

Revista Investigaciones Turísticas, nº 26 (2023), pp 134-161.

ISSN: 2174-5609

DOI. <https://doi.org/10.14198/INTURI.22661>

Cita bibliográfica: Cordeiro, J. P. y Pitacho, L. (2023). Employees' conflict management in the hospitality industry: an empirical study on the importance of sociodemographic variables. *Investigaciones Turísticas* (26), pp. 134-161. <https://doi.org/10.14198/INTURI.22661>

Employees' conflict management in the hospitality industry. An empirical study on the importance of sociodemographic variables

Gestión de conflictos de los empleados en la industria hotelera. Estudio empírico sobre la importancia de las variables sociodemográficas

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the analysis of conflict management styles from a constructive perspective. Its main objective is to identify and reflect on the styles of conflict management in the hospitality industry in Portugal. The specific objective is to analyze the relationship between conflict management styles and sociodemographic variables among employees in Portuguese hotel units. The sample consists of 798 employees, mainly male, between 30 and 34 years old, with secondary school education, who are mostly operating staff or undifferentiated employees, and with middle levels of seniority in the organization. The results suggest that employees use different strategies to manage organizational conflicts, with an emphasis on compromising and integrating styles. At the same time, conflict management styles are differently determined by certain sociodemographic variables of the employees. This research helps in the design and implementation of constructive conflict management strategies for managers, which contribute to the formulation of management systems focused on behaviors and attitudes of professionals in the context of the hotel sector.

Palabras clave: Conflict management styles; sociodemographic variables; hotel industry.

RESUMEN

Esta investigación se enfoca en la analizar y discutir los estilos de manejo de conflictos desde una perspectiva constructiva. Su objetivo principal es identificar y reflexionar sobre los estilos de gestión constructiva de conflictos en la industria de la hospitalidad en Portugal. Se pretende aún analizar la relación entre la gestión constructiva de conflictos y las variables sociodemográficas entre los empleados de las unidades hoteleras portuguesas. La muestra está compuesta por 798 empleados de 21 hoteles, en su mayoría hombres, entre 30 y 34 años, especialmente con estudios secundarios, que en su mayoría son operativos/empleados

Fecha de recepción: 09/05/2022 Fecha de aceptación: 24/11/2022

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indiferenciados, y con niveles medianos de antigüedad en la organización. Los resultados sugieren que los empleados utilizan diferentes estrategias, con énfasis en los estilos de gestión de conflictos de compromiso e integración. Al mismo tiempo, los estilos de manejo de conflictos están determinados de manera diferente por algunas variables sociodemográficas de los encuestados. En cuanto a las implicaciones, esta investigación ayuda al diseño e implementación de estrategias constructivas de gestión de conflictos por parte de los directivos de estas empresas, que contribuyan a la formulación de sistemas de gestión enfocados en los comportamientos y actitudes de los profesionales en el contexto de la industria hotelera.

Keywords: Estilos de gestión de conflictos; variables sociodemográficas; industria hotelera.

I. INTRODUCTION

The sovereign debt crisis had a particularly harmful impact on Portugal, which was affected mainly by its structural weaknesses. Its impact was very strong, both at the level of individuals (unemployment, decline in wages, increased precariousness, increased flexibility, and versatility of workers) and organizations (loss of competitiveness, bankruptcies, and decreased profits). To cope with this context, it is important that organizations develop new forms of management that are sustained by and for people. That is, to be successful, organizations need to reinvent themselves by placing people at the centre of their policies.

Among the various sectors of activity, Hospitality and Tourism is one of the most affected by global crises. As times of crisis are the times when managers are most needed, managers have an important role in crisis management to prevent further losses in tourism and turn the crisis into an opportunity (Çoban & Özel, 2022).

The interest in studying the conflict is not new, but it has recently taken on a new breath of life in the face of the economic, financial, social, and political crisis. The impact of this sovereign debt crisis has inevitably resulted in the escalation of conflict situations between countries and organizations. Sociodemographic characteristics are the antecedents of conflict management and are considered the basis for explaining this type of behaviour. Although there is no consensus in its conclusions, several studies have analysed the relationship between sociodemographic variables and conflict management styles (e.g., Rahim, 1985; Goel, 2012; Kristanto, 2017).

The objective of this study is to identify and analyse the process of articulation between sociodemographic variables and conflict management styles, thus seeking to verify whether these variables explain conflict management styles.

Methodologically, a quantitative case study was carried out using a questionnaire survey. To test the relationship between the model presented and the hypotheses formulated, an eminently quantitative analysis was carried out using multivariate statistics. The objects of the study are the hotel industry employees. The hotel sector is the main mover and protagonist of the internationalization of Portuguese tourism firms (Breda et al., 2020). Nowadays is one of the most dynamic and fastest growing globally and is already an important

part of the national product, contributing significantly to the balance of trade and the creation of employment in Portugal (Almeida & Silva, 2020).

The interest in studying conflict in the hospitality industry comes from the fact that it represents a ubiquitous phenomenon that has an impact on all the processes of these organizations. Conflict is inevitable in organizations, and the hospitality industry is no exception (Curcija, 2016; Yirik et al., 2015). Moreover, by their nature, the hospitality industry has some characteristics that foster the development of conflict situations, such as different cultural and environmental factors and the ambiguity of employees' authorities and roles (Mohammad et al., 2018). By promoting different moments of socialization, these industry contexts constitute a social space of relationships and interactions which is often guided by problematic situations among their various actors with different cultural and environmental factors – the ambiguity of values, objectives, and perspectives – making these institutions vulnerable to conflict (Amin & Nika, 2020).

In theoretical terms, this study contributes to the strengthening of the understanding of the importance of behaviours at and towards work, as well as the established dynamics between conflict management styles and sociodemographic variables. In practical terms, it contributes to the formulation and implementation of management policies and practices based on processes that emerge from these same behaviours in specific industry contexts, such as the hotel sector.

This paper is structured in four main parts: first, theoretical framework describes the theories, existing studies, and proposes the research hypotheses; second, methodology includes the conceptual model, methods and process of questionnaire design, data collection and statistical analysis; third, the results of this empirical study are analysed and discusses in comparison with the results of existing studies; finally the conclusions are drawn, theoretical and practical implications highlighted, limitations pointed out, and suggestions for future research put forward.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Organizational conflict management

Research on conflict management has highlighted its complex and dynamic nature (Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019). Conflicts are a routine phenomenon in every organization (Mihra et al., 2018), and conflict management is a fundamental process that constitutes one of the structuring axes of the organization's management (Avgar, 2020). Conflict defining is not simply a matter of how many and varied the conceptual and analytical approaches are. However, the systematization of the different conceptual approaches to conflict reveals that they share some common aspects.

As a process built between the parties, the conflict appears, develops, and consolidates itself based on a pattern of interaction, so it is essential to develop new forms (cooperatives) of conflict resolution. In other words, the conflict manifests negative aspects, which is true, but it is necessary to (re)focus the analysis, highlighting its positive aspects. In this sense, if the objectives or goals of the parties involved in the conflict are at least reconcilable and have some degree of compatibility, it is possible to develop a spirit of cooperation, compromising,

citizenship, and mutual help, which can have a positive effect, benefiting both parties strengthening the teams and the organization itself (Iturbide & Maya, 2000, *cit. in* Claudino, 2012). In the hospitality industry, conflict management has a positive impact on various performance indicators like productivity, interpersonal relationships, employee turnover, absenteeism, and effective utilization of organizational resources (Satyam et al., 2012). Conflict is positive and desirable to strengthen relationships between individuals and correct emerging problems, gains space and centrality in organizational analysis (Marujo, 2017).

