (%)	0%	0%
Average conflicts per team	**5**	**7**

As displayed in Table 1, no team, regardless of the degree of cultural diversity, experienced any relationship conflict throughout the whole sample. In contrast, the most common conflict type was task conflict for both multicultural and Dutch-only teams with 81% and 63% as a percentage of all conflicts within the respective team type. Therefore, the cultural diversity of a team was associated with a higher tendency for task conflicts. This was followed by process conflicts as the second most frequent conflict type. However, monocultural teams faced proportionally considerably more process conflicts than culturally diverse teams. Ultimately, multicultural teams faced more conflict situations in general, with two more conflicts per team on average.

Qualitatively, multicultural teams seemed to more often struggle with expressing thoughts and opinions in a precise way. Increased ambiguity of statements then seemed to increase the propensity of misunderstandings or misinterpretations to result in micro-conflicts. This can be illustrated with a brief process

conflict situation from team 4 (see Transcript excerpt 1 in the appendix [9.5]).

In this situation, F7 adds to what she thinks F1 meant in her previous utterance (line 2). Then F1 disagrees with this addition (line 3), after which F7 again disagrees with F1 (line 4). Only in line 6, F7 suddenly realizes that F1 was right. In the video recording, it seems as if the first explanation of F1 was not clear enough and carried too much ambiguity in this context, which led to the misunderstanding and the resulting micro-conflict.

Furthermore, multicultural teams seemed to escalate a micro-conflict quicker than monocultural teams. This was especially prominent in conflict situations in team 5, which can be illustrated by a task conflict situation as displayed in transcript excerpt 2 (see appendix [9.5]). Because of the chaotic nature of the situation and the strong accents of the participants, the transcript does not accurately represent the dynamics of the situation. Therefore, a qualitative description of the situation was deemed more appropriate. Initially, the situation started with a normal task conversation. However, when F3 joins the conversation he instantly initiates a more heated debate about the topic of discussion. Team members start interrupting each other and start shouting in (but not yet yelling) their arguments. In the end, it seems to have been just a clarification issue that escalated into a conflict more than it would have in similar situations in monocultural teams.

4.2.2 Theme 2: Emotionality

Table 2 shows the level of emotionality for each type of team.

Table 2. Emotionality in Monocultural and Multicultural Teams

	Monocultural teams:	**Multicultural teams:**
***Emotionality*:**	Total	Total
High	**0%**	**11,1%**
Medium	26,3%*	27,8%
Low	78,9%*	61,1%
Negative	**15,8%**	**27,8%**
Neutral	68,4%	66,6%
Positive	**15,8%**	**5,6%**
Negative (post hoc)	5,3%	2,8%
Neutral (post hoc)	63,1%	91,6%
Positive (post hoc)	**31,6%**	**5,6%**

** See the explanation for summed percentages being over 100% below Table 2a in the Appendix (9.4).*

The values in the columns below the team types and below *Total* represent the average percentage of the respective emotionality attribute found in all conflicts of all teams of that respective type. This was chosen over *Mean* values, which give an average of the proportions of the occurring attribute across the teams, while the *Total* value provides the proportion of the emotionality attribute across all conflicts, regardless in which monocultural team they occurred. The *Mean* value would therefore be more susceptible to the influence of teams with very few conflicts (e.g. Team D which had only one conflict). For this reason, the *Total* values will be used as main indicator to derive the averages for the emotionality attributes (tables 2a and 2b, which display all percentages per individual team as well as the additional *Mean* values, can be found in the appendix [9.4]). All subsequent tables (except Table 5 in the appendix) are organized using the same logic and structure (including additional tables in the appendix, displaying the *Mean* values and all individual team percentages).

As can be seen in Table 2, multicultural teams exhibited more conflict situations with high emotionality levels than monocultural teams (11,1% and 0% respectively). Furthermore, multicultural teams experienced both more negative emotions (27,8% versus 15,8%) as well as less positive emotions (5,6% versus 15,8%) during conflict situations. A similar difference occurred with emotions that were shown after the conflict situations ended, where monocultural teams showed positive emotions in 31,6% of the conflicts, while multicultural teams exhibited such positive emotionality after only 5,6% of their conflicts.

