Task and Relationship Orientations of Thai and American Business Students' based on Cultural Contexts

Bahaudin G. Mujtaba, Nova Southeastern University
Email: mujtaba@nova.edu

Abstract:

Global managers and educators should understand that cultural differences cannot be cured and, therefore, they should be accepted if professionals are to build strong relationships in order to work effectively in diverse workplaces and educational settings across the globe. Some of the common differences are across high and low context countries as well as those of individualistic and collectivistic cultures. To explore such differences, this paper focused on the cultural differences of Thai students in Thailand and American students from the United States of America (U.S.A.) in the business programs.

Using the t-test statistical analysis, the results of 77 Thai respondents' show that they tend to score similarly on the relationship-orientation and task-orientation; however, this is not the case when their averages are compared to the scores of respondents from the United States. The results of 87 American respondents are higher on both orientations when compared to their Thai counterpart. For practical application, some of the common cultural differences are presented for managers and educators who work in diverse settings, such as in the United States or Thailand. Finally, suggestions and implications for future studies are presented.

Key words: Culture, business students, high context, low context, individualistic, collectivistic, relationship orientation, task orientation, Thailand, the United States.

Introduction and Cultural Values

In the world of international business, understanding cultural behaviors are paramount to succeeding in cross-cultural management. Navigating between individualistic and collectivistic cultures and recognizing the shifts in diverse cultures can have a direct impact on how an international firm performs. People of an individualistic culture tend to value the needs, concerns, and identity of oneself above the needs of the community. As concluded by Mujtaba, Luk, Murphy, and Saowakul (2007), a collective culture's members tend to focus more on world peace, being helpful to others and group interests instead of an individual's needs. As can be seen from existing research data, presented on Tables 1.1 and 1.2, such values as true friendship and inner harmony are ranked as more important by Thai respondents (collectivistic culture) than people from the United States (individualistic culture).

The instrumental values of being polite, forgiving and helpful are ranked as much more important by people in Thailand than respondents from the United States. On the other side, the value of being independent is ranked much higher by respondents in the United States than people in Thailand. Research on the cultures of Thailand and the United States demonstrates that the people of a collective culture tend to rank being intellectual, broadminded, and having self-control as more important than respondents from an individualistic culture. These cultural differences and behavioral tendencies also carry over to the workplace as well as the educational environments.

Table 1.1 – *Terminal* Values Mean Ranking (1 = most important)

Values	USA	Thailand
Family Security	1	1
Health	2	2
Accomplishment	9	10
National security	15	15
A world at Peace	16	11
Equality	12	13
Self-respect	3	6
Wisdom	8	4
Freedom	4	5
A comfortable life	5	9
Mature love	6	12
Inner Harmony	11	7
True friendship	7	3
Social recognition	17	17
An exciting life	14	16
A world of beauty	18	18
Pleasure	13	8
Salvation	10	14

Source: Mujtaba *et al* (2007)

A focus on business students in the United States and Thailand further reveals the significant differences between two culturally opposite students, and the responses that occur when there is a change in the academic environment.

The implementation of the American MBA program to Thai students in the United States and the way the students adapted to their new surroundings shows how different the American culture is from the Thailand population. Based on the author's personal experiences with American and Thai business students in the United States, as well as Thai students in Thailand, comments about cultural differences are expanded upon for the benefit of future managers and educators. For example, in regard to technology usage in the classroom, American students engage themselves in individual activities at their respective computers while Thai students work in a group format to confer on each assignment. By analyzing the differences between the American and Thai business students' approach towards the same education program, deductions can be made to show how the cultural behavior of students reflect their own societies, and how changes in technology can potentially shift their way of life.

Table 1.2 –*Instrumental* Values Mean Ranking

Values	USA	Thailand
Honest	1	1
Courageous	9	12
Intellectual	11	7
Independent	6	14
Responsible	2	2
Self-controlled	8	4
Loyal	7	10
Loving	4	13
Capable	5	11
Ambitious	3	5
Broadminded	10	3
Logical	14	16
Imaginative	16	15
Forgiving	13	6
Polite	15	9
Helpful	12	8
Clean	17	17
Obedient	18	18

Source: Mujtaba *et al* (2007)

Culture and Communication Challenges

Cultures tend to regularize human behavior or make them more predictable for each group of people in their own unique ways, and effective communication becomes extremely critical in a diverse environment where different cultures are present. Good communication is an essential skill both in

business and in life for building strong relationships. In international business it is important to realize that cultural differences can severely affect one's relationship with others and their communication. According to anthropologist Edward Hall, there is a clear distinction in the way of communicating between the so-called high-context and low-context cultures. "The notion of cultural complexity refers to the way messages are communicated within a society (Kotabe & Helsen, 2007, p. 127)." In high-context cultures such as Thailand, Japan or India, there is a less verbally detailed communication and less written/formal information. Instead, there is a more subliminal understanding of what is communicated. Often what is left unsaid is as important as what is said. Low context cultures such as the United States or United Kingdom put more emphasis on the written or spoken words. In such an environment, communication is very explicit and clear, and normally "what is meant is what is said" (Mujtaba, 2007).

