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Master Thesis in Strategic HRM and Labour relations

WORKPLACE CONFLICTS IN PUBLIC ELDERY CARE HOMES

An Exploration of Employee Experiences of Workplace Conflicts and the Role of Cross-Cultural Differences.

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Abstract

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Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore employees' experiences of conflicts in elderly care homes to identify, describe and analyze what causes conflicts among employees in the elderly care, with specific emphasis on the potential role of cultural differences. This aim is pursued through a twofold objective. First, to explore triggers of conflicts in the elderly care. Secondly, to explore what role, if any, cultural diversity plays in collaboration and conflicts.

Theoretical Framework: The theoretical framework is based on two understandings. First that multiple factors trigger conflicts and these could be tackled if attention is focused on developing robust collaboration cultures at work. Secondly that culture could play a role in the occurrence of conflicts hence understanding diverse cultures at work is necessary. Two theoretical models, namely Jordan's theoretical framework for analyzing workplace conflicts and Hofstede's cultural dimensions are used to understand, interpret and explain data collected regarding workplace conflicts.

Methodology: A qualitative study based on participant observation combined with in-depth open-ended interviews that take a narrative and interpretative approach. Narratives of 15 interviewees with 3 or more years of work experience and field notes in a culturally diverse elderly care home in the public sector were studied and analyzed.

Results: In meeting the purpose, this study has revealed that individual characteristics (like personality, attitudes, behaviors), relationship characteristics (like work load, task distribution, informal leadership and communication) and system conditions to be responsible for emergence and reoccurrence for conflicts. It further reveals that cultural differences come with misunderstandings and aids in escalation of trivial matters into workplace conflicts.

Acknowledgement

Foreword

In April 2013, I moved from Uganda to Sweden. To my surprise, I met many people from all over the world. From Iraq, Iran, Brazil, Somalia, Eritrea, Gambia, Italy etc, all these diverse cultures living in the same country. This is impressive but for me it raised three questions, questions that I still ask myself even today. Do all these diverse cultures live and work together amicably? If yes, how? If no, why? For some people like those from Eritrea and Gambia I could relate to their culture but to those from Sweden, I found their culture and people to be different. During these encounters with diverse people living in Sweden, I have come to know a lot more about myself and my values than I did three and a half years ago.

In 2015, I started a journey to pursue a masters' degree in HR, and decided to find part-time work besides my studies. I quickly found a part-time work in elderly care. This raised more questions within me. I could not understand why people only said "Hej" while greeting each other and did not ask any more information if they did not know you personally. With so many questions in mind, I took an elective course in robust collaboration cultures in spring 2016. That course exposed me to conflict studies and to Hofstede's cultural dimensions which gave me answers to some questions but also raised a variety of questions when I thought of issues in elderly care. Questions like: Is culture a problem? Is culture to blame for disagreements in diverse groups? Why are people always irritated at each other at work? I was bothered and helpless both for not having answers to my questions and for not being of help. As a temporary employee who neither participated in workplace meetings, nor had access to any organizational documents, a team-leader/immediate manager to turn to - those questions were never answered. With all those questions an idea was born, an urge to understand conflicts among diverse groups. The quest to understand what really causes these conflicts, how managers work with conflict and how cultural background contributes to conflict is really my biggest motivation for embarking on this study.

However, this thesis is not about me but rather experiences of employees, and managers in elderly care. During this study, I have had the privilege of both observing and interviewing employees with backgrounds from Sweden, Finland, Eritrea, Gambia, Iran, Iraq, Ethiopia and Bosnia. Through them I have learned even more about culture and conflict that I hope to convey to the reader. I hope this thesis can teach us something about ourselves, and how our culture lens could provoke how we react and deal with conflicts.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Before this era of globalization, most people around the world grew up and lived both their personal and career lives within restricted geographical confines, rarely coming face to face with others from different cultural backgrounds (Skelton & Allen 2000). However, with globalization, technological developments, forced migration from wars and increased economic cooperation and collaboration of governments like the EU, cultural diversity has become a natural aspect in work life (Brew & Carins 2004). A good example is the Swedish elderly care where employees and managers originate from all corners of the world (Tullberg 2006). Most of the immigrants who have moved to Sweden are from west Asia, for example Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Turkey and Northeast Africa, like, Eritrea and Somalia (Statistics - Swedish Migration Agency 2017). Skelton & Allen (2000) argue that multiple cultures at workplaces have paved the way for increased conflicts at workplaces because there is no globalized method/criteria(s) for conflict management, yet people differ in values, beliefs and attitudes which are often strengthened by their cultural backgrounds. This mix of cultures according to LeBaron & Pillay (2006) calls for culture and conflict fluency to live amicably in diverse workplaces. Therefore, workplaces must deal with workplace cultural diversity in conflicts (Brew & Carins 2004).

Like other workplace concepts for example innovation, job sharing etc, workplace conflicts have both advantages and disadvantages. When employees and managers lack collaboration and conflict skills; disagreements, disputes and minor issues most likely will escalate into conflicts which damages work relationships often costing the organization lots of money and talent (as talented employees exit) in efforts to remedy the firm (Ferraro & Briody 2013). Therefore, to effectively survive in workplaces, both employers and employees need to have collaboration and conflict skills. And, employers and HR practioners need to effectively support employees in doing this (Brew & Carins 2004, Ferraro and Briody 2013). In Sweden, as of 31 March 2016, regulations on organizational and social work environment that regulate knowledge requirements, goals, workload, working hours and offensive treatment were implemented (Arbetsmiljöverkets författningssamling, 2015:4). The purpose of the regulations is to promote a good working environment and to prevent the risk of ill health due to organizational and social conditions in the work environment. The Work Environment Authority's regulations on systematic work environment include rules on work environment policy, knowledge and how the employer regularly examines and assesses risks at the workplace. There are also rules that the

employer must take measures to address the risks and ensure that employees obtain the required knowledge (Arbetsmiljöverkets författningssamling, 2015:4). Considering all this, it is evident that being fully responsible for employees in this era requires improving knowledge about workplace conflicts and about the role of cultural diversity in workplace conflicts.

Researchers like Rämgård, Blomqvist, & Petersson (2015) and Hauer (2013) have argued that workplace conflicts in elderly care are a growing concern and not largely researched qualitatively (Rämgård, 2010; Rämgård, et al 2015). Furthermore, Josefsson and Ryhammar (2010) assert that the continued threats and violence in the Swedish elderly care need to be given attention. This has been the focus of much debate and discussions over the years. Recent discussions have drawn attention to the problems like continuous disagreements among employees, neglect and abuse of various forms, which has spread a picture of a welfare institution in crisis (Hopen, 2013, Johansson, 2008 cited in Wrede et al, 2008). Hence it is necessary to explore workplace conflicts in the elderly care. It is with such consideration that the fundamentality of studying workplace conflicts in elderly care is embarked on, looking at what triggers conflicts and the role if any cross-cultural differences contributes. According to the authors above, this would allow for in-depth knowledge on the triggers of conflicts and what role cultural differences contribute during conflicts. Furthermore, this qualitative study on workplace conflicts in the elderly care answers the calls of LeBaron (2003), Rämgård, (2010), Rämgård et al (2015) and Hauer (2013) for qualitative studies on workplace conflicts.

1.1.   Purpose and Research questions

The purpose of this study is therefore, to explore employee experiences of conflicts in the elderly care to identify, describe and analyze what causes conflicts in the elderly care, with specific emphasis on the potential role of cultural differences. This aim is pursued through a twofold objective. First, to explore triggers of conflicts in the elderly care. And secondly, to explore what role, if any, cultural diversity plays in collaboration and conflicts. To reach this aim, the following two research questions will be explored.

- What are the conflicts triggers among workers/teams in public elderly care homes?
- In what way does cultural diversity in public elderly care homes contribute to collaboration and conflict in public elderly care homes?

1.2. Short description of elderly care

Sweden's elderly care model is often referred to as the Scandinavian model (Einhorn & Logue 2010), and is known to emphasizes equality (Kamp & Hvid 2012). Elderly care is a social right regulated by Swedish Social Services Act and is universal in nature hence targets all senior citizens (Anttonen 2002, Burau & Vabo 2011). The law offers the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the elderly receive the support and assistance they need to the municipalities ("(Social Services Act (socialtjänstlag) SFS 2001:453)",2001). Additionally, elderly care is provided either in forms of institutional/residential care or home care services. Day activities, meal services, personal safety alarms, home adaptation and transportation services are additional services supplied by the municipalities and are also regulated by law (Edebalk, 2010).

Its management is split among three authorities, namely central government, the county councils and the local authorities each with a different but important role in the welfare system (Edebalk 2010, Tullberg 2006). They are represented by directly elected political bodies and have the right to finance their activities by levying taxes and fees within the frameworks set by the Social Services Act (Edebalk 2010, Elderly care in Sweden, 2017). The goal of elderly care is to provide the elderly with possible support to live a high quality, independent life for as long as possible. Achieving their goal is complex and dependent upon multiple professions and other stakeholders namely politicians, doctors, nurses, nursing assistants, psychologists, next of kins, social workers, etc. working together. Yet working together is often difficult because of competing interests of various stakeholders hence making elderly care provision vulnerable to conflicts (Josefsson & Ryhammar 2010).

There are both private and public elderly care homes although both sectors are publically financed, are governed by the same laws (Edebalk 2010), and are both supervised by the country administrative board ("(Social Services Act (socialtjänstlag) SFS 2001:453)",2001). However, government has limited control of the private elderly care homes (Jordan 2006). One interesting law governing the elderly care sector is called freedom of choice (Edebalk 2010). This law allows the elderly to choose the provider of their choice and therefore forces both sectors to provide quality services hence regulating competition. There are over 250.000 senior citizens in Sweden, who receive care services from both public and private companies. Of those roughly above 95,000 live in residential elderly care homes (Edebalk, 2010). This study however, only targets conflicts in the public elderly care homes. Public elderly care home here means a special

home where fulfillment of special needs and requirements that are unique to senior citizens are offered. This includes assisted living, adult day care, long term care and nursing homes (Edebalk 2010).

The structure of this thesis is divided into six different sections namely, previous research, theoretical framework, methodology, results, analysis/discussion and conclusion. Each section opens with an introduction explaining what it explores.

2. LINKS TO PREVIOUS RESEARCH

This chapter begins by exploring previous studies on tensions/conflicts in the elderly care then proceeds to look at cross-cultural encounters.

2.1. Tensions/conflicts in elderly care

The definitions of conflict are diverse and vary due to scholars' opinions and contexts. To some people conflicts involve physical destruction/arguments while to others it could be hot or cold. Whether it occurs in the form of a difference of opinion, harsh words, or a form of direct action taken to resolve competing goals, it has a friction involved (Kaushal & Kwantes, 2006). For example, Robbins' (2001) views conflict as a process in which one notices any bad influence coming from one party to another. In agreement, LeBaron & Pillay (2006) define conflicts as any differences that are real or perceived as challenges to something one believes, needs and values between two people on any significant ground. According to Jordan (2015:15) conflict arises when *one/more parties' have desires that they are* unwilling to give up*, that they feel someone else is *blocking those desires,* which causes *frustration* and often leads either party to act in a conflicting way to the other to achieve their goal.

Workplace conflicts are those that occur at the workplace. They could be disputes or relationship conflicts (Jordan 2015). It is a growing concern in elderly care, especially regarding its most extreme expression workplace violence (Josefsson 2012, Rämgård 2010, Kamp & Hvid 2012). Josefsson & Ryhammar (2010) in their survey of threats and violence in the Swedish community elderly care homes, found that all participants reported to have been in conflict at work triggered

by violence from the elderly and their relatives. Other quantitative studies on stress in elderly care and nurses health in elderly care (Josefsson 2012), workplace reflections and experiences of elderly care (Josefsson et al 2007), changing roles in elderly care (Rämgård 2010), privatization/intersection perspective of elderly care (Cuesta and Rämgård; 2016), elderly care in transition (Kamp and Hvid 2012), intervening with care (Hauer2013) and quality in elderly care (Fontaine et al 2006) have also painted the nursing home as a virtual hotbed of conflict. In agreement, Hopen (2013), asserts that changes in work shift, forced increase of work percentage in elderly care causes stress and unconducive work environment which later increases tensions and frictions in elderly care homes. Her interview participants expressed how tensions and stress at work led them into more workplace conflict and increased sick leave.

