



The Role of Team Trust and Team Conflict on Innovative Performance of Multicultural Teams in the Restaurant Business

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Abstract

This research investigated the contribution of team trust to team conflict and team innovation in the restaurant business. In particular, this research extended prior research by exploring the influence of team trust in the area of cross-cultural teams. Moreover, this research advanced prior research by examining the moderating effect of team task interdependence that might possibly influence the impact of team conflict on team innovation. Survey data were collected from 103 restaurant multicultural teams in the five most visited tourist cities in Thailand, namely Bangkok, Chiangmai, Pattaya, Krabi, and Phuket. Data were collected from multiple sources to prevent common method bias. Partial least squares structural equation modeling was used for data analysis. The results indicated that the teams with a high level of team trust tended to exhibit a lower degree of conflict ($\beta=-0.543$; $p<.001$) and achieved a higher degree of team innovation than the teams with a low level of team trust ($\beta=0.274$; $p<.001$). The results also showed that team conflict mediated the relationship between team trust and team innovation. Moreover, team-task interdependence moderated the negative relationship between team conflict and team innovation ($\beta=0.211$; $p=.003$).

Keywords

Multicultural team, Diversity, Team trust, Team conflict, Team innovation

Introduction

In the fast-growing world of business shaped by globalization, the restaurant business is spotlighted due to its low entry barriers and its capability to generate a rapid flow of revenue (Choi et al., 2018; Tong et al., 2019). To stay competitive, restaurants need competitive advantages in terms of innovation, which is required for the restaurants to differentiate themselves from others, and to respond to the dynamic needs of consumers (Cho et al., 2018). In many big cities characterized by multicultural environments which are also major tourist destinations, many restaurants hire multicultural teams to help them achieve successful innovation (Cox, 2019). Even though cultural diversity among team members can potentially foster innovative performance, it can also cause challenges that would inhibit them from successful innovation (Brett, 2007; Østergaard et al., 2011; Van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). Research in cross-cultural management suggested that cultural diversity can create unpleasant relationships and tension among team members, thereby limiting team synergy, which is a key factor in achieving team innovations (Collewaert & Sapienza, 2016; De Wit et al., 2012). From the theoretical perspective, this phenomenon can be explained by the social identity theory, which states that people tend to socialize with those who share the same cultural backgrounds, but on the other hand discriminate against others who are different from them (Jang, 2017). Given that cross-cultural diversity in a team could be productive and counterproductive to team performance, it is crucial to understand some characteristics of cross-cultural teams that might motivate members from diverse cultures to overcome negative perceptions caused by cultural dissimilarity, and work together effectively to produce innovative performance for a restaurant.

Among key characteristics of a team that are crucial to enhance collaboration and performance of members, team trust was frequently proposed in the literature as a crucial characteristic of teams that makes members develop healthy relationships with each other thereby facilitating effective interaction and collaboration (Krawczyk-Bryłka, 2016; Paul et al., 2018). Given the positive contributions of trust mentioned in the literature (De Jong et al., 2016; Grossman & Feitosa, 2017; Williams Middleton & Nowell, 2018), it could be likely that members of cross-cultural teams that have high levels of trust may be more adaptive to culture differences of other members, thereby lowering tension and conflict in the team. As good relationships and cooperation among team members is fostered by trust, the cross-cultural team could, as a result, have a higher potential to achieve innovative performance.

Despite the importance of trust that has been extensively supported in previous research, there are some research gaps that need more clarifying evidence. First, prior research has tended to focus mainly on the role of trust in monocultural teams (Hendarsjah et al., 2019). Studies of trust in the area of cross-cultural teams has been very limited, especially in the context of the restaurant business (Curşeu & Schrujjer, 2010; Han & Harms,

2010; Simons & Peterson, 2000). Second, while trust was frequently linked to various positive outcomes in teams (Costa et al. , 2018; Rezvani et al. , 2019) , research that investigated the role of trust in the area of innovative performance of teams has been limited. Third, prior studies in this have been unclear regarding the process by which trust could promote innovative performance for the team. In particular, it is crucial for research to clarify what could be some mediating factors that might possibly explain the positive contribution of trust on team innovation.