But more than its definition, it is important here to focus on how it can be managed. In other words, the conflict does not present itself as something inevitably negative. It can even make an important contribution to the development of the system where it occurs. That is why, when conflict occurs, it is essential to pay special attention to its management – to make a constructive and positive management of the conflict, seeing it as an opportunity (Cunha & Leitão, 2016; Ensari et al., 2016) to be able to preserve the behaviours of its workers, specifically those of compromising and organizational citizenship.

Conflict management is one of the functions underlying the framework activity of organizations. Conflict, being the perception of interest incompatibility, which arises from the difference in objectives, motivations, and action plans between two or more parties, is also, and for this very reason seen as a phenomenon with which any manager/director/supervisor is inevitably confronted. Rahim et al. (2018) already postulate that organizational conflict management involves the diagnosis and intervention of substantive conflicts at personal and group levels and the strategies used to deal with these conflicts.

The positive consequences of conflict in organizations are directly related to how it is perceived and mediated by managers. In other words, the consequences can be beneficial if they see it as a positive way to achieve satisfactory and integral solutions for the benefit of the parties in conflict (Hussein & Al-Mamary, 2019; Vukić et al., 2017), contributing to improving levels of organizational involvement and compromising (Hussein *et al.*, 2017), social intelligence and problem-solving (Rahim *et al.*, 2018) and a performance culture (Atteya, 2013).

One of the important perspectives for analysing effective conflict management is based on the Bidimensional Model of Rahim and Bonoma (1979, *cit. in* Rahim, 1985). Conflict management styles represent the way people deal with conflict, presenting them with a set of benefits and disadvantages that arise from the contingencies of the situation. Their model, which is framed by two main dimensions: “interest for oneself” and “interest for others,” postulates the existence of different management styles which result, to a large extent, from the simultaneous influence of two independent motivations: to achieve one's own objectives and/or to achieve the objectives of the other (Rahim, 1985). Other research has been developed based on the model of Rahim and Bonama, being the touchstone for the investigations into conflict management styles as well as the situations in which each one is appropriate (1979, *cit. in* Rahim, 1985). Among them, the approach developed by Thomas (1992) is noteworthy for its dissemination and use.

Thomas (1992) considers that conflict management styles should be interpreted as intentions, more generic or more specific, that each party advocates during the conflict. The

various conflict management styles can assume a structural character and emphasise the mechanisms of differentiation and integration.

The interrelationship between their different dimensions results in a two-dimensional taxonomy of strategic intentions. One's strategic intentions are classified and defined along two basic orthogonal dimensions: assertiveness – the extent to which the party tries to satisfy their own concerns; and cooperativeness – the extent to which the party tries to satisfy the concerns of the other. This results in five strategic intentions that correspond to five different ways of managing conflicts: integrating, compromising, dominating, obliging, and avoiding (Thomas, 1992).

The integrating style – satisfaction of mutual interests, one's own and the other's – is manifested by the attempt to reach a joint agreement, i.e., the effort made to achieve the objective(s) and the expectation(s) of both parties. It is characterised by assertiveness and cooperation. The compromising style – moderate and intermediate satisfaction of one's own and the other's objectives – is manifested by the attempt to reach a partial/intermediate agreement regarding the acceptance of the objective(s) or guilt. It is characterised by medium assertiveness and cooperation. The dominating style – satisfaction of one's own interests to the detriment of the interests of the other – is manifested by the fact that the individual intends to achieve his or her own objectives by sacrificing those of the other party, trying to convince the other that his or her judgement is correct. It is characterised by assertiveness and non-cooperation. The obliging style – satisfying the interests of the other to the detriment of one's own interests – is manifested by the will to support the opinions of the other, that is, the professional supports and defends of the interests and objectives of the other party to the detriment of his own interests and objectives. It is characterised by cooperation and non-assertiveness. The avoiding style – neglects the interests of both parties – is manifested by the fact that the individual avoids the situation/event that can give rise to conflict, leaving the situation/event to run without taking part in any of the interests under discussion (of one's own or the other's). It is characterised by non-assertiveness and non-cooperation (Cunha et al., 2018; Cunha & Leitão, 2016).

In general terms, integrating style and compromising style tend to be used by employees to deal with strategic problems, while acceptance, dominating and avoiding styles tend to be used to deal with tactical problems or day-to-day problems (Rahim, 1985). However, it can be said that there is no ideal way to manage conflict. The functional and effective management of a conflict depends on the situation, i.e., considering that a conflict management style is more useful and appropriate than others depends on the situation in which it occurs and the context in which it occurs. Organizational conflict management is thus a contingent and situational area because it is sensitive to the different factors that involve and condition the functioning of organizations and are constantly changing.

2.2. Relationship between sociodemographic variables and organizational conflict management

At the heart of the debate on organizational conflict are studies on the interrelationship between constructive conflict management and other variables, seeking to identify its causes and consequences.

The research results on conflict management are abundant, but there is still a lack of theory-driven research on the relationship between sociodemographic variables and organizational conflict management in the hotel business. Most of the studies focus only on the assessment of organizational conflict management styles (Mohammad et al., 2018), relationship with innovative behavior or employee engagement (Jung & Yoon, 2018), global conflicts implications and tourist's perceptions (Amin & Nika, 2020), work attitudes and performance of hospitality employees (Raub et al., 2021) and the crisis of the conflicts management strategies (Çoban & Özel, 2022). There is no studies evidence on the analysis of the importance of sociodemographic variables in the hotel sector. The studies that are referred to support the hypothesis are the most cited studies in the literature, which include diverse sectors as public services sector, health sector, educational sector, automotive sector, among others.

At the level of causes, which is what this study is about, it is possible to identify some trends that confirm the importance of individual and professional variables in the difference in conflict management styles. The causal models refer to the studies which consider that sociodemographic variables have an explanatory power on the option for different conflict management styles (Smarty & Zakkariya, 2018; Chaturvedi, 2017; Kristanto, 2017; Kirti, 2016, and others). However, there is no homogeneity in the results presented by the different studies. Despite that, some studies in other sectors showing no correlation between sociodemographic characteristics and conflict management (Yirik et al., 2015; Torres, 2012), several studies indicate a strong and statistically significant relationship.

Regarding gender and seniority variables, there is no consensus established in the conclusions — there are even those who do not find significant differences in the use of conflict management styles between men and women (Hasani et al., 2014). By levels of seniority (Torres, 2012), some authors argue that these individual and professional characteristics have a significant influence on the adoption of conflict management styles (McIntyre, 2007), while others consider that women are more dominating, and men more obliging (Din et al., 2012). Torres and Cunha (2014) confirm this data for health professionals, that is, male employees advocate more collaborative strategies than female, and develop more avoidance strategies.

Kristanto (2017) in a study on Indonesian bankers, Cunha et al. (2018) in a study about health professionals, and Kirti (2016) in a study on managers of public companies, had found similar results. The first identify that there are statistically significant relationships between gender and styles of integrating and obliging, with men preferring to use these styles of conflict management. The second postulate that avoiding behaviours are mainly linked to female professionals. The third concluded that although collaboration is the most preferred in both categories, the competition style is more preferred among men and the commitment style among women.