The increased emotionality (especially with negative emotions) can be illustrated by another task conflict by team 5 (see transcript excerpt 3 in the appendix [9.5]). The conflict situation started in an already tense atmosphere in an ongoing discussion about a task. After a statement by F9, F3 starts to heavily shake his head in disagreement. While he then starts to loudly express his opposing opinion to the matter, he turns around to F9 (who is sitting on his left) and directly faces him with his body language. He then supports his arguments with hand gestures that count his points that he brings forward. The situation is laden with negative emotions and other team members seem to not dare to enter the discussion. F9 similarly seems to not want to further escalate the situation and stays relatively silent without showing much response to the utterances of F3.

4.2.3 Theme 3: Expression of Conclusion

This theme describes the tendency of the multicultural teams within this sample to end a conflict situation without the explicit or implicit expression of a conclusion. This means that the parties within the conflict do not come to an agreement where one party agrees on the opinion of the other or a compromise is found. This theme similarly does not include cases where conflicts have been terminated prior to a conclusion but it is clear that the discussion will have to be resumed later on or conflicts where finding an agreement seemed impossible.

Table 3. Expression of conclusion in Monocultural and Multicultural Teams

	Monocultural teams:	**Multicultural teams:**
	Total	Total
Resolved	**63,1%**	**47,2%**
Resolved, no conclusion	**15,8%**	**36,1%**
Not resolved	21,1%	16,7%

Table 3 provides information about the number of conflicts that have been resolved, resolved without an expressed conclusion as well as the number of conflicts that have not been resolved.

It can be concluded that monocultural teams tended to resolve more conflicts with an expressed conclusion than the multicultural teams (63,1% and 47,2% respectively) and had

significantly fewer conflicts that were resolved without an expressed conclusion (15,8% and 36,1% respectively). However, there has also been a slight tendency of monocultural teams to end conflicts without being resolved at all. However, given the small sample size and the small percentage difference (4,4%), this tendency has been left out of this theme.

The higher propensity of conflicts within multicultural teams to be resolved without the expression of a conclusion can be illustrated by a process conflict during a meeting of team 3 (see transcript excerpt 4 in the appendix [9.5]). The main conflict happens when F2 disagrees with F7, who previously stated that the time was not enough. F2 then asserts that F7 and his colleagues were enough people to complete the task. Eventually, F7 states that he is unsure how much time the task would take. From here on, other team members join into the discussion about the task, which results in a shift away from the focus between F2 and F7. It does not seem that anybody noticed that no conclusion to the disagreement was made.

4.2.4 Theme 4: Explicit and Implicit Confrontation

The last theme that has been identified in this thematic analysis is the tendency of monocultural teams to exhibit more clearly direct as well as clearly indirect confrontation styles during conflicts.

Table 4. Confrontation styles in Monocultural and Multicultural Teams

	Monocultural teams:	**Multicultural teams:**
	Total	Total
Direct confrontation	**63,2%**	**52,8%**
Indirect confrontation	**10,5%**	**0%**
No clear tendency	**26,3%**	**47,2%**

Table 4 shows the proportion of direct versus indirect confrontation styles as a percentage of all conflicts experienced by monocultural and multicultural teams respectively. Both the total values for direct confrontation as well as the total values for indirect confrontation are higher for monocultural than for multicultural teams (63,2% versus 52,8% and 10,5% versus 0% respectively). Consequently, only the percentage of conflicts in which no clear tendency toward direct or indirect confrontation is exhibited was higher for multicultural teams.

Descriptive of the explicit directness frequently observable during conflicts of monocultural teams is a short process conflict during a meeting of team A, as displayed in Transcript excerpt 5 in the appendix (9.5).

After the proposal of F9, F7 directly answers with “No, that’s way too soon” (rough translation of line 2). However, shortly after, the new proposal by F9 (line 5) quickly resolves the conflict without increased emotionality.

4.3 Additional Findings

4.3.1 Predominantly Micro-Conflicts

An additional finding of the frequency analysis is that the vast majority of conflict situations showed the duration of a micro-conflict. This means, that most conflicts were resolved (or simply terminated) within a few minutes, rather than hours or days, and did not seem to be reoccurring throughout the meetings (see 2.1.4 for the full definitions). This did not appear to depend on the cultural diversity of the teams, since both monocultural teams and multicultural teams exhibited very high percentages for micro-conflicts (95% and 97% respectively).