It is important for international managers and cross-cultural educators to reflect on their relationships with people of different cultures and examine how differences in context can lead to cultural misunderstanding for overseas students studying or working in the United States. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the relationship similarities and dissimilarities between American and Thai students in an American university class. This section reflects on a Thai student's cross-cultural perspective of American classroom etiquette and provides insights into the classroom culture and the effects of the wider aspects of culture and society in it.

Dutch cultural anthropologist, Gert Hofstede, defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category from those of another" (Hofstede, 1991 p. 5). Despite the plentiful definitions of culture, there are at least three factors that exist to form a culture: it is learned, it is interrelated, and it is shared (Cellich and Jain, 2004). Culture is learned, it is not something that is transmitted biologically from one person to the next. A society's culture is passed on through family, school, community activities, workplace relationships, and youth clubs. Culture is interrelated, it has many parts that correlate to the next, for example one's upbringing and social class interrelates to the language that a person will use, and their social mannerisms. Finally, culture is generally shared by individuals from the same society. The factors that make a culture different from others are also what make communication difficult between diverse people groups.

Culture and communication. The low context American communication style tends to be direct, linear and explicit. In such a low context culture, often very little is left to interpretation of the receiver (Gardenswartz *et al.* 2003, p. 137). Therefore, an American in a classroom will be more interactive, direct and open with his or her professor. He/she may also go as far as challenging the professor's views or concepts in any given subject. In a classroom, Americans see it as an advantage to participate to show their knowledge or to gain points and respect from their professor. They believe it is their responsibility to communicate with others and build relationships that are important to them in a classroom setting. They look at who they need to communicate with, what they communicate, when it is appropriate to communicate, and how they should

communicate to help build the relationships to make their message more persuasive. This in-turn engages discussions and influences responses and participation by the professor and other classmates.

Personal experience of the author demonstrates that Thais in the American classroom rarely spoke in class, or asked questions. In the Thai culture, speaking and giving your own ideas in the classroom to the professor is seen as disrespectful, unless you are asked by the professor to give your comments. In Thailand, students tend to show respect in class by carefully listening to what is being said by the professor. In the high context Thai style, communication is often indirect, and implicit, and meaning is found less in the words than in the context surrounding the communication. "It leaves a great deal of information about their needs, positions, and priorities unstated - understood between themselves, but not always by outsiders" (Condon, 1984, p. 43; Scarborough, 1998, pp. 36 -7; Ferraro, 2002, p. 125 – 6; Salacuse, 2003, p. 101). In the formal classroom structure, a Thai student's behavior will differ from that of an American. To the Thai student it is not just communicating that makes it important, it is when and how something is communicated. Culturally, for the Thai student, when his/her opinion is solicited from a professor that is when it is shared, outside of that they tend to listen and respect the professor by paying careful attention and not directly challenging their views or remarks.

Different cultures have different needs for structure in order to function efficiently. In the American culture active initiation of discussion and spontaneous and detailed comments are encouraged (Samovar & Porter, 2001). "To the American silence is considered socially undesirable (Ishii & Bruneau, 1994)." For that reason, an American may interpret the Thai student being reserved, silent and subdued in class as showing a lack of interest. However, in the Thai culture attentive listening and brief comments after contemplation are expected (Kindaichi, 1988). In Thai culture, silence has positive connotations because it implies contemplation, deep thinking, reflection, and respect.

Culture and foreign subsidiaries. Let us transition to a practical cross-cultural workplace scenario and assume that you are the CEO of an American-based engineering company. You have decided to establish a subsidiary in Thailand. This will be staffed entirely by the local people in Thailand. How might efficient management systems differ than those you apply in the United States?

As CEO of an American based engineering company, establishing the appropriate management system for the Thai subsidiary will take a deep level of understanding of Thai culture. Ultimately, the management system should be designed to be viable, efficient, and friendly to the employees, while helping the company achieve its goals (Mead, 2005).