In the study on managers' conflict management styles in the service sector, Smarty and Zakkariya (2018) also found that there are differences regarding gender in the adoption of gender identity conflict styles. However, the results are different from those found in the studies we presented previously. For these authors, conflict management styles have been

shown to be statistically significant in dominating style, with men showing a higher average value. This result is consistent with the Goel study (2012), where men showed higher scores in that style. Men thus prefer to adopt a confrontation perspective, such as the dominating style, which tends to be more persuasive and sometimes more irrational in approach, but can also be effective. On the other hand, women prefer to adopt a style of greater cooperation through compromising. Chaturvedi (2017) also identified statistically significant differences in conflict management styles by gender in the automotive industry: women mainly use avoiding style and men use the dominating style.

- H1: *The “gender” variable is correlated, with statistical significance, with the compromising conflict management (h1.1.), integrating (h1.2.), obliging (h1.3.), dominating (h1.4.) and avoiding (h1.5.).*

Regarding age, Goel (2012) and Torres and Cunha (2014) found no link with conflict management strategies. Conversely, Chaturvedi (2017) observed positive age correlations with all five conflict management styles (the largest correlations being found in the obliging and compromising styles), indicating that with increasing age, the adoption of these styles also increases. Kristanto (2017) found only age-based correlations between the (older) dominating and compliance styles. He identified some trends in the analysis, namely; that the integrating style is superior in the younger ones and that the acceptance and compromising styles are almost always preferred by older professionals. For Havenga (2007), age shows a statistically significant positive and negative correlation with some conflict management styles and found that younger professionals tend to use the conflict management style of dominating more often than other groups.

Din *et al.* (2012) found significant differences, but only in the style of conflict management of compromising. The older teachers were more committed when compared to other age groups. Similarly, Balay (2007) and Jenkins *et al.* (2008) findings show that older teachers are more likely to use the integrating and obliging styles compared to younger teachers. At tourism sector, Caber *et al.* (2019) also showed that as tour guides get older, they tend to adapt an integrating perspective on conflicts by aiming to unify people. Less young guides behave strategically and prefer to put rules for avoiding the conflicts and for finding solutions to the conflicts.

At this level, Beitler *et al.* (2016) developed a study with 444 German workers who have frequent contact with the client. The results revealed that the variable “age” is associated with the use of conflict management styles of avoiding and integrating (active constructive character in the search for a solution to the problem), being that, above all, older professionals are those who use these styles more effectively and efficiently. When using these two types of styles, older professionals have demonstrated more effectiveness and efficiency at work than their younger colleagues. Younger professionals have benefited considerably less from the use of these styles, revealing higher levels of burnout in general.

At the same time, Vrbnjak *et al.* (2011) in their study on education teachers concluded that teachers develop various approaches to conflict resolution and found differences in conflict management strategies between younger (≤ 45 years) and older teachers (≥ 45 years). In general, older teachers advocate more the conflict management style of integration (integrating) and less often the domination style (dominating). Both oblige students to reach

compromises, but to a lesser extent. There were statistically significant differences between the two groups when it comes to avoiding conflict: older teachers advocate more often than younger teachers the avoiding style as a way of managing conflict.

- H2: *The “age” variable is correlated, with statistical significance, with the compromising conflict management (h2.1.), integrating (h2.2.), obliging (h2.3.), dominating (h2.4) and avoiding (h2.5).*

Regarding academic qualifications, although some studies do not confirm the existence of a relationship with conflict management styles (Kristanto, 2017), others, such as Torres and Cunha (2014), in a study on health professionals, found that professionals with a higher academic degree tended to show higher average scores for compromising, integrating and accommodation styles, and, appearing at the opposite pole, the style of avoiding and dominating. These results are in line with the postulates of Rahim (1985) and Jenkins et al. (2008), who have already stated that higher educated professionals used the avoiding style less (Rahim, 1985) and the dominating style (Jenkins et al., 2008) than those with lower academic qualifications.

- H3: *The “academic qualifications” variable is correlated, with statistical significance, with the compromising conflict management (h3.1.), integrating (h3.2.), obliging (h3.3.), dominating (h3.4) and avoiding (h3.5).*

Rego and Jesuino (2002) consider that professional categories and functions tend to be at the origin of different styles, with managers taking on a strategy of greater integrating and obliging and less avoiding. At this level, Watson and Hoffman (1996) found that managers with more power tend to be more cooperative, whereas when their power diminishes, they tend to become more dominating. Thomas et al. (2008) showed that the hierarchical level in the organization was positively related to the collaboration style and negatively related to the avoiding style, i.e., the higher the hierarchical level in the organization, the higher the use of the integrating style and the lower the avoiding style. Similar conclusions were drawn by Wang et al. (2007) when they identified the collaborative conflict management style as the most widely used by Chinese top executives/managers.

In contrast, the study by Din et al. (2012) showed that the highest hierarchical level is negatively related to the style of integrating and positively related to that of avoiding. According to their results, the highest category professionals essentially advocate the avoiding style, while the lower category ones mainly use the dominating strategy to manage organizational conflicts. Dee et al. (2004) concluded that the presidents of Catholic colleges and universities in the USA essentially apply integrative conflict management strategies such as integrating. Kirti (2016) concluded that although collaboration is preferred by middle and lower-level employees, a competition is the preferred style among top managers.

- H4: *The “professional category” variable is correlated, with statistical significance, with the compromising conflict management (h4.1.), integrating (h4.2.), obliging (h4.3.), dominating (h4.4) and avoiding (h4.5).*

Finally, at the seniority level, Chaturvedi (2017) sought to determine whether seniority and professional experience of the employees influence conflict management styles in the

automotive industry. From the results of his study, seniority has shown a negative correlation with the style of compromising, indicating that with increasing years of experience, the compromising attitude diminishes and the dominating one increases. The remaining styles (integrating, acceptance and avoiding) showed a negative correlation with seniority/years of experience, but this relationship is not statistically significant. For his part, Kristanto (2017) noted statistically significant differences between the seniority avoiding style, which is advocated by individuals with high seniority/experience. Although he found no differences in preference for styles of integrating, dominating, obliging, and compromising based on years of service, he identified some trends such as individuals with less seniority/experience making more use of the integrating style and individuals with more seniority/experience making more use of the compromising style in conflict management.

Caber et al. (2019) showed that as professional tour guides get more experienced, they tend to adapt an integrating perspective on conflicts. Less experienced guides prefer the avoiding style to management conflicts.