4.3.2 Perceived team effectiveness and team psychological safety

Survey items measuring meeting effectiveness as well as psychological safety have been collected. Results show almost no difference in the mean score for meeting effectiveness between multicultural and monocultural teams (M=5,46 versus M=5,47). Supporting this apparent similarity, a t-test resulted in no significant difference (i.e. a 95% confidence interval included 0). However, perceived meeting effectiveness for multicultural teams had a considerably higher standard deviation (SD=0,79) compared to Dutch-only teams (SD=0,41), suggesting higher differences in the perceived meeting effectiveness across multicultural teams. Psychological safety scores were again relatively similar, however, monocultural teams reported slightly higher meeting effectiveness perceptions (M=6,21) than multicultural teams (M=6,04). Again, however, a t-test could not find a significant difference (i.e. a 95% confidence interval included 0). Similar to the results from meeting effectiveness, multicultural teams exhibited higher variances between the teams’ psychological safety scores, with a standard deviation of SD=0,38 compared to SD=0,22 for monocultural teams.

Subsequently, the scores for psychological safety and the reported meeting effectiveness were compared to the frequencies of conflicts (see table 5 in the appendix [9.4]). The clearest combination of scores was found for teams that exhibited above-average conflicts and above-average psychological safety scores. Both teams scoring this combination (teams A and 2) also scored above average on meeting effectiveness. Similarly clear was only the combination for team D, which had below-average amounts of conflicts and below-average psychological safety scores, combined with low effectiveness. Teams that experienced below-average amounts of conflict as well as high psychological safety scored predominantly also high on meeting effectiveness (teams 1 and C). However, team B, with the same combination of conflict and psychological safety scores, reported below-average meeting effectiveness.

The exact opposite ratio appeared for the combination of above-average conflicts and below-average psychological safety, which predominantly resulted in below-average effectiveness (teams 3 and 4). Only team 5 reported above-average meeting effectiveness with the same combination of conflict and psychological safety scores.

Furthermore, if only psychological safety and meeting effectiveness were compared, only one out of the five teams with above-average meeting effectiveness reported below-average psychological safety.

4.3.3 Further Microethnographic Situations

Besides the above described situations that illustrate the overall thematic findings of this research, there were also other interesting situations that deserve attention. To comply with the restrictions of this paper, the basic findings of only one exemplary situation will be discussed below. The full description of the situation as well as an illustrative transcript excerpt can be found in the appendix (9.1).

This additional microethnographic analysis focuses on the macro-conflict experienced by team 4. Throughout the reoccurring and more than 15-minute-conflict situation, predominantly two team members are heavily discussing how a recent impediment was handled and, most importantly, how it was communicated. It is very apparent that this highly emotional conflict is rooted in differences in preferences for

communication styles, as one member repeatedly complaints about a lack of direct and open communication about the said impediment (please refer to the appendix for the full analysis).

5. DISCUSSION

Using thematic, content, and microethnographic analysis, this research examined behavioral differences between monocultural and multicultural Agile teams in conflict situations. Although multicultural teams and monocultural teams both almost exclusively experienced conflicts on the micro-level, multicultural teams were found to generally exhibit conflicts more frequently. Furthermore, conflicts in culturally diverse teams were proportionally more often task-related, while monocultural teams experienced proportionally more process conflicts than their multicultural counterparts. Emotionality was also found to be a distinguishing factor between the two team types. Multicultural teams exhibited higher levels of emotionality, where members exhibited both more negative emotions during as well as less positive emotions during and after the conflicts occurred. Moreover, findings showed multicultural teams to more often end a conflict situation without the expression of a conclusion as well as to more often explicitly terminate a conflict when no agreement could be found. Lastly, the monocultural teams were found to more often exhibit clearly direct or clearly indirect confrontation styles. Findings from an additional microethnographic analysis, examining team 4's macro-conflict, indicated underlying problems to stem from communication differences, in particular differing preferences toward direct and indirect communication.

In general, many of the found differences might indeed be attributable to differing preferences in communication styles. This is clearly illustrated by the macro-conflict by team 4. As previously mentioned, this conflict was likely a result of differences in the team members' cultural orientation toward preferring direct or indirect confrontation styles. While the one discussant seemingly preferred direct communication and confrontation, and thus complained about her colleague's lack of clear communication, this very colleague, who seemed quite uncomfortable with the whole situation, most likely preferred more indirect communication styles. In line with suggestions by Behfar et al. (2006), these differences in communication preferences indeed resulted in an escalation of interpersonal tensions, causing high emotionality levels during said macro-conflict. The given excerpt from the same meeting (see Transcript excerpt 6 in the appendix [9.3]) provided further evidence for the apparent communication differences. In this brief situation, F5 quickly corrects himself after using the word 'maybe', which supports Behfar et al. (2006) in suggesting that such communication differences might result in team members paying more attention to the way a message is delivered than the content it conveys.