Researchers have identified individual factors (like stress, fatigue, judgment of others' competence and perception of others seemingly selfish motive), interpersonal factors (like prior unresolved conflicts, dehumanization, power differentials, communication breakdown) and organizational factors (like navigating between complex organizational factors and non-compliance between group norms) as contributing to conflicts in the healthcare (Kim et al 2016, Tullberg 2006). Josefsson & Ryhammar (2010) argue that tensions and violence in the elderly care often involves verbal and physical abuse. They add on that nursing assistants are exposed to a lot of conflicts and that they are sometimes slapped, punched and even spitted on. Such violence does not only spark off destructive conflicts but also impacts the psychological and physical wellbeing of the elderly, employees and relatives. Studies for example by Tullberg (2006) and Josefsson & Ryhammar (2010) report that violence in elderly care is an existing problem that employees recognize and consider as an occupational hazard.

Furthermore, the above authors argue that conflicts in the elderly care are often enacted and controlled by communication in relation to words, tone, volume, tempo and body language (Josefsson and Rymmar 2010). This is because often in elderly care, different professions are competing to ensure that their interests are achieved. The doctor strives to see that the elderly receives the medication on time, the therapist wants them to train, the nursing assistant desires that they have a good quality of life. These competing needs are what Nelson & Cox (2003) call organizational values versus consumer values. Organizational values include facility efficiency and risk management imperatives, while consumer values are the elderly's desire for expanded services, more options, and greater individual attention. As nursing assistants are faced with the

pressure of ensuring that they follow directions from managers, residents' relatives, doctors and therapists, often stress and disagreements is encountered as they work through meeting different needs. Disagreements according to values are often intense and protracted because it is a matter of goals and needs that are difficult to negotiate away (Josefsson & Ryhammar, 2010). Tullberg (2006) asserts that managers' failure to clearly communicate goals and values that could integrate staff has undermined cooperation amongst employees and allowed room for poor relationships.

Considering that no single profession in elderly care can solely provide the desired quality of life, it is necessary for the professional groups involved to collaborate to foster life quality for the elderly. Matziou et al (2014) in their quest to explore perceptions about collaboration and what triggers disagreements in UK elderly care homes found the absence of inter-professional collaboration as a key trigger for tensions, errors and omissions in elderly care. Consequently, some studies have found collaboration as a growing behavior in times of tensions in elderly care. For example, Sportsman and Hamilton (2007) in their study to explore the prevalent conflict resolution tactics employed by healthcare workers in US found that collaboration was very prevalent. In Sweden, Josefsson et al (2007) in their survey of work situation of registered nurses in municipal elderly care found that considering work pressures, stress and conflict, registered nurses employed collaboration amongst themselves as a quest to deal with the pressures associated with work. They also found high levels of time pressure and conflicting demands to be common among nursing assistants in elderly care residential homes especially in dementia care. Therefore, for the quality of everyday life of residents in elderly care, concerned professions ought to acknowledge the importance of collaboration, develop and implement inter-professional teamwork interventions to improve collaboration (Matziou et al., 2014, Tullberg 2006, Josefsson et al 2007).

2.2. Cross-cultural encounters

It is almost impossible to talk about conflicts and not talk about culture as culture could be said to be part of conflict. For example, according to LeBaron & Pillay (2006:13) *"conflicts are always cultural because we are cultural beings"* as such we need to understand what culture is. Culture is the shared patterns of behavior and interaction shared by a group of people learned through socialization (Schein 2010). It is more than language, dress code, food (LeBaron 2003). It also entails beliefs, norms, rituals, heroes, values, nationality race, ethnic background etc (LeBaron & Pillay 2006). However, it could also arise from cleverages of generations like sex orientations, economic class, religious affiliation, gender etc (LeBaron 2003). It is important to remember that cultures are always changing, relate to the symbolic dimension of life, are multi-layered, elastic and constantly in a flux (LeBaron 2003, LeBaron & Pillay 2006, Schein 2010). Therefore, any attempt to generalize must take the dimensions of time, context and individual differences into consideration (LeBaron 2003). Because cultural generalizations are not the entire story and should not be taken as a substitute for building relationships, sharing experiences and coming to know others more deeply over time (LeBaron & Pillay 2006).

Most often when culture is said, ethnic background is at focus, which is also the case in this study. According to Kaushal & Kwantes (2006), a person's cultural background defines every aspect of the conflict process, ranging from the goals considered incompatible, why they are so, how one reacts about it, and whether the outcome is satisfactory or not. As such, the nature of conflict itself is seen very differently across cultures. Where it may be emphasized in one culture, it may be swept under the rug in another. As such, cultural competence in the health care and in the care for the elderly is highly recommended as a needed skill if conflicts are to be minimized (Rämgård, 2016, Tribe & Lane 2012).

Worchel (2005) in his work of "culture role in conflict and conflict management" clearly elaborates the above. His personal experience in Hawaii with neighbors from diverse backgrounds (Japan, Portugal, Hawaii and China) came with conflicts provoked by cultural differences. He planted one banana which quickly multiplied beyond his boundary. His Hawaiian neighbor smiled and harvested the bananas that had grown in his property, the Japanese neighbor scolded him at every opportunity accusing him of white arrogance and need

for colonization. The Chinese neighbor on the other hand never said a word, but late at night Worchel would hear strange chopping sounds, and in the morning, he would find the remnants of banana plants stacked neatly in his yard. The Portuguese neighbor responded by planting a variety of giant bananas on his border proclaiming, ''you think you can grow bananas, now you will see what a Portuguese banana can do'' (Worchel 2005:741).

That story shows how culture is the vehicle for identifying and distinguishing groups that are likely to be parties to conflict. For the Japanese neighbor, Worchel represented white American culture and he, the neighbor represented Japanese culture. The runaway banana plants represented the evils of white American culture, and were viewed as a direct attack to Japanese culture. Similarly, his Portuguese neighbor's comments showed his view that the banana war was one between the Portuguese and the Americans (Worchel 2005). The story also shows how culture shapes the way individuals perceive a conflict and respond to it. His Hawaiian neighbor influenced by his culture saw no conflict in a situation created by the land. The Chinese neighbor on the other hand avoided direct confrontation with Worchel but silently resolved the problem on his border. These two roles often overlap, and together they make a clear case for the urgent need to consider culture when exploring conflict (Worchel 2005).

During intercultural encounters at work unintended conflicts and cultural shock often happens as humans carry in them patterns of thinking, way of doing things, reaction and action to different situations all of which were learned during childhood in social interactions at home, school, neighborhoods etc (LeBaron & Pillay 2006). Often culture assigns meaning to the conflict by telling individuals what the conflict is about hence culture and conflict are indeed intertwined (LeBaron & Pillay 2006). Tullberg (2006) in her work of leadership in elderly care identifies culture clashes and unintended conflicts in elderly care as a growing concern. Intercultural encounters in groups often provoke group feelings rather than breeding mutual understanding. Group feelings confirm each group in it is own identity and yet such divisions often lead to the creation of in-groups and out-groups (LeBaron 2003). Virtually, members from different cultures are received in stereotyped fashion rather than as individuals. A study by four researchers at the University of South Carolina showed that stereotypes on grounds of race caused diverse effects especially in health care settings (Abdou, Fingerhut, Jackson, & Wheaton, 2015). Stereotypes affect individual perception of actual events which later influence the conflict and collaboration behaviors during conflicts.

In addition, cultural encounters at work often come with those involved speaking different first languages. These first language differences often contribute to mistaken cultural perception which could spark off disagreements and conflicts at work (Worchel 2005, LeBaron & Pillay 2006). Tribe & Lane (2012) in a study of mental wellbeing of dementia care in diverse ethnic groups with emphasis on black and minority ethnics in the UK, found that language and humor plays a role in how care is given and perceived since some words like dementia are not universal. Because not all cultures view dementia as a disease and many cultures stigmatize dementia. Therefore, calling it a disease to others causes frictions and misunderstandings. Thus, these two authors emphasize that employees in elderly care ought to both understand other cultures and reflect on how their own culture provokes others and avoid generalizing their individual culture as the acceptable norm and one which should be adapted to.

Additionally, during cross-cultural encounters, tendencies to prefer something else to the other often refered to as values are common. Values are the fundamentals of culture and encompass the positive and negative feelings/views about various states of affairs and are often acquired earlier on in life thus hard to unlearn (LeBaron 2003, Schein 2010). They are unconscious to those who hold them (LeBaron 2003). LeBaron & Pillay (2006) argue that disagreements on grounds of values causes frictions between parties concerned at work because the more one tries to explain why something is important and the other party seems not to understand, more frustrations develop which makes collaboration hard and lead to value conflicts.

Although earlier research (see studies by authors cited above) shows that culture and workplace conflicts are intertwined and that culture influences workplace conflict and choice of conflict behavior, it is important to note that other authors, for example LeBaron (2003:3), asserts that "*culture does not cause conflict although culture is inextricable from conflict*". Hence awareness about other cultures to conflicts helps one to make adaptive choices during conflicts. Therefore, it is a question of awareness and communication style (LeBaron 2003, Rämgård 2016, Tribe and Lane 2012).

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section discusses the theory used for analysis. It starts off by explaining the rationale behind the chosen theoretical framework. Two themes from Jordan's (2015) theoretical models are discussed and then followed by Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Later the critique against Hofstede's cultural dimensions is acknowledged and presented.

3.1. Rationale behind the chosen theoretical approach

Based on the purpose of this study, two modules from the robust collaboration model by Jordan (2015) have been chosen because this allows for identification of issues to the conflict and the blocked desires leading to conflicts. Secondly, no earlier study was found to have used this model which opens opportunity to employ a new model.

Furthermore, because the study emphasizes what role, if any, culture plays in collaboration and conflicts at work, the Hofstede cultural dimensions (Hofstede el al 2005, 2010) are adopted to look at how cultural differences play out in a workplace. These dimensions were developed to compare the differences in cultural values, between different societies. No previous study in elderly care was found to have used these dimensions, thus this leaves a gap and opens opportunity to further understand workplace conflicts using Hofstede dimensions. Using Hofstede's theoretical framework, it might be possible to better understand the difficulty and complexity of the cultural encounters between different cultures and highlight important aspects of integration. A combination of aspects of these two models is thus relevant.

3.2. Three levels of conflict

Jordan (2015) argues that the causes of conflicts can be found at three different levels namely, the individual, the relational and the systems levels. The individual level focuses on the role played by individuals' personalities, behaviors, attitudes and life situations as reasons for the emergence of conflicts. If conflict is looked at from this perspective, measures to deal with it are directed to the individual. For example, giving feedback, setting limits and perhaps threaten with certain consequences or even take measures such as warnings, transfer, notice or dismissal (Jordan 2015).

The relational level focuses on conflict causes that emerge due to the nature of the relations between the parties. Here the reasons for the conflict are sought in incompatible interests, communication problems, frictions due to personality differences or a history of continuously worsening relations. From this perspective, it's natural to see conflicts as issues that should be resolved thus, forums for cooperation to reduce irritations could be developed (Jordan 2015).

The systems level on the other hand focuses on conditions like work organization, resource allocation, organization culture and how these factors contribute to the emergence and perseverance of conflicts. Hence conflicts are seen as possible symptoms of inadequacies in the organization, such as unclear goals, strategies and distribution of roles, small management and lack of well-functioning forum for problem solving. Conflicts at this level are dealt with through organizational development like clarifying goals, roles and norm clarity. As well as ensuring good prerequisites for well-functioning leadership and approaches to problem-solving (Jordan 2015).

3.3. The five themes with conflict potential

Jordan (2015) identifies five common themes i.e. distribution issues, position issues, structure issues, behavioral norm issues and conviction issues that are most likely to provoke the tensions and disagreements which when not managed could lead to destructive workplace conflicts.