Traditionally, the Thai culture is considered a collectivist entity, with relatively high needs to avoid uncertainty and where high power distances are common. To alleviate the transition of the more traditional Thai staff into the engineering company there is a need to reaffirm the long-term commitment and provide a structure with their concerns in mind. This view of traditional Thai culture will apply to the majority of Thais, however, research shows that there is a culture shift underway and the younger generations are influenced by Western

ideology. This shift needs to be planned and prepared for in advance considering that the engineering firm will hire a vast range of expertise, ranking from entry-level college graduates to senior level management. Since the culture shift is relatively new, perhaps an initial goal of senior management will be to research the culture shift and implement solutions that will attract and retain top talent (Mead, 2005).

The appropriate management system will require a formal structure to delineate employee tasks and interrelationships. According to Mead, tasks are duties for which each member is made responsible, and relationships determine how each member interacts with other members (Mead, 2005, p. 169). With the Thai, the roles and responsibilities will be clearly identified for each employee. For each task Mead's contextual task model can be used to describe and distinguish between each task (Mead, p. 160). The contextual task model is a very interesting tool that can be used to answer the who, how, what, where, when, and justifies why each task exists.

The Thai engineering firm should also be provided with a clear hierarchy from the top level down. It will be its own entity, with its own internal structure, overall mirroring a divisional structure. Large corporations, with different geographical locations and/or products, usually adopt divisional structures (Mead, p. 171). The product and services the Thai engineering firm delivers will predominantly serve the Asian market, making the divisional structure appropriate due to the differences in geographical location and product services.

Mead states, "The organization designs and implements task descriptions and communication relationships that are perceived as most likely to achieve its goals as efficiently as possible" (Mead, p. 170). Hence, with the structure chosen for the Thai engineering firm, the goals of the company should be achieved; however keeping an open mind and implementing feedback from the system will ensure long-term success.

For an international organization it is essential to understand the culture of the country or region in which it is doing business. "Culture is a key pillar of the marketplace. To a large extent, the local culture drives the success of international marketing activities...These cultural variables may act as barriers or opportunities" (Kotabe & Helsen, 2007, p. 135). In essence, it is almost impossible for a company to be successful in a foreign country without knowledge and understanding of the culture. Managers of international operations should be aware of the importance of context in various countries. Context indicates the level in which communication occurs outside of verbal discussion. It is clear that high-context communicating students from Thailand and low-context communicating students from the United States have learned their classroom behaviors through socialization in their home country. Understanding the effect of the differences in context provides a knowledge base and cultural intelligence that can help provide not only effective classroom education but more over effective international business relationships.

Analysis of Behavior and Culture with Business Students

In the "*Computers in the Business School*" scenario, Mead (2005) provides a short case detailing the differences between American and Thai students. From the review of the case, one can explore whether the Thai and American students' behavior reflect their native cultures. To other cultures, especially in Asian countries, Americans from the United States can be perceived as selfish or arrogant due to their individualistic nature. When American children attend school, they are taught to be creative and innovative by thinking of their own ideas. As competition is extremely prevalent in this culture and rewards are given to the ones who succeed, children are also taught that to become a leader and to get rewarded, they should stand out and express their own opinions. Being rebellious and going against the majority is considered positive for the American society. Another way that American students are encouraged to show their individualistic tendencies is through their dress code.

The public educational dress code is an extremely liberal policy that allows public school students to choose their own clothing to encourage their own individualistic. As individualistic is highly regarded in the U.S. society, the students of public education have the right to wear their own clothing so that they may express their own individuality. Unlike other countries, like Thailand or Japan whose students wear uniforms, children in the United States are given the opportunity from an early age to learn and showcase who they are as a person, which can help them become and be more creative individuals when they get older and begin work. American students are also encouraged to cultivate individualistic characteristics by receiving a high percentage of individual assignments (Mean, 2005).

As the majority of American school assignments are set to be completed on an individual basis, American students tend to work autonomously in order to complete their coursework. These students who work alone without the assistance of other classmates depict the individualistic behavior displayed by most people in the American culture. Inhabitants of an individualistic culture tend to be more interested in taking care of themselves and forming their own identity. As one writer states "the person is expected to achieve for himself/herself, and to satisfy his/her own needs, so they are taught to think, learn, and work independently" (Mead, 2005).