The thematic findings of multicultural teams resolving conflicts more frequently without expressing a conclusion, and monocultural teams exhibiting more clearly direct or clearly indirect confrontation might be similarly rooted in communication challenges. Less fluent members might have troubles expressing opinions and thoughts in a precise way, causing conflict situations to dissolve, as the discussants experience difficulty exploring the actual differences of opinion. Similarly, native speakers in monocultural teams are often able to express intended tone and connotation more precisely. This might result in more deliberate usages of direct or indirect confrontations, depending on what is deemed appropriate and desired in a given context.

Another important finding of this study is the found higher frequency of micro-conflict occurrences in multicultural teams compared to monocultural teams. This is directly contradicting earlier findings by Paletz et al. (2018), who found increased cultural diversity to be related to fewer occurrences of micro-conflicts. This discrepancy in findings could be due to the nature of the Agile meetings that were studied in this research. Compared to Paletz et al. (2018), who required team meetings to be "inherently creative meetings (i.e. not be recap or debrief meetings)" (Paletz et al., 2018, p. 102), Agile meetings studied in this research were basically the opposite. All meetings (i.e. sprint planning, refinement, and retrospective) are meetings were no actual work-output is generated, but where the team's organization is planned, refined, or the performance evaluated. Hypothetically, it might be that the increased complexity of the communication challenges in multicultural teams is more dominantly present in such retrospective or planning meetings. Precise phrasing of opinions about past performances or future directions might be more critical than input in the form of creative ideas in actual output-generating meetings. However, this requires further investigation.

The nature of Agile meetings might have another important implication. As it is suggested that the self-managing nature of Agile teams increases benefits of shared leadership (Magpili & Pazos, 2018) and shifts away from "command-and-control management" (Stray, Fægri, & Moe, 2016, p. 459), a crucial common conflict source might be avoided. In particular, it has been suggested that disregarding hierarchies in teams with a cultural orientation toward high power distance might be the "most serious violation of respect" (Behfar et al., 2006, p. 242). However, this cause of conflict was never found within this research, which might be a result of the shared leadership approach causing a flatter hierarchy in Agile teams.

Another communication problem discussed in the literature are negative reactions to accents, as described by Behfar et al. (2006). Such language proficiency differences seemed to have a constant yet subtle effect on team 3's members' perception of F6, who talked with a pronounced French accent, as well as team 2's members' perception of F3, who (next to her German accept) had difficulty talking in a precise and concise way and was often interrupted. The given examples of less fluent team members did indeed show less verbal participation than other members in the same team, as suggested by Peltokorpi (2007).

Other interesting findings of this research focused on the type of conflict and expressed emotionality during the conflict situations. Findings by Paletz et al. (2018), who reported that relationship conflicts very rarely occur during micro-conflicts were clearly supported by this study's findings, as none of all nine teams within this sample experienced any relationship conflict. Similarly, Paletz et al. (2011) suggested that the often claimed negativity that is believed to dominate the expressed emotions during all types of conflicts (Jehn, 1997) would not translate to micro-conflicts. While it is true that the findings from this study show that most emotional conflicts included negative emotionality, positive emotions were frequently expressed too. Therefore, this study finds further support for the claims made by Paletz et al. (2011). Here, however, the results of this exploratory research go a step further. Findings showed multicultural teams to express more negative emotions during the conflicts and more negative and less positive emotions right after the conflicts ended. This could be related to the previous findings of multicultural teams resolving conflicts without expression of a conclusion. Since culturally diverse team members might have problems expressing their opinions in a clear way, it might be considerably harder for multicultural teams to understand each other's points and find an agreement that considers everybody's opinion. This might then not only cause conflicts to end without having an expressed conclusion but might also lead to frustration

during and after the conflict. This might also explain the higher levels of positive emotions after the conflicts in monocultural teams, as they are able to better resolve conflicts by expressing and thus considering opinions more effectively.