Distribution issues concerns for example distribution of money, workload, time and attention among the parties. Therefore, it is vital to understand why and how different sections of the budget are allocated. Failure for all parties to understand and agree breeds disagreements and tensions at workplaces which when not managed in the long run are destructive to the workplace. In relation to that, workload is connected to how work is allocated within and among teams and departments. The distribution of work should be in such a way that is perceived fair and enough time should be allowed for accomplishment of the work tasks. Otherwise feelings that one is often allocated more than others with little time to accomplish leads to tensions and workplace stress which often if not always breeds ground for destructive workplace conflicts (Jordan 2015).

Position issues are connected to roles, placements and positions people wish to get or avoid. Hence, the parties are in competition over resources that are indivisible or are perceived to be indivisible for example a stimulating work assignment, a spacious office space, promotion or demotions. These conflicts could be informal in nature and negative. Informal nature conflicts could be a concern of competence and authority like who is more competent or who has the final say in the group. The negative side on the other hand involves situations that nobody wants for example, a demotion/transfer. Conflicts that arise from position issues are difficult to solve because in most cases only one party in the conflict can or must accept the position leading to a win-loose situation (Jordan 2015).

In difference, structure issues deal with issues like delegation of authority, regulations, routines, work methods. In this theme, it is about what work order is to prevail in the organization hence concerns issues of organizational structure and work organization. Disagreements, tensions and later workplace conflict due to structural issues are often because of organizational changes as change often comes with consequences regarding distribution of time and other resources. This in most cases triggers tensions as the new changes will prevail over a specific period (Jordan 2015).

On the other hand, behavioral norm issues include communication styles, attitudes and equal treatment. These issues are grounds for behavioral conflicts and often regard the interpersonal order of norms for accepted/unaccepted behaviors. These issues show interpersonal relations among people for example how people communicate with each other, attitudes portrayed towards one another in both verbal and non-verbal communication. The attitudes that managers and colleagues have towards each other in relation to work tasks/assignments is critical here thus it considers how one takes responsibility for accomplishment of work tasks, work pace, behaviors towards clients, compliance with routines, length of breaks etc. Conflicts arising because of behavioral issues are difficult to resolve because it is hard to separate between behavior and person hence any criticism can be interpreted as a personal attack (Jordan 2015).

Similarly, conviction issues concern deep rooted differences on what is good/bad, values/beliefs. Here it is about values and morals hence what individuals consider right or wrong which is often based on individual values, beliefs, attitudes and perception. The most common example of

conflicts arising from conviction issues are value and moral conflicts. Parties disagree over which perspective or value system should serve as a guide in the organization. Here Jordan (2015) elucidates that in workplaces where employees disagree on conviction grounds, it is common that employees experience that they are unable to work according to their deeply felt values often coupled with time pressure and inadequate resources. Chances to deal with tensions and conflicts using dialogue, discussion and negotiation are very limited while there is high risk for parties to make moral judgments about each other, hence it is important for both parties to feel/have high respect for one another (Jordan 2015).

3.4. Hofstede's cultural dimensions

After careful study and research of large data base scores on employee values from employees of IBM between 1967 and 1973 by the Dutch researcher Geert Hofstede, the Hofstede cultural dimensions were developed. The dimensions are power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity and uncertainty avoidance. (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov 2010). Two of these dimensions will be incorporated for identifying the role of cultural differences for conflict in workplace.

The power distance dimension is about the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations expect and accept that power is unequally distributed (Hofstede et al 2010). Cultures can be characterized by small power distance or large power distance. In large power distance cultures, inequality is accepted as normal and hierarchy is seen as necessary and thus should not be removed. Superiors are superior beings who deserve to be admired and respected by subordinates. Power comes before good and evil, thus power is a reality of life and one cannot decide for themselves who they will become, hence respect is a key virtue. Subordinates behave in a way which reflects their respect for superiors when they meet them. In such cultures, it is important for one to be able to judge the other's status to show respect (Hofstede et al 2010). It is necessary to centralize decision making and power to get the firm running and subordinates expect to be told thus they cannot criticize their superior even when he or she is wrong. Those who rebel are considered a problem to society and the company. Eritrea, Gambia, Iraq and Bosnia (countries where participants in this study stem from) fall under countries with large power distance with a score of 77/80. The power distance is even reflected in the work relationship with patients and doctors and next of kins. It is normal for employees

and managers to consider themselves as completely unequal at workplaces and these relationships are often loaded with emotions (Hofstede et al 2010). On the other hand, in small power distance societies, inequality is wrong and undesirable. Hierarchy is only for practical purposes. Use of power should be legitimate and independence is a key virtue. Decentralization of decision making is encouraged because they believe competence matters as such one should be able to act with their competence. Subordinates are consulted and therefore, have a voice since their knowledge, views and ideas are considered. In countries with small power distances, employees and managers consider themselves as equals and differences are not tolerated. Sweden is considered as a country with small power distance with a score of 31 (Hofstede et al 2010).

The individualism vs collectivism dimension is about the properties of ties among persons. Individualism means that the ties between individuals are loose, hence everyone is expected to look after him/herself and immediate family. In an individualistic culture, I consciousness is strong so individuals form their own opinion and control their resources (Hofstede et al 2010). The country also builds systems that allows one to stay independent, like student loans in Sweden's case. Identity is based on the individual so others are classified as individuals. More so, in individualistic cultures although it is nice to have relationship, they are not central at workplace as one must accomplish task and work, hence task is primary in relation to relations. Therefore, relationships are not considered during recruitment processes as personal qualifications come first (Hofstede et al 2010). There is also low context communication as one is free to speak as one wishes hence high clarity during communication and confrontations can be healthy. This is because people are expected to give their opinions and views which are also respected. Therefore, conflicts do not over escalate as everyone is expected to deal with their conflict. Collectivism on the other hand, is about how individuals from birth onwards are part of strong in-groups which last a lifetime. In collectivist cultures, we consciousness is strong and therefore, identity is based in social system and decision making is based on what she/he is expected to do. Often particularism (others classified as in-group or out-group) is at play. At workplaces, those from such cultures need to have a belonging and be treated as members with the different loyalty ties. People in the same group have the same morale obligation. An important issue is that relationships over tasks are valued hence establishing relationship and trust first before carrying out tasks is vital (Hofstede et al 2010). Besides employment could be based on relationship/relatives hence it is important that one establishes contact because that is

necessary for survival. There is high context communication for that reason, one must be very careful during communication in order not to hurt the group members because in-group harmony must be maintained. Individuals' own desires and conflicts are for all; therefore, everyone has a say which makes it complex (Hofstede et al 2010). On this dimension, East-Africa scores 27, West-Africa 20, Arab countries 38 and Sweden 71 on individualism. The higher the scores the more individualistic a country is (Hofstede et al 2010).

The above descriptions represent the extremes and Hofstede argues that most work situations will be in between and contain both elements of large and small power distances. Individuals will also portray individualistic or collectivists values depending on time and context. (Hofstede et al 2010).

3.5. Critique against Hofstede's cultural dimensions.

Indeed, as explained in the literature review culture changes therefore critique against the chosen theoretical framework (Hofstede's cultural dimensions) is both acknowledged and presented in this study.

According to Nathan (2015), the paradigm of essentialism in which Hofstede's cultural dimensions fall under ignore identity and agency. Therefore, Nathan (2010, 2015) argues for a model of culture within the non- essentialist paradigm derived from Dilthey's (1962, 1976, 1988 &1989) social interactionist perspective. Nathan argues that since the paradigm of essentialism, is rooted in human nature, the notions of culture within this paradigm are characterized by being static, holistic, homogeneous, deterministic and bounded. Holiday, (2011:4 quoted in Nathan 2015:5) and Osland and Bird, (2000 quoted in Nathan 2015:5) assert that *notions of culture within the paradigm of essentialism lead to the stereotyping of individuals, defining and constraining their behaviors according to their cultures.* Contrary, the paradigm of non-essentialism challenges this and is rooted in human conditions. It is dynamic with continuity and change, internally riven, heterogeneous, changeable and with blurred boundaries (Nathan 2015).

Furthermore, Nathan (2015) points out that Hofstede started off with 4 dimensions and later added one, the critique is "*how many dimensions, and of what sort, would completely and holistically determine a national culture*" (Nathan 2015:9). He adds that the underlying assumptions of Hofstede' dimensions are that they are independent variables without any

interaction and each national culture reflects an 'average tendency' within each dimension of a continuum. His critique here is "*are they valid assumptions*" (Nathan 2015:9), because individuals can, depending on the context of the situation, be at opposite ends of the spectrum of those dimensions and even siblings can be different. Therefore Nathan (2015) views the idea of a national culture that reflects an average tendency within each cultural dimension on a continuum as ignoring agency and undermining differences in value orientations based on identity. Hence according to him "*Hofstede's dimensions do not address identity explicitly but implicitly assume a singular national identity disregarding agency for the individuals in an organization*" (Nathan 2015:17).

Critique against Hofstede's cultural dimensions is plausible, intriguing and indeed calls for attention when analyzing cultures especially considering the different context, time and Holden (2008:249)'s call for researchers and trainers to get off the "*Hofstedian grip*". However, since this study neither targets generalization of cultures and democratization of an organization nor determination/comparison of which model is best and why, but rather analyzing experiences and how employees and managers interpreted them, the non-essentialist model is not used although acknowledged. However, it is a recommendation to incorporate for a future study.

4. METHODOLOGY

This section explains the research design, case selection, how observation and interview guide are used for data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, validity and reliability and limitations of the methodology.

4.1. Research design

For this study, participant observation together with open ended semi-structured qualitative interviews with a narrative and descriptive approach were adopted. Work groups were studied in view of their learned and shared behaviors, looking at norms and actions. Angrosino (2011) argues that ethnographic fieldwork is often geared towards uncovering the meanings social actors attach to their actions and experiences especially for sensitive fields. Therefore, since conflicts are sensitive, being in the field to observe was a better way to explore and clearly describe the dynamics, experiences and encounters of conflicts and later select the interview participants.

Due to the explorative nature of this study, a combination of participants' observation and qualitative semi-structured interviews was ideal in capturing the employees' perspectives on conflict experiences in a comprehensive way. According to Hakim (2000) such a qualitative approach captures rich data originating from employee's experiences, feelings, thoughts and assumptions which allows deeper reflection upon the shared incidents thus providing rich data. On the other hand, Charmaz (2006) asserts that the combination of different qualitative methods allows the researcher opportunity to understand common themes in the phenomenon and gain new and unexpected knowledge. Thus, offering validity through capturing people's attitudes and views on a specific phenomenon (Charmaz 2006). This design allowed for collection of first-hand information to answer the research questions.

4.2. Case selection

Earlier researchers within the nursing sector have found that conflicts are common in the nursing sector and assume it could be an outcome of cultural mix (Josefsson and Ryhammar 2010). It was therefore of importance to identify a culturally diverse workplace for the study. However,

because this is a five months' thesis, there was need to narrow down therefore only the public elderly care sector was the area of focus. By doing so, the author believed that this would provide for data needed to answer the research questions, be efficient and credible. Hence access was sought through open visits to different culturally diverse public elderly care homes. During these visits, the objectives of study and preferred method for data collection was explained. Access was later granted. The case has been anonymized hence all names and direct figures/numbers are altered in description throughout this paper. The case is within the public elderly care sector in Sweden and is characterized with cultural diversity.

The elderly care home is middle sized and consists of approximately five-eight departments with approximately 100-120 elderly residents suffering from dementia, psychological issues, strokes, reduced mobility, old age etc. In all departments, employees work round the clock, and each department has 2-4 nurses with a total of 60-80 employees/nursing assistants on full-time, 30-40 part-time employees and 15-30 on call employees all working day and night shifts often under pressure. Employees' responsibilities include, monitoring of medication often delegated to nursing assistant by a trained nurse, personal care (like toilet assistance, bathing, dressing, eating), social and recreational activities, emergency care, occupational and physical therapy to those in need of it etc. Conflicts occur often amongst employees, employees with managers and between employees and residents and their relatives/next of kins. However, conflicts involving next of kins and employees are immediately refered to management. This study tackled only employee experiences of conflicts amongst themselves (on floor conflicts).