It is also important to examine whether the Thai students' behavior reflect Thai culture. In Mead's case, both schools were designed with the same program and assignment input devices. There were sufficient computers for each student yet the Thai students worked in a group around computers to discuss their thoughts since this is the way most Thai students are accustomed to learning. As a matter-of-fact, as part of the inculcation process, many public universities in Thailand require entering college students to work closely with their assigned or selected mentor (or "buddy") to successfully complete their school requirements. The assigned or selected mentor of "buddy" is usually someone who is at the higher level or a senior at the college or university. The new college student is expected to closely follow the directions, guidelines, and commands of his/her mentor or buddy. This type of group work behavior is normal in Thailand's

educational and work settings. This is described in Hofstede's individualistic/collectivistic model. The Thai students and employees display a collectivistic culture. A collectivistic culture or collectivism is the practice that makes a group rather than the individual the fundamental unit of societal concerns. In theory, collectivists insist that the claims of groups, associations, or the state must normally supersede the claims of individuals. In collectivistic cultures, group interests are preferred over individual interests. The Thai student derives his/her social identity from the group. Of course, there are many differences between an individualistic culture such as the United States and collectivistic culture such as Thailand. As explained by Mujtaba (2007) and others, collective cultures tend to be high on other interest, compliance, harmony, and interdependence; while individualist cultures tend to be high on self-interest, assertiveness, acceptance of conflict, and independence. Furthermore, while collective cultures tend to be focused on duties, individualist cultures are high on rights.

Trumbull (2008) lists some of the main differences between individualistic and collectivistic cultures as presented in Table 2.

Table 2 –Individualistic and Collectivistic Cultures (Trumbull, 2008)

Individualistic	Collectivistic
1. Fostering independence and individual achievement	1. Fostering interdependence and group success
2. Promoting democracy, empowerment, self-expression, individual thinking, and/or personal choice?	2. Promoting adherence to norms, respect for authority/elders, group consensus
3. Associated with egalitarian relationships and flexibility in roles (e.g., upward mobility)	3. Associated with stable, hierarchical roles (dependent on gender, family background, age)?
4. Understanding the physical world as knowable apart from its meaning for human life	4. Understanding the physical world in the context of its meaning for human life
5. Associated with private property, individual ownership	5. Associated with shared property, group ownership

From a quick review of Mead's case and general literature on cultural differences between the United States and Thailand, it appears that the Thai students' behavior reflect Thai culture in that the Thais are accustomed to working in groups and feel that this is the best way to learn and achieve better long-term results. Even though there are enough computers, they still rely on each other for the correct answers and opinions to questions.

In regard to new technology inducing a shift in the two cultures, it is fair to say that the two schools used their computers in different ways. The American business school had sterner, individual approach to learning, while the Thai school uses a community approach to learning. It has been said that "technology causes a shift in the culture when it causes people to significantly change how they live and work" (Mead, 2005). From Mead's example it is hard to know whether the computers caused a shift in culture since the case does not mention how the two schools had their students interact and learn before the introduction of the technology. According to Mead, technology induces a shift in culture when one of three things takes place: gaining an existing technology, the adaptation of that technology, or the making and invention of new technology. Furthermore, "While making new technology is the most drastic of the three stages in the causation of culture shift, any of the steps can cause different levels of shift" (Mead, 2005).

Thai culture differs from American culture in many ways. However, Thais as well as Americans, enjoy great levels of freedom and pragmatism as both groups of people are flexible and open-minded toward new ideas, creativity and innovations. As can be witnessed, Thais have adopted many western practices perhaps due to the constant evolution of culture and widespread availability of information over the cyberspace highways. Technology has induced changes in both cultures.

The space concept is a factor not influenced by the introduction of computers in the classroom. Every culture and more precisely every individual has its own demand of personal space. In other words, this can be described as a bubble that defines the personal boundary needed in order to feel comfortable when interacting with people. The personal space in Thai culture is rather small compared with the Americans. Based on personal observations by the author, it is apparent that Thais are comfortable working close to each other, while Americans prefer to keep a larger amount of distance between them.

It is clear that Americans have an individualistic character, and as a result students tend to work alone. The fact that a new technology, the computers, is available to the students does not change the individualistic character of the Americans, or the group character of Thais. In Thai culture the group is the primary unit of social organization as a consequence of their living in extended families (Edmundson, 2007); thus, this explains why students gather together in groups around computers, even though there are enough computers for everyone. Hofstede's cultural dimensions corroborate the fact that both cultures differ in their individualistic dimension; Americans scored 91% on individualistic, the highest, while Thais scored 20%. Lastly, the individualistic dimension and space concept of both cultures remained intact even though computers allow students to change how they interact (Edmundson, 2007; Mead, 2005).