Apart from the thematic findings, this research also examined levels of psychological safety and perceived meeting effectiveness related to the occurrence of micro-conflicts, which led to further important implications. As suggested by Bradley et al. (2012), the presence of psychological safety within the team might lead to higher task-conflict effectiveness. This is supported by this study's findings about micro-conflicts, where all but one high performing teams exhibited high levels of psychological safety. If high psychological safety was paired with above-average levels of micro-conflicts, teams even experienced exclusively above average effectiveness.

This qualitative finding therefore directly adds to the micro-conflict literature, as it indicates an important mediating role of psychological safety in the relationship between micro-conflict occurrences and meeting effectiveness. While this mediating role has been suggested by Bradley et al. (2012) in the context of macro-conflict, this research finds first qualitative anecdotal evidence that this mediating characteristic of psychological safety might very well be valid for micro-conflicts too. Moreover, findings about higher micro-conflict frequencies for multicultural teams similarly enrich the micro-conflict literature, as it is directly contradicting the findings earlier suggested by Paletz et al. (2018). Lastly, findings related to communication difficulties in multicultural teams that give rise to increased levels of conflicts and negative emotionality, present another contradiction to the previously reviewed literature. While Stahl et al. (2010) found neutral effects of cultural diversity on a team's communication effectiveness, this study finds conflicts to be frequently caused by potential communication problems caused by differing language proficiency levels as well as cultural orientation differences toward direct or indirect communication and confrontation. Again, however, the potential mediating role of psychological safety should be further considered, as the presence of psychological safety in multicultural teams might mitigate such communication issues.

These findings have important practical implications. As previously illustrated, communication problems were found to be a frequent cause of intragroup conflicts in multicultural teams. Specifically, practicing managers are suggested to benefit from putting increased focus on the team members' proficiency in the respective lingua franca. This might reduce the conflict frequency as well as excessive negative emotionality if a conflict occurs. Furthermore, practitioners should be increasingly aware of potential differences in indirect versus direct communication and confrontation between team members. Raising awareness for these differing communication style preferences and creating a psychologically safe environment where everybody can bring forward their opinions and viewpoints might mitigate such conflict potential (Gabelica & Popov, 2020).

6. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The previously presented findings are subject to several limitations. All Agile teams within this study were part of the same financial organization and were all located in the Netherlands. This gives rise to potential biases resulting from firm-specific characteristics and dynamics. Furthermore, since cultural orientation data could only be derived from a participant's nationality or most fluent language, this might have resulted in potential inaccuracies in the classification of Dutch and international team members. As actual cultural preferences could not be recorded in the self-reported survey, factors such as the degree of an individual's cultural appropriation of the Dutch culture could not be considered. In this sense, teams classified as multicultural could nonetheless lack such diversity in their actual behavior. While this risk has been partly mitigated by only classifying teams as multicultural if they had at least three different cultural backgrounds represented, it is still recommended for future research to integrate more detailed and individual accounts of the participants' cultural orientation.

Another limitation of this research is its relatively small sample size of nine Agile teams. While the given sample size was sufficient to perform a rich qualitative analysis of the cultural differences, the additionally provided findings about the mediating role of psychological safety should be interpreted with the necessary caution. Similarly relevant in this additional finding is the measure of meeting effectiveness. In this research, all meeting effectiveness scores were collected with validated survey items, which might give rise to potential response biases. Further studies are therefore recommended to perform more quantitative analyses to validate the potentially important role of psychological safety in micro-conflicts, using more objective and less obtrusive measures for meeting effectiveness.

Lastly, the analysis phase of this research gave rise to two further limitations. As a result of occasional technical difficulties during the recordings of several meetings, the video recordings and corresponding transcripts are partly of poor quality. This resulted in sections were reliable judgment of the verbal behavior of participants was difficult, which may have potentially resulted in otherwise avoidable mistakes. Furthermore, it should be noted that the researcher who conducted the thematic analysis is neither a native speaker in English nor Dutch (the two languages used in the meetings). While the language proficiency in both languages is sufficient for all business-related team settings, a certain risk of misunderstanding or misinterpretation of some situations could not be eliminated entirely. Hence, future research would benefit from analyses conducted by native speakers to enhance the rigor of these findings.