4.3.   Observation, interview guide and data collection

Observations were made through being present at the workplace and spending time at the premises and observation of employee reactions to different issues in conversations. Hence daily visits to the study premises which offered the author the chance to get to know every department in the elderly home and to move freely between the departments were done. The observations were made during the day and evening time five days a week but in different shifts and departments. Approximately, a total of 200-260hrs were spent on observation during the five weeks of observations. This allowed the author to obtain a sense of everyday work life in an elderly care home. The focus during the observations was to explore the daily routines, practices particularly checking out for work environment, collaboration, attitudes, behaviors and how cultural differences play out. Interactions between employees and residents, employees and

employees, employees and managers were observed. Staff was followed around in and out of the departments, in the common room, dining room and the author attended all meetings like report taking meetings, shift change meetings and weekly staff meetings (APT). To remember the information for empirical data, notes were taken and at the end of the day when the author got home, all notes were transferred to a computer for easier access and record keeping.

From observations, interview respondents were selected. Only those employees who during the observation period were seen to be always at tensions with others, always complaining about things, easily irritated and stressed and those who were always silent were first considered as potential candidates for the interviews. Before recruiting them for the interviews, a minimum of three years working within elderly care was required. These were chosen because this category was expected to have rich experiences, information and knowledge to share. Mixture of the background was a fundamental requirement since cultural background role is of interest in this study. See table (1) below for sample characteristics of the interview respondents.

Respondents' code & Profession	Country of origin	Years of Experience
RE	Sweden	10years
RE	Uganda	5years
R1E	Iran	10 years
R2E	Sweden	30 years
R3E	Gambia	10 years
R4M	Finland	7 years
R5E	Sweden	35 years
R6E	Iraq	3 ½ years
R7T	Bosnia	20 years
R8A	Bosnia	22 years
R9E	Sweden	30 years
R10E	Sweden	25 years
R11E	Eritrea	9 years
R12A	Ethiopia	13 years
R13M	Germany &Sweden	15 years
R14M	Gambia	35 years
R15M	Bosnia	16 years

Table 1 showing the characteristics of the sample.

Blue interviews are trial interviews.

R= Respondent, E= Employee, M= Manager, A= Administrator, T= Therapist

The interviews were semi-structured with 15 respondents, i.e. four managers, two administrators, one therapist and eight employees. An interview guide was formulated in line with the purpose of study, the research questions and the theoretical approach. The interview guide See (appendix 1) entailed background questions, participant opinion on what is/not conflict. The guide then proceeds to critical areas like strategy, structure, relations and culture, collaboration, support systems, cultural encounters and impact of cultural encounters that are relevant when understanding an organization's collaboration and conflict management system.

All interviews were arranged at the respondents' place of choice and they were carried out in Swedish. During the interviews, the respondents were asked to narrate and describe their stories and experiences of conflicts and cultural encounters. According to Charmaz (2006) and Hakim (2000) such narrative and descriptive open-ended interviews offer a researcher the opportunity to understand the common themes from the respondent's point of view to gain new or unexpected knowledge. For purposes of accuracy, all interviews were recorded and the duration ranged from 40 to 90 minutes. Each interview was transcribed and the data collected was simultaneously collated under common themes to come up with codes providing a basis for analysis and thereafter draw conclusions and recommendations for future research (Charmaz, 2006). A copy of the interview guide is attached (appendix1).

4.4. Data analysis

Following the completion of the data collection, analysis was done and it followed thematic content analysis. This method focuses on identifying, analyzing, reporting themes within the data and generating categories under which common themes and categories can be grouped during the open coding process (Ritchie et al 2014). The data gathered from observations and recorded interviews was transcribed and grouped under common themes to come up with codes that provided a basis for analysis of the data from which conclusions were drawn. After all the observations and interviews had been transcribed, interview transcripts were sent to the respondents for them to read and confirm if that is what they said. All requests for removal of any information was adhered to. Later when the transcripts had been received back from the respondents, each transcript was independently reviewed and analyzed by reading and rereading through all the transcripts several times to identify the key themes and examples from the data to

create codes and take note of the emerging themes. The themes and their examples were in form of repetitive quotes from interviews and field notes. A coding template that evolved and developed with each stage was drafted. All data was coded and divided into categories that covered various responses. These were in form of quotes from respondents and field notes from the observations. These codes and categories were then compared, contrasted between and within cases, and sorted until no new categories and codes emerged. Some respondents were contacted again to clarify some unclear findings and the transcripts were reread to verify and confirm the data. It was a step by step process that went from open coding to collecting important words and phrases relevant to the themes in a common set. Overlapping and similar categories were combined to narrow down to the most relevant categories. The connections between the categories were analyzed and results were interpreted considering the theoretical framework and previous studies on workplace conflicts.

4.5. Ethical considerations

According to Silverman (2015) voluntary participation, right to withdrawal, protection of research participants, obtaining informed consent and not doing harm are key ethical issues. The elderly care homes that the field work and study is conducted are well known in Sweden and hence confidentiality if not protected would be the major problem for this study. Since job rotation is often used in the elderly care as a conflict management strategy (Tullberg 2006), the employees and managers interviewed probably know each other in the context of workplace. In addition, the people interviewed may be recognisable to any one working in this field for instance in another elderly home or a keen outsider like relatives to the residents and contact persons. As such, the researcher sought permission, offered voluntary participation and right to withdrawal to both participants during the observations and interview respondents. All names were avoided when making field notes and during interview transcription. Informants are protected throughout the study and were asked to use fictious names when narrating their experiences thus data gathered is anonymous and treated with confidentiality.

4.6. Validity and reliability

Reliability is about consistency of the findings, whether the information is trustworthy and can be taken as true or not (Bryman 2008). For this study, reliability is related to the role and credibility of the observer and interviewer, how questions are asked during interactions and interviews (i.e. were they leading questions or not) and recording, transcribing and categorizing of data. All interviews were explorative with a narrative and descriptive approach. For reliability purposes, all respondents were asked the same main questions, leading questions were avoided and all interview participants were offered the right to contact the interviewer in case they would like to add, or delete anything. They used this opportunity to add more information. Therefore, regarding reliability and credibility, the experiences, behaviours and reflections reported in this report are consistent on the part of the participants.

Validity deals with how effective and accurate a study does what it says it does. Conclusions therefore ought to be well founded (Bryman 2008). Validity is confirmed or denied by looking through the original text for examples and categories and connecting them to the theory (Lincoln 1995). The author therefore provided a detailed theoretical framework that was used to analyse the empirical data. Before performing interviews, two pilot/test interviews were carried out. This helped to improve the quality of questions to gain data for answering the research questions. More to that, respondents' views and experiences are based on their own interpretative system when they narrate, and describe their experiences. So, this method highly offers validity considering employees' and managers' interpretation of what is going on in the workplace. The amount of data retrieved from interviews was very extensive and provided deep insights about experiences of workplace conflicts of employees and managers. Since public elderly care homes follow the same procedures and management, and a detailed methodology on how the study was done has been provided, it is highly replicable and similar findings could be found with maybe some small differences. Therefore, this study thoroughly provides and analyses experiences of respondents. Findings are presented and are regarded as valid and reliable.

Nevertheless, since it is difficult to totally avoid subjectivity in qualitative studies (Hakim 2000), it is possible that as the observer and interviewer, the observer's own values and personal view of looking at things created obstacle for making valid generalization. To minimize this, all that

happened at the observation scene and during interviews was recorded. Theoretically since similar patterns to different respondents were found, the findings could be generalized.

4.7. Limitations

The first week during the observations was so hectic/discouraging and unconstructive as participants were not so free. This is normal as everyone naturally strives to make a good impression but since the author had only one month, that lagged the data collection. However, this later improved. They became more open and freely carried on with their duties without trying to make an impression.

Being that Swedish is a second language to the author and to most of the respondents, this could have caused a barrier like misunderstandings of terms and leaving out important terms both by respondents and the interviewer which may be affected quantity and quality of data collected. To overcome the language barrier problem, follow up questions were asked and clarity was sought by both the respondents and interviewer when needed. Writing down words when unsure of their pronunciation was also used by both respondents and the interviewer, this was so helpful. Besides using semi-structured interviews was beneficial because this provided an opportunity to follow up and ask for explanations and clarifications.

5. RESULTS

This chapter presents a descriptive summary of the empirical findings and it is centered on the experiences, narrations and observations of participants. It is structured in accordance with the research questions in the introduction and the theory. In all cases quotations are used to support the themes from the data collected. A unique finding, which shows a loophole in Hofstede's cultural dimensions, is also described. At the end of this section, a visual qualitative summary model is presented to provide more clarity. Because of anonymity and confidentiality reasons, the different respondents' codes assigned to the respondents in methodology (see table 1 in section 4.3) are used when quoting respondents. Also, all quotations are indented on both right and left and are presented with font 10,5 in regular for interviews and in italics for observation for easier identification.

5.1. Conflict triggers

Based on respondents' interpretations of their experiences of workplace conflict and cultural diversity encounters, three characteristic triggers and five ways in how cultural differences influences collaboration and conflict were identified from the interviews and observation transcripts. Each of these triggers is presented and explained below.

5.1.1. Individual characteristics as reasons for conflict

Respondents' narrations reveal individual traits as sources of conflict. Respondents argued that from their personal conflict experiences, who one is regarding behavior like late coming, personality and attitude like authoritative was responsible for the emergency and resolution of conflicts. Interestingly, often in these narrations, they considered the other party as the basis for the conflict. For example, others were said to be naturally lazy, to be controlling and late comers. As such those colleagues were considered as the problem causers as R6E put it.

> …. well before there were a lot of disagreements because of laziness, where the lazy ones did so little while others did a lot. There was always someone dominating over others in the group, trying to show what has been done and what has not been done, such people are the problem causers…. [R6E].

In agreement, managers also argued that employee behaviors and character had been reason for conflicts. They argued that who one is, is decisive to how the conflict plays out and how it is managed hence the reason for employee rotation.

> …. It is about individual behaviors that cause others to be irritated. Like you always come to work late, you ring to say you are sick at the last moment. These cause others to be so irritated and at last it becomes a big conflict…[R4M].

> …. I think what contributes most to conflicts is about behavior and character. That is the worst because there are people who really behave so badly and it is really very hard to change those people. They are contagious, infect others, form small groups and irritate everyone…[R13M].

No respondent acknowledged their own personal contribution to the conflict but instead accused it on the other party's personality. Although managers argued that individual traits are reason for conflict, employees directly implied personality traits are not justifiable reasons for job rotation as a conflict management strategy.

5.1.2. Relationships characteristics as reason for conflict

Many respondents brought up incompatible interests amongst themselves which they argued were being blocked by colleagues leading to tensions in the team. They narrated a clash of interests regarding *distribution issues* like task allocation, time and attention. Some wanted to equally distribute tasks while others made it impossible to do so by working at a low pace and refusing to take up certain tasks. As such employees' interests were often incompatible and they could not find a way to equally distribute tasks without tension. Certain people always performed lighter tasks which provoked feelings of unfairness and irritations with others who performed heavier tasks. In agreement, during observations in all teams' unfair distribution of tasks was noticed, constantly provoking most of the tensions. Each person perceived the task allocation in their own way and this triggered continuous tension.

> …. we often have so many issues regarding task distribution especially when the tasks are tough/heavy. Some people do not want to carry out any tough task and as such those who perform them feel it is unfair and then they begin to quarrel about it with those whom they consider lazy. Others think that they have a lot of responsibility and so do not want to take up more while others do not want to take any responsibility at all…. [R11E].

In some teams' people only wanted to work with specific individuals based on cultural backgrounds or friendship which led to small groups with in teams. These small groups also decided who to work with and who not to work with which made collaboration difficult, especially since on call work is common in elderly care. It was difficult for them to communicate amongst themselves when their interests were incompatible.