H5: *The “seniority” variable is correlated, with statistical significance, with the compromising conflict management (h5.1.), integrating (h5.2.), obliging (h5.3.), dominating (h5.4) and avoiding (h5.5).*

III. METHODOLOGY

To achieve the proposed objective of this paper, a methodological strategy was made based on the systematization of the analysis model, the study object, the sample, the procedure and the instrument and data analysis

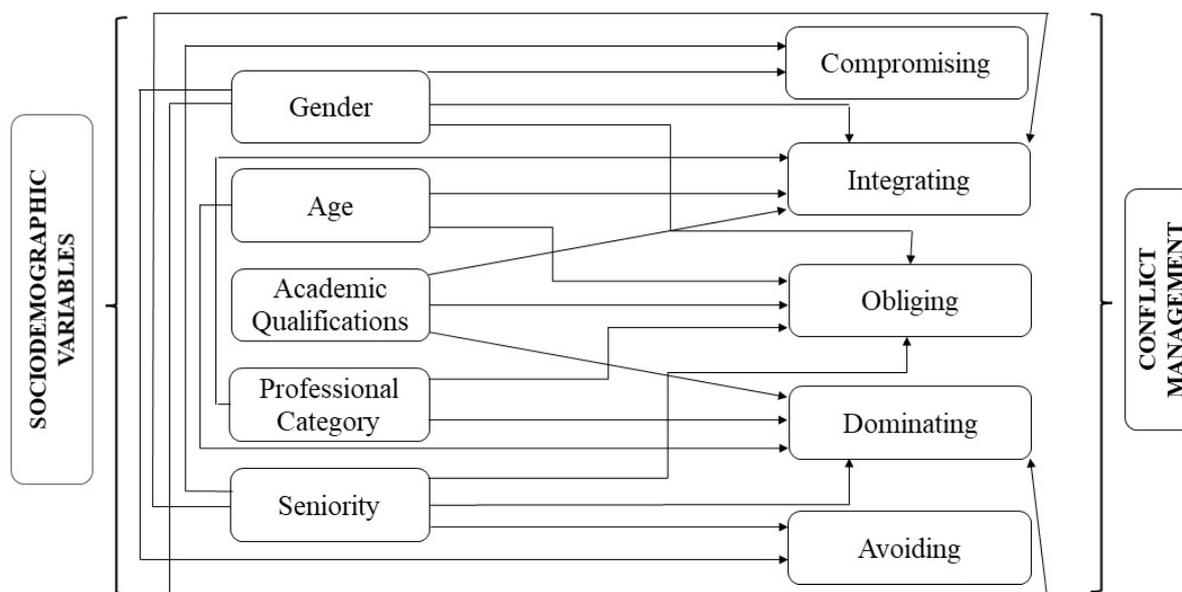
At the methodological level, the research configures a quantitative and correlational perspective (Field, 2009), focussed on the Portuguese hotel industry. It is intended to analyse and reflect on the relationship between sociodemographic variables and the organizational conflicts management of employees from different professional categories and functions.

3.1. Conceptual framework

To carry out the study, the conceptual model adopted follows the analytical-interpretative logic postulated by Kristanto (2017), Hasani et al. (2014), Din et al. (2012), and Goel (2012), regarding the relationship between the antecedents of management of organizational commitment, verifying if the sociodemographic variables are, or are not, explanatory of different types of conflicts management (Figure 1).

The ex post facto design was adopted in the study because the variables were not manipulated by the researcher. The independent variables of the study are sociodemographic characterization, while the dependent variable is the conflict management, namely its five styles.

Figure 1. Conceptual model



Own elaboration

The proposed research model aims to explore the nature of the relationship between sociodemographic variables and the management of organizational conflicts of employees in the Portuguese hotel industry.

Based on the literature review, a cross-sectional research design was adopted (Ahiauzu & Asawo, 2016). The study does not involve manipulating variables, allow us to look at numerous characteristics at once (e.g., age, gender, and others), and can provide information about what is happening in a population. This type of study can provide a look at correlations that may exist at a particular point, that is, researchers can collect data on a few different variables to see how they affect a certain condition. In this specific case, trends are analyzed on whether differences in gender, age, academic qualifications, professional category, and seniority can be correlated with different forms of conflict management.

3.2. Data collection techniques and procedure

The present study adopted quantitative research methods. This is a descriptive and comprehensive study that aimed to describe the characteristics of a given phenomenon or population and relationships between variables. The facts were analysed and interpreted by the researcher without being influenced by them.

A questionnaire survey was applied to the employees to analyse the relationship between the two constructs. To analyse the styles of conflict management, the questionnaire on the Thomas model (1992), adapted to the Portuguese context by Jesuíno (1992). The questions are closed on a Likert scale with 5 points (1 “never” to 5 “always”), it included 25 items distributed over five scales: integrating (5 items – e.g., “Confront the issue openly”), compromising (5 items – e.g., “Clearly sets out the problem by seeking a solution”), dominating (5 items – “Strongly seeking a solution to the problem”), obliging (5 items – e.g., “Seek not to argue”), avoiding (5 items – e.g., “Give up easily”). The following variables were

used to carry out the sociodemographic characterisation of the respondents: gender, age, academic qualification, professional position, and seniority. Data from these variables were presented in classes for respondents choose the response options.

3.3. Participants and procedure

The research was carried out among Portuguese employees of various types of hotels and hotel categories. The study object focuses on the employees from hotel establishments from all over the country. To obtain information on trends, a convenience sampling was chosen through privileged contacts between the author and professionals in the hotel sector in Portugal. This option was mainly due to the ease of access and the difficulty in compiling all the units (Hair et al., 2010). Through these contacts, hotels were selected that met the following requirements: hotel companies in activity, belonging to the different categories (5-star hotels, 4-star hotels, 3-star hotels, 2-star hotels, and 1-star hotel). After identifying a set of 22 hotel establishments, a meeting was held with the person in charge of the hotel, or someone indicated by him, to explain the objectives of the study.

Subsequently, the following criteria for inclusion of participants in the study were defined: i) employees with a contract with the hotel unit; ii) in service at the time of data collection; iii) with an active email account; iv) belonging to one of the following categories: directors/managers, supervisors, technicians, operatives/undifferentiated employees.

In terms of professional categories:

- Directors/Managers include functions such as hotel director, hotel vice-director, commercial director, technical services director, administrative and financial director, human resources director, among others.
- Supervisors include functions such as bar supervisor, head of reception, head of kitchen, head of Section, head of technical services, head of table, head of control section, head of security, general manager of floors, among others.
- Technicians include professionals with the roles of specialist technician in hotel and accommodation management, specialist technician of management and production of kitchen and pastry, specialist technician in hotel management of restaurants and beverages, guest relations, maintenance technician, marketing technician, human resources technician, distribution and logistics technician, quality technician, accounting technician, electromechanical, trainer, among others.
- Operatives/Undifferentiated Employees include a multiplicity and heterogeneity of professionals such as baggage, receptionist, butler, steward, bartender, various employees, telephone operators, various administrative assistants, gardeners, apprentices, various interns, among others.

The questionnaire surveys were carried out through a web-based platform. The employees received information about the information collection process, having been made explicit that the survey would be answered at two different times to eliminate potential concerns about common method bias in the performed analysis. They also received an invitation form with a participation code to access the questionnaire survey, a description of the goal of the project, and a general description of the data collection procedure.

The responses to the questionnaire's surveys could be recorded by the participants, allowing it to be completed at different times. Respondents were not grouped to not adulterate the assumption of independent observations. Questions were written in a way to infer the causal direction between the dimensions of analysis. Data can, therefore, be considered cross-sectional throughout the cut, making it possible to determine the direction of causality.

Two waves of questionnaires were distributed to collect data in April (Survey Time 1 – ST1) and in October (Survey Time 2), considered periods that precede the high seasons, which may lead to a higher response rate. The respondents were the same in ST1 and ST2. The procedure to ensure that the participants were the same in ST1 and ST2 was guaranteed by their identification through a code.

About ST1, a total of 1.651 questionnaires were distributed, 1.235 of which were recovered, with a recovery rate of 74.8%. Of the recovered questionnaires, 89 were invalid, and 1,146 were valid. Valid questionnaires accounted for 69.4% of all the applied questionnaires. About ST2, a total of 1.146 questionnaires were distributed, involving the employees who participated in ST1. After a one-to-one match for the data collected in ST1 and ST2, 798 valid questionnaires were obtained, with a valid questionnaire recovery rate of 69.6%.