7. CONCLUSION

This study examined behavioral differences during task, process and relationship conflict between multicultural and monocultural Agile teams in a large financial organization. Four thematic differences were found to differentiate teams with only Dutch members and teams with additional international members. Multicultural teams were found to exhibit more conflicts, as well as higher and more negative emotionality during said conflicts. Multicultural teams were furthermore found to resolve conflicts more often without expressing an explicit or implicit conclusion. On the other hand, teams with only Dutch members were found to exhibit more clearly direct as well as clearly indirect confrontation during a conflict. Additional findings of this research indicate an important mediating role of psychological safety during micro-conflicts in the relationship between micro-conflict frequency and meeting effectiveness. Practical implications from this research suggest better effectiveness from increased attention to team members' language proficiency, psychological safety, and awareness toward communication style differences.

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9. APPENDIX

9.1 Explanation of Emotionality Intensities

Situations with low levels of emotionality included no or very little expressed emotional engagement by the discussants, while medium levels of emotionality required more vivid exchanges with expressions of emotions such as sighing or shaking their heads in a disapproving way. In contrast, high emotionality entailed more severe expressions of emotions such as yelling or high levels of aggression.

9.2 Survey Items

9.2.1 Psychological Safety

The psychological safety of the individual members was measured after each team meeting using three survey items that were created by the research team at CMOB based on Edmondson (1999) and Detert and Burris (2007). The survey items were: (1) *During this past meeting, it felt safe for me to make suggestions,* (2) *During this past meeting, it felt safe for me to give my opinion,* and (3) *During this past meeting, it felt safe for me to speak up.* Responses were collected using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree and 7 = Strongly Agree), with a high internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha = .975).

9.2.2 Meeting Effectiveness

The perceived meeting effectiveness was measured after every team meeting using four survey items created by the research team at CMOB based on Rogelberg et al. (2006). The survey items were: (1) *This past squad meeting was effective,* (2) *This past squad meeting was productive,* (3) *This past squad meeting was worth my time,* and (4) *This past squad meeting was efficient.* Responses were collected using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree and 7 = Strongly Agree), with a high internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha = .904).

9.3 Additional Microethnographic Analysis

Very noteworthy and unique throughout the data set was the macro-conflict as experienced by team 4. This was coded as a macro-conflict since according to statements by the team members, this problem (or related problems) had occurred before. Since the conflict reoccurs throughout the third meeting multiple times and entails more than 15 minutes of discussions, a qualitative description of the situation was deemed more appropriate than providing the whole transcript. In general, the discussion is mainly focused around two members of the team (F1 and F5), who are discussing how a specific impediment in a team task should be handled. F1, the product owner[1] of the team, is blaming F5 for not communicating openly and directly enough that he faces problems and needs assistance. Both parties, but especially F1, get quite emotionally engaged in the conflict with frequent outbursts of high and negative emotionality. During the whole conflict, however, F5 has serious problems getting his points across, as he is held back by low English proficiency and generally appears to be more reserved and very uncomfortable in the situation.

One underlying problem in this meeting can be illustrated very well with another example from later on in the same meeting, including F7, who mostly took the mediating role throughout the conflicts in this meeting, and F4.

Transcript excerpt 6:

1	F7	and to make it concrete for now, what can we do?
2	F5	we <>.
3	F4	well I don't know
4	F7	yeah
5	F4	what again what uh maybe today - not maybe - *today* I will actually […]

What happened is that F4 attempted to answer F7's question (line 1) and started with saying "maybe today" (line 5). After realizing that he just used the word *maybe,* he looks at F1 and immediately said "not maybe – today…", while showing apologetic gestures to F1. After hearing this quick correction, F1 starts slightly laughing in amusement, realizing that F4 tried to implement the more direct communication that F1 was demanding from F5 throughout the previously described macro-conflict which was dominating most of the meeting.

[1] The product owner is responsible for the objectives and requirements of a project as well as maximizing its final output (Sverrisdottir, Ingason, & Jonasson, 2014).