The main objective of this research was to fill the research gap mentioned earlier. In particular, this research was conducted to explore the contribution of team trust to innovative performance of cross-cultural teams in the restaurant business. In addition to the direct association between team trust and team innovation, this research explored whether the contribution of team trust to team innovation could be mediated by team conflict. Conflict was suggested in prior research as a dysfunctional team process that can easily happen in cross-cultural teams (Brett, 2007; Østergaard et al. , 2011; Van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). Team conflict was chosen as a mediating variable in this research because it was shown in literature as a factor that potentially caused dissatisfaction and frustration in team members, thereby damaging team synergy and innovative performance (Tekleab & Quigley, 2014). In addition to this mediating role of team conflict, this research explored whether the contribution of team conflict on team innovation could be moderated by team-task interdependence. Given that task interdependence reflects a high level of team communication and cooperation, which is crucial for team creativity (Echem & Chan, 2018; Fong et al., 2018), it could be possible for the role of team conflict on team performance to be especially more important when the nature of work that the team operates is low in task interdependence. The results from this research not only fill the research gaps mentioned earlier, but also provide important insights and recommendations for companies in the restaurant industry to enhance the potential of their cross-cultural teams to create innovation outcome for their business.

Literature Review

Innovation in Cross-cultural Teams

Innovation is defined as processes of interaction among people allowing them to introduce new ideas together, new products, or new processes that benefit their organization (Scozzi et al., 2017). Innovations within organizations tend to be generated by the synergy of employees pooling and integrating their diverse ideas, knowledge, and skills (Karlsson & Skålén, 2015). For this reason, cross-cultural teams have become significantly more common and important for organizations in achieving innovation (Cox, 2019; Lisak et al., 2016). Stahl et al. (2010) defined a cross-cultural team as a group of individuals with different

cultural backgrounds joining together to work towards mutual goals to benefit their organization. In particular, cultural diversity among team members provides new and various information and knowledge that helps expand the existing team knowledge base, which is the foundation of innovation development (Lee & Nathan, 2010). Several studies also found that teams with cultural diverse structures tend to be more innovative than monocultural teams (Lee & Nathan, 2010; Nathan & Lee, 2013). On the other hand, cultural diversity can also cause threats and challenges to multicultural teams (Mittelmeier et al., 2018; Velten & Lashley, 2018). For example, Cox (1994) argued that a rise in cultural diversity can decrease team cohesiveness and cause communication difficulties among team members. Hofstede (1980) argued that a team comprising of people from different cultures would face challenges in developing shared values among themselves.

Team Trust

Trust is a very important concept that explains different levels of social phenomena, especially the process of social interaction (Balliet & Van Lange, 2013). In the literature, the concept of trust has been applied in a variety of contexts at different levels including individual, team, organization, or even society in general (Costa, 2003; Kanawattanachai & Yoo, 2002; Phungsoonthorn & Charoensukmongkol, 2018). This study focuses on interpersonal trust at a team level. Trust is viewed by scholars as a very important factor for developing effective team processes and high-performance teams (Mach & Baruch, 2015). Team trust focuses on relationships among team members (Mach & Lvina, 2017; Williams Middleton & Nowell, 2018). Scholars generally appear to conceptualize team trust as the integration of interpersonal trust, which includes expectations of trustworthiness and the willingness to accept vulnerability in all team members to others in the team (Costa et al., 2018). For example, Jarvenpaa et al. (1998) argued that team trust is a positive mutual belief among team members that other members will behave according to their mutual commitments, and be honest and not take advantage of other team members under any circumstances.