> …Like I said before, people form and work in small groups depending on country of origin and as such those who are in the out-group are considered a problem often disagreeing and finding fault in others…. [R13M].

Additionally, groupings were also based on length of experience. The more experienced formed their own group while the less experienced also formed their own. Both groups considered their work methods and ethics as the acceptable order. The more experienced did not want any change in working methods.

> …Those who have worked longer and have gathered a lot of experience also provoke conflicts because they do not want to change and work with those who are new… [R7T].

Because of incompatible interest and unwillingness to take on certain tasks, informal leaders developed in teams. These too provoked tensions in the group as team members sometimes considered their leadership as authoritative. This difference in whose word ought to be final and given more authority in a team provoked tensions in teams as everyone wanted their word to be considered as the final word.

> …If there is one who often takes the lead, all get irritated at that person and often say, well she comes again, the one who thinks they know it all, always wanting to direct and lead others...…. [R13M].

Furthermore, respondents narrated how it was hard to work with so many different professions. They got irritated sometimes because they did not understand why they were told to perform different professions' tasks. The nursing assistants wanted to ensure a quality life, the therapists wanted them to get ample therapy while doctors wanted them to get all medication on time. Because each professional group sent requests to nursing assistants on what to do concerning what, they in most cases felt it was not collaboration.

> *…. well it is not really collaboration here in my opinion. They (doctors, nurses, physicians, therapists, social workers etc.) sit and agree on everything then they throw it here to us the nursing assistants to implement and you know what the managers just accept. Ohh for example three years ago we were asked to start working until 22.00, we told the managers we don't like it,*

it's not in favor of our health, personal lives and all they said was it had already been decided

for the entire city...... [An interaction during observation 6th feb 2017].

The above quote shows employee inability to understand why they ought to collaborate with other professional groups who do not involve them during decision making. Clearly for collaboration to work both parties ought to be both informed, involved and to understand why they do what they do. It also shows management inability to clearly communicate reason for change which ruins collaboration. Indeed, empirical data reveals that such collaboration difficulties were created by communication difficulties and as such affected relationships as others were perceived as blocking interests.

Ten of the fifteen respondents' narrations show that irritations, tensions and problems emerged from poor communication with their colleagues. For instance, some did not consider it necessary to inform others when taking breaks and when they will be late which provoked irritations in the teams. Respondents also said that during communication most people misunderstood each other either because they were not listening or because of communication styles making collaboration more difficult. Managers argued that employees were not directly communicating yet, communication and how it is perceived by the parties was decisive for how tensions played out.

> …. misunderstanding during communication, it is always expecting that someone else should have done it. Someone else should have taken the report, instead of saying so and so has not done their job. They cover up, then they begin to get irritated about small issues which combine into a big disagreement…. [R4M].

In agreement, the above was also noticed during observations. Because of failure to understand each other, people were seen choosing who to work with and not work with. Sometimes employees communicated to each other in authoritative ways, this triggered unintended misunderstanding.

> *....one employee asks why they have not had the report and another (who I will call knowitall) replies because there is nothing to report. Knowitall starts to distribute the day's tasks and demands that all do as she says. I look around and everyone is so pissed at her. Even though all through the time they are always the quiet ones in meetings, this time they react and tell knowitall they would like to know what she herself will do. She replies I will watch and direct you all on what to do.... [Observation 7th feb 2017].*

The above observation is a good example of how authoritative communication brings tensions in work groups. Probably if Knowitall's tone was calm and friendly when asked about the report,

involved others in deciding on task allocation and nicely talked with colleagues they could not have ended up in disagreements. For effective collaboration, all parties ought to be involved and clear during communication.

5.1.3. Systems characteristics as symptom for organization inadequacies

The empirical data reveals that system conditions like workload, stress, passive leadership, unclear roles, work organization and problem-solving procedure are issues contributing to the emergence and continuation of tensions/conflicts. Increased work tasks were said by all respondents as a reason for tensions and misunderstanding. During meetings workload was blamed on delegation from other professions, a new law that led to increase in work hours, increased documentation, employee shortage and management style.

> ….. here it is workload. You know every morning when we come to work, someone calls and says they are sick and the administrator and manager are not able to bring in a substitute worker. So, we are forced to do extra work. This brings a lot of disagreements between us who inform on time and/or rarely sick with those who inform late and the manager/administrator who fail to find a substitute employee…. [R1E].

Indeed, during the observations one could clearly see workload caused by employee shortage. There was no single day during the five weeks of observation that all employees on a shift were fulltime employees. In workplace meetings, sick leave was constantly brought up. Employees expressed feeling forced to work with substitute employees who in most cases were unfamiliar with elderly care duties and lacked the required work ethics. As such they argued they were overworked. They also viewed workload as reason for increased sick leave and stress which allowed room for occurrence and continuity for irritations among employees. This was also asserted during interviews. Respondents said their work environment made collaboration difficult.

> …. so many people are irritated here mostly because we are overworked, Yes, it is like that. So many sick leaves and we get part-time employees who are unfamiliar with the job, it is tough for us permanent employees and it leads to irritation. I experience that it is easy to disagree and end up in conflicts when there is increased workload and when we have shortage of employees…. [R5E].

Considering such observations and narrations, the questions: *"What resources are needed by staff here to work well? What kind of support do you think you need to collaborate? How is the physical work environment?"* were asked. Six respondents (four managers and two administrators) implied time and passion for elderly were required and were the most fundamental resource one needed. On the contrary nine respondents said they needed more employees, work equipment, collaboration skills, and equal task distribution for them to be able to function well. They expressed always finding themselves in the same irritations even after rotations. In addition, they argued that, because they work 6-days/week with a lot of employee shortage, they got easily irritated at each other.

> …It is rare to be off-work 3 days in a row, we are always working and have no public holidays. That is so tiresome and irritating that one is never off for some days in a row if one does not take a vacation. …. [R5E].

Additionally, to understand how employees and managers dealt with collaboration difficulties and tensions at work, the question, *"how do you deal with the tensions that arise here at work?"* was asked. All respondents said they tried to talk about it themselves and involved the manager if needed. The manager has the sole responsibility for ensuring that collaboration works. Unfortunately, employees argued management was passive when it came to identifying and dealing with conflicts. 10 respondents blamed management for the continued conflicts and argued that managers did not take immediate action when conflicts occurred. Where they did, they used rotation as a conflict management tool. Such passive management was viewed as moving the mountain to another place, as R3E below put it. This led to employee distrust of the management's ability to solve problems.

> …. it's a scandal that managers have not been able to solve issues and disagreements for so many years. In department - and - they are always in conflicts and all managers do is to break up the department by moving the employees to other parts of the city instead of solving the disagreement. They just shift a mountain to another section to explode there and break up relationships instead of solving the issue…. [R3E].

Considering that, passive leadership was being held responsible for collaboration difficulties and triggering tensions and conflict escalation. The question *"what are the available channels of information on how to deal with collaboration difficulties?"* was asked. Both managers and employees said that they received information during weekly meetings and yearly planning day.

Some respondents said that for them they used sick leave to show that collaboration was not functioning and that there were tensions at work. When asked about the routines, all 15 respondents said the routine was to try and solve the issue on your own. If that fails then contact the manager. Friends, trade unions and immediate manager were said by employees as the channels they turned to during conflicts. In contradiction, managers said there existed other channels like a city therapist, occupational health care services, skyddsombud, police and HR department all of which could be used by employees.

Consequently, it is possible that management is just being blamed as the cause of conflict occurrence because of difference in interpretation. Employees might think that passive leadership is the problem but maybe the real problem is very high workload for both managers and employees. The high workload allows no chance for management to be active leaders even if they have the motivation and skill.

5.2. The role of cultural backgrounds in conflict

Employees were asked to narrate their encounters with those from diverse cultures. During their narrations, they all in a way expressed what an awesome learning experience it is. They had learnt different recipes, different customs, values, virtues, new language abilities and even got exposure to other cultures views on elderly care.

> ….one can learn many things, other cultures take better care of the elderly than we do here in Sweden. They move in with their old people and take care of them from home. People from such cultures when they come here, they have far more respect for the elderly than we do here in Sweden…. [R7T].

However, they were very keen to say that during these interactions they encountered many challenges and these challenges escalated issues into conflicts. Themes below show how culture escalated difficulties into conflicts.

5.2.1 Language barrier

Respondents reported misunderstanding because Swedish is a second language to most people working in elderly care. The respondent expressed how this caused a lot of tensions especially when they tried correcting each other because colleagues were not honest during communication.

> …many times, immigrants are not good at the language which makes it hard for the employees and the residents to understand each other. When you ask, have you understood, they say yes but

when they have not, they do not want to admit because it shows that they have failed and so they decide to lie..... [R8A].

For any communication to succeed, both parties ought to understand each other and to be honest. The above quote displays how lack of understanding and honest during communication blocks interests to timely execute the tasks. Interestingly, respondents argued that, sometimes colleagues said they understood even when they did not understand which caused irritations later.

5.2.2 Silence and voice as a tool for respect

...I work with people from Iraq, Iran, Africa, Brazil and all these different people see things differently. There has not been a time in a meeting where we the Swedes who are the minority here at work have disagreed with the managers' opinions that the immigrants have said anything to disagree with the manager. All they do is yes and ok. You know they just keep quiet and then complain later because they cannot disagree with the manager, this irritates us....... [A conversation during observation 6th feb 2017].

The above observation extract is clear example of how silence and unused voice triggered more tensions at work. Furthermore, that observation agrees with respondents' expression of lack of solidarity amongst them which triggered tensions. They argued that most of their immigrant colleagues were silent during weekly meetings and planning days, times that they ought to voice issues and most times their yes meant no and vice versa. This brought misunderstandings between them and their Swedish colleagues who felt their colleagues were not being cooperative as respondent 10 explained.

.... we often end up in disagreement with colleagues from Eritrea, Somalia and even Iran for not expressing themselves before the manager. They just cannot disagree with the manager. We often get so irritated at them and it grows into big issues .... [R10E].

The above quote shows how different people perceive voice and silence differently. R10E might argue that immigrants are silent because they do not want to disagree with managers, but that might not be the case. It could be that they are being respectful and only talk when asked. It also shows how human perception differs and how humans easily get irritated when others do not do as they do. To R10E silence was agreeing with the manager and therefore encouraging the status quo. To immigrants it was respect.

5.2.3 Values and beliefs

People's values differ depending on their cultural background. Immigrants valued family and group loyalty over work which provoked tensions at work. For example, some immigrants would rather come late because they had to take care of a family member. Respondents expressed how they didnot understand this behavior.

> …one time I asked… who is from Iran always comes late and wants to leave early why she is always late, she told me that its none of my business, she must take care of her grandmother and cannot leave so early. And that life is not all about work but about family. I was so pissed because I didnot ask her about her family or what is more worth/valuable but she went on to explain all that…. [R1E].

The respondents also expressed how they had different views on how one ought to take care of the elderly. They explained how over the years they found themselves differing in values and beliefs. For example, some immigrants argued those who did not regularly come to check on their relatives were uncaring. These differences in views escalated tensions especially because they could not understand the why behind the action as evidenced below.

> …People from Iran, Gambia, Eritrea, Somalia and even Iraq that I work with have a different view on how one must take care of the elderly. It is clearly different from mine and most of the time I feel they are trash talking my opinion. They believe those who do not come to check on their elderly always are not caring but that is far from facts……. [R7T].

More to that, respondents also argued that the difference in beliefs often escalated conflicts and caused trivial issues to grow into big issues especially when they could not understand each other's view. Clearly immigrants who believe in group loyalty viewed those who did not come often to visit as uncaring which provoked tensions when they said it to their Swedish colleagues who saw this as a total misunderstanding of their beliefs. The below observation explains this difference in value and belief quite well.

> *... a lady who is up and very sad tells the nursing assistant she misses her children and would like to see them. The nursing assistant promises to call them later. The nursing assistant gets emotional and asks to sit and talk. she begins to talk about how one should never become self-centered, should care about their extended family and put their interests first. One should value and respect elders and superiors always. You see that lady is sad because her children have not come and why have they not come? Because they trust the system to take care of their elderly……*
> [Observation 23rd jan 2017].