9.4 Tables

Table 2a. Emotionality in Monocultural Teams

***Emotionality*:**	**Team A (2)**	**Team B (3)**	**Team C (8)**	***Team D (14)****	**Mean***	**Total**
High	0%	0%	0%	*0%*	**0%**	**0%**
Medium	42%**	0%	0%	*0%*	**14%**	**26%**
Low	67%**	100%	100%	*100%*	**89%**	**79%**
Negative	25%	0%	0%	*0%*	**8%**	**16%**
Neutral	58%	100%	100%	*0%*	**86%**	**68%**
Positive	17%	0%	0%	*100%*	**6%**	**16%**
Negative (post)	8%	0%	0%	*0%*	**3%**	**5%**
Neutral (post)	58%	75%	100%	*0%*	**78%**	**63%**
Positive (post)	33%	25%	0%	*100%*	**19%**	**32%**

** Team D only had 1 conflict. To not distort the 'Mean' values with the resulting high percentages, Team D has been excluded in those calculations. However, the respective conflict is still considered in the calculation of 'Total'.*

*** One of Team A's conflicts, which turned out to be a meso-conflict that reoccurred throughout the meeting, showed varying levels of emotionality (low and medium). This caused the percentages of Team A's emotionality levels to sum up to more than 100%, which merely means that one reoccurring conflict contained more than one emotionality level.*

Table 2b. Emotionality in Multicultural Teams

Emotionality:	***Team 1 (1)****	**Team 2 (4)**	**Team 3 (6)**	**Team 4 (7)**	**Team 5 (12)**	***Mean****	**Total**
High	*0%*	0%	0%	25%	18%	**11%**	**11%**
Medium	*0%*	14%	14%	0%	47%	**19%**	**28%**
Low	*100%*	86%	86%	75%	35%	**70%**	**61%**
Negative	*0%*	14%	29%	25%	35%	**26%**	**28%**
Neutral	*100%*	71%	71%	75%	59%	**69%**	**67%**
Positive	*0%*	14%	0%	0%	6%	**5%**	**6%**
Negative (post)	*0%*	0%	14%	0%	0%	**4%**	**3%**
Neutral (post)	*100%*	86%	86%	75%	100%	**87%**	**92%**
Positive (post)	*0%*	14%	0%	25%	0%	**10%**	**6%**

** Team 1 only had 1 conflict. To not distort the 'Mean' values with the resulting high percentages, Team 1 has been excluded in those calculations. However, the respective conflict is still considered in the calculation of 'Total'.*

Table 3a. Expression of conclusion in Monocultural Teams

	Team A (2)	**Team B (3)**	**Team C (8)**	***Team D (14)****	**Mean***	**Total**
Resolved	67%	50%	50%	*100%*	**55%**	**63%**
Resolved, no conclusion	17%	25%	0%	*0%*	**14%**	**16%**
Not resolved	17%	25%	50%	*0%*	**31%**	**21%**

Team D only had 1 conflict. To not distort the 'Mean' values with the resulting high percentages, Team D has been excluded in those calculations. However, the respective conflict is still considered in the calculation of 'Total'.

Table 3b. Expression of conclusion in Multicultural Teams

	Team 1 (1)*	**Team 2 (4)**	**Team 3 (6)**	**Team 4 (7)**	**Team 5 (12)**	**Mean***	**Total**
Resolved	*0%*	43%	29%	75%	53%	**50%**	**48%**
Resolved, no conclusion	*100%*	57%	71%	0%	18%	**37%**	**36%**
Not resolved	*0%*	0%	0%	25%	29%	**14%**	**17%**

** Team 1 only had 1 conflict. To not distort the 'Mean' values with the resulting high percentages, Team 1 has been excluded in those calculations. However, the respective conflict is still considered in the calculation of 'Total'.*

Table 4a. Confrontation styles in Monocultural Teams

	Team A (2)	**Team B (3)**	**Team C (8)**	***Team D (14)****	**Mean***	**Total**
Direct confrontation	67%	50%	50%	*100%*	**56%**	**63%**
Indirect confrontation	8%	25%	0%	*0%*	**11%**	**11%**
No clear tendency	25%	25%	50%	*0%*	**33%**	**26%**

**Team D only had 1 conflict. To not distort the 'Mean' values with the resulting high percentages, Team D has been excluded in those calculations. However, the respective conflict is still considered in the calculation of 'Total'.*

Table 4b. Confrontation styles in Multicultural Teams

	Team 1 (1)*	**Team 2 (4)**	**Team 3 (6)**	**Team 4 (7)**	**Team 5 (12)**	**Mean***	**Total**
Direct confrontation	*100%*	0%	43%	25%	82%	**38%**	**53%**
Indirect confrontation	*0%*	0%	0%	0%	0%	**0%**	**0%**
No clear tendency	*0%*	100%	57%	75%	18%	**62%**	**47%**