Study Methodology: Task and Relationship Orientations

The concept of leadership has been discussed since the days of the ancient Greek philosophers and it is one of the most interesting topics for

researchers and managers. One of the most widely used leadership theories around the world today is situational leadership, which was founded by Drs. Paul Hersey and Kenneth Blanchard in the 1960s (Personal Communication with Dr. Paul Hersey, February 2008 in Escondido, California). *Leadership* is the process of influencing an individual or a group of individuals while providing an environment where personal, professional, and/or organizational objectives can be successfully achieved. Leaders tend to use various amounts of task or relationship behaviors. *Task behavior* is the extent to which leaders engage in top-down communication by explaining what the follower is to do, as well as when, where, and how each function is to be accomplished. *Relationship behavior* is the extent to which leaders engage in joint communication with followers while providing socio-emotional support. Peter G. Northouse (2007, p. 65) provides a useful instrument, known as Style Questionnaire (p. 85), which can be used to obtain a general profile of a person's leadership behaviors regarding task and relationship orientations. The Style Questionnaire can be completed by oneself as well as one's friends, peers, bosses, and/or employees for comparison purposes. The results can show one's use of various task and relationship behaviors. Appendix A shows a copy of the survey for task and relationship orientation. To determine one's personal leadership characteristics, the person circles one of the options that best describe how he or she sees himself or herself (or the person that is being evaluated) regarding each statement. For each statement, the person indicates the degree to which he or she (or the person being evaluated) engages in the stated behavior. A rating of 1 means "Never" and a rating of 5 means "Always" with the person demonstrating the specific behavior. To determine one's scores for the leadership styles questionnaire, one can add the responses for the odd numbered items to determine the score for task-orientation behaviors, and add the responses for the even numbered items to determine the score for relationship-orientation behaviors. The scoring interpretation for the Style Questionnaire by Northouse (2007, p. 87) is presented in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 – Task and Relationship Score Interpretations

SCORES	DESCRIPTIONS
• 45-50	Very high range
• 40-44	High range
• 35-39	Moderately high range
• 30-34	Moderately low range
• 25-29	Low range
• 10-24	Very low range

High task behavior scores tend to mean that the leader engages in more top-down communication by explaining what the follower is to do, as well as when, where, and how each function is to be accomplished. High relationship behavior scores mean the leader engages in more joint communication with followers while providing socio-emotional support. Of course, the degree to which one engages in more task or relationship oriented behaviors should depend on

the variables present in the situation; some of the situational variables can include the difficulty of the task, the importance of the job, the time available to get it done, and the readiness of the follower to successfully complete the task without much input. According to Dr. Paul Hersey, effective leaders stay in control by managing through a balance of both task and relationship oriented behaviors, as appropriate, to make sure the objectives and goals are accomplished (Personal Communication with Dr. Paul Hersey, February 2008).

Hypothesis

The research question for this study was to determine whether high-context culture Thai students have a higher average score on the relationship orientation than their low-context culture American counterparts? The specific hypotheses for this study are as follows:

1. *Null Hypothesis1:* Thai respondents will have similar scores for relationship orientations and task orientations.
   Alternate Hypothesis1: Thai respondents will not have similar scores for relationship orientations and task orientations.

2. *Null Hypothesis2:* Thai respondents will have similar scores on task orientation as the respondents from the United States.
   Alternative Hypothesis2: Thai respondents will have different scores on task orientation than respondents from the United States.

3. *Null Hypothesis3:* Thai respondents will have similar scores on relationship orientation as the respondents from the United States.
   Alternative Hypothesis3: Thai respondents will have different scores on relationship orientation than the respondents from the United States.

4. *Null Hypothesis4:* United States respondents will have similar scores for relationship orientations and task orientations.
   Alternate Hypothesis4: United States respondents will not have similar scores for relationship orientations and task orientations.

For the purpose of this study, a copy of the questionnaire was submitted to 150 English-speaking Thai students in Bangkok and Hat Yai provinces of Thailand in various business courses. Within three weeks, 102 completed surveys were returned to the researcher. Of the returned surveys, 25 were completed incorrectly (perhaps due to miscommunication since the survey was only offered in the English language and not in the local lingo); thus, leaving 77 surveys for analysis in this study. From the total usable Thai responses, 57 were Buddhists, 14 were Muslims, and the rest marked "Other."   In the United States, for over a period of one year, a copy of the survey was given as a part of an exercise for two different graduate management courses in South Florida to 88

students and all scores were recorded for the study. From the total American responses, 41 were Christian, 3 were Muslims, 2 were Buddhists, and the rest marked "Other."   The average age of Thai respondents was 23, and for the U.S. respondents it was 28 years. While only 4 Thai respondents stated that they had 1 to 5 years of management experience, 28 people from the United States said they had at least 1 or more years of experience (and 7 students reported having 6 or more years of management experience).

Task and Relationship Results

The average scores of Thai respondents for task orientation falls in "moderately high range," and their relationship orientation average also falls in "moderately high range." On the other hand, as presented in Table 3, the average scores of American respondents for both task and relationship orientations fall in the "high range."