Team Conflict

Among issues that may be caused by the dissimilarity in cultural backgrounds, conflict is one of the most serious, and it is often found in cross-cultural teams where the cause is tension among team members with diverse backgrounds and opinions (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). Conflict refers to an emotionally driven disagreement concerning personal and political preferences, values, and beliefs, as well as interpersonal styles, but these may not be work-related (Tekleab & Quigley, 2014). Scholars characterized conflict as tension, frustration, anger, hostility, animosity, annoyance, and distrust among group members (Tekleab & Quigley, 2014; Wickramasinghe & Nandula, 2015). Prior studies have revealed

that conflict can cause dissatisfaction and frustration in team members leading to negative reactions, and this could limit team synergy and their innovative performance (Charoensukmongkol et al., 2016; Tekleab & Quigley, 2014). Once conflict is detected in cross-cultural teams, team members tend to cooperate less, and hesitate to share and contribute diverse resources to their team, which discourages team cohesion and innovative performance (Wickramasinghe & Nandula, 2015).

Contribution of Team Trust to Conflict and Innovation in Cross-cultural Teams

In the literature, team trust has dominantly been found to play a vital role in facilitating team relationships and innovation, which are the final desired outcomes of work teams (De Jong et al., 2016; Grossman & Feitosa, 2017; Williams Middleton & Nowell, 2018). Team trust encourages team members to take risks, to rely on other team members, and to engage in team processes more openly and cooperatively (De Jong et al., 2016; Grossman & Feitosa, 2017). Thus, trust among team members enables a smooth workflow in teams by fostering their cooperative behaviors, brainstorming, and team cohesion among team members (De Jong et al., 2016; Fung, 2014; Grossman & Feitosa, 2017). Trust also promotes belonging among team members as well as their overall satisfaction (Pinto, 2015). Teams with a high level of trust tend to deal less with conflict among team members, and have better interaction patterns, problem-solving, and productivity (Fung, 2014; Grossman & Feitosa, 2017). With the ability to motivate team members to openly accept other team members, even though they are culturally different from them, team trust can potentially help members of cross-cultural teams overcome challenges caused by the cultural diversity existing in cross-cultural teams. Trust facilitates team cooperation and motivates members to communicate, engage in the team process, and share ideas openly (De Jong et al., 2016; Grossman & Feitosa, 2017). This allows cross-cultural team members to work closely together, perceive fewer differences among themselves, and cooperate and share information and knowledge with one another, thereby reducing conflict and fostering synergy in the team (Han & Harms, 2010). When conflict is reduced among team members with a high level of trust, the team can benefit from effective synergy, and that can establish a greater pool of knowledge. This can potentially enable cross-cultural teams to achieve successful team innovations (Cheung et al., 2016; Fung, 2014).

Regarding all supporting arguments, trust among team members is predicted to be negatively associated with conflict, and positively related to team innovation. Moreover, given that conflict is negatively associated with innovation (Collewaert & Sapienza, 2016; De Wit et al., 2012), this research predicted that conflict might also mediate the positive relationship of team trust and team innovation. Therefore, the following hypotheses are presented:

H1: There is a negative association between team trust and team conflict.

H2: There is a positive association between team trust and team innovation.

H3: There is a negative association between team conflict and team innovation.

H4: Team conflict mediates a positive association between team trust and team innovation.

Although team conflict was proposed to have a negative association with team innovation, this research considered the possibility that it may happen, particularly in a team that had a low level of team-task interdependence. Task interdependence refers to the extent to which an individual team member needs resources and support from other team members in order to perform his or her job (Somech et al., 2009). Task interdependence is an important part of group dynamics because it can promote team communication and cooperation, which is crucial for team creativity and innovation (Echem & Chan, 2018; Fong et al., 2018). Teams with a high level of task interdependence tend to have better cooperation due to their diverse resources (Duan et al., 2019). Considering this positive role of task interdependence, even when conflict happens in a team, the quality of task interdependence among members may still persuade them to work together effectively to create innovative performance for the team (Lee et al., 2015). Therefore, it can be predicted that the negative impact of conflict on team innovation might be mitigated when the degree of task interdependence in the team is high. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H5: The negative association between team conflict and team innovation is moderated by team-task interdependence

Methods

Sample and Data Collection Procedure

This research focused on team-level analysis. The data were collected from multicultural teams working for restaurants located in the five most popular tourist cities in Thailand namely Bangkok, Chiangmai, Pattaya, Krabi, and Phuket which are also home to a number of foreign workers with diverse cultural backgrounds. The researcher initially contacted the persons who are in charge of the restaurants (supervisors or owners) asking for their permission to collect data from their team members before having questionnaires distributed. Judgment sampling was used for sample selection. All participating teams were required to meet the criteria that the team must have at least three members with different nationalities and use English as their operational language. A total of 195 restaurants were approached and qualified; however, only 103 of them agreed to participate.