** Team 1 only had 1 conflict. To not distort the 'Mean' values with the resulting high percentages, Team 1 has been excluded in those calculations. However, the respective conflict is still considered in the calculation of 'Total'.*

Table 5. Psychological Safety, Conflict Frequency, and Meeting Effectiveness*

	Above-average psychological safety	**Below-average psychological safety**
Above-average conflicts	**Team A**, **Team 2**	(Team 3), (Team 4), **Team 5**
Below-average conflicts	**Team 1**, (Team B), **Team C**	(Team D)

** Teams scoring above average on perceived meeting effectiveness are displayed in bold, teams scoring below average perceived meeting effectiveness are displayed in parentheses (and regular font).*

9.5 Transcripts

Transcript excerpt 1:

1	F1:	ok so if anybody has any time and knows how to do that, then pick up that one.
2	F7:	you can put in on the top of your <>-
3	F1:	nee, because, no no no, because it's not the priority on the project.
4	F7:	no no no if you don't bring it to the sprint.
5	F1:	nee it's like-
6	F7:	ok yeah I understand yeah.
7	F1:	sorry, what I mean is also if we

Transcript excerpt 2:

1	F9	tax officers, relationship manager, those exist. So, are we following the same kind with the mass retail we have? Like the tax officer, relationship managers will be there? Or-
2	F1	yeah everything will be there
3	F2	everything should be there, always.
4	F8	yes, everything should be there
5	F1	we're going to be have-
6	F3	whether we use them or not-
7	F1	we have it. We don't use it, that's < >
8	F3	< > if the country want to < > then that is a different question
9	F6	no, no, no.
10	F9	we've never used that in-
11	F6	for Belgium it's not there technically.
12	F1	< > because it's not assigned < >-
13	F3	tax office is not there?
14	F4	no, no it's created, created. Disabled.
15	F5	We are not using, but it's created.
16	F4	disabled, huh? Okay.

Transcript excerpt 3:

1	F3	But it is not that, that is all a different issue -
2	F9	<> considered that <>-
3	F3	<> No <> I mean that- only time for that the operator is there.
4	F9	Not for this one.
5	F3	But <> for this operation <name > is a different operation.
6	F9	Yeah from <what floor>. It is still got the <known from Germany> -
7	F3	<Name F9>,
8	F9	Yeah
9	F3	We did <all the acquisition >
10	F9	Yeah, but from <Sittard> point of view- from day one <>
11	F3	You're-- you are- I mean <several things> set up and operational is different, workflow is different. If workflow <opens> as such - particularly work force, <To let the> the operator this is the work or not. <> or not. <>. That comes to the <sol>. But the work flow it is an opening gate to tax officer and that gate is supposed to be closed and there is no <informant> if the gate should be there or not. That we are supposed to euh- How <> data <>, that is the issue. I was the one asked to what- which part is flow supposed to tax officer <settle>. Than we <> with the euh- <equipment>, then <we are > test to do.

Transcript excerpt 4:

1	F7	Yeah, we will. We should be, yeah, what we do as a pre-check then. Because we can check really thoroughly and make sure that if we send it to you it runs through the tool in one time. But that will cost a lot of time and—and -- and um I don't think we have that time currently.
2	F6	But, I mean, that would-
3	F2	What time? What, what are you, <what now>?
4	F7	Well, we are answering a lot of questions from locations and <as well as> -
5	F2	< >.
6	F7	- performing a lot of the eh-
7	F2	<There were twelve questions>.
8	F7	- requirements gathering euh < >.
9	F2	< >. So eh, that should be possible right, yeah, there are three of you, two and a half <here> as well. Yeah, that should be possible.
10	F7	Yeah, well, I currently have not really an idea of how much time it takes eh to do all the pre-checks, so eh-
11	F4	Yeah, I think – I think that-
12	F1	The first time that they pre-checked the data and the – and solely the – I -- I don't know common issues that you can see like the < >- the – the column is not in form, the values are percentage and you see one million so it doesn't make sense, these types of checks.
13	F7	Hmm.
14	F1	Because I'm pretty sure-
15	F7	I'm sure, yeah.
16	F1	- that after <this pre-check> I will go to Matlab and I will find other issues as well.

Transcript excerpt 5:

1	F9	Volgende week vrijdag, is dat realistisch, haalbaar?
2	F7	Nee, is veel te vroeg.
3	F10	Ah.
4	F4	<>
5	F9	Een week later?
6	F7	Ja.