The nursing assistant's view shows how she perceives those who do not often visit their relatives as uncaring. And clearly shows her collective values.

5.2.4 Difference in perception of respect

In addition, respondents argued that their varying view on respect escalated tensions. Immigrants' view on respect was one that meant silence when the manager spoke, leaving the seat for the manager, following orders and always coming to visit the elderly. This to their Swedish work colleagues was arrogance. This different perception of respect often escalated issues even amongst those who had worked long together.

> ….one time we forgot to distribute medicine in the right boxes and the Iranian nurse came here, she was very angry at us. We told her to start distributing the medicine. She felt so disrespected because for her as a nurse she thinks she has authority to decide over us nursing assistants….. [R1E].

The above quote clearly explains how different individuals' have different perception of respect. The nursing assistants probably out of respect informed the nurse of his or her duties. The nurse on the other hand took it as disrespect from nursing assistant, a position below nurses. Indeed, one action can be interpreted differently by different individuals often because different cultural lenses.

5.2.5. Power distance, leader as a symbol of authority

Clearly there is a difference to how the Swedes and immigrants view the leaders at work. While the Swedes could easily approach the manager, and voice their concerns, immigrants on the contrary waited for orders and viewed the manager as superior authoritative beings who must be respected. Managers felt this could be reason for silence in meetings as immigrants feared to make mistakes.

> …. Swedish people have a different view to the manager and that view is not authoritarian like what the immigrants have. Immigrants see a manager as another superior person with authority who decides and one does not talk back to the manager …. [R13M].

In agreement, during observations it was evident that immigrants left their seats for the manager as a way of showing respect and they did not talk back. An act that their Swedish colleagues never understood and often ended in disagreement when brought up.

> *…. the manager comes to the department to check out the situation, a lady from Iraq who I am observing immediately moves away from the seat where she was seating while drinking her tea.*

All the others stay except for her, she asks the manager to take her seat and listens as the manager speaks.... [Observation 2nd feb 2017].

The above is one of the many observations of immigrants leaving their seats for the manager and waiting for orders to carry out their tasks which clearly triggered tensions. They also reveal immigrants not daring to say anything to the manager because of fear to lose their jobs.

Despite cultural differences escalating conflicts, when managers were asked: *what are the major differences if any between managing multicultural teams and culturally homogenous teams?* Only religion was said to be a difference and it was also the only issue brought up at the end of each interview when respondents were asked if they would like to add anything. Whether this is a challenge is an issue for another study and time.

5.3.   Unique reaction to conflict in relation to Hofstede's assumption.

Surprisingly, the results also revealed patterns of individuals who were individualistic but with backgrounds from collective cultures and vice versa. They were silent during observation but when respondents were asked to narrate, and describe how they had reacted to previous conflicts, their narrations show a reaction that theoretically does not depict their cultural background thus, portrays a loophole in the Hofstede assumption. See below quote for some clarity.

> …. I personally try not to talk about it. When I had just started working here, most times when I worked with -- (a colleague's name) I worked more than her, she always just left her work to me and went outside to smoke. Even when I knew she was using me, I just kept quiet, I am afraid to disagreements. I want to live in harmony…... [R2E].

R2E although born and raised in an individualistic country, where individuals learn to speak up right from childhood was afraid to speak up. However, managers in their narrations show a way that directly depicts their cultural backgrounds when explaining how they reacted to a conflict that had already escalated. For example, R13M below.

> …. I let them to narrate and describe the issue from their respective opinions. I also expect that each employee reflects on the issue and identify their individual role in the conflict. It's a relationship there. One must be reflective and come up with ways to collaborate so that they do not end up in a conflict again.…... [R13M].

Both the above two quotes are from respondents that are pure Swedish but both reacted differently to a conflict. R2E stayed silent while R13M left the solution generation to the concerned parties expecting them to think as individuals. Interestingly, during conflicts, some immigrants reported to directly and immediately seek management intervention like R3E below.

> ……I always go straight to the shift manager because I wanted the manager to be part of solution generation so we can solve it and stop talking about it and stop conflicting……. [R3E].

R3E preferred to both immediately and directly involve a third party/manager to solve the conflict. This was neither observed or even expected considering that R3E was always silent during the observation. Although this (unique reaction to conflict) has only been found in interview transcripts and not in the observation transcripts, it's relevant to consider and thus will also be analyzed and discussed in the next chapter in 6.5.

5.4. Qualitative visual explanatory model of the findings

For purposes of clarity and flow of the next section, the results have been summarized in the explanatory model below.
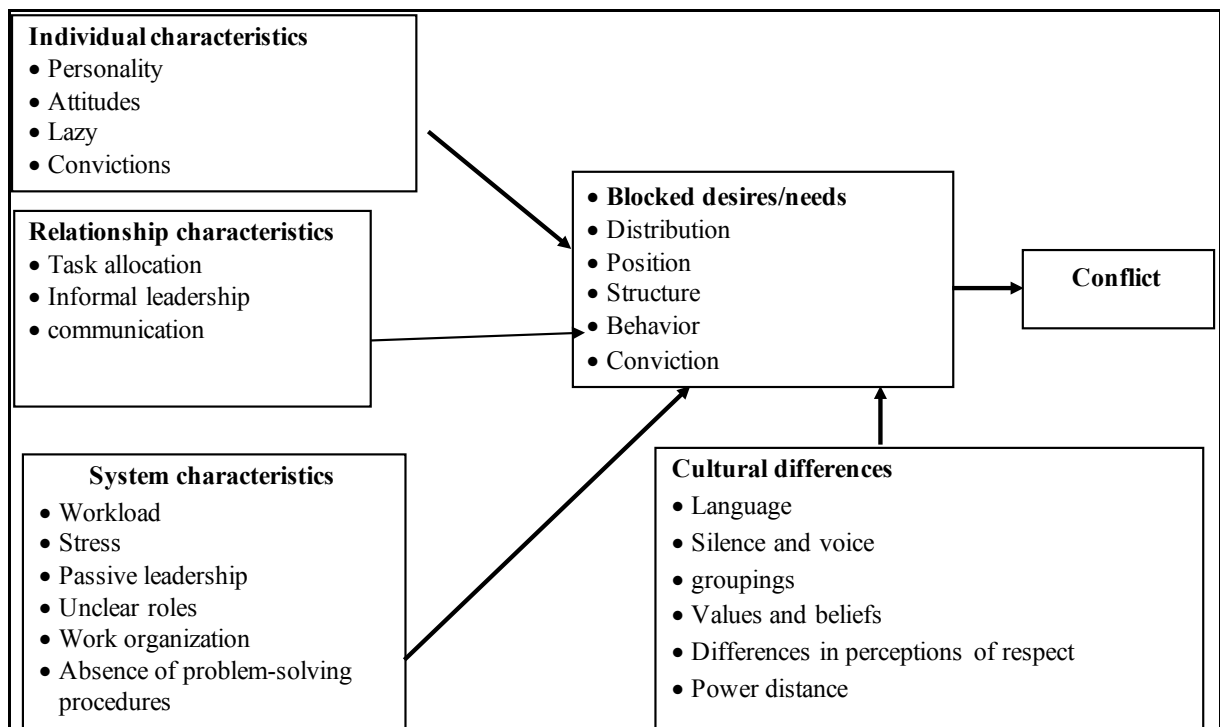

Figure 1. Contributing factors to workplace conflicts in elderly care.

6. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the results are analyzed and discussed. The analysis uses the themes in the above summary (5.4). First, the individual characteristics, relational characteristics and system conditions as conflict triggers are analyzed and discussed in relation to the three levels of conflict and five themes of conflict discussed in the theoretical framework and previous literature. Secondly, cultural differences role is then analyzed and discussed using Hofstede cultural dimensions and previous literature. Then reaction to conflict is analyzed and discussed showing the inadequacy of Hofstede's cultural dimensions. This section ends by showing the relationship between conflict management and cultural background.

6.1. Individual characteristics

From the results, it is evident that individual characteristics, for example personality differences, behavior patterns and perception like late coming or laziness provoked irritations among employees. Individual personality was considered as the source of problems and irritations, and was blamed for contributing to *distribution issues* like workload and time stress. When disagreements from these distribution issues continued, it led to *distribution conflicts*. This resonates with the findings of Kim et al (2016) and Hopen (2013) that individual factors are reasons for workplace conflicts. To deal with this, management used employee rotation to different elderly care homes, a measure that was always directed to the individual in question. Interesting, as Jordan (2015) argues that when conflicts are looked at from this perspective then measures to deal with the conflict are directed to the individual. Nevertheless, results reveal that employee rotation did not entirely deal with the problem. More to that, because the individual personality was considered the cause of the misunderstanding, individuals felt attacked because it is difficult to separate behavior from individual personality. Certainly, conflicts due to individual behavioral patterns are difficult to resolve (Jordan 2015).

Similarly, results reveal that individual conviction regarding what is right or wrong and what individual methods work or do not work to be responsible for the occurrence and reoccurrence of conflicts. Every individual wanted their personal order to apply even when everyone else was not in agreement. This led to tensions when changes were to be made and led to *conviction conflicts*. This potentially fits with Josefsson & Ryhammar (2010)'s argument that disagreement on

grounds of convictions and values are usually intense because it is a matter of goals, needs and values that are difficult to negotiate away. Employees felt they could not work according to their own deep felt values and considered this to be because someone else in the group was authoritative or lazy. Because it was about individual personal convictions, even discussions, dialogue and negotiations with individuals to change was limited as no person wanted to change their personal views. Instead they made morale judgements about each other like she really has no manners, she is a late comer etc. Clearly, respect is important when dealing with irritations triggered by individual convictions (Jordan 2015).

6.2. Relationship characteristics

More to that, results reveal that tensions emerged from a difference in interest, for example, regarding task allocation and informal leadership and were often created by communication difficulties. This shows that, clear communication is vital for collaboration to be successful in elderly care (Tullberg 2006). Conflicts were viewed as issues that could be resolved. For instance, they thought if they equally distributed tasks amongst themselves, avoided delegation from nurses, therapists, doctors and if informal leaders stopped acting authoritatively, they could then easily collaborate. This echoes Jordan (2015)'s assertion that when conflicts are looked at from a relational outlook, it is natural for parties to assume that issues should be resolved. Based on results, employees have not been able to understand the criteria for task allocation. They felt tasks were unequally distributed which they perceived as unfair leading to collaboration difficulties. Further, collaboration difficulties were experienced when dealing with different professional groups. Different professional groups delegated duties to nursing assistants, this nursing assistants argued was not collaboration because they were told what to do and not involved in the decision-making process hence prompting irritations. This concurs with Matziou et al (2014) assertion that, the absence of inter-professional collaboration is responsible for tensions in elderly care homes. Considering that Matziou' (2014) findings are based on UK elderly care, it can be concluded that, both UK and Swedish elderly care homes need inter-professional collaboration.

In the absence of active leadership, often informal leaders developed within a team. These informal leaders' interests collided with team members' interests especially regarding *position issues* like roles and tasks that people wanted to have/avoid which led to *position conflicts*. From

this it could be deducted that management inactivity undermined cooperation amongst employees and allowed room for informal leadership which created tensions in the group. While informal leaders needed to ensure equal task allocation, work colleagues had specific tasks they wished to perform. This competition on who should or should not carry out some tasks and non-compliance between group norms is ground for conflicts (Kim et al 2016). And remarkably, it is responsible for emergence and continuation of tensions in the team especially because only one individual could perform that task on a day. No wonder Jordan (2015) argues that in position issues, only one party can achieve the goal and that conflicts could be negative position conflicts. Unsurprisingly, respondents narrated how these tensions continued and affected the relationship leading to certain people never talking to each other. Such issues were not immediately brought to management attention which also allowed for continuation of the status quo. Conflicts arising from position conflicts are difficult to resolve and could also be informal in nature (Jordan 2015). Clearly leadership ought to actively work with conflict to identify frictions and deal with them. This could improve collaboration among employees (Sportsman & Hamilton 2007, Matziou et al., 2014).