Table 3 – Orientation Scores of Thai and U.S. Respondents

Respondents	No.	Gender		Average Task Orientation Score	Average Relationship Orientation Score
		Male	Fem.		
Thailand	77	41	36	36.82	36.03
United States	87	56	31	41.18	43.39

As can be seen from Table 4 and using the t-test for differences in two means, at a 0.05 level of significance, the first null hypothesis ("*Thai respondents will have similar scores for relationship orientations and task orientations*") cannot be rejected because the calculated t of 1.32 falls within the critical value of t for statistical significance; in other words, since the t value does fall within the critical values (+1.97 and -1.97), the hypothesis is supported. Furthermore, since the p-value is larger than alpha (α) = 0.05, there is sufficient evidence to accept the null hypothesis.

Table 4 – Thai Task and Relationship Orientations	
Task Orientation – Thailand	
Sample Size	77
Sample Mean	36.82
Sample Standard Deviation	3.56
Relationship Orientation – Thailand	
Sample Size	77
Sample Mean	36.03
Sample Standard Deviation	3.88
t-Test Statistic	1.32
Two-Tailed Test	
Lower Critical Value	-1.975
Upper Critical Value	1.975
p-Value	0.1899
Do not reject the null hypothesis	

Based on the results, the task orientation and relationship orientation scores of Thai respondents appear to be similar. As such, one can conclude that the Thai respondents have similar scores on the task orientation and relationship orientation. Perhaps because they are students, while valuing their relationships, Thais appear to be focused on the tasks at hand to ensure they are completed in a timely manner, i.e. completing course assignments during the current semester.

As can be seen from Table 5, the null hypothesis ("*Thai respondents will have similar scores on task orientation as the respondents from the United States*") is rejected because t= -5.57 does not fall within the critical value of +1.97 and -1.97. Also, because the p-value is smaller than alpha (α) = 0.05, there is sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis. Based on these results, Thai respondents' scores are significantly different or lower from the American respondents. The alternative hypothesis is supported since the Thai respondents have different scores on task orientation than the respondents from the United States.

Table 5 – Task Orientation Scores	
Task Orientation - Thailand	
Sample Size	77
Sample Mean	36.82
Sample Standard Deviation	3.56
Task Orientation - United States	
Sample Size	87
Sample Mean	41.18
Sample Standard Deviation	5.99
Total Degrees of Freedom	162
t-Test Statistic	-5.57
Two-Tailed Test	
Lower Critical Value	-1.97
Upper Critical Value	1.97
p-Value	0.00

As can be seen from Table 6 and using the t-test for differences in two means, at a 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis ("*Thai respondents will have similar scores on relationship orientation as the respondents from the United States*") is rejected because t= 10.74 does not fall within the critical values. Based on these results, it can be concluded that the Thai respondents have significantly different and lower scores on relationship orientation than the respondents from the United States.

Table 6 – Relationship Orientation Scores	
Relationship Orientation - Thailand	
Sample Size	77
Sample Mean	36.03
Sample Standard Deviation	3.88
Relationship Orientation - United States	
Sample Size	87
Sample Mean	43.39
Sample Standard Deviation	4.78
t-Test Statistic	-10.74
Two-Tailed Test	
Lower Critical Value	-1.97
Upper Critical Value	1.97
p-Value	0.00

As can be seen from Table 7, the last null hypothesis ("*United States respondents will have similar scores for relationship orientations and task orientations*") is rejected because the calculated t of -2.69 far exceeds the critical value of t for statistical significance (1.97) and the p-value (0.007) is smaller than alpha (0.05). Based on these results, the task orientation and relationship orientation scores of respondents from the United States appear to be significantly different. As such, one can conclude that the U.S.A. respondents have a significantly higher score on the relationship orientation than the task orientation.

Table 7 – USA Task and Relationship Orientations	
Task Orientation – USA	
Sample Size	87
Sample Mean	41.18
Sample Standard Deviation	5.99
Relationship Orientation – USA	
Sample Size	87
Sample Mean	43.39
Sample Standard Deviation	4.78
t-Test Statistic	-2.69
Two-Tailed Test	
Lower Critical Value	-1.97
Upper Critical Value	1.97
p-Value	0.0007

In general, it was hypothesized that Thai respondents will have similar scores for relationship orientations and task orientations, and the current study did support this hypothesis. As a result of this study, one can further summarize that Thai respondents have significantly different scores on task orientation than respondents from the United States. Similarly, Thai respondents have significantly different scores on relationship orientation than the respondents from the United States. Last but not least, one can summarize that respondents from the United States do not have similar scores for relationship and task orientations.