The results analysis was based on the weighted average of the respondents' answers to the two questionnaires (e.g., item 3 from compromising style: ST1, answered 5 from de scale, and ST2 answered 3 from de scale – the final score considered was 4).

The final sample consisted of 798 employees belonging to the following categories of hotels: 5-star hotels (335 employees), 4-star hotels (179 employees), 3-star hotels (95 employees), 2-star hotels (117 employees), and 1-star hotels (72 employees). The respondents were not clustered into groups to ensure the assumption of independent observations.

The ethical and deontological precepts of the Declaration of Helsinki for research were considered throughout the research. The participation of workers in the study was made possible by those responsible for the hotel units or those responsible for the area of people management. As ethical procedures, voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality of the participants were also guaranteed. Free and informed consent was requested from the participants, with a description of the objective of the study and a general description of the data collection procedure. Consent was made available on the web-based platform where the questionnaire was applied, and the access link was sent to the participants.

3.4. Data analysis

Once the process of applying the questionnaire surveys was completed, the data was exported and analysed through the SPSS/AMOS25 programme. The analysis was essentially quantitative, using univariate and multivariate analysis techniques to assess the strength and direction of associations between the study variables.

A descriptive analysis of the data was carried out through the analysis of frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviation, asymmetry, and kurtosis.

To analyse the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used with a confidence interval greater than 0.70 (Streiner, 2003). Pearson's r coefficient was used to verify the associations between the model variables, considering that: < 0.200 is very low; 0.200 to 0.399 is low; 0.400 to 0.699 is moderate; 0.700 to 0.899 is high; 0.900 to 1 is very high (Marôco, 2018).

To test the validity of the questionnaire, factor analysis was performed, having considered as acceptable in all solutions factor loadings values (λ) greater than 0.40 (Brown, 2015). The normality analysis of the variables included in the model was performed. The parametric tests (anova or t-student) are quite robust when the distribution under study is not normal and when the distribution under study has considerable asymmetry ($As < 2$) and kurtosis ($Ct < 7$) (Finney & DiStefano, 2013). When these assumptions of normality were verified, the t-student and one-way anova tests were used for independent samples, to verify if there were statistical differences between the variables under study. Pearson's r correlation coefficient was used to perform the convergent validity analysis of the instrument items, assessing the magnitude and direction of the associations between the variables (Marôco, 2018).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the study objectives and the hypotheses, the results of the empirical study undertaken are presented below. We began by systematising the results related to the sociodemographic characterization of the sample and the dimensions of conflict management, to subsequently present and discuss the results related to the relationship between both (sociodemographic variables and the conflict management of employees in the hotel sector).

4.1. Sociodemographic characterization

The sample is mainly composed of professionals: male 57.4%), between 30-39 (20.2%) and 25-29 years of age (19.2%); with secondary school education (43.5%), operatives/undifferentiated employees (37.8%), with middle levels of seniority (36.0% and 33.1% have been with the institution for 3-5 years or 6-10 years, respectively (Table 1).

Table 1. Sociodemographic characterization of the sample

Variables		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	458	57.4%
	Female	340	42.6%
Age	Up to 24 years	80	10.0%
	25 – 29 years	153	19.2%
	30 – 34 years	161	20.2%
	35 – 39 years	84	10.5%
	40 – 44 years	138	17.3%
	45 – 50 years	133	16.7%
	More than 50 years	49	6.1%
Seniority	Up to 3 years	109	13,7%
	3 – 5 years	287	36.0%
	6 – 10 years	264	33.1%
	11 – 15 years	74	9.3%
	16 more years	64	8.0%
Qualifications	Up to 9th year or equivalent	128	13.2%
	12th year or equivalent	347	43.5%
	Degree	260	32.6%
	Master's degree or more	63	7.9%
Professional Category	Directors/Managers (upper and middle)	68	8,3%
	Supervisors	165	20,7%
	Technicians	265	33,2%
	Operatives/Undifferentiated Employees (receptionists, doormen, cooks, bartenders, waiters, helpers, interns, and others)	302	37,8%

Own elaboration

4.2. Conflict management styles

We carried out the factorial analysis and the study of internal consistency to analyse the internal validity of the questionnaire survey scales. Thus, in the first stage, to analyse the data concerning the components of conflict management, a Factorial Analysis of the main components in their five dimensions was carried out (Marôco, 2018). Due to low factor loading compared with other items, the item A7 ("Try not to get involved") was deleted from the scale of avoiding conflict management. Totally, four items were used. After the above item were removed, the commonality values of hall remaining items were greater than 0.4 (the values are between 0.645 to 0.978), indicating that the information on the items could be extracted effectively.

In the current study, the reliability of the sub-scales of conflict management was supported by high Cronbach's alpha coefficients, respectively: compromising $\alpha = 0.915$; integrating $\alpha = 0.967$; obliging $\alpha = 0.969$; dominating $\alpha = 0.983$; avoiding $\alpha = 0.974$ (table 2).

Table 2. Confirmatory factorial analysis on conflict management

INTEGRATING CONFLICT MANAGEMENT	
I6. Confront the issue openly	0.930
I9. Emphasises that differences are less important than the common goals	0.970
I16. Faces the conflict directly	0.906
I18. Does not consider a "no" as an answer	0.949
I25. Considers both sides of the problem	0.978
TOTAL	0.967
COMPROMISING CONFLICT MANAGEMENT	
C1. Clearly sets out the problem by seeking a solution	0.875
C5. Seeking compromising	0.803
C10. Seeking an intermediate solution	0.895
C15. Is ready to negotiate	0.863
C21. Expresses his views clearly	0.896
TOTAL	0.763
DOMINATING CONFLICT MANAGEMENT	
D3. Strongly seeking a solution to the problem	0.904
D8. Insists on a certain solution	0.989
D11. Does not drop the issue without it being resolved	0.982
D13. Trying to move forward	0.989
D23. Imposes its solution	0.989
TOTAL	0.983
OBLIGING CONFLICT MANAGEMENT	
O2. Seek not to argue	0.955
O4. Emphasises common interests	0.931
O14. Mitigating differences	0.954
O19. Seeks to settle disagreements	0.959
O20. Give a little to get something in return	0.946
TOTAL	0.969
AVOIDING CONFLICT MANAGEMENT	
A12. Give up easily	0.987
A17. It withdraws from the situation	0.970
A22. Ignores the conflict	0.972
A24. Act as if your common objectives were of primary importance	0.924
TOTAL	0.974

Extraction Method: Analysis of the Main Components.

Varimax Method: Varimax with Kaiser Standardization

Own elaboration

Based on composite reliability, the internal consistency of indicators for each dimension of conflict management was tested. The results obtained corroborate the presence of five main factors with very significant values, and the respective indicators are clearly grouped in their respective dimensions (table 2). The indicators have scattered factor weights between $\alpha = 0.803$ (C5. "Seeking compromising" included in the compromising dimension of conflict management) and $\alpha = 0.989$ (D8. "Insists on a certain solution", D13. "Trying to move forward" and D23. "Imposes its solution" included in the dominating dimension of conflict management).

Concerning the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test for sample suitability and Bartlett's sphericity for the conflict management scale, the results show fitting values and reveal optimal explained variances: for conflict management, KMO (0.781) and Bartlett's sphericity ($\chi^2(300) = 6038.089$; $p < .001$) with total explained variance of 85.37%.