Further, as mentioned before, communication style largely created feelings of dissatisfaction especially because they each had to collaborate with different professional groups and nursing assistants could not understand why. Kim et al (2016) Josefsson & Rymmar (2010) and Tullberg (2006) suspected that communication skills are responsible for collaboration difficulty and conflicts in elderly care. This finding in a way validates their suspicion. Communication style regarding tone, body language and volume during communication also determined how relations functioned at work. When the tone was authoritative, tensions emerged. Jordan (2015) upholds that, communication shows the interpersonal relations like attitudes towards each other, verbal and non-verbal communication and determines the acceptable and unacceptable attitudes and behaviors. Fairly, other work colleagues' behaviors were considered unacceptable for instance late coming, silence in meeting, speaking authoritatively to others etc, and these behaviors led to *behavioral conflicts.*

6.3. System characteristics

As mentioned, results also imply system conditions like work organization, resource allocation, leadership and role clarity as responsible for the emergence and continuation of conflicts. For instance, employees argued there was often employee shortage which led to workload and those working easily got irritated towards each other. Continued tensions from system characteristics is evidence for organization/management problems (Jordan 2015). Thoroughly, the results reveal unclear goals, passive leadership and lack of a well-functioning forum for problem-solving as blocking employee desires/needs for a conducive and calm working environment thus leading to conflict. This somehow resonates with Nelson & Cox (2003) argument that organizational values like work and resource allocation are basic requirements for successful collaboration. Such *structural themes* had consequences for task and time distribution among teams. For example, the change in shifts and delegation from nurses forced employees to dedicate more time to nursing duties and not to nursing assistant duties. These triggered *structural conflicts* especially because change was viewed as increase in tasks. The continued tensions arising from organizational changes like delegation from nurses and change in length of shift are symptoms of management failure to clearly justify the reasons for changes and support employees during changes. This in turn has triggered feelings of dissatisfaction since employees considered changes as an increase in workload. This could be what Jordan (2015) means when he asserts that, disagreements due to structural issues are often due to changes because they come with consequences regarding distribution of time.

Conclusively, it is impossible to solely attach responsibility for conflict occurrence to one theme. All the above three levels (individual, relationship and system) provoked the five conflict themes of distribution, position, structure, behavioral and convictional. Which in turn led to distribution conflicts, position conflicts, structural conflicts, behavioral conflicts and conviction conflicts. Therefore, when looking at the individual level, it is important to understand the role that involved parties' personalities and life situation contribute to blocking desires and understand what should be done. This for example could be through dialogues with specific employees. On the other hand, at the relational level calls for understanding what the obstructed desires are, and what has happened to the relations between parties. While at the system level, organizational development like ensuring goal clarity, well-functioning leadership and approaches to problem-solving could be good options (Jordan 2015).

6.4. Cultural background's role during collaboration and conflict

Results revealed five themes that show cultural differences role during conflicts. These themes are each analysed and discussed below using theory and previous literature.

6.4.1. Language difficulty as blocking interests/desires

Although Swedish is the official language at work, most employees have a different language as a mother tongue which looking at the results has contributed to mistaken cultural perceptions and unintended irritations. Everybody has understood the message using their already existent perceptions leading to unintended conflicts. This shows culture is more than language (LeBaron 2003) and that language is a surface layer of a culture and a channel for culture transfer. Therefore, sharing a language should not be assumed to mean sharing a culture and vice versa. This is evidenced by the continuous misunderstanding due to language even though they are all speaking Swedish. No wonder authors like Tribe & Lane (2012), LeBaron (2003) and LeBaron & Pillay (2006) argue for cultural fluency and not just learning the language to reduce cultural conflicts. Thus, one ought to use the learned foreign language to understand the values and beliefs which are the fundamental of a culture. The rituals, symbols, heroes and values that make up a culture, although could be easily seen, cannot be understood easily (Hofstede et al 2010, Schein 2010).

6.4.2. Perception of respect and silence as sign for power distance dimension

The analysis revealed that employees from countries with high power distance expected to be told what to do and they did not disagree with the manager. When asked why *"it is not in my blood", "I cannot do that"*, *"I was not raised that way"*, were often the reply. This displays that, power distance has its roots in family (Hofstede's et al 2010). Those statements are evidence of how they are raised to be obedient towards others and independent behavior is discouraged. Those replies also shows how respect to elders and those in authorities are held all through childhood. Managers said they experienced that employees from Gambia, Bosnia, Somalia and Iran considered them as superiors hence unequal to them. They expected to be told what to do and kept a distance between them and managers. This echoes Hofstede's et al (2010) assertion that large power distance cultures often consider managers as superior good fathers to be respected and feared. Thus, employees expect privileges for managers.

Even the perception that silence, standing while the manager sits coupled with unwillingness to initiate communication with the manager resonates with large power distance where high context communication is favored. Such high context communication encourages lack of clarity and complexity during conflict resolution (LeBaron 2003). On the contrary, their colleagues from Sweden were not amused by this because for them being from a small power distance culture, managers and employees are equal beings hence none should be given special treatment. Therefore, one could say that those from small power distance cultures are task demanding subordinate initiatives while those from large power distance cultures are good at task demanding discipline (Hofstede et al 2010). This difference in power distance constantly escalated already existing tensions with colleagues who could not understand reasons why colleagues showed respect differently and used silence/voice differently. Based on which power dimension an employee was, they thought their own method was better than others thus wished colleagues could adopt it. Clearly, we each look at our context, experiences, happenings using our cultural lens and therefore judge good and bad with them (Hofstede et al 2010). No wonder LeBaron & Pillay (2006) argue that conflicts are always cultural. Power-distance was also noticed in employees' relations with nurses, doctors, therapists and even among themselves. Employees from large power distance cultures said yes to everything and those from small power distance cultures were keen and analytically sought to understand. This perhaps is because in small power distance cultures, people have independent minds and so can easily ask without just taking orders (Hofstede et al 2010).

6.4.3. Silence and voice as sign of collectivism vs individualism dimension

Similarly, results reveal silence and voice being used differently. Immigrants used silence in all meetings and feared they would lose their jobs and get a bad recommendation if they spoke. Therefore, they chose to maintain harmony and avoid direct confrontation. This finding is a good example of the role of individual versus group. In collectivist societies interests of group prevail over individual interest since group loyalty both practically and psychologically is favored (Hofstede et al 2010). The Swedes on the other hand, spoke up arguing that speaking one's mind is honest. This is a clear trait of individualistic cultures (Hofstede et al 2010). It is not surprising that the immigrant groups chose group ties/relationships over work tasks. And formed small groups with colleagues from the same country which confirmed each group in its own cultural

background identity. Such divisions often lead to the creation of in-groups and out-groups rather than breeding mutual understanding (LeBaron 2003), a good example of a "we" consciousness. An issue that escalated the already existing irritations. Employees from individualistic culture (here the Swedish) acted with their own interests. They freely voiced their views to ensure that self-interest and employer interests coincide, an expectation of employees from individualistic cultures (Hofstede et al 2010). No wonder the respondents did not accuse their Swedish colleagues of forming small groups within a team that caused tensions. On the contrary results show those from collective cultures forming strong in-groups, which they stayed loyal to leading to divisions in a team. The argument that voice is better than silence shows how culture is the vehicle for identifying and distinguishing what is good/bad, defining and shaping the conflict (Worchel 2005, Kaushal & Kwantes 2006). To the Swedish respondents' voice was honesty and silence was arrogance while for their immigrant colleagues, silence was respect and voice when not asked was disrespect.

6.4.4. Values and beliefs as evidence for cultural differences

Further on, results reveal that differences in values and beliefs also escalated tensions. For instance, those who valued relationship and believed in strong in-group loyalty were easily irritated when others did the opposite and vice versa. Continuous explanations led to even more misunderstanding. Naturally, values are unconscious to those who hold them and hence, cannot be discussed nor directly observed and understood by outsiders. Thus, continuous explanation as to why one did what she or he did led to more irritations for both parties hence leading to value conflicts (Schein 2010, Hofstede el al 2010).

Therefore, this shows the need for knowledge about different cultures if one is to interact with different cultures. People ought to learn about other cultures' symbols, heroes, rituals and try to gain an intellectual grasp of where their values differ from their own. Although one will not change their own values, this will hopefully minimize the value conflicts (LeBaron & Pillay 2006). In addition, since there are continuous irritations regardless of silence and voice being showed differently, the author reasons that neither silence nor voice are perfect measures for conflict resolution and in this case, are not to blame for the continuous irritations. On the

contrary, this shows employees and management need to learn how to deal with tensions among diverse cultures (Brew & Carins 2004).

6.5. Unique reaction to conflict in relation to Hofstede's assumptions analyzed and discussed.

According to Hofstede et al (2010)'s collectivism vs individualism dimension, employees from collectivist backgrounds are most likely to let conflicts escalate because of the high context communication. However, parts of the empirical data revealed that some respondents like R3E from collective cultures did not leave conflicts to escalate but rather directly tackled the issue and immediately sought management action. Since such low context communication according to Hofstede el al (2010) is a trait of an individualistic culture this finding proves otherwise and shows a loophole in the theory.

Consequently, narrations of individuals with individualistic cultural backgrounds' show that they were interested in group harmony and were afraid of confrontations. R2M for example said: "*I just kept quiet, I am afraid of disagreements. I want to live in harmony*" *......* [R2E].

Such an attitude delayed early problem-solving. This is a clear loophole in Hofstede's cultural assumption regarding people from individualistic cultures who he argues do not let conflicts to grow bigger and consider confrontations as healthy.

This could be explained in many ways. First, these differences could be because individuals react immediately when the issues directly concern their values and do not react when it does not directly concern their individual values and therefore evidence that cultural generalizations are not the entire story (Brew & Carins 2004 and LeBaron 2003). Secondly, it's possible to argue that R3E went straight to the manager because in collective cultures conflicts are for all. But that would be a shallow and stereotyping way of looking at this finding. Considering that the respondent went direct and quickly instead of letting it to escalate is the issue.

However, it could also be possible to argue that this is because of globalization, experience, exposure or change of perception. And therefore, new concepts need to be considered when explaining cultural backgrounds. Possibly, Nathan (2015) and Holden (2008) could argue that

this is evidence for culture change and therefore need to get off the Hofstedian grip. If that is so, before coming to that conclusion, one needs to clearly show how values (since they are the cores of culture) have changed overtime otherwise that would also be a shallow way of looking at this finding. The point here is that, this finding cannot be explained by the chosen theoretical framework.

6.6. Link between cultural differences and conflict management

Throughout the analysis and discussion, the results have revealed a link between culture and conflict management. This is an issue that previous studies have suspected (Worchel 2005, LeBaron & Pillay, 2006) since conflicts are always cultural. The findings imply a dilemma for both managers and employees to work together based on their view on power distances and consciousness (I vs WE). Since in large power distance cultures people are very reluctant to raise issues as evidenced from the results. This undermines early identification of issues to be dealt with because if there are lots of frustrations these will not be raised in meetings when the manager is present, making it more difficult for the manager to become aware of issues that need to be resolved and play an active role in early resolution. Hence silence encourages the reproduction of the status quo.

Considering that, results show a relationship between cultural background and conflict management, and yet there is no consensus across cultures or situations on what constitutes a conflict or how events in the interaction should be framed, the ways of dealing with the conflicts are diverse and parties ought to understand each other' views. Because clearly, inability to do so, is more likely to escalate the conflict. Since although the views themselves are neutral, negative motives are easily attributed to someone who begins from a different end of the continuum (LeBaron 2003, LeBaron & Pillay 2006). Many ways could be employed to tame conflicts. For example, those involved in conflict could meet face to face and explain their perspectives and stories with or without the help of an outside mediator. Alternatively, a trusted employee could talk with each of those involved to help resolve the disagreement (Brew & Carins 2004. LeBaron 2003).

7. CONCLUSION

This section summarizes the study by portraying fulfillment of the research purpose. In addition, knowledge contributions and the implication of the research study to work-life, individuals and future researchers are outlined. Further recommendations for future research are suggested.