The questionnaire package included a cover letter stating clearly the research objectives and instructions. It was distributed to each team including supervisors and team members who were on duty at the time of data collection. Participation in the study was

voluntary. The participants were clearly informed about the anonymity of the data collection. The reason why the data were collected from both the supervisors and team members was to avoid common method bias. This is the method that has been frequently implemented in prior research (Eisenbeiss et al., 2008; Jiang & Chen, 2018). The data of team trust and team conflict were collected from the team members, while the data about team innovation were collected from the supervisor. The number of team members in each team varied across each restaurant sample. The final number of participants was 620 including 103 supervisors and 517 team members having 46 different nationalities. Characteristics of the sample of restaurant teams are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Characteristics of the sample

Characteristics	Descriptive statistics
Gender	Male: 279 (53.97%) Female: 238 (46.03%)
Age of team members	Mean: 40; S.D.: 7.7
Team tenure	Less than 1 year: 88 (17.02%) 1 year: 106 (20.50%) 2 years: 112: (21.66%) 3 years: 97 (18.76%) 4 years: 38 (7.35%) 5 years: 7 (1.35%) More than 5 years: 69 (13.36%)
Team size	Mean: 16.54; S.D.: 13.85
Ethnicity of team members	White: 40 (7.74%) Black: 13 (2.51%) Hispanic: 5 (.97%) Asian: 455 (88.01%) Pacific Islander: 4 (0.77%)

Measures

Team trust was measured using the six-item interpersonal trust scale adopted from the study of Kucharska and Kowalczyk (2016). All items were rated on five-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Sample items are “*My partners were open and honest when problems occurred,*” and “*My partners helped me make critical decisions.*”

Team conflict was measured using the four-item conflict scale drawn from Jehn (1995). All items were rated on five-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Sample items include “*There is friction among members of your team,*” and “*There are personality conflicts evident in your team.*”

Team innovation was measured using the four-item team innovation scale adopted from Lovelace et al. (2001). All items were rated on five-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Sample items are “*The quantity of innovative products (or ideas) by the team is large,*” and “*The overall technical performance of the team is high.*”

Team task interdependence was measured using the three-item scale developed by Campion et al. (1993). All items were rated on five-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). A sample item is “*Within my team, jobs performed by team members are related to one another.*” The scores from team members were averaged to create the mean score at the team level.

The data that measured team trust and team conflict were collected from individual team members and were averaged to create the aggregate scores for the team.

Control Variable

This study included five control variables including gender composition, age of team members, team tenure, team size, and team task interdependence. These variables were found in previous research as factors that affected team outcomes. The gender ratio was measured by the percentage of male to female members in the team. Age of team members was measured by the average age of all members. Team tenure was measured by the average months of work tenure of all members. Team size was measured by the number of team members. Team task interdependence was measured by the scales mentioned earlier.

Data Analysis Method

Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used for data analysis. PLS-SEM combines principal component analysis, path analysis, and a set of regressions to generate estimates of the standardized regression coefficients for the model's paths and factor loadings for the measurement items (Chin & Newsted, 1999). PLS-SEM is more appropriate than covariance-based SEM because it requires a smaller sample size, and it is more efficient when data are not normally distributed (Hair Jr et al., 2016). These features of PLS matched the small-sample data used in this research (n=103). Moreover, the result of the Jarque-Bera test of normality and the Robust Jarque-Bera test of normality also indicated that none of the main variables are normally distributed, thereby making PLS-

SEM appropriate for the nature of the data. PLS-SEM estimation was performed using WarpPLS version 6.0.