After checking the validity of the scales, a descriptive analysis of the data was made (Table 3). Regarding the analysis of normality of the variables included in the model, the data obtained are in accordance with that established by Finney and DiStefano (2013), for whom 2 (asymmetry) and 7 (kurtosis) are the maximum values allowed, respectively. The results indicate that the professionals of this institution advocate different styles of conflict management.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the dimensions of conflict management

Variables	Min Value	Max Value	Average	Standard Deviation	Asymmetry	Curtose
Integrating CM	1.00	5.00	2.91	0.918	0.388	-1.689
Obliging CM	1.00	5.00	3.13	1.372	-0.161	-1.832
Compromising CM	1.00	5.00	2.85	1.113	0.474	-1.414
Dominating	1.00	5.00	3.47	1.225	-0.322	-1.796
Avoiding CM	1.00	5.00	3.15	1.595	0.033	-1.570
Global CM	1.00	5.00	3.10	0.680	0.155	-1.643

Own elaboration

Concerning organizational conflict management (Table 3) overall, this is a process that is present in this institution at the level of employees. Considering that the items are assessed on a Likert scale of five points, the cut-off point is 2.5. The overall average value for conflict management (3.10) is higher than the average value of the scale.

In specific terms, all dimensions of conflict management have means above the midpoint of the scale: dominating (3.47), avoiding (3.15) and obliging (3.13) stand out as the most recommended dimensions in average terms; integrating (2.91) and compromising (2.85) stand out as the least recommended dimensions in average terms. The average values of the five dimensions are all above the cut-off point (2.5), so it can be said that professionals mainly develop strategies of dominating but also present acceptable levels both in terms of avoiding, obliging, integrating, and compromising, although with lower values. These results allow us to consider and maintain that employees seek to develop dominating strategies, allowing them to satisfy their own interests and objectives in a competitive manner.

At this level, Kristanto (2017) argues that this situation tends to prove less appropriate and positive in as much as the preference for dominating style, compared with the compromising and integration, presupposes that the decision is not mutually beneficial for the parties in conflict. On the one hand, the compromising strategy leaves less space for negotiation and, consequently, for less moderate opinions and positions when making decisions, thus creating an environment less conducive to mutual acceptance. On the other hand, the dominating strategy requires that professionals act with prudence but also with assertiveness, according to the principles of the organization, highlighting the non-collaborative and non-cooperative aspects, which shows that the professionals are less available to find consensus, with disadvantages for themselves and the organization.

4.3. Organizational Conflict management styles by Sociodemographic Variables

After the sociodemographic characterization of the respondents and the conflict management, we will now present and discuss the results of the relationship between both

dimensions. To this end, we will use Pearson's r-correlation to analyse the convergent validity of the instrument items, also evaluating the intensity and direction of the associations between the variables. The analysis reveals that some variables are associated with each other and are statistically significant (Table 4). According to Marôco (2018), the values of the associations vary from very weak (r between 0.000 and 0.200), weak (r between 0.200 and 0.399), moderate (r between 0.400 and 0.699) and strong (r between 0.700 and 1), some of which are statistically significant.

Table 4. Pearson's correlations between conflict management dimensions by sociodemographic variables

Pearson Correlation	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Gender (1)	-								
Age (2)	.008	-							
Seniority (3)	-.010	-.028	-						
Qualifications (4)	.012	.233**	-.006	-					
Prof. Category (5)	-.016	-.099**	-.069	-.043	-				
GCintegrating (6)	.017	.896**	-.019	.197**	.799**	-			
GCcompromising (7)	.005	.607**	-.004	-.004	-.114**	.799**	-		
GCdominating (8)	-.011	-.822**	.026	-.140**	.109**	-.976**	-.882**	-	
GCobliging (9)	-.026	.647**	-.003	.073*	-.081*	.741**	.678**	-.749**	-
GCavoiding (10)	-.016	.741**	-.042	-.036	.847**	.853**	.847**	-.901**	.717**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Own elaboration

It is interesting to note that the five dimensions of conflict management were all strongly correlated (ranging from $r=0.678$ to $r=-0.976$). The most statistically significant associations are between the integration and the dominating styles of conflict management ($r=-0.976$ and $p<0.01$), the dominating and the avoiding style ($r=-0.901$ and $p<0.01$), and the age and the integration style ($r=0.896$ and $p<0.01$). The variables with the largest number of statistically significant associations are the age, qualifications, integrating, dominating, and obliging variables (7). The gender and seniority variables do not present any statistically significant association.

The correlation matrix between all dimensions of conflict management reveals significant associations, which is in line with other studies (Smarty & Zakkariya, 2018; Atteya, 2013).

The results show a weak and very weak correlation (positive and negative) between the gender variable and the five dimensions of conflict management. It should be noted that the relationships are not statistically significant, being these results confirmed by the analysis of the independent sample T Test: integrating ($T=-0.480$ and $p=0.852$), compromising ($T=-0.147$ and $p=0.053$), obliging ($T=0.722$ and $p=0.060$), dominating ($T=0.301$ and $p=0.800$), and avoiding ($T=0.440$ and $p=0.350$). In this sense, hypothesis 1 in its various sub-alignments is not confirmed: being male or female has no influence on how individuals manage organizational

conflicts. Thus, this corroborates the research of Hasani et al. (2014), who found no statistically significant relationship between gender and conflict management styles. At the same time, the obtained results are also in line with the studies of Chaturvedi (2017) and Goel (2012): the first found no statistically significant relationship between gender and the obliging, integrating, and compromising styles of management conflicts; the second found no significant association between gender and the avoiding, integrating, and obliging dimensions.

These results are in line with the results of the study by Kristanto (2017), which concluded that men are more collaborative and committed than women in conflict management; the results obtained by Chaturvedi (2017) and Goel (2012) in the obliging dimension concluded that men tend to use more accommodating behaviours in conflict management than women; and the conclusions of Cunha (2018), Chaturvedi (2017) and Torres and Cunha (2014), which shows that the style of avoiding is, above all, advocated by woman.

Regarding age, there was a positive correlation with all dimensions of conflict management. Explaining this, age shows: a moderate positive significant association with the compromising ($r=0.607$ and $p<0.01$) and the obliging ($r=0.647$ and $p<0.01$) styles of conflict management; a strong positive significant association with the avoiding style ($r=0.741$ and $p<0.01$) and the integrating ($r=0.896$ and $p<0.01$); and a negative strong association with the dominating conflict management style ($r=-0.822$ and $p<0.01$). The hypothesis 2 is fully confirmed. There is an association statistically significant between the dimensions of conflict management and age.

This was also confirmed through the independent sample T Test analysis (Table 5). For this analysis, age group variables were coded and categorized into two subdimensions: younger and older. The "younger" are the employees up to 39 years old and the "older" are the employees more than 40 years old. The conflict management styles differ according to the age of employees. On the one hand, the older employees develop conflict management strategies of greater integrating ($T=-124.545$ and $p<0.01$), compromising ($T=-48.630$ and $p<0.01$), obliging ($T=-33.169$ and $p<0.01$) and avoiding ($T=-64.480$ and $p<0.01$). On the other hand, the younger one's advocate conflict management strategies of greater dominating ($T=160.828$ and $p<0.01$).

