



**INTERCULTURAL ANALYSIS ON THE
PERCEPTIONS OF *KRENGJAI* AMONG THAI AND
NON-THAI EMPLOYEES IN ACADEMIC
WORKPLACES**

BY

MISS KATESARA BOONPRASERT

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MASTER OF ARTS IN
ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LINGUISTICS
FACULTY OF LIBERAL ARTS
THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY
ACADEMIC YEAR 2016
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THESIS

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ENTITLED

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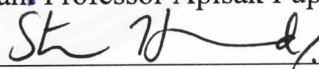
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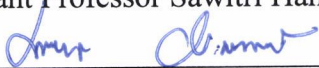
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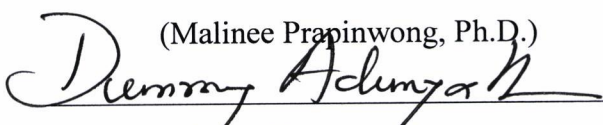
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Thesis Title	INTERCULTURAL ANALYSIS ON THE PERCEPTIONS OF <i>KRENGJAI</i> AMONG THAI AND NON-THAI EMPLOYEES IN ACADEMIC WORKPLACES
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ABSTRACT

The term *krengjai* (to be considerate) is frequently claimed to represent a Thai social value which is reflected in Thais' daily behaviors. Over the last decade, globalization and the integration of South-east Asian nations into ASEAN Community has accelerated international mobilization, cross-regional collaboration, as well as intercultural exchanges within various organizations especially educational institutions. Nowadays, several universities in Thailand increasingly offer international study and research programs to meet up this regional trend with international standard. Therefore, staff and faculties from diverse cultures are employed to fulfil such an international standard requirement. This diverse group of intercultural employees has to encounter daily interactions in their workplace inevitably involving how to behave *krengjai* manner with their colleagues. Interestingly, *krengjai* can affect the quality of communication and subsequently the professional relationship of the interlocutor. The purpose of the present study was to examine how *krengjai* –its English definitions and effects on

communication and professional relationship is perceived in multicultural environment.

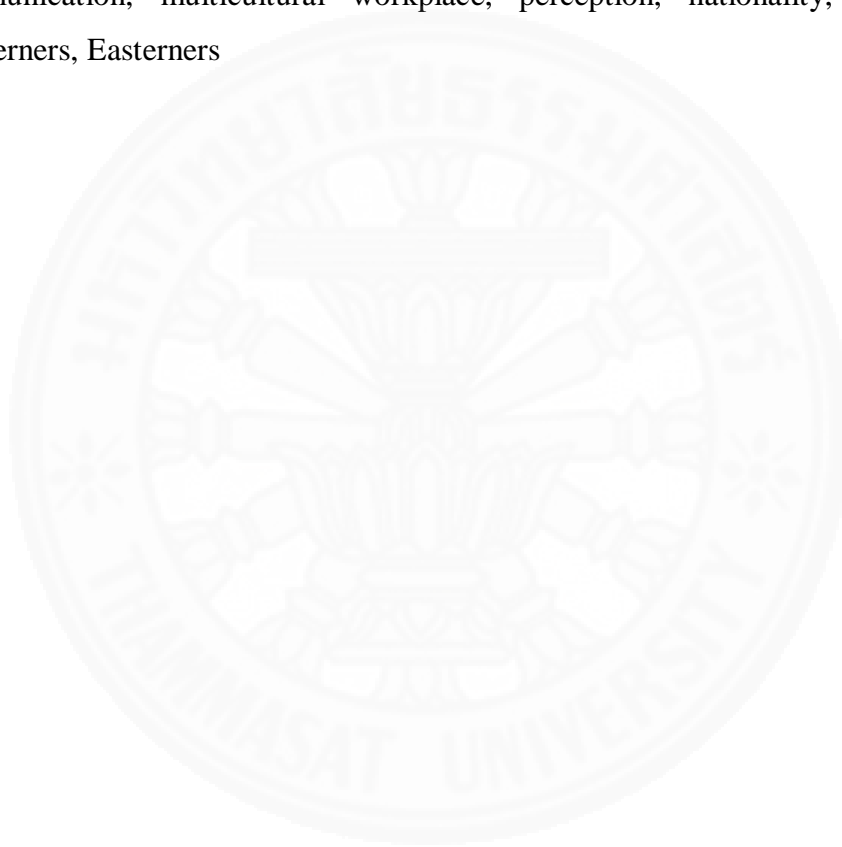
To investigate the perceptions towards *krengjai*, a mixed methodology was implemented. A combination of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were the preliminary sources of primary data for this combined method. The participants (subjects) were Thai and non-Thai employees (staff and faculty members) from an international study program of two Thai state (government) universities. The questionnaires were collected with 201 Thais 33 Westerners and 8 Easterners. Then, 2 participants, in total of 6, from each group were chosen to participate in an in-depth interview.

The findings of this study revealed that Thai and non-Thai participants provided both similar and different English definitions of *krengjai* from which “consideration” or “being considerate” is mostly used to interpret the term. In addition, there was no explicitly direct relationship with nationality to definitional similarity or difference on *krengjai*. The investigation on perceptions of *krengjai* effects on communication and professional relationship showed that most Thai and non-Thai participants agreed with negative effects of *krengjai* on communication, whereas positive effects on professional relationship. However, the qualitative findings showed that the value of *krengjai* binary effects was based on context and therefore perceived otherwise. The analysis of relationship between nationality and perceptions towards *krengjai* revealed further that the Western participants had the highest percentage of negative perceptions towards *krengjai*, following with Eastern and Thai participants.

The study concludes that the interpretation of *krengjai* is based on personal experiences of participants, respectively influencing their different level of perceptions. In response, Thai and non-Thai employees should be aware of the subjective interpretation of *krengjai*. Moreover, any assumption of similarity/difference based on nationality can deteriorate the quality of communication and personal relationships when *krengjai* is displayed. To

create multicultural understanding and thus a healthy and professional working environment, a workplace should initiate intercultural training session, which entails a complete conceptual picture of *krengjai*. An open forum could also encourage discussion on specific issues relevant to the practice of *krengjai* at workplace.

Keywords: *krengjai*, definition, Thai culture, national culture, intercultural communication, multicultural workplace, perception, nationality, Thais, Westerners, Easterners



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“Don’t be overwhelmed with your data; be selective. Don’t try to be perfect” (Hammond, 2015). Without these words of my thesis advisor, this study would not be completed. I express my heartfelt gratitude to my thesis advisor, Asst. Prof. Dr. Sawitri Hammond, for her academic guidance and valuable comments, kindness and understanding when I was in hard times and hours of reminding me to overcome the fear of not writing perfectly enough. I equally extend my gratitude to Asst. Prof. Dr. Apisak Pupipat as the chair of my thesis committee, for his direct and constructive feedback on my work. I also express my heartfelt appreciation to Dr. Malinee Prapinwong in accepting to be my thesis defense committee member and for her kindness and sympathy for my panic disorder.

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Miss Katesara Boonprasert

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Motivated by the saying *ความเกรงใจเป็นสมบัติของผู้ดี - Kwamkrengjai (Being considerate) is a trait of cultivated person* by Phrasadetsurenthrathibodi (1912), this study attempted to examine how such a purported value is perceived in a multicultural context. This chapter accordingly provides an overview of the study. It discusses the related background information, gives a statement of the problem and the purposes of the study that set the background for conducting this research. The research questions are then addressed in accordance to the formation of the hypothesis. The scope, definition of terms and significance of the study are explained. The chapter concludes with an emphasis of *krengjai* as a key factor in daily interactions.

1.1 Background of the study

For decades, globalization has become a cliché to explain the phenomenon of increasing connections and so increasing intercultural contact and/or communication. Yet, it is a good beginning point to explain the phenomenal process of developments in transportation and technology, integrated social and cultural activities and, as such, it is the focus of this study. Recently, there has been a stronger focus on promoting regional integration, such as the European Union (EU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which encourages further mobility of labor and a marked rise in the contact of people from dissimilar cultures. Thailand has without doubt been a part of and subject to these processes. With the wave of globalization and the coming of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), there are an increasing number of international organizations of all sizes as well as mobility of workers across the border. Workplaces in almost all sectors have become increasingly multicultural and

daily interactions are now more or less involved with various issues related to dissimilar linguistic and/or cultural backgrounds.

While the use of different languages is an obvious barrier to communication between two interlocutors, cultural differences also add major complications and create a greater barrier to effective communication in multicultural workplaces. Indeed, Gudykunst (1998) claimed that culture is inextricably intertwined with communication. More simply stated, the culture in which we were born and raised influences the ways we communicate. Culture can be defined in numerous ways, but in brief it is the way of life that involves shared beliefs, values and norms (Kurylo, 2013). These beliefs, values and norms determine the core thoughts and actions and so the perception of an individual (Lustig and Koester, 1996; Weaver, 2000). Although all cultures are unique, they share systematic similarities and differences, especially between Western and Eastern cultures, and this systematic pattern can help explain variations in communication (Gudykunst, 1998; Hofstede, 1980). The relationship between culture and communication is discussed in detail later in this study, but here it is noted that failure to understand cultural differences can lead to unpleasant consequences, such as bias, stereotyping, unhealthy interpersonal relationships and miscommunication at work.