As mentioned in the introduction, the purpose of this study was to explore experiences of conflicts in the elderly care to identify, describe and analyze what causes conflicts in the public elderly care homes and how collaboration and conflict is managed, with specific emphasis on the potential role of cultural differences. In meeting the purpose, this study has revealed that, individual characteristics (like personality, attitudes and behaviors), relationship characteristics (like task distribution, informal leadership and communication) and system conditions to be responsible for emergence and reoccurrence for conflicts. The majority of the narrations directly implied system conditions/issues like work organization, workload, passive leadership and unclear roles coupled with behavioral aspects like communication style as the main reason of continuous conflict in elderly care. The study also revealed that not much was done to support employees during conflicts. Instead, there was confirmation to the fact that the responsibility mainly rests on the individual employees to learn to collaborate and where one fails seek management help. Hence, this echoes the need for continuous employee and management involvement in working with conflict management.

Additionally, this study revealed that cultural differences come with misunderstandings and aids in escalation of trivial matters into workplace conflicts. Not far from Worchel (2005), LeBaron & Pillay (2006) and Hofstede et al (2010), this study shows that individuals look at life experiences with their own cultural windows and maybe consider people from different cultures as special but still hold on to their own cultural views. Because home is always normal, unfortunately, there is always no normal position in culture and conflicts since both parties are right based on their own cultural backgrounds. This therefore echoes both the need to continuously improve intercultural communication skills and cultural fluency. And the need to consequently continue working to understand and develop collaboration and conflict management skills, these are extremely relevant for HR, employers, employees and governments in this era of globalization and continued immigration.

Conclusively/Finally, there is a need to continue experimental work looking at cultural diversity and personality role on workplace conflicts. Only then could one be able to conclude the role of cultural background in workplace conflicts. In this study, it can be cautiously concluded that, conflicts triggers are individual, relational and organizational. And in diverse workplaces, lack of cultural fluency serves as an escalating factor to workplace conflict. Hence at this point, actively working with developing cross-cultural competence, collaboration and conflict management skills as a way forward would be worth investing in.

7.1. Contributions to knowledge

The study adds to a pool of earlier research on workplace conflict for example, it brings to light how personal traits, conflicting interests and system conditions provoke frustrations between parties. These frustrations compel the parties to act often leading to workplace conflicts. Besides, the research area is a contribution especially because conflicts in elderly care has been a subject of continuous discussion and it covers only diverse groups.

So far, most studies on workplace conflicts have focused on the leaders' role (e.g. Tullberg 2006), stress (Josefsson 2012), reflections and experiences of elderly care (Josefsson et al 2007), changing roles (Rämgård 2012) and have used quantitative theoretical framework models (Josefsson et al 2007, Cuesta & Rämgård 2016, Hauer, 2013). In this study, however, the researcher has tried to shift the focus to both managers and employees and incorporated qualitative theoretical models. These models have not been employed in studies on workplace conflicts in elderly care before. Therefore, this theoretical approach is itself a contribution to knowledge. Additionally, this approach contributes to knowledge through shedding new light to the fact that two different qualitative theories can be combined and yield result. By suggesting that a combination of the robust collaboration model and Hofstede's cultural dimensions are useful lenses through which to view the triggers of conflict, escalation and management of workplace conflicts.

Besides, the methodological approach used for this study is also a contribution. Prior studies on workplace conflicts have used quantitative methods like questionnaires and surveys (See Rämgård 2012, Josefsson et al 2007, Hauer 2013). This study however, was carried out through

a combination of comprehensive participant observations with in-depth open ended interviews. This qualitative approach provided an opportunity for difference and for unique findings hence adding to the body of knowledge and therefore providing for balance to knowledge. Also, as stated in the introduction, this qualitative approach answers to the call and recommendation by LeBaron (2003), Rämgård, (2010), Rämgård et al (2015) and Hauer (2013) for qualitative studies on workplace conflicts.

Additionally, this study contributes to knowledge on cultural diversity role during conflicts by showing that there is a big link between cultural differences and conflict management. This is through explaining how cultural backgrounds are decisive in how people perceive, interpret and react to conflicts. It has also brought to light the view that silence and voice at work are perceived and used differently basing on cultural background. As such, the author argues that this could be a good basis to consider when developing conflict management strategies, especially for managers in elderly care and those of culturally diverse groups.

7.2. Implications and some recommendations

Since the results have revealed that employee rotation is not a suitable conflict management strategy, this implies need to find a new method for dealing with the conflicts. For example, talks with the specific employees, providing feedback, conflict coaching and developing job descriptions could be better options for dealing with conflicts arising from individual specific traits. Also, since this study revealed that learning a language does not always mean learning the culture, the author argues that an integrated approach that involves learning both the surface and core of a culture like values could be adopted when educating nursing assistants and immigrants as they learn the language. However, it should be tailored to suit and address contextual needs for it to be relevant and yield results.

Considering that the analysis revealed that employees found certain behaviors unacceptable, it is important that employees work on how to communicate with each other and agree on how much they can stand up for each other. This calls for management to consider employees' attitudes towards each other' behavior. This could be through considering how much responsibility employees assume for their work assignments, the work pace and treatment of clients, following of fixed routines and length of breaks. In this regard, a lot could further be done to easy collaboration at this relational level. For example, through mediation between people, continuous investigation of facts, common evaluation of outcomes of change process, decisions on disputes by the responsible manager and transfer of parties that just cannot work together etc. In a culturally diverse context, communication skills remain a fundamental backbone in the success of collaboration and conflict management. Therefore, acquiring intercultural communication abilities would be beneficial and a good starting point.

Similarly, since change was viewed as increase in task and triggered structural conflicts, this implies/suggests a need to introduce organizational development to deal with conflicts arising from the systems level. For example, to ensure role clarity, management could clearly draft routines, ensure clear communication channels and provide clear information on procedure for collaboration and conflict management. This could minimize conflicts arising from system conditions. Because although different channels for conflict management existed, only the immediate manager, trade union and police were trusted by employees. It is embarrassing that

the HR department could not be trusted and the location of HR offices was not even known to most people. Basing on that, the author suggests that it is not enough to have these policies, routines and procedures for conflict management. These should be clearly communicated, easily accessible, and trustable and the management needs to constantly be on the alert looking out for potential conflict triggers and dealing with them.

Further, since this study revealed that, different use of silence and voice creates a dilemma for management especially regarding early identification of issues to be dealt with, this implies need to understand what voice and silence means to different individuals. And the need for managers to actively seek out employees' differing points/perceptions to silence and voice. Managers could consider speaking privately to people who are always silent. They could also demand that everybody speaks out. It is likely that demanding voice coming from managers could force the silent employees to abide and speak up, since results reveal that they were good at task demanding discipline. Additionally, identifying and assigning responsibility for identifying conflict issues to specific employees who are always silent could be another way that managers could use. Henson the storyteller' saying, "*if you cannot fight them, then join forces with them*" (Henson, n.d.) could be a constructive tool here. These presumably know the signs and would bring them up considering the old English saying, "*It takes a thief to catch a thief*". Management could then ensure that they avail them with instruments for regularly gathering information on collaborative climate and problems in the organization. All this should then be followed up and attended to in groups with concerned parties' representation, as such they could identify sources of frictions and tensions and come up with ways of dealing with them to prevent reoccurrence.

Consequently, managers could ensure that they are continuously searching for clarity, looking through the inner causes for issues that are leading to irritation. This might be better than employee rotation, because although resolutions are important, they are only successful in times of clarity. Further on, as already mentioned, education about different cultures' views on voice and silence to both management and employees could be worth embarking on. This could allow both to gain an intellectual understanding of why silence and voice is used differently. It could also hopefully help employees understand how their individual self contributes to conflict emergence and reoccurrence. And how they could deal with it to ensure collaboration and minimize conflicts. A good starting step for education could be done through continuously spreading information about different cultural values on company vouchers, send emails like

weekly reminders. It could also be through incorporating in the workplace norms and ethics. However, this should be in line with the context, otherwise it could result into development of stereotypes.

7.3.   Suggestions for future research

Considering that this study was explored from the perspective of the public elderly care homes, exploring workplace conflicts in private elderly care homes and elderly home-help services centers while incorporating in the elderly experiences too would be worth of additional attention. It would also be interesting to see a similar study with a different methodology which could agree or disagree with the findings. Importantly, carrying out a comparative study on the role of cultural background during conflicts would be worth exploring. This could be through studying three types of teams. One purely individualistic, feminine with small power distance, the second team with participants from countries with large power distances cultures, collective and masculine. And the third team mixed. Hopefully, such a study would clearly show cultural role during conflicts and how culture influences the conflict management style. In addition, a study that uses a non-essentialist theoretical framework looking at personality, identity and agency during conflicts would be worth exploring. Even a study looking at the role of silence and voice during conflicts in multicultural groups would be relevant and interesting.

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APPENDIX 1. INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction

I will introduce myself and talk about the topic and objectives of the study.

All ethical issues like anonymity, confidentiality, right to withdrawal, consent to record the interview are discussed before the interview starts.

Demographic questions

1.What is your education background?

2.How long have you worked for this organization?

3.What attracted you to the work you're doing in this organization?

4.Would you give a brief overview of what you do in your work?

Conflict

5. What in your opinion is conflict?

6. Could you please describe your experiences of collaboration frictions, communication issues and conflicts in your daily work? Give examples please

7. How do you yourself deal with the situation? How do others react and act?

8. What have been the consequences come with such irritations, collaboration frictions, communication issues and conflicts that you have described?

9. Would you describe incidents or examples of conflict experiences that you have handled here at work? (managers only)

10. What issues might trigger irritation, annoyance and tension at this workplace?

Collaboration.

11. When you work with a team or a group, disagreement about direction, decisions, and even mission and vision, are common. Could you please describe a time when you handled a disagreement? How did you approach the situation and what was the resolution?

12. Think about a time when you as a manager and a reporting employee disagreed about a direction, how you handled a situation, a performance review, or suggestions for improvement. How did you handle the disagreement? (only to managers)

13. As a manager, I'm sure you have experienced situations in which employees were in conflict and disagreed with each other on important issues. What is your preferred approach for helping the employee resolve the conflict? (only to managers)

14. The question which of the below themes might constitute a certain conflict potential in your work place?

Distribution issues (money, workload, time)

position issues (e.g. who should be assigned a certain role, who should have the last word)

behavioral issues (treatment or communication style between colleagues or between manager and staff, ways of handling work assignments)

convictional issues (which approach should serve as a guide, which are the best methods)

structural issues (order of delegation and authority, distribution of responsibility and roles, routines, rules and regulations and order of priority, organizational structure)

16. How is the organization's attention called to collaboration difficulties that need to be addressed?

Organizational diagnosis

17. How does the organization work to make it easy for employees to solve frictions and problems early on and constructively?

18. Whom can employees turn to incases of more severe collaboration problems?

19. How do employees gain access to the information that they need incases of frictions and tensions?

20. Who is responsible for ensuring that collaboration exists at work?

21. Could you please describe a time when there were any unresolved issues regarding division of responsibilities, roles and collaboration in teams? How did you deal with it?

21. How do different units and work group work together?

22. Have you had any disagreements/different opinions over concrete goals to be attained and which procedures/working methods should be used to attain goals? If yes, how do you deal with them?

Support systems

23. What resources in form of time, qualifications are needed by staff here to work well? Are they given access to them?

24. What well-functioning routines and procedures for dealing with the work assignments and problems that emerge exist? Do staff have access to adequate equipment?

25. How is the physical work environment?

26. How does the information between teams' function?

Relations and culture.

27. How are problems with collaboration and conflicts dealt with?

28. What differences do you as a manager notice among different employees during conflict?

Nature of cross-cultural encounters

29. Would you describe incidents or examples of experiences from working and interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds in your work?

30. What do you find helpful when you have that kind of of experiences/resources?

31. Are there any differences in managing diverse teams? Are there differences in managing teams with people from different cultural backgrounds, as compared to managing teams where all employees have a Swedish background? (managers only)

32. In general, how in your opinion do cultural background contribute to workplace conflict behavior?