Table 5. Independent sample T Test – Differences in Conflict Management Styles by Age

Dimension	Age	N	M	SD	T	Sig. (F)
Integrating	Younger	478	2.17	0.20	-124,545	0.000**
	Older	320	3.99	0.20		
Compromising	Younger	478	2.06	0.51	-48.630	0.000**
	Older	320	4.02	0.35		
Obliging	Younger	478	2.28	1.08	-33,169	0.000**
	Older	320	4.41	0.47		
Dominating	Younger	478	4.46	0.27	160,828	0.000**
	Older	320	2.00	0.00		
Avoiding	Younger	478	1.96	0.78	-64,480	0.000**
	Older	320	4.94	0.34		

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Own elaboration

As for the conflict management style of obliging, the results confirm the studies of Chaturvedi (2017), Din et al. (2012), Jenkins et al. (2008), Havenga (2007) and Balay (2007), as the tendency to resort to this type of conflict management is greater among older professionals. Regarding the integrated style, this study confirms the results of Caber et al. (2019) who identified that the management of integration conflicts is greater among older people. About avoiding style, these results are in line with Beitler et al. (2016) and Vrbnjak et al. (2011), which identified significant differences according to age, showing that the levels of avoiding conflict management are higher among older professionals. For the dominating style it is more commonly used to manage conflicts by the younger ones. Regarding the compromising style, these results follow the conclusions of Din et al. (2012), which stated that older teachers are more committed when compared to other (younger) age groups. In observance of the obliging style of conflict management, the results contradict those obtained by Chaturvedi (2017), Kristanto (2017) and Havenga (2007), who found that it is the younger ones that tend to use the most accommodating style.

Concerning academic qualifications, there is a correlation (positive and negative), sometimes with statistical significance, between the academic qualifications and some conflict management styles, suggesting that conflict management is differently advocated according to academic qualifications. There is a statistically significant very low positive linear association with the integrating style ($r=0.197$ and $p<0.01$) and the obliging style ($r=0.73$ and $p<0.05$); a very low negative significant association with the dominating style ($r=-0.140$ and $p<0.01$). There is no statistically significant linear association with the compromising style ($r=0.040$ and $p=0.258$) and the avoiding style ($r=-0.036$ and $p=0.312$).

The independent sample T Test does not confirm the correlations in the dominating style ($T=-2.041$ and $p=0.061$). There is a statistically significant correlation between academic qualifications and the compromising ($T=3.240$ and $p<0.05$), integrating ($T=0.500$ and $p<0.01$), obliging ($T=2.493$ and $p<0.01$), and avoiding ($T=6.416$ and $p<0.01$) conflict management dimensions. Employees with higher academic qualifications advocate behaviours of greater integrating conflict management, and less compromising, avoiding, and obliging (Table 6).

We can state that hypothesis 3 is confirmed in four sub-alignments: h.3.1, h.3.2, h.3.3 and h.3.5. On the one hand, the conclusions of Torres and Cunha (2014) identify positive relationships between the academic degree and the compromising, integrating, and accommodation styles. On the other hand, the results obtained by Rahim (1985) and Jenkins et al. (2008) are also confirmed in the dimension of avoiding, who found that professionals with higher academic qualifications used this style of conflict management less. The hypothesis is not confirmed in sub-alignment h.3.4, that is, the academic qualifications of employees are an invariant (not statistically significant) of the dominant conflict management style, following Kristanto's postulate (2017).

Table 6. Independent sample T Test – Differences in Conflict Management Styles by Academic Qualifications

Dimension	Academic Qualifications	N	M	SD	T	Sig. (F)
Integrating	Up to 12th year or equivalent	475	2.17	0.97	0.500	0.000**
	Degree or more than degree	323	3.99	0.84		
Compromising	Up to 12th year or equivalent	475	2.95	1.07	3.240	0.015*
	Degree or more than degree	323	2.69	1.16		
Obliging	Up to 12th year or equivalent	475	3.23	1.35	2.493	0.009**
	Degree or more than degree	323	2.99	1.39		
Dominating	Up to 12th year or equivalent	475	3.40	1.23	-2.041	0.061
	Degree or more than degree	323	3.58	1.21		
Avoiding	Up to 12th year or equivalent	475	3.44	1.39	6.416	0.000**
	Degree or more than degree	323	2.72	1.77		

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Own elaboration

As for the professional category, a very weak relationship with conflict management was noted, being statistically significant in dominating, integrating, compromising, and obliging styles. Hypothesis 4 is partially confirmed in its sub-alignments: h.4.1, h.4.2, h.4.3 and h.4.4; that is, there are statistically significant association between the professional position and the dominating ($r=0.109$ and $p<0.01$), compromising ($r=-0.114$ and $p<0.01$), integrating ($r=-0.117$ and $p<0.01$), and obliging ($r=-0.081$ and $p<0.05$) conflict management styles.

These results are reinforced by the Anova analysis (Table 7). At this level, to the higher professional category, the results reveals that the employees are more compromised ($F=3.937$ and $p<0.01$), more collaborative ($F=4.591$ and $p<0.01$), and more consenting ($F=3.508$ and $p<0.05$). In turn, the lower the professional position in the organizational structure, the greater the use of dominating style ($F=4.090$ and $p<0.01$). At this level, these results corroborate those obtained by Thomas et al. (2008) and Rego and Jesuino (2002), who concluded that the higher the hierarchical level, the greater the tendency to use more collaborative and cooperative behaviour (compromising and integrating) and less of competitive style. This is also in line with the postulations of Wang et al. (2007), Dee et al. (2004), and Watson and Hoffman (1996), who identified the collaborative conflict management style as the most used by senior executives/managers.

Table 7. Differences in Conflict Management Styles by Professional Category

Dimension	Professional Category	N	M	SD	F	Sig. (F)
Integrating	Directors/Managers (upper and middle)	66	2.99	0.98	4.591	0.003**
	Supervisors	165	3.07	0.93		
	Technicians	265	2.93	0.88		
	Operatives/Undifferentiated Employees	302	2.76	0.91		
Compromising	Directors/Managers (upper and middle)	66	2.99	1.11	3.937	0.008**
	Supervisors	165	3.02	1.12		
	Technicians	265	2.87	1.16		
	Operatives/Undifferentiated Employees	302	2.68	1.05		
Obliging	Directors/Managers (upper and middle)	66	3.10	1.40	3.508	0.015*

	Supervisors	165	3.42	1.36		
	Technicians	265	3.11	1.35		
	Operatives/Undifferentiated Employees	302	3.00	1.37		
Dominating	Directors/Managers (upper and middle)	66	3.37	1.25	4.090	0.007**
	Supervisors	165	3.23	1.25		
	Technicians	265	3.45	1.22		
	Operatives/Undifferentiated Employees	302	3.64	1.19		
Avoiding	Directors/Managers (upper and middle)	66	3.32	1.55	1.579	0.193
	Supervisors	165	3.34	1.65		
	Technicians	265	3.08	1.69		
	Operatives/Undifferentiated Employees	302	3.06	1.48		

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Own elaboration

Finally, the results show a very weak positive and negative correlation between the seniority variable and the conflict management dimensions. The values suggest that professionals with less seniority in the organization have greater dominating ($r=0.026$ and $p=0.470$) and less avoiding ($r=-0.042$ and $p=0.240$), obliging ($r=-0.003$ and $p=0.931$), compromising ($r=-0.004$ and $p=0.901$), integrating ($r=-0.019$ and $p=0.600$) in conflict management.