Taking into account such integration and its impacts, this study attempted to address the potential cultural barriers to workplace communication in a specific Thai context. Judging from the deficiencies in understanding *krengjai*, in terms of the ongoing number of research reports, as well its purported value, this study examined the display of *krengjai* - a specific Thai cultural value - in a multicultural workplace setting. Among other Thai cultural values, *krengjai* is often found to be an influential determinant of Thai people's daily behaviors and subsequently their communicative practices (Fieg, 1989; Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 1995; Klausner, 1993; Knutson, 2004; Sirimahawan, 2003; Sriussadaporn-

Charoenngam & Jablin, 1999; Sriussadaporn, 2006). *Krengjai* appears to be transmitted from generation to generation through the traditional saying “*khwām-krēngjai-pen-sombat- khōng- phūdī*” (ความเกรงใจเป็นสมบัติของผู้ดี) or “being considerate (*krengjai*) is a trait of cultivated person.” In brief, *krengjai* refers to the suppression of one’s personal goal for the benefit of others. In so doing, it involves complex emotions and acts. Some of them are, for instance, being reluctant to impose upon people, not directly criticizing and/or rejecting one’s offer. Such a combination forms unique characteristics that are hard to explain or specifically define in other languages, including English (Andrews & Chompusri, 2013; Intachakra, 2012).

For several decades up to the present, a coherent meaning of *krengjai* has been of interest amongst English language learners as well most native English-speaking persons. The equivalent English meaning commonly given to the term *krengjai* is *consideration*. Interpreted by morpheme to morpheme into English, *krengjai* would mean *fear heart* or *awe heart*, which is not the intended meaning of *krengjai* act(s) (Klausner, 1993; Wyatt & Promkandorn, 2012). As previously explained, the practice of *krengjai* is in fact related to various behavioral patterns, thereby making it difficult to provide the best English meaning and so leading to the ongoing attempt to provide an equivalent English definition of *krengjai* amongst both Thai and foreign scholars (e.g. Fieg, 1989; Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 1995; Klausner, 1993, 1977; Komin 1990; Wichiarajote, 1973).

One of the earliest English definitions of *krengjai* was from the Foreign Area Studies Division in the United States Army Handbook for Thailand published in 1963. The term was referred to as “one’s attitude towards superiors involving the desire to be self-effacing, respectful, humble and extremely considerate, as well as the wish to avoid embarrassing other people or intruding or imposing upon them” (Foreign Areas Studies Division, 1963, p. 139). A decade later, Wichiarajote (1973), who was later recognized as being one of the first researchers to study the concept of *krengjai* and its

implications, associated the definition of *krengjai* to the feeling of *respectful fear*. His definition was later criticized by Komin (1990) as “being unrealistically narrow” (p. 166). Komin (1990) argued that *krengjai* is unnecessarily confounded with feeling fear of power-inequality among members of a society. To be more precise, the term should instead be referred to as feeling concern. Nonetheless, Wichiarajote’s work established a reference point for the further study of *krengjai* among other Thai and foreign scholars (e.g., Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 1995; Mulder, 1985, 2000; Sensenig, 1975). For example, Mulder (1985, 2000) studied Thai behaviors in everyday life. Using the theatrical framework of moral-amoral power inspired by Wichiarajote to conceptualize *krengjai*, he concluded that *krengjai* was related to fear.

Apart from its complex meanings, *krengjai* as a cultural element was found to determine an individual’s communicative behavior. Many reports have pointed out that *krengjai* has established particular communication practices of Thais, such as silence, indirectness and understatements (Barr, 2004; Fieg, 1989; Jongudomkarn et al., 2012; Klausner, 1993; Klausner & Klausner, 1977; Niratpattanasai, 2002a,b). For example, Niratpattanasai (2002a,b) demonstrated a scenario in which *krengjai* determined one’s communication: On the way to a business trip, a boss crashed her/his car and died while the driver was injured. The police questioned the driver and he admitted that due to feeling too *krengjai* he remained silent and did not advise his boss to slow his car down. While *krengjai* is a mechanism of social support, in the workplace or business context it is not appreciated much by most non-Thais. Expressed to avoid imposing upon someone, *krengjai* rather causes conflict and is seen as an ineffective act through its (adverse) influences on communication practices in the workplace (Fieg, 1989; Klausner, 1993; Klausner & Klausner, 1977; Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 1995). For example, when in a meeting, a Thai person who feels *krengjai*-considerate will tend to not ask or make a suggestion to a non-Thai colleague, expecting to

discuss it later. The non-Thai colleague, who expects a productive meeting, may not understand the Thai's intention and go away upset or mistaken that the Thai person is being ineffective. This misunderstanding can finally lead to the loss of a professional relationship at work (Fieg 1989; Klausner, 1993; Klausner & Klausner, 1977).

There are two main reasons why *krengjai* is at the forefront of my interest. First, as stated above, the definition of *krengjai* cannot be translated into one coherent word but rather involves a set of words to describe related behaviors. Not being aware of this fact, many scholars and non-scholars aimed for a direct interpretation of *krengjai*. Interestingly, not only are some non-Thais found to misconceptualize the term, but some Thais still attempt to equate a definition of *krengjai* as a single English term, which then understates the dynamic cultural attributes of *krengjai* (Wyatt & Promkandorn, 2012), and so misunderstands its primary values. With increasing global and regional integration, and the above stated reasons, this study explored the English definition of *krengjai*, where the results were varied by participant nationality in the specific context of a multicultural workplace. Secondly, there are misperceptions of the relationship between *krengjai* and communicative practices (Andrews & Chompusri, 2013; Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 1995; Klausner, 1993; Niratpattanasai, 2002a,b). This intertwined relationship clearly has a marked detrimental effect on the interaction between Thai and non-Thai people in the workplace. However, there is ample evidence that *krengjai* and its impacts are associated with a systematic cultural pattern (Barr, 2004; Sriussadaporn-Charoenngam & Jablin, 1999). This pattern can be explained by the framework of Hofstede (1991), whose work identified the various similarities and differences in national culture, and which was applied in this study to investigate the relationship between nationality and its perception towards *krengjai* effects on communication and professional relationships.

As stated above, *krengjai* has marked impacts and so warrants further research. Very little research has so far discussed *krengjai* specifically in a multicultural context with respect to its definition and effect on communication practice and professional relationships. The next section reviews the unexplored facets of *krengjai* and gives the rational reason to investigate *krengjai* and perception towards its value.

1.2 Statement of the problem

With the major characteristic of *krengjai* given above, numerous studies on *krengjai* have been conducted in various disciplines with different contexts and frameworks. Over the past few decades, within a local/national context, most of the early studies focused on the practice of *krengjai* in a Thai educational context or classroom context, investigating the relationships between *krengjai* and the development of various classroom behaviors (e.g., Buaklee, 1971; Kamparasiri, 2003; Kanhanetr, 1972; Prechamart, 1972; Prempreungves, 1974; Ratchakotr, 2009). Although some studies investigated the display of *krengjai* among students with different cultural backgrounds, none of the studies were found to explicitly examine the impact of *krengjai* on their communication practice as well as interpersonal relationships. For example, Buaklee (1971) comparatively studied “anxiety, *kwamkrengjai* and creative thinking of Thai and non-Thai students in Bangkok” and discovered that Thai students were more influenced by feeling *krengjai* than non-Thai students. Subsequently, Thai students were less able to deal with anxiety and/or think creatively.

With respect to the definition of *krengjai*, most studies have extensively investigated Thai culture from which *krengjai* is included as a core value and the definition of *krengjai* was addressed merely to provide a brief understanding of it. There are, however, only a few studies on the definition of *krengjai*. For instance, Sirimahawan (2003) investigated the definition of *krengjai* in a comparative fashion without emphasizing the English language

but the participant's nationality and perception of the definition. While claiming that the perception and definition of *krengjai* varied from group to group, the obtained definitions of *krengjai* were quite specific and narrow due to Sirimahawan's limited context of study to an aircraft working environment. The study of Wyatt and Promkandon (2012) placed more emphasis on the definitional analysis of *krengjai*, where they investigated the correctness of the English definition of *krengjai* reported in past research. However, the responses were quite limited and otherwise merely reflected those of Thai passengers at the terminal.