Implications and Recommendations

Due to the societal conditioning and general nature of human beings, some managers and educators often assume that employees from high-context cultures are likely to be more relationship-oriented. The implication is that such an orientation may cause employees to not complete their tasks in a timely manner. For example, they may not be assertive enough to pressure their peers toward working faster if there is a backlog or even to ask for help when necessary because they do not want to appear "pushy" or "rude." Of course, such assumptions are often wrong. This research has shown that business students from a high-context culture of Thailand are just as task-oriented as they are focused on their relationships. This is good news for local and expatriate managers working in Thailand as employees are likely to treat their customers with respect and good service without losing focus from their assigned tasks. It is very possible that these results might only be true of business students and not necessarily others in the educational arena or in the general population of a high-context culture. Some managers may also think that people from individualistic or low context cultures are likely to focus more on tasks even when this comes at the cost of hurting the relationship. In reality, this study has shown that American respondents who had high scores on the task-orientation were actually more focused on the relationship than the task. Once again, it is possible that these results might only be true of business students and not necessarily others in the educational arena or in the general population of a low-context culture.

One implication of this research is that even though a low-context group's orientation toward individualistic cultures (such as people from the United States) might be very high, this research has concluded that they can be highly focused on the relationship while completing their tasks. Similarly, despite a high-context group's orientation toward collectivistic cultures (such as people from Thailand), this research has shown that they can be focused on the task at hand while keeping the relationship strong due to the nature of their upbringing and years of socialization. While the Thais are often expected to score higher on the relationship orientation than the task orientation, this research has not supported this notion with the business student population. Similarly, while the respondents from the United States are expected to score higher on the task orientation than relationship orientation, this research has demonstrated the opposite with the business student population. Furthermore, perhaps due to the emphasis on

teamwork training and the need for working interdependently to remain competitive, the respondents from the United States scored significantly higher on both the task orientation as well as the relationship orientation than the respondents from Thailand. Despite the fact that the scores of Thais and Americans are significantly different, there are likely to be a convergence of scientific or analytical thinking and strategic decision-making processes in the business arenas as students and managers are reading and reviewing similar profession- or industry-related books and articles.

There is little doubt that we are witnessing a convergence of cultural thoughts and views when it comes to the usage of technology in the classroom and in the workplace. Furthermore, personal observations show that there is a culture shift underway in Thailand regarding the use of cyberspace technologies and global brands of various products; this is especially true of the younger generations of students who are more heavily influenced by Hollywood (U.S.A.), Bollywood (India), and Western or European ideologies.

General review of demographic data demonstrates that age seems to be a variable in the high or low orientation scores of respondents since, on the average, the American students were about five years older than their Thai counterparts. As demonstrated by the higher scores of respondents from the United States, one implication is that those who are older tend to put more focus or a higher level of importance on both the task as well as their relationships in the workplace.

Work experience is always important for quality outcomes and professionalism, and this is especially true in management. It should be noted that management experience also seems to be a factor in higher scores of Americans as more of them reported having one or more years of experience in management or supervisory levels. Since managers are required to stay focused on the timely completion of all tasks in their department, they tend to maintain a healthy relationship with their employees, peers, superiors, vendors, customers, and others who regularly influence their work in the value-chain. Perhaps, due to this requirement for a balance of both relationship and task completion with various stakeholders in the value chain, those who have been in management tend to score higher on both orientations. More data is needed to see if management experience is actually a dominant factor in the task or relationship orientation of respondents in low-context or individualistic and high-context or collectivistic cultures.

Limitations and Future Direction

There are several limitations to this study and the small number of responses is one of them. The fact that the survey was given only in the English language to Thai students in the international business program might be a factor in their scores. It is recommended that future researchers translate the instrument into the Thai language and have another person "back-translate" it into the English language for accuracy evaluation so the final survey can be made available in both languages to respondents in Thailand. Another limitation

is the fact that this study was conducted with a student population where the respondents from Thailand were younger, but the respondents from the United States were older and many of them were employed full-time. Future studies can compare students with similar demographic backgrounds. Another limitation is the fact that some students might have felt obligated to respond according to the "textbook" answers since for a majority of them this was part of the course assignment during discussions of management and leadership styles. As such, some of the responses might be geared toward "pleasing" the teacher for a higher score on the participation evaluation rather than representing their true intentions. Perhaps future studies can remove this pressure from respondents by having a third party facilitate the distribution and collection of data from the target groups.