The results obtained at the level of the one-way Anova analysis are consistent and allow concluding that hypothesis 5 in its various sub-alignments is not confirmed: integrating ($F=1.165$ and $p=0.325$), compromising ($F=1.285$ and $p=0.274$), obliging ($F=0.236$ and $p=0.918$), dominating ($F=1.361$ and $p=0.246$), and avoiding ($F=1.483$ and $p=0.205$). In this sense, it can be inferred that, in this sample, having seniority does not condition the way professionals manage organizational conflicts. These results corroborate Torres (2012) research, which showed that this variable does not show statistically significant correlations with conflict management. Moreover, this study also presents similarities with the results of Chaturvedi (2017), which reveal a negative correlation between seniority and the obliging and avoiding styles, but the correlations found are not statistically significant. Finally, these results are still supported by Kristanto's study (2017), who found no significant differences between seniority and the integrating, dominating, obliging, and compromising of conflict management styles, and therefore have little predictive importance in their explanation.

In summary, the results of this study have proved to be very pertinent overall, consistent with other studies, to understanding the relationship between these two constructs. On the one hand, there were positive and negative associations with statistical significance between conflict management and sociodemographic variables such as age, academic qualifications, and professional category, which is in line with the research that considers conflict management as a variant of sociodemographic characteristics. On the other hand, they show very weak correlations, but without statistical significance, between conflict management and sociodemographic characteristics of gender and seniority, which is in line with the research that considers conflict management as an invariant of sociodemographic characteristics of employees.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The main objective of this study was to analyse the relationship between sociodemographic variables and the conflict management styles of employees in the hotel industry. The results show that the employees have different styles and levels of intensity of organizational conflict management. In parallel, the greater or lesser tendency for the use of organizational conflict management styles is related to some of the sociodemographic dimensions, namely: age, academic qualifications, and professional category.

Regarding the relationship between conflict management styles and sociodemographic variables of the employees, the hypotheses formulated that guide the specifications between the conflict management styles and age (hypothesis 2), academic qualifications (hypothesis 3) and professional category (hypothesis 4) have been confirmed in some of their various sub-alignments, which means that they are a determinant of conflict management, since they condition the way in which professionals manage organizational conflicts. The hypotheses that systematise the specifications between the conflict management components and gender (hypothesis 1) and seniority (hypothesis 5) have not been confirmed. That is, it was not possible to show a positive effect between the gender and seniority of employees in conflict management in the hospitality industry companies.

So, we can conclude that conflict was an inevitable process in the organizations in the hotel sector and must manage, and each person may be involved with conflict in the workplace, according to the individual characteristics.

5.1. Theoretical and practical implications

As for theoretical implications, this study contributes to systematizing and operationalizing an analytical model that allows to understand, in a relational way, the dynamics established between the set of sociodemographic variables and the styles of organizational conflict management for companies in the hotel sector.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this study is the first empirical study in Portugal focused on the effect of sociodemographic characteristics of hotels' employees on conflict management. This study is the first study that introduced the conflict management scale in the hotel industry, identifying the five dimensions (integration, commitment, domination, obligation, avoidance), and explored in the hypothetical model the different roles of each dimension of conflict management in the relationship with the sociodemographic characteristics of hotel employees. In this sense, this study provides a measurement tool and bibliographic references for future research on conflict management styles of Portuguese hotel staff. Thus, it fills a gap in the research on the mechanism by which sociodemographic variables influence the conflict management process of employees in the hotel industry.

The results of the study have some practical implications that can be useful for researchers as well as for managers and policy makers in the hotel industry in Portugal, shedding light on the impact of the causes of conflict – demographic factors – and how to deal with conflict.

At this level, the results should be able to support the organization's objectives, through efforts to explore the opinion of different characteristics, so that it can be aligned

with corporate objectives (Goel, 2012). Managers and policy makers should use different conflict resolution strategies, customizing their management according to sociodemographic variables, which allows to maximize their positive effects. Managers and policy makers decisions improved by their knowledge of employees should also be implemented with a view to establishing an effective relationship with workers, involving them, and increasing their levels of engagement (Smarty & Zakkariya, 2018). This would allow professionals to be able to show better levels of loyalty, dedication, and a more positive attitude towards work, as they would feel more valued and recognized as strategic agents in the development of the organization. From this point of view, especially in countries with strong individualistic cultures, hotel managers could use the importance of the sociodemographic variables of the employees to manage conflict differently in the organization.

As noted by Rahim (1985) and Rahim et al. (2018), an integrator conflict management style can offer a win-win situation for all parties. This study shows that some of the individual characteristics (the most experienced and the oldest) can find the solutions to conflicts as they gain more proficiency over time. Also, cultural characteristics – related to the higher levels of education and to higher-level functions of hotel employees – may have influence on management and problem-solving behaviors, by reinforcing the collaborative perspective.

The results can be used as a source of information for hotel management in understanding the individual differences and its influence on conflict management. The findings are important for human resource management itself, as they may change to human resource management practices. On the one hand, this study illustrates that there is a difference that cannot be avoided in the selection of organizations associated with the different conflicts management strategies caused by differences in the demographic characteristics (Kristanto, 2017). On the other hand, give an insight to the human resource managers to undertake the various human resource functions (recruitment, training, and development, assessment, and others), keeping in view that a right mix of employee demographics in the workforce can lead to positive conflict management in the organization (Goel, 2012).

Once it is understood which variable affects and how much the conflict style training, behavioral assessment, performance and required environment supported by policies and practices should be designed to ensure a congenial work environment and an enthusiastic working environment. This can not only help in fostering positive and harmonious work culture but will also help in building a strong employer brand (Chaturvedi, 2017).

Hotel managers or department managers in hotel businesses could institutionalize conflict management in the organization as a formal organizational management process, encouraging them to raise the professional level of existing staff with training programs on this topic. This could be achieved by using team coaching and teambuilding activities (Caber et al., 2019), offering training in conflict management and conflict resolution techniques, and/or strengthening the capacity for mediation carried out by the hotels' human resources department.

if it is considered that conflict management influences the development of organizations and, at the same time, this can be determined by sociodemographic variables, it is urgent for hotel managers to address these issues, when they think of implementing

management practices centered on the development of people and teams, based on their different individual and behavioral characteristics. This may be helpful for an organization to be successful and to achieve organizational objectives with positive employee relations.

5.2. Limitations and future research

In terms of limitations, it is important to point out that this study was supported in only one technique of collecting information, which may limit the extrapolation of the results and obtained conclusions.

All the variables in the questionnaires used in this study were self-reported by the employees. Respondents' subjective feelings may affect some results. However, the application of the questionnaire in two different moments allowed to reduce the subjectivity in the answers.

Given the relevance and complexity of this industry, to consolidate the knowledge on the relationship between sociodemographic variables and conflict management, it is suggested to carry out further studies in other hospitality organizations (e.g., tourist resorts or inns), with different methods (e.g., case studies) and with other data collection techniques (e.g., in-depth interviews), which should bring a robustness perception of this relationship in the hotel sector.

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CONTRIBUTION:

Author 1: Conceptualization, Original conception of the work, Methodology, Data Analysis, Formal Analysis, Data Curation, Resources, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing, Supervision, Visualization.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

The authors thank the professionals of the hotel sector (privileged contacts for access to organizations, hotel directors, responsible for the human resources area) for their institutional support for the research, as well as the employees who answered to the questionnaire.