Table 2 Correlation among constructs VS. Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Variables	Cronbach's alpha coefficient	Composite reliability coefficient	CONF	TRUST	INNO	TIND	GEN	AGE	TEN	SIZE
CONF	.964	.973	(.949)							
TRUST	.968	.974	-.543**	(.929)						
INNO	.869	.911	-.598**	.591**	(.848)					
TIND	.918	.948	-.386**	.521**	.434**	(.927)				
GEN	n/a	n/a	-.204*	.111	.098	.234*	(1)			
AGE	n/a	n/a	-.286**	.314**	.188	.324**	.371**	(1)		
TEN	n/a	n/a	-.061	.218*	.121	.289**	.283**	.521**	(1)	
SIZE	n/a	n/a	.213*	-.181	.063	-.175	-.238*	-.172	-.023	(1)

Note: * p-value < .05, ** p-value < .01; CONF=team conflict, TRUST=team trust, INNO=team innovation, TIND=team task interdependence, GEN=team gender ratio, AGE=average age of team members, TEN=team tenure, SIZE=team size; The square root values of AVE are displayed in the parentheses.

Results

Before estimating the structural model for hypotheses testing, a series of measurement model estimations were performed. First, the convergent validity was examined by using factor loading values. The ideal value of factor loadings is .7 or above (Hair, 2010). The results were satisfactory. Second, discriminant validity was tested. Fornell and Larcker (1981) suggested that the square root of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of each construct must be higher than other correlations involving that particular construct. The results reported in Table 2 show that this criterion was met. Third, reliability of a measurement instrument was measured using two values which were the Cronbach's alpha

coefficient and composite reliability. These values must be at least 7 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The results in Table 2 show that this criterion was also met. Results from PLS-SEM estimation are reported in Figure 1.

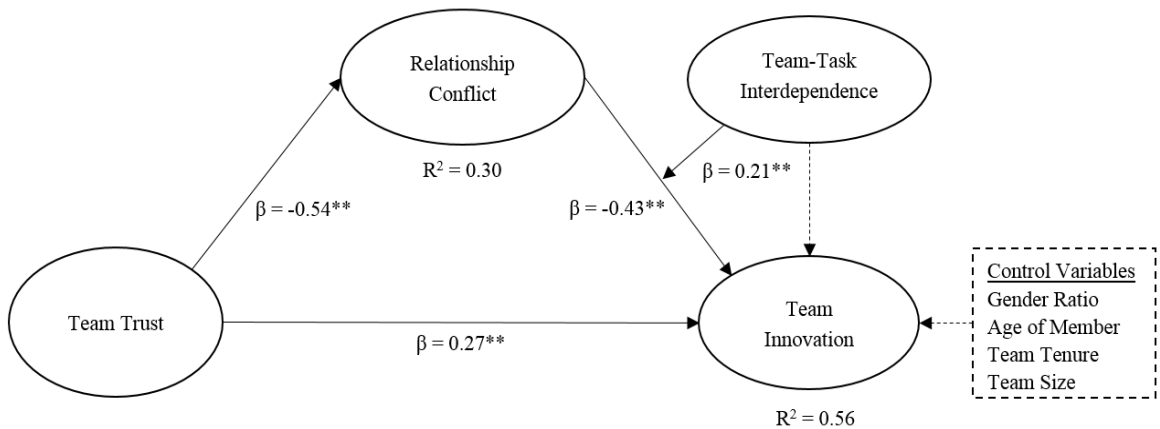


Figure 1 Main model results

Note: - ** and * means p-value <0.01 and ≤0.05

- Solid lines refer to significant paths and dashed lines refer to non-significant paths

Hypothesis 1 proposed a negative association between team trust and team conflict. The results showed that these two variables were negatively related ($\beta = -0.543$; $p < .001$). The relationship was also statistically significant. Thus, hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 proposed a positive relationship between team trust and team innovation. The results showed that these two variables were positively related ($\beta = 0.274$; $p < .001$). The relationship was also statistically significant. Thus, hypothesis 2 was supported.

Hypothesis 3 proposed a negative relationship between conflict and team innovation. The results showed that these two variables were negatively related ($\beta = -0.427$; $p < .001$). The relationship was also statistically significant. Thus, hypothesis 3 was supported.