Shifting to a more international context, since 1900s, as a result of the boom in the Thai economy towards a global society and immigration of expatriates into the country, the interest in cross-cultural factors or cultural differences has burgeoned. The Thais and Thai values have been investigated and introduced by both Thai and international scholars with an attempt to bridge the cultural gap or smoothen communication in a multicultural setting. As a core value frequently noticed by non-Thais, *krengjai* has been continuously studied and presented in both the academic and private sectors. In an attempt to clarify *krengjai* and its roles, some foreign scholars revealed the relationship between *krengjai* and the communication practices of Thais (e.g. Barr, 2004; Fieg, 1989; Klausner, 1993). Nonetheless, these findings were from a one-way Western point of view without any two-way feedback from the native practitioner of *krengjai*, and with only a limited nationality of participants. For example, in his study of international negotiations and cross-cultural communication, Barr (2004) claimed that *krengjai* was an indirect form of communication. He further found that the cultural context shaped the negotiation behaviors of participants, who in that study were Thai and Canadian. However, Barr collected the data separately such that his participants were not from the same context and, therefore, lacked reciprocal (two-way) feedback on such interactions.

Recently, there have been more studies on the practice of *krengjai* in intercultural settings, where it was noted as either a barrier to communication or a mechanism for maintaining harmonious relationships. For example, Sirimahawan (2003) indicated that *krengjai* helped maintain a working relationship among Thai and foreign employees while causing misunderstandings in some certain situations. Supporting Sirimahanwan's findings, Sriussadaporn (2006) found that *krengjai* was a communication problem in an international setting. Based on her findings, non-Thais or expatriates reported *krengjai* not only affected the success of intercultural communication but also the work-and/or relationship-related outcomes. In a slightly different research setting, Andrews and Chompusri (2013) examined the organizational practices of e-communication, employee empowerment and performance appraisal. Although their findings implied the influence of *krengjai* on the organizational practices where communication in part plays a role, the study did not directly shed light on its role in intercultural communication.

As already shown above, most studies to date have disclosed the definition and effects of *krengjai* within a limited context that merely reflects a certain point of view of Westerners, Easterners or Thais. Also, when it comes to communication in English, British or American settings are likely at the front of most people's mind. With the new emerging superpowers, like China and India, as well as the coming AEC, this present study included Easterners, in particular from the South East Asia region, as research participants. In addition, there is ample evidence showing that Easterners and Westerners have systematically contrasting cultures. This study was, therefore, interested in comparing their perceptions of *krengjai* with those of Thais, from which the results were expected to provide an understanding of each other in intercultural communication.

Given the rapid increase in internationalized Thai universities as well as the mobility of both foreign *ajarns* (teachers) and students, this research

was performed in a multicultural educational context. In addition, very little literature has incorporated a cultural context to study both Western and Eastern perspectives towards *krengjai* and its impacts on communication and professional relationships, and none have comparatively observed interactions among Thais, Westerners and Easterners where *krengjai* is a key. Based on the implication proposed by Hofstede (1991, 2005) that similar cultures share a consistency in general patterns of perception and communication, this research accordingly intended to fill the gap by employing Hofstede's concept of the *software of the mind* to investigate how cultural similarities and/or differences affect the perception towards *krengjai* in communication and professional relationships, as well as its definition.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The fundamental purpose of this study was to analyze how non-Thais and Thais perceive the display of *krengjai* in educational institutions with a multicultural working environment. To be precise, this present study aimed to:

1. To investigate the discrepancy in the English definition of *krengjai* between Eastern, Western and Thai employees.
2. To identify the effects of the Thai cultural concept of *krengjai* on intercultural communication and professional relationships in workplaces.
3. To compare the perception towards the Thai cultural concept of *krengjai*-related behavior among Thais, Westerners and Easterners in multicultural workplaces.

1.4. Research questions and hypotheses

In order to examine *krengjai* and its significant influences on Thai communicative practices and professional relationships in the workplace, this research addressed the following questions:

1. How do Easterners, Westerners and Thais explain the concept of *krengjai* in English?
2. What are the impacts of *krengjai* on communication practice and professional relationships among Easterners, Westerners and Thais at work?
3. How do Thais and non-Thais perceive *krengjai* in the context of communication and professional relationships?

These three research questions formed the following hypotheses:

1. There are differences in defining *krengjai* amongst Thais, Easterners and Westerners .
2. Non-Thais are adversely affected by the practice of *krengjai* while Thais are not.
3. The nationality of employees has a significant relationship with their understanding of the *krengjai* concept and its values .

1.5 Scope of the study

This present study focused on the perception towards *krengjai* in the workplace setting within two university campuses by evaluating their perception towards the definition of *krengjai* and its implications on communication practice and professional relationships. In particular, as regards the investigation of the English definition of *krengjai*, linguistic coherence or correctness was not analyzed but categorized for similarities and differences. Regarding research participants, the total number was 242 people and they were divided into three groups of Thais (201), Westerners (33) and Easterners (8) based on her/his nationality not culture, sub- or co-culture. The participants were voluntarily recruited from two government universities located in Thailand.

1.6 Definition of key terms

For the common understanding of the specific terms used in this study, the definitions are provided as follows:

1. Westerners refers to people who come from the western hemisphere, and in this study were employees from the following ten nationalities - Canadian, British, American, Danish, Polish, Latvian, Australian, French, German and Russian .
2. Easterners refers to people who come from the eastern hemisphere, and in this study were employees from the following seven nationalities - Indonesian, Vietnamese, Japanese, Filipino, Malaysian, Chinese and Indian .
3. Non-Thais is used interchangeably and inclusively to refer to both Westerners and Easterners.
4. Communication practice refers to the four specific communication strategies of silence, indirectness, understatements and lie that are caused by *krengjai*.
5. Multicultural workplace in this study refers to an international program of a selected university in which employees are of various nationalities .
6. A binary effect is used to inclusively refer to *krengjai*-related effects on communication practice and professional relationships .
7. National culture refers to a set of norms, values and beliefs that are maintained and shared by national group members.

1.7 Significance of the study

As mentioned, the international mobility of workers around the globe has significantly increased in recent decades. The establishment of the AEC in 2015 guarantees a free-flow of goods, services and, in particular, human resources around Thailand, and her neighboring countries. Communication within workplaces are expected to include more employees from ASEAN

nations, including Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Brunei. As a result, diversity or cultural gaps may become a real challenge in workplaces. In addition, daily communication is not limited to uni- but to multi-cultures and, therefore, gets complicated by the use of unfamiliar symbols or practices. This study places an emphasis on the significant cultural concept of *krengjai* as it poses both linguistic and cultural challenges. When in an intercultural interaction, English language is universally used as the medium of communication and so this study examines the concept of *krengjai* in English as perceived by people from dissimilar cultures. In addition, *krengjai* markedly underlies the behavioral patterns and communication practices of Thai people, and so this study aimed to investigate the perceptions towards *krengjai* in order to identify the effects of *krengjai* on intercultural communication and professional relationships in workplaces.

The results are expected to shed some light into intercultural communication with Thai people. In a working context, the results were not only being applied to help raise the cultural awareness of *krengjai* but also to get a better understanding of its effects. Furthermore, the results could be used as a guideline for both Thais and non-Thais to tackle communication barriers that potentially arise from the practice of *krengjai* at work. Apart from the implications on effective communication, a clear understanding about *krengjai* could maintain harmoniously professional relationships between non-Thais and Thais and so increase work performance.

Despite the specific research setting, the researcher believes that the results of this study could be further adjusted to other settings, such as international business companies, where intercultural communication occur frequently, since the study provides guidelines for dealing with the barriers that arise from the practice of *krengjai* at work. Moreover, the findings could be applied beyond employee-employee interactions, such as to benefit student-employee or student-*ajarn* (lecturer) interactions. Therefore, it is hoped that

this research can generate further discussion of *krengjai* in other intercultural contexts.

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter provided the background information on the driving force of globalization and localization on daily interactions within the workplace in which *krengjai* is a key factor. Placing a high value on social harmony, *krengjai* is practiced on a daily basis and possibly at all levels. In addition, the practice of *krengjai* is not limited to in-group members, but out-group members (in this case Westerners and Easterners) are also exposed to (experience) *krengjai* to a certain level and failure to understand the practice can sometimes cause conflict. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate *krengjai* in terms of its English concept and communication practice in professional relationships and how this practice affects the interaction between Thais and non-Thais at work. The literature review and theoretical framework are provided in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Krengjai, a Thai-specific cultural value, appears to actually permeate every section of Thai society (e.g. family, educational institution, government and/or private national/international organization). It can be stated that *krengjai* affects most of Thai people's perception and so guides their daily behaviors. These certain influences grasp on-going interest among scholars at both a national and international level. Meanwhile, there is ample evidence that *krengjai*, besides its confusing concept in native and foreign language, influences the communication practices and interpersonal relationships. To understand its core, the intertwined linguistic and cultural elements need to be clearly elaborated. In this chapter, a review of research on the English definition of *krengjai* followed by the impacts on communication and professional relationships is first presented. Then, the essential cultural characteristics and the related theoretical framework in relation to communication practices of Thais are presented, followed by a review of the previous studies on *krengjai* and its binary effects. Lastly, this chapter concludes with the influential values of *krengjai* that were examined in this study.