While the Thai students seem to have an equal focus on task-orientation and relationship-orientation, this might be true simply because they understand the importance of completing assignments in a timely manner during each semester. Or, it is possible that these respondents, who are enrolled in the English-speaking international business program, are both task- and relationship-oriented simply due to the convergence of work practices as they may have adapted a Western style of managing their time and activities. However, these results cannot be generalized to the total population as students are conditioned differently than working adults. Furthermore, students tend to be younger than traditional working adults. As such, future studies can focus on working populations in Thailand and in the United States, and such research can analyze the responses based on different categories of age to see if being older or younger makes a difference in the task or relationship orientation scores of respondents from high and low context cultures.

Researchers should also note that management experience seems to be a variable or factor in the scores of respondents. Therefore, future studies should compare those who have five or more years of management experience with those who have never been a manager to see if this is a variable in the task and relationship orientation scores of respondents. Finally, it should be mentioned that it is very possible that these results might only be true of business students in both high-context and low-context cultures and not necessarily of others in the educational arena or in the general population. Therefore, future researchers can test these hypotheses with students in non-business fields as well as with employees in the general population.

Conclusion

This paper discussed some of the common differences regarding individualistic and collectivistic cultures where an individualistic environment is often linked to low-context cultures and a collectivistic one is linked to high-context cultures. After reflecting on the behaviors of people in Thailand and the United States, one is better able to get an understanding of Thai and American students and their cultures. American students tend to work based on their individualistic views, and Thai students work based on their collectivistic views.

Individualistic and collectivistic paradigms are conflicting views of the nature of humans, society, and the relationship between them. Contrary to the popular belief, the results of this study show that Thai students are equally focused on tasks as they are on their relationships. Furthermore, as shown in the responses, Thai business students are not necessarily more relationship oriented than their counterparts from the United States.

The cultural behaviors of people do not easily change because of the introduction of new technology or a few inculcation and familiarization exercises about another culture. As demonstrated through various cases and studies, people usually function in the way that they are accustomed to working based on their cultural upbringing and socialization. However, despite a group's individualistic orientation in a low-context culture (such as people from the United States), this research has implied that they can be highly focused on the relationship while completing their tasks. Similarly, despite a group's collectivistic orientation in a high-context culture (such as people from Thailand), this research has implied that they can be equally focused on the task at hand while keeping the relationship strong.

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Appendix A: Task and Relationship Orientation Survey

1. **Gender**: A - Male,   B - Female.
2. **Age**: A – 17 to 25,   B – 26 and above.
3. **Management experience**: A – None,   B – 1 to 5 years,   C – 6 or more years.
4. **Religion** – A: Buddhist,   B: Muslim,   C. Christian,   D. Other.

To determine your dominant personal leadership style, circle one of the following options that best describe how you see yourself (or the person that is being evaluated) regarding each statement. For each statement, you can indicate the degree to which you (or the person being evaluated) engage (s) in the stated behavior. A rating of 1 means Never and a rating of 5 means Always with the person demonstrating the specific behavior.

Table AP1 – Task or Relationship Style Questionnaire

Questions	Never………………Always
1. Tells group members what they are supposed to do.	1 2 3 4 5
2. Acts friendly with members of the group.	1 2 3 4 5
3. Sets standards of performance for group members.	1 2 3 4 5
4. Helps others feel comfortable in the group.	1 2 3 4 5
5. Makes suggestions about how to solve problems.	1 2 3 4 5
6. Responds favorably to suggestions made by others.	1 2 3 4 5
7. Makes his or her perspective clear to others.	1 2 3 4 5
8. Treats others fairly.	1 2 3 4 5
9. Develops a plan of action for the group.	1 2 3 4 5
10. Behaves in a predictable manner toward group members.	1 2 3 4 5
11. Defines role responsibilities for each group member.	1 2 3 4 5
12. Communicates actively with group members.	1 2 3 4 5
13. Clarifies his or her own role within the group.	1 2 3 4 5
14. Shows concern for the well-being of others.	1 2 3 4 5
15. Provides a plan for how the work is to be done.	1 2 3 4 5
16. Shows flexibility in making decisions.	1 2 3 4 5
17. Provides criteria for what is expected of the group.	1 2 3 4 5
18. Discloses thoughts and feelings to group members.	1 2 3 4 5
19. Encourages group members to do high-quality work.	1 2 3 4 5
20. Helps group members get along.	1 2 3 4 5

To determine your scores for the leadership styles questionnaire, do the following:
1. Add the responses for the odd numbered items to determine your score for task-orientation behaviors.
2. Add the responses for the even numbered items to determine your score for relationship-orientation behaviors.

Task Orientation Scores: _____   **Relationship** Orientation Scores: _____