Hypothesis 4 proposed that the positive relationship between team trust and team innovation is positively mediated by conflict. Before testing the mediating effect, the direct association between team trust and team conflict was estimated. The result supports their negative association which was statistically significant ($\beta = -0.543$; $p < .001$). The test of the mediating effect was conducted using the Sobel test suggested by Preacher and Hayes (2004). The results supported the positive mediation of conflict ($t = 4.475$; $p < .001$); the result was also statistically significant. Therefore, hypothesis 3 was supported. Considering the direct association between team trust and team innovation that was statistically significant, the mediating effect of conflict was a partial mediation.

Hypothesis 5 proposed that the negative association between team conflict and team innovation is moderated by team-task interdependence. The moderating effect was tested by including the interaction between team conflict and team-task interdependence in the model estimation. The results showed that the beta coefficient of the interaction term was positive ($\beta = 0.211$; $p = .003$) and was also statistically significant. This result suggested that the negative association between team conflict and team innovation became weaker for the team that had high team-task interdependence. The moderating effect of team-task interdependence is presented in Figure 2.

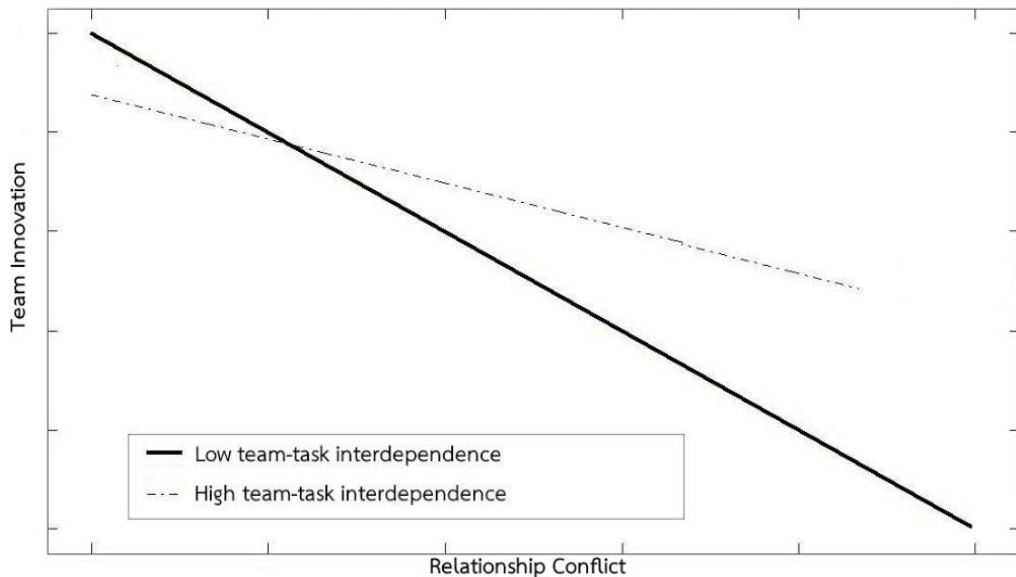


Figure 2 Moderating effect of team-task interdependence

From the comparison of the regression slopes between teams characterized by high and low task interdependence, it was clear that the negative association between team conflict and team innovation was weaker for the team characterized by high task interdependence. Thus, hypothesis 5 was supported.

Regarding the effect of the control variables, the results showed that team innovation was positively associated with team task interdependence ($\beta = .099$; $p = .095$), gender composition ($\beta = .054$; $p = .236$), team size ($\beta = .227$; $p = .002$) and team tenure ($\beta = .035$; $p = .322$); but was negatively associated with the average age of members ($\beta = -.070$; $p = .178$). Only the effect of team size was statistically significant.