2.1 English definitions of *krengjai*

The interconnected world has led to an increasing frequency and number of people having contact with people of a dissimilar culture. Accordingly, understanding cultural similarities and differences has become necessary and advantageous for an individual regularly interacting or working in a multicultural environment. For decades, general and specific cultural elements have been heavily studied and provided to help individuals get closer to each other. In the study of Thai culture, *krengjai* has proved itself to be one of the core cultural values as it appears to guide most Thais' behaviors and is

practiced in a variety of daily situations. This influential trait has triggered interest and a countless number of studies in both a national and international context (Andrews & Chompusri, 2013; Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 1995).

Krengjai is a Thai-specific cultural value shared and transmitted from generation to generation. There is no clear evidence pointing to the origin of the existence of *krengjai*, yet there has been the clichéd remark of *kwamkrengjai-pen-sombat-khøng-phūdī* (consideration is a treasure of noblemen). Meanwhile, the evidence of such a remark is written in the book “*Sombat- Phūdī*” –a trait of cultivated person by Phrasadetsurenthrathibodi (1912; page 9). In fact, *krengjai* is a compound word. When considering its morphemic composition, the term is composed of two words –*kreng* and *jai*. Literally, the word *kreng* means awe and *jai* means heart. Like any other compound words, *krengjai* does not mean awe heart and it appears wrong to believe so. Based on The Royal Institute Dictionary (n.d., 2007), *krengjai* means *mai-yāk-hai-phūeün-deūatrøn-ramkhān-jai*, which directly means do not want to bother anyone in English. Linguistically speaking, the word *krengjai* mainly functions as a verb. For example, I *krengjai* (don’t want to bother) you. In some contexts, it can be used as an adjective, such as I feel/am *krengjai*.

Nonetheless, understanding the *krengjai* concept may not be as simple as it seems, especially for non-Thais. Although an in-group will normally have sensitivity to her/his own culture and an out-group will not, the characteristics of *krengjai* itself are already complicated to comprehend. The *krengjai* meaning of not wanting to bother anyone is in fact not limited to such certain acts. In doing so, it engages the expression of various behaviors, both physically and emotionally. For instance, to not disturb anyone, a *krengjai* person may remain silent or not ask for help even when s/he is in dire need of help. Therefore, in some contexts, *krengjai* is directly referred to as remaining silent and/or not asking for help.

As mentioned above, *krengjai* involves the combination of various acts and feelings, and so it is complicated to coherently describe the term in one English word and problematic in so doing. Niratpattanasai (2002a,b) claimed that *krengjai* has no direct interpretation to English but an explanation of combined acts. Meanwhile, Wyatt and Promkandorn (2012) found that various factors, in particular limited social context and actor(s) of *krengjai*, are needed to better understand the term *krengjai* inclusively.

Wyatt and Promkandorn (2012), who studied the trajectory of *krengjai* English meanings, indicated that the earliest attempt to define *krengjai* started in 1963 when the Foreign Area Studies Division in the United States published the Army Handbook for Thailand. Interestingly, there was no attempt to equate *krengjai* with one English word. Instead, it included mixed attitudes such as *self-effacing, respectful or humble to be displayed towards other people*. Based on a review of the literature, this current study, however, found Blanchard's work appeared some 5 years earlier as it was published in 1958. Furthermore, his definition of *krengjai* was similar to the Foreign Area Studies Division's and only minor differences were found. Blanchard (1958) defined *krengjai* as *self-effacing, respectful, humble and extremely considerate* (p. 482).

However, both Thai and foreign scholars have been involved in the interpretation of *krengjai* in English language. During the same period, Wichiarajote (1973), a Thai scholar who initiated the sophisticated studies of *krengjai*, related the meaning of *krengjai* to the structure of Thai culture, called *affiliative society*, in which a member of such a society has to maintain social harmony. On the other hand, the social member has to take the interests of others as well those of a different social order into account. Based on this fact, the definition of *krengjai* was further linked to the feeling of *fear*. Wichairajote's finding, despite its mere emphasis on Thai culture, inspired many foreign scholars' perspectives on *krengjai*, including Mulder (1985). Studying the logic of Thai behavior, Mulder found *krengjai* influenced a

Thai's action. Relating to Wichairajote's work, he explained *krengjai* as, among other feelings, one's fear of mysterious forces or a hierarchical power. However, in addition to *fear*, Mulder explained *krengjai* in the simple terms of courtesy and inhibition, including consideration, the latter of which has been prevalently used.

In compliance with Wichiarajote and Mulder, Klausner (1993) confounded *krengjai* with Thai culture and social characteristics placing emphasis on the social place. Klausner's definition of *krengjai* included diffidence, deference and consideration merged with respect. In contrast, Fieg (1989), in his exploration into Thai culture, studied Thai in comparison with American culture. In so doing, he translated *krengjai* based on an American's perspective. In contrast to American culture, which places value on direct expression of emotion, Fieg found Thais mostly avoid outright confrontation. This trait is further included in the concept of *krengjai* and vice versa. Therefore, *krengjai* can be explained as "self-effacing, respectful, extremely considerate and wishing to avoid embarrassing others or intruding or imposing on them" (p. 43).

These early generation foreign scholars conceptualized *krengjai* as a part of their Thai culture study. Therefore, the given definitions were essentially linked to other core values, such as deference to authority, respect of others or face-saving. In fact, this link is not surprisingly new as culture cannot be understood through its isolated element. When compared with the work of Thai scholars, there were some similarities and differences in the definition. Komin (1990) similarly associated *krengjai* with other core values of Thais, where studying the pattern of values and behaviors of the Thai majority, she found that *krengjai* was practiced along with *face-saving* and *criticism-avoidance* to preserve one's ego. Nonetheless, Komin contradicted the given meanings of foreign scholars and in particular those of Mulder (1985). She argued that Mulder, who was influenced by the Wichiarajote's affiliative society framework, wrongly equated *krengjai* with fear. The term

“worry” should be instead used to describe the concept of *krengjai* (p. 167). Further, *krengjai* was not necessarily displayed towards someone of a higher status but also towards equal or even subordinate people.

As intercultural interactions began to increase, the attempt to define the English concept of *krengjai* was related to certain contexts or communicative scenarios. Holmes and Tangtongtavy (1995) inclusively provided eight scenario-based definitions of *krengjai*. Some of the definitions, for instance, were “complying with others’ wishes or requests; reluctance to disturb or interrupt others; restraint of one’s show of displeasure or anger so as not to cause discomfort to others; avoidance of asserting one’s opinions or needs and reluctance to give instructions or pass orders to a superior or peers with more age or experience” (p. 47–48). In the same fashion, Niratpattanasai (2005), who had studied cultural gaps for cross-cultural understanding, linked the meaning of *krengjai* to various scenarios. An example of one of these scenarios is:

A businessman loved to drive his care on provincial business trips. Aware that his health was weak, he always took along his driver just in case. On one trip, the car crashed, the businessman died, and his driver was seriously injured. Questioned by police later, the driver said that his boss often drove too fast and on that day visibility was poor. The driver confessed that he was too *krengjai* to advise his boss to slow down. (p. 48).

Based on the given example, it may appear confusing to a person who is familiar with *krengjai* as the story combined various acts. However, in comparison with Holmes and Tangtongtavy, I would say that Niratpattanasai’s definition is consistent with their work. In particular, the given scenario likely refers to avoidance of asserting one’s opinions or needs and reluctance to give instructions or pass orders to a superior or peers with more age or experience. The context-meaning interpretation of *krengjai* can also be even more specific. For example, Sirimahawan (2003) defined *krengjai* in a close setting of intercultural communication between Thai and non-Thai flight attendants. Therefore, the retrieved meanings appear subjective and correlate with the

nature of the setting (flight attendants in an airplane). Some of the meanings included *always smile, not complaining* and *not wanting to bother anyone despite inconsistency between actions and thoughts*.

While the scenario or context-based interpretation of *krengjai* has become prevalent in later years, various studies show that *consideration* appears as a common English definition of *krengjai*, especially when an individual attempts to equate *krengjai* with a single English word or concisely define the term. Many scholars or non-Thai teachers similarly stated that they experienced Thais attempting to translate or equate *krengjai* into one English term (Biggs, 2005; Klausner, 1993; Wright, 2007; Wyatt & Promkandorn, 2012). However, some uncommon or rare definitions were also given, such as *white lie* or *aojai* –to please others (Bradford, 2012; Bangkok-Real, 2012; Vongvipanond, 1994). For example, Bradford (2012), sharing his opinion on the Internet Public Forum, defined *krengjai* as a white lie. Interestingly, the given meaning was not found in any other literature or given by a Thai. These interpretations are mostly given on Internet blogs or non-reviewed sources and often are considered unreliable. In my opinion, most of them are based on cultural experiences of an individual translator so these definitions appear subjective and/or incomprehensible to others.

Placing the emphasis on differences in the *krengjai* definitions between different nationalities, I found no significant relationship between these two variables in a literature review. Although Klausner (1993) and Fieg (1989) both comparatively studied Thai and American culture, including *krengjai*, they both provided similar definitions to other scholars (e.g. Mulder and Knutson) whose studies mainly reflected the understanding of a non-Thai/foreigner towards Thai culture. However, Klausner (1993) and Fieg (1989) interestingly pointed out that *krengjai* and its functions were related to indirectness in communication of most Thais. This trait is essentially different from American culture in which directness in communication is preferential. This significant relationship will be discussed in the next section. Taking the

English interpretations of *krengjai* retrieved from Thai and non-Thai scholars into consideration, only the work of Sirimahawan (2003) was found to be related, yet limited to a group of Easterners. He pointed out that Thai and non-Thai attendants perceived *krengjai* differently. Consistent with other reports, Thais defined *krengjai* as *not wanting to bother anyone despite inconsistency between actions and thoughts*, while non-Thais noted it meant *always smile and not complaining*.

Despite numerous studies of *krengjai*, I found relatively few studies have indicated the relationship between the *krengjai* definition and differences in the nationality of the interacting people. However, what becomes clear is that the retrieved English definitions of *krengjai* are either emotion or behavior-based. From my point of view, this can be explained by the fact that *krengjai* functions as both a verb and an adjective. In addition, the interpretations have relied on other social practices or cultural core values, contexts and/or empirical evidences. Likewise, Wyatt and Promkandorn (2012) noted when tracing the meanings of *krengjai* that the results showed original and contemporary or unusual definitions. The original meaning of *krengjai* was interpreted from focusing on the relationship between Thai culture and the practice of *krengjai*, while the new meaning may refer to the original meaning or may not. In addition, the given meanings of *krengjai*, both original and new, are highly contextualized.

Taking the English interpretations of *krengjai* retrieved from Thai and non-Thai scholars into further consideration, this study found no significant differences among them, except for those in non-reviewed sources where one given meaning of *krengjai* refers to lie. Based on the literature review, it cannot be argued which interpretation or meaning is best or truest. In addition, it is in my view even wrong to attempt to find the true meaning. According to Wyatt and Promkandorn (2012), various factors, such as a limited social context and the actors of *krengjai*, should be necessarily involved to understand the term inclusively. Instead of placing emphasis solely on

definition, the essence or value of *krengjai* should be addressed. I found that most of the problems lie in the lack of understanding of the influential characteristics of *krengjai*. As mentioned earlier, the practice of *krengjai* involved various acts and feelings, thereby making it complicated to comprehend. These *krengjai*-related issues are further discussed in the following part (section 2.2).

2.2 Impacts on communication and interpersonal relationships

2.2.1 *Krengjai* and communication

As stated above, *krengjai* directly affects the behaviors of most Thais, including communicative behaviors. Notwithstanding the abundant studies on *krengjai*, a few have advocated for the impact of *krengjai* on communication. In addition, an elaboration of certain impacts lacks integrity, despite being ubiquitous. Based on a comprehensive review of the literature, four types of communication practices (silence, indirectness, understatement and lie) were reported to be the effects of *krengjai* practice on communication.

In an attempt to reflect the understanding of Thai culture, many early scholars witnessed complicated characteristics as well as a significant impact of *krengjai*. According to Blanchard (1958), *krengjai* has been challenged for its precise definitions from Westerners. Due to its cultural values, he found *krengjai* caused Thais to hesitate in direct communication. In Blanchard's conclusion, such *krengjai*-related traits affect the relationship between Thais and Americans. Likewise, Klausner (1993) indicated that *krengjai* appeared to be one of the most difficult concepts of Thai culture (p. 258). This statement has been referred to later by most researchers whose research involved *krengjai*. Elaborating on the *krengjai* concept, Klausner (1993) pointed out that *krengjai* affects one to not frankly or directly communicate one's desire, so as to be reticence to ask for or to seek help (p. 259). He further criticized *krengjai* as being an unfavorable quality from a foreigner's perspective. Likewise, Fieg (1989) noted that sensitivity to direct

cues was due to the concept of *krengjai*. To ensure a harmonious relationship, *krengjai* is displayed in forms of suppressed emotions and feelings and/or unspoken cues. In contrast to American culture, this trait leads to miscommunication between Thais and Americans (p. 44). The work of Komolsevin et al. (2010) gives supporting evidence. Even though he did not engage *krengjai* directly into their comparative study of Thai and American communication, Komolsevin et al. (2010) indicated that, due to their social milieu of a collectivist society, Thais prefer silence as one of a significant communication means. He added further that the use of silence by Thai people is “abhorred” by “Westerners” (p. 4).

In direct relation to the focus of this present study, i.e. *krengjai* in a multicultural context, Chaidaroon (2003) explored the communication behaviors of Thais while interacting with Americans or Westerners. Similar to Klausner (1993), his findings indicated that *krengjai* appeared to be a key cultural factor that determined the communicative behaviors of Thais to not speak up or ask for help. It also caused Thai people to refrain from criticizing, requesting and responding to certain requests or from negotiating. Interestingly, he put forward that these behaviors are not considered unfavorable or negative by Thais. Later, based on his years in Thailand, Barr (2004) reaffirmed that *krengjai* is a form of indirect communication (p. 20), and further proposed that such indirectness is evident in negotiation activity, but is in a different fashion from non-Thais, in particular Canadians, who prefer a direct communication style. However, in his study of negotiation style, in which *krengjai* was counted as an influential factor, the result revealed that, in contrast, the Thai participants adopted a more direct communication style than the Canadians.

Some researchers have paid attention to intercultural communication in a specific context (e.g., airplane and business work settings), where they emphasized how cultural specific traits, including *krengjai*, affects or becomes problematic in a multicultural setting

(Sirimahawan, 2003; Sriussadaporn, 2006). Similar to most studies, Sirimahawan (2003) noted that *krengjai* is considered as possessing a negative trait that causes a person not to ask for help or to do something s/he does not want to or is in contrast to her/his thoughts/needs. Similarly, Sriussadaporn (2006) reported *krengjai* as a cultural value that poses a problem in communication between Thais and non-Thais. She explained that when feeling *krengjai*, Thai employees remain silent not refusing or asking for help when they cannot do the work. The absence of talk was further mistaken as lack of commitment to the assigned task.

Regardless of the relevant context of intercultural communication, the effects of *krengjai* on communication practices were evaluated in terms of its impact on the behavior of parents and their child patients (Jongudomkarn et al., 2012). Taken as a strong cultural belief, *krengjai* affected the perception and so guided behavior, while it also limited the expression/interaction as well direct specific communication strategies (silence, indirectness and understatement). These then impeded effective communication between the healthcare service provider and patients (Jongudomkarn et al., 2012). Notwithstanding the obviously negative communication strategies, Jongudomkarn et al. (2012) did not discuss the value(s) of such impacts, whether the strategies were considered positive or negative, in their study.

Apart from silence, indirectness and understatement, another allocated communication strategy of *krengjai* is to *lie*. Some non-Thais regarded this strategy as one of the *krengjai* definitions (Bangkok-Real, 2012; Bradford, 2012). Interestingly, regarding *krengjai* as lie was only found among non-Thais. Bangkok-Real (2012) addressed that in Thailand, people say or tell something untrue because of *krengjai*, a practice which he viewed as strange and different from Western culture. In slight contrast, Bradford (2012) opined that *krengjai* rather causes people to tell white lies and the reason in so doing is because Thai people do not want to hurt the other person's feeling. As

mentioned above, this finding is rare and listed mostly on non-reviewed sources. However, I found it interesting and so included it in this study, since such communication clearly indicates a negative quality of *krengjai* practices.

2.2.2 *Krengjai* and professional relationship

Besides its impacts on communication practice(s), *krengjai* also plays a significant role on interpersonal relationships. The literature review revealed that *krengjai* is in general a mechanism that helps insure interpersonal relationships and so maintains social harmony (Fieg, 1989; Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 1985). As already implied in its definition, *krengjai* is practiced to avoid causing another's discomfort or violating another's feelings. Further, when considering the essence of *krengjai* in relation to its social function of maintaining interpersonal relationships, I gathered that it does not encapsulate an isolated concept, but rather it involves other cultural values, as already mentioned.

Holmes and Tangtongtavy (1995) stressed that Thais have two norms, which are to maintain relationships and to function well or act in a hierarchical society. In order to create and maintain strong relationships, Thais tend to avoid personal conflict or confrontation. *Krengjai* is then adopted as a mechanism to ensure social harmony. Likewise, Vongvipanond (1994) noted earlier that Thais are taught from a young age to *krengjai*, to be careful of words so that conflicts are avoided and social harmony is preserved. However, both agreed that to display any behaviors, including *krengjai*, one should be aware of the social rank or status of the others. Any confrontational acts that may cause the loss of face are unacceptable and lead to disastrous results, such as disputes with a superior.

Komin (1990) on the other hand indicated ego-orientation as a root value underlying the necessity for one's display of *krengjai*. She elaborated that Thai people are ego-oriented. They highly value independence, pride and dignity (p. 161). Therefore, the violation of one's ego is intolerable

as well as unacceptable. This characteristic is embodied in various values, such as face-saving, avoidance of criticism and *krengjai*. She noted further that ego is similar to face-saving in that preserving ego is saving face. Meanwhile, I found these three values appear interrelated. Usually, *krengjai* is referred to as a practice to save one's face as well as to avoid criticism. The finding of Komin (1990) is congruent with Blanchard (1958), the foreign early-generation social investigator. Interestingly, Blanchard (1958) related *krengjai* to the *Chinese* concept of face-saving and elaborated further that *krengjai* essentially helps to avoid putting anyone in an embarrassing situation. Fieg (1989) also supported this, stating that since Thais prefer indirect criticism, they adopt *krengjai* to avoid conflict as well to save the face of others. However, he added that the practice of *krengjai* also involved showing respect to others.

Niratpattanasai (2002a,b) suggested that *krengjai* is a core Thai value that is practiced to save the face of others. Likewise, he found *krengjai* was performed to show respect to others. He explained that saving face and showing respect to others have been shaped by the deep rooted characteristic of deference to authority. Because Thais have been partly influenced by a class system, they should be aware of their and other peoples' social position, where violation of face or ego is intolerable. *Krengjai* is, therefore, performed to preserve face of people in a position of power or of authority. However, Komin (1990), who criticized the concept of fear, did not agree with Niratpattanasai's idea and pointed out the relationship between *krengjai* and face, arguing that *krengjai* can be performed between all social levels including superiors towards inferiors or vice versa.

Clearly, when ego or deference to authority is considered as one of the core characteristics, most Thais appear to seek *krengjai* for social acceptance (Wichiarajote, 1973; Mulder, 1985). Influenced by Wichiarajote's model of Thai society, Mulder (1985) indicated that Thais are taught *krengjai* so that they are accepted by others in their group. He further added that this

form of acceptance is related to motives of power, that being a key achievement in the hierarchical Thai society.

In specific intercultural communication interaction scenarios, Sirimahawan (2003) investigated influence of *krengjai* on the working relationships between Thai and non-Thai flight attendants. His findings indicated that *krengjai* gives positive influences, in that it helps build up and maintain relationships with others as well as between a boss and subordinates. However, he noted that *krengjai* also affects a user negatively as s/he must suppress feelings or act in the opposite manner to her/his real need.

2.3 Culture influencing perception (towards *krengjai*)

2.3.1 National culture

There are several factors influencing how one perceives or reacts to certain things. Such factors can be national culture, race and/or country of origin (Jacob & Jolly, 2012). In this study, the perception towards *krengjai* in a multicultural environment, a university workplace, in which understanding cultural similarities/differences can become major challenges as well as obstacles, was investigated. Taking into account the dynamic and complicated elements of culture, where the difficulty in attempts to define the term has already been established, this study emphasized the generalization of (national) culture as a determinant of how Thai and non-Thai participants perceive *krengjai*, particularly in terms of the impact on communication practices and professional relationships.

Generally speaking, as globalization is a cliché for intercultural communication, so way of life is for culture. That is the way of life is mostly used to define the culture in a broad sense. It refers to all aspects or essential elements, including behaviors, attitudes, language and so forth, which make up a person's life (Kurylo, 2013). In fact, culture has a variety of broad, abstract and complex definitions. For example, Benedict (1959) defined culture as “what really binds men together is their culture that is the ideas and the

standards they have in common” (p.16). However, most definitions encompass shared values, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, norms and material things (Samovar et al., 2006, 2012).

As a way of life, culture provides rules for living that affect how individual members of society behave, communicate and/or perceive the world. Most important, it establishes standard or norms of how an individual thinks about others differently and even judges other’s behavior. Because cultural internalization begins at a very early age, all individuals react to familiar surroundings subconsciously. Most individual members are, therefore, not aware of how culture affects their behavior until they interact with people from different cultures (Gudykunst, 1998; Samovar et al., 2006, 2012). Essentially, cultural differences can impede effective communication and/or lead to misunderstandings.

In response, many scholars (e.g., Gudykunst, 1998; Hall, 1959, 1966, 1976, 1983; Hofstede, 1980, 1991, 2005, 2010) have tried to explain how cultures influence people’s awareness of others’ behaviors and attitudes. Hall (1976) suggested that the categorization of cultural differences and similarities provided a better understanding as well as lessen misunderstandings. He categorized these systematic differences as high context (HC) and low context (LC) cultures. Hall’s theory of high vs. low context cultures explains that HC cultures typically value history, status and relationships with others, while LC cultures value individual needs in lieu of the needs of the group (Nishimura et al., 2009). Supporting Hall’s work, Gudykunst (1998) also stated that cultural similarities and differences influence how people interact or communicate across culture.

Notwithstanding the uniqueness in each culture, there are systematic patterns, in particular of individualistic and collectivistic cultures that help predict or explain people’s behaviors and the way they communicate. Studying cultural patterns at a larger scale, Hofstede (1980) developed a model of national culture from research in 50 countries and three regions (total

of 64 countries). He systematically divided cultural differences initially into four dimensions and in later years into six dimensions from which one national culture can be compared with one another. These six dimensions consisted of the (i) power distance index (PDI), (ii) individualism vs. collectivism (IvC), (iii) masculinity vs. femininity (MvF), (iv) uncertainty avoidance index (UAI), (v) long term orientation vs. short term normative orientation and (vi) indulgence vs. restraint. Each dimension provided generalized characteristics that could be compared with two or more cultures.

The present study investigated perception towards *krengjai* in which the national culture or nationality of participants is an influencing factor. However, after taking into account the various number of participants' nationality recruited into Hofstede's work, I based my analysis on Hofstede's (1991) dimension. Furthermore, in relation to the characteristics of *krengjai*, only four dimensions (PDI, IvC, MvF and UAI) were considered relevant and so were adopted throughout the present study. The overview of these four dimensions is as follows:

PDI: This dimension determines how members in the society accept or reject the distribution of power. Where the PDI is high, the members of the society are aware that the people are very unequal and live a hierarchical society, compared to a society with a low PDI, where power is attempted to be distributed equally.

IvC: Individualism is a form of cultural dimension whereby the individual attempts his or her own wellbeing in comparison to the society as a whole. An example of such a society is USA. However, collectivism is a societal structure where by an individual works, behaves and responds on the basis of how it affects the society as a whole. An example of such a society is Japan.

MvF: This dimension refers to two aspects of the societal responsiveness that depends on how the society focuses on their means to daily operations and their long-term success. A masculine society is focused

towards assertiveness, heroism and rewarding society, which is in most cases very competitive. However, femininity is a societal structure where the focus is towards modesty and cooperation within the society.

UAI: UAI demonstrates how the members within a society respond towards change. A society with a high UAI score resists changes to a stronger level compared to a society with a low UAI score.

The cultural dimension of Thais is summarized in Figure 2.1.

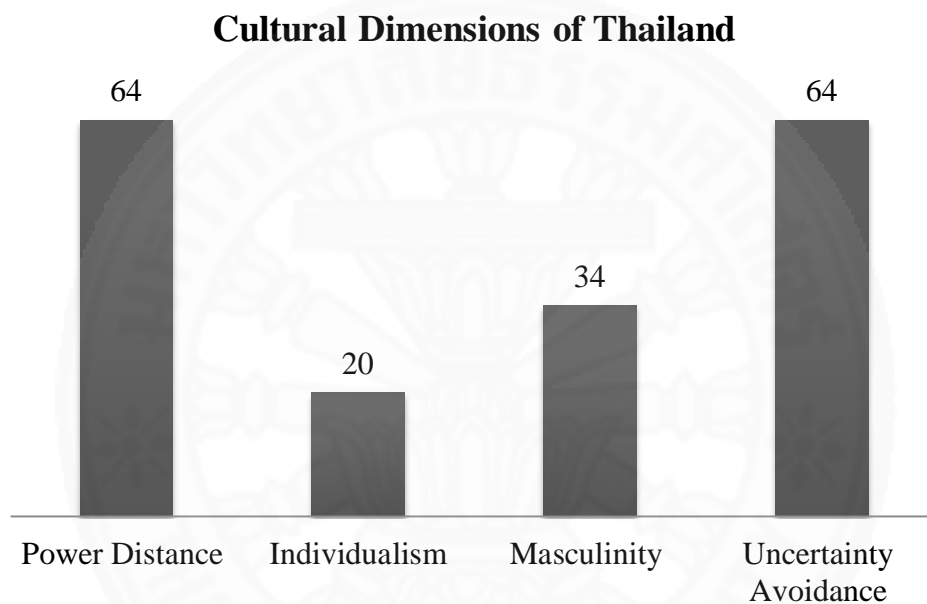


Figure 2.1 Scores of cultural dimension of Thai national culture; adapted from Hofstede's dimension (2010a).

Source: Hofstede 2010a, *National Culture Dimension*, viewed 28 April 2016, <https://geert-hofstede.com/national-culture.html>.

It has been claimed that Hofstede's dimensions of national culture are quite limited to a certain group of IBM employees and to merely reflect Western views towards other cultures. However, his survey data are still useful to provide a primary explanation of how other cultures have a different expectation of communication behaviors, since his dimension is frequently employed to differentiate Eastern from Western cultures

(Gudykunst, 2001). Accordingly, in this study, Hofstede's framework was applied to help theoretically explain Thais' expectation about how non-Thais perceive *kreng jai* and vice versa.

Even though these cultural categorizations help understand as well as bridge the gap among people of dissimilar culture, it was stressed that people who share similar cultural attributes tend to generate reciprocal opinions and approve of each other (Brewer & Campbell, 1976; as cited in Jacob & Jolly, 2012). According to Gudykunst (1998), people's expectations for the behavior of others, in particular strangers, are cultural-based. The majority are more favorable or agreeable to members of similar culture (in-groups) than dissimilar cultures (out-groups). In addition, there is ample evidence that people from the Eastern and Western hemispheres have profoundly and systematically different cultural patterns, where one of the salient features is the IvC (Gudykunst, 1998; Qingxue, 2003). Based on Hofstede's (1980, 2010) dimensions, the mainstream Easterners are considered collectivist as they give precedence to groups. Accordingly, the collectivist Easterners tend to communicate in an indirect fashion to avoid conflict as well as to maintain the group's harmony. On the other hand, the Westerners give precedence to individuals. They are self-reliant and independent. Because they are less interconnected with others, the Westerners tend to use more direct communication. As already mentioned, this fact forms one of the hypothesis of this present study, that the nationality of employees has a significant relationship with their understanding of the *krengjai* concept and its values. Note again that this present focus is on the major cultural patterns. Therefore, the nationalities of participants in this study had to be matched with the national cultures when determining their quality of response towards *krengjai* for assumption purposes.

2.3.2 Specific analysis of Thai cultural characteristics

In a specific analysis of Thai cultural patterns, based on Hofstede's dimension, Thailand has a high PDI (64), so inequalities are acceptable in the society. This is congruent with many scholars and/or social investigators (e.g., Boonnuch, 2012; Fieg, 1989; Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 1995; Klausner, 1993). As mentioned, many scholars stressed that the Thai social structure is hierarchical. Niratpattanasai (2005) explained the culture feature as that Thailand was historically influenced by the Indian class system in which people in positions of authority are responsible for nurturing their people. The highest class was the king and under the king were hierarchical nobles. Such a hierarchical system essentially discourages Thais to assert themselves more. That is, assertiveness is mostly considered as showing disrespect or violating one's ego.

Although the ranking system has already been abolished, in relation to the others, individual Thais still automatically place themselves in a rank or position based on age, gender, wealth, family background or education level (Niratpattanasai 2005; Vongvipanond, 1994). For instance, younger Thai people will be expected to spontaneously pay respect to those who are older or a subordinate should not be assertive to her/his boss. The Thai hierarchy is also reflected in the Thai language system. Thais are expected to use a proper pronoun with one another in order to properly show respect or a level of intimacy (Fieg, 1989). As a result, in social interactions or intercultural communications, most non-Thais grown and raised in an egalitarian society, such as Americans, probably feel uncomfortable or frustrated at the apparent unwillingness of Thais to stand up or speak out (Fieg, 1989; Klausner, 1993). At present, Thais, especially the new or younger generations, seem to be becoming more assertive in that they share their ideas with elders more openly. Yet, not paying respect to senior partners or superiors still appears unacceptable in Thai society (Andrews & Chompusri, 2013).

Like most Asian cultures, Thailand has a low individualistic characteristic and is collectivistic (Individualism index at 20). This cultural presupposition is essentially reflected in the Thais' habit of avoiding conflict or public confrontation. Overt expressions of negative feelings in an interaction are then considered as threatening social harmony (Hofstede, 1991; Klausner, 1993; Sriussadaporn-Charoenngam & Jablin, 1999). Another characteristic supporting Thais as being collectivist is the lack of overt directedness. Thai people are sensitive to criticism and so are aware of offending one's face (Boonnuch, 2012; Mulder, 2000). This is congruent with Komin (1990), who stressed that Thai people are ego-oriented and so they save the ego or face of others to avoid confrontation. In contrast, Fieg (1989) referred to Thais in parallel with Americans as being individualist. One of the reflected behaviors he mentioned was that Thais rely the most on themselves and so do not ask others for help to solve a problem. Those who seek help will be considered weak and foolish. However, Fieg (1989) also noted that Thais are to some extent collectivist. He elaborated further that Thais prioritize group harmony over their personal achievement or preference.

Thailand has a low (34) MvF score, and so is considered as a feminine society in which assertive and competitiveness are less valued. In accordance with this finding, Thais are found to be so non-assertive that they barely give critical opinions or feedbacks, even if required in many situations (such as in the classroom and workplace). Obviously, such a characteristic is still prevalent, especially in the classroom where most students usually keep quiet rather than give any critical ideas.

Even though Thailand has an intermediate UAI dimension score (64), Thai people likely prefer to avoid uncertainty, where Thais were described as not being bold risk takers (Fieg, 1989). For instance, most Thais prefer working with government since "it offers both comfort and security as well as coveted titles" (p. 69). However, note that this attitude towards government positions is changing. In relation to communication behaviors,

Thais avoid uncertainty through employing appropriate communication tactics, including the use of correct pronouns and appropriate postures of respect or deference (Sriussadaporn-Charoenngam & Jablin, 1999). Nowadays, such communication tactics of using correct pronouns are still employed even to communicate with a non-Thai.

As already mentioned, *krengjai* has been used as a social mechanism, mainly to maintain interpersonal relationships. Also, *krengjai* involves other cultural values (e.g., face-saving or showing respect to others), these cultural values can be explained or related to each of Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Generally speaking, *krengjai* is used in congruence with these cultural dimensions. For example, being collectivist, most Thais apply *krengjai* to avoid conflicts and so maintain social harmony. Also, Thai social structure is considered a high power distance society in which seniority or inequality is acceptable. As a result, *krengjai* is then expected as well as used to express fear and respect to superiors (Berendt & Tanita, 2011; Prpic & Kanjanapanyakom, n.d.).

Accordingly, this current study assumed that people with a similar level of Hofstede's cultural index will have a positive perception towards *krengjai*. Taking how culture(s) determines the people's perception and relation to others into account, this study recruited participants of different nationalities. Based on statistical calculation, ten nationalities of Easterners and Westerners were included in the current study. Table 2.1 compares the cultural preferences of recruited participants based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions (1989).

Most Eastern countries had a similar cultural orientation to Thailand (Table 2.1). Only Japan and Vietnam were quite different, having a masculine society and a low preference for avoiding uncertainty, respectively. Interestingly, although the evidence showed that most Western culture(s) in general appeared different from Eastern culture(s) (Gudykunst, 1998; Qingxue, 2003), Russia, Poland and France had a closer PDI level compared

to the Asian average (70). In comparison to Thailand, France had only a two-point lower PDI than Thailand. Only Denmark had the most contrasting cultural dimension scores, and so had a different culture from Thailand, as well as from the average of the Asian countries. Taking individualism and the PDI as an indicator of perception towards *krengjai*, based on the overall dimensions, the Western participants should respond in compliance with this study's assumption that non-Thais perceive *krengjai* negatively.

Table 2.1

Summary of the participant's national culture

Country	PDI	IvC	MvF	UAI
<i>Easterners</i>				
Indonesia	78	14	46	48
India	77	48	56	40
Malaysia	100	26	50	36
Philippines	94	32	64	44
Japan	54	46	95	92
Vietnam	70	20	40	30
Thailand	64	20	34	64
<i>Asian Average*</i>	<i>71</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>53</i>	<i>58</i>
<i>Westerners</i>				
Canada	39	80	52	48
Denmark	18	74	16	23
France	68	71	43	86
Germany	35	67	66	65
Latvia	44	70	9	63
Poland	68	60	64	93
Russia	93	39	36	95
United Kingdom	35	89	66	35
<i>European</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>53</i>	<i>70</i>

Average

United States	40	91	62	46
World Average*	55	43	50	64

Note: The cultural dimensions are adapted from Hofstede (2010a). The average values of each region taken from narrative reports. Since the actual values are not published, an IvC average score of Asian is unavailable

Source: Hofstede 2010a, *National Culture Dimension*, viewed 28 April 2016, <https://geert-hofstede.com/national-culture.html>.

2.4 Research on perceptions towards *krengjai*

Krengjai and its impacts have grasped ongoing interests amongst both academic and non-academics. As previously discussed, *krengjai* is one of the core Thai values creating profound impacts on Thais' behavior. The practice of *krengjai* is not necessarily limited to or displayed towards Thais but also involves non-Thais. However, very few studies have directly explored *krengjai* values in multicultural contexts, and there has so far been no study where the perception towards *krengjai* was comprehensively compared, especially in terms of English definition and impacts, amongst groups of Easterners, Westerners and Thais. The results of this study will, therefore, expand the existing previous research studies as reviewed below.

Based on the literature review, it was gathered that the main focus of previous studies can be categorized into the study of the (i) *krengjai* definition, (ii) definition and effects of *krengjai* and (iii) *krengjai* effects. Using Komin and Klausner as the research references, Wyatt and Promkandorn (2012) conducted an analysis of the English definition of *krengjai*. Overall, three meanings (consideration, deference and not wanting to hurt feelings) were considered as the correct English meaning of *krengjai*. Similar to previous literature, consideration is still considered the closest English meaning of *krengjai*. However, their results indicated that the English definition of *krengjai* can be understood precisely based on a variety of given social contexts. Although Wyatt and Promkandorn contributed substantially to our

understanding of the English definition of *krengjai*, their findings only reflect the Thais' perspective on the correctness of such definitions.

Encompassing a dissimilar perspective on *krengjai* and its values, in particular in the workplace context, Sirimahawan (2003) investigated Thais' and non-Thais' perception of *krengjai* in terms of definition and impacts on professional relationships. His findings revealed that Thais and non-Thais defined *krengjai* differently. The definitions included *don't want to bother others*, *smiling*, *no complaint* and *expression of empathy*. Despite that Sirimahawan (2003) did not point out the quality of perception towards such definitions, I gathered that non-Thai participants did not signal any negativity when defining *krengjai*. In relation to *krengjai* and the working relationship, the results indicated the cons of displaying *krengjai* at work. Sirimahawan (2003) found that *krengjai* affected relationships between Thai and non-Thai co-workers as it repressed the feelings of a *krengjai* individual. His findings essentially set a benchmark for this research study. However, the setting of Sirimahawan's research was quite specific and, therefore, limited the nature or quality of *krengjai*. He observed the definitions and roles of *krengjai* as perceived by flight attendants. Clearly, the nature of work involves providing hospitality. In line with Wyatt and Promkandorn (2012), the given definitions may not be applicable in general but rather in a specific context of an aircraft setting.

With respect to the research on *krengjai* and impacts on communication, the work of Barr (2004) is incongruent with this current study. In addition, his work was one of the early studies of intercultural communication in a Thai context. Despite not placing emphasis on *krengjai*, Barr (2004) related *krengjai* to his study of intercultural/cross-cultural communication in Thailand. He focused on how cultural differences, in particular high/low and individualist/collectivist cultures affect Thai and Canadian communication styles. His hypotheses were incongruent with the assumption of this research that *krengjai* affects communication behaviors of

Thai people. Interestingly, the results contradicted his assumption that Thai participants adopted a more direct communication style than Canadian participants. Notwithstanding these interesting results, Barr (2004) did not elaborate much on how *krengjai* affects communication styles, and in particular negotiations. The relationship between *krengjai* and communication style was too briefly provided.

Years later Fernandez-Freercks (2004) examined national culture and preferred conflict management style. Similar to Barr (2004), Fernandez-Freercks adopted Hofstede, in particular the IvC dimension to explain the differences between Thai and Western cultures. Again, *krengjai* was raised in part to explain Thai culture and also related to how collectivist Thai society is. As interesting as Barr's (2004) findings, his results indicated no difference in conflict management style between Thai and Western staff. On the other hand, national culture had no impact on Fernandez-Freercks who premised his argument on the assumption that Thai cultural values had shifted away from what the Hofstede cultural dimensions had demonstrated.

Focusing on the existence of *krengjai* in the workplace, Jaokaew (2005) investigated the effects of *krengjai* in a cross-cultural workplace. Her findings affirmed the profound impacts of *krengjai* in such a setting. However, the results were presented merely from the Thai respondents and so lacked the non-Thai's reflected perspectives on *krengjai* and its effects. In addition, Jaokaew (2005) did not elaborate on *krengjai* effects but pointed out only that such effects lead to misunderstandings as well as affect working relationships between Thai and foreign staff in a cross-cultural workplace.

As reviewed above, there has so far been no research in which the effects of *krengjai* on communication practice and/or professional relationship was observed as well profoundly elaborated. In addition, the participants' national culture was limited to one or two groups. Also, most previous studies lacked a holistic perception from intercultural communication of Easterners,

Westerners and Thais. This suggests further research into *krengjai* and its impacts is important as the world becomes more and more global.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, the literature review and theoretical framework were provided. In compliance with the objectives of this current study, the literature review encompassed an archive of *krengjai* English definitions. Some new concepts of *krengjai* definition (emotion or behavior-based meanings) were also drawn and offered by this current study. The relevant studies on *krengjai* effects on communication practices and professional relationships were also reviewed and helped identify a research gap, to be filled in this present research. Then, nationality or national culture was discussed in line with the theoretical framework of Hofstede's cultural dimension. Several relevant studies were also reviewed. In the next chapter, the selection of research methodology is provided in detail.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

To investigate the perception towards *krengjai*, a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collections has been mooted to yield more insightful data. Accordingly, this research employed such a mixed method data collection, as detailed in this chapter. This chapter presents the research design, followed by the details about the participants. The research instruments in the data collection included a questionnaire and interviews. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the data analysis.

3.1 Research design

As discussed in the literature review (Chapter 1), the currently available research lacks a reciprocal perception towards *krengjai*. Most studies have been solely focused on one specific group of Thai, Western or Eastern people. In an attempt to fill this gap, as well as to gain a fuller understanding of the English definition of *krengjai* and its effects, participants with a Thai, Western and Eastern nationality were included in this study.

In so doing, this study was designed as a mixed method with the aim to yield new findings on the English translated meaning of *krengjai* and to provide descriptive information regarding the effects of *krengjai* on communication and professional relationships. Accordingly, it embraced a qualitative investigation, including an open-ended questionnaire and an interview. In parallel, quantitative data was conducted in relevance to Hofstede's theory of culture and communication, which predicts that nationality will influence the perception towards *krengjai*.

3.1.1 Research questions

As previously mentioned, this research addressed the following questions:

1. How do Easterners, Westerners and Thais explain the concept of *krengjai* in English?
2. What are the impacts of *krengjai* on communication practices and professional relationships among Easterners, Westerners and Thais at work?
3. How do Thais and non-Thais perceive *krengjai* in the context of communication and professional relationships?

3.2 Participants

3.2.1 Population

In compliance with the research objectives, the participants of the study were recruited from the international departments of the top two Thai state (government) Universities, which have a successful history of performing English-language-based programs in Thailand for over 20 years. However, to maintain confidentiality and credibility, the Pseudonyms University A and University B were used to represent the two universities. The programs at both universities had both Thai and non-Thai employees, thereby creating a multicultural working environment, which was one requisite of this research. In 2015, the number of employees in the two international programs was 610, and is summarized in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

The number of employees at two international departments by nationality (N=610)

Nationality	Number (N=610)	University	
		A (N=422)	B (N=188)
Thai	507	333	174
American	34	30	4
British	15	-	-

Australian	5	3	2
German	6	6	-
Canadian	3	3	-
French	2	2	-
Irish	1	1	-
Polish	1	1	-
Finnish	1	1	-
Russian	2	-	2
Icelandic	1	-	1
Spanish	3	3	-
Italian	2	2	-
Latvian	1	1	-
Danish	2	2	-
Portuguese	1	1	-
Austrian	1	1	-
South African	1	1	-
Chinese	5	5	-
Japanese	4	2	2
Filipino	3	3	-
Taiwanese	1	-	1
Vietnamese	1	-	1
Malaysian	1	1	-
Indian	4	3	1
Indonesian	1	1	-
Chinese (Hong Kong)	1	-	-
Total	610	422	188

3.2.2 Sample size

To determine the sample size, this study adopted Yamane's criteria (Yamane, 1973) with a 95% confidence level and precision levels of 0.05, as presented in Eq. (3.1):

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2} \quad , \quad (3.1)$$

where n is the sample size, N is the population size and e is the precision level. Applying Eq. (3.1) gives a calculated result of:

$$n = \frac{610}{1 + 610(0.05)^2} = 241.56 \approx 242$$

That is, the minimum sample size of the study from the two international departments was determined as 242 persons of mixed nationalities.

3.2.3 Sampling design

To determine the proportion of the sample size required from each university program, a stratified sampling approach was