Discussion and Conclusion

Results Discussion

The objective of this research was to investigate the contribution of team trust to conflict and team innovation of multicultural teams in the restaurant business. The results from PLS-SEM estimation supported all four hypotheses proposed in this study. In particular, the results showed that teams with a high level of trust among members tended to demonstrate a lower degree of conflict, and a higher degree of innovation than teams with a low level of trust. In addition, the analysis of the mediating effect also supported that the high level of innovation that teams with a high level of trust achieved could be explained by reduced conflict. The higher level of trust within a team makes members more open to other members, thereby lowering interpersonal conflict in the teams. As a result, team members are willing to dedicate and share more resources which are required for developing new ideas and innovation. Moreover, the analysis of the moderating effect showed that conflict tended to have stronger negative effects on team innovation in the teams with a low level of task interdependence. Overall, these results are consistent with previous research which found that team trust was an important characteristic of teams that allow team members to work effectively together with other members (De Jong et al., 2016; Grossman & Feitosa, 2017; Williams Middleton & Nowell, 2018). The findings are also in line with previous research which found that team trust can promote collaboration between people from different cultural backgrounds (Gefen et al., 2005; Rockstuhl & Ng, 2015). In particular, the findings are consistent with the research showing a link between team trust and innovative performance (Cheung et al., 2016; Krawczyk-Bryłka, 2016). Furthermore, the results confirmed that team size and average age of team members had significant impacts on team innovation. This means team innovation tends to be higher in the cross-cultural teams that have many members than in the cross-cultural teams that have a few members, and also in the cross-cultural teams that have younger members rather than older team members.

Research Contributions

The results from this research also provide several contributions to prior team trust studies. Firstly, the results about the contribution of team trust in the cross-cultural team provided additional evidence to prior team trust research that has rarely investigated team trust in multicultural teams. Secondly, this research showed extra evidence regarding the benefits of team trust related to conflicts and team innovation in the restaurant business, which was previously unexplored in a research context. This finding additionally proved the essential role of team trust that can promote the effectiveness of the multicultural teams. Thirdly, the results that supported the mediating effect of conflict that linked team trust to

team innovation also added new evidence to clarify the mechanism by which team trust could result in innovative outcomes for the team.

Suggestions for Future Research

Because research about trust in multicultural teams is still limited in number, there are some suggestions for future research that can add more contributions to this area of study. First, future research may investigate the contributions of trust to other desirable outcomes in intercultural teams besides team innovation, such as team performance, team viability, and team unity. Future research may also explore the effect of trust in intercultural teams in other industries and contexts. Lastly, future research may compare the impact of team trust between intercultural teams and monocultural teams, or examine whether the impact of trust could be influenced by the degree of cultural diversity of team members.

Suggestions for Restaurant Businesses

This study provides some recommendations for the management of restaurants. Given the highly competitive nature of the restaurant industry, having a team of culturally diverse employees who can work together to create innovative ideas for the restaurant is necessary for them to enhance their business success. However, restaurants need to manage their workforce to ensure that cultural diversity in the team will create synergy instead of causing difficulty for team members to collaborate. Given that trust was found to prohibit conflict and promote team innovation, this research suggests that restaurants that employ a cross-cultural workforce may need to consider a team trust development program for their employees to enhance their ability to work effectively with colleagues from different cultures. Literature has suggested that trust among members in cross-cultural teams can be developed through experiential-based training. A staff team can develop team trust by learning about the cultures of their teammates. In the training, staffs from different cultures can share knowledge about their culture with other colleagues so that team members can understand the nature of cultural norms and any expectations that are different from theirs. This can allow them to develop cross-cultural awareness, and to know how to behave appropriately when working with people from different cultures. Apart from this training, the restaurants also need to have their staff team engage in some interrelated work activities that give them the opportunity to interact and learn how to collaborate with colleagues from different cultures. When team members understand each other and can respond appropriately to the cultural characteristics of other members, it can promote the ability of the team to coordinate their knowledge and skills, which is a supporting condition for the team to produce innovative outcomes for the restaurant as a result.

Limitations

Some limitations of this research also need to be acknowledged. Firstly, the results were obtained from data collected from a small sample in Thailand. This small sample size may affect the generalizability of the findings. Secondly, the measures of the key variables were obtained from subjective evaluation, which may contain subjective bias. Thirdly, there could be some other variables that might influence the findings such as team leadership, management structure, and team ethnic dominance. Fourthly, given that the data were collected using a cross-sectional approach, the results could be interpreted as only correlations between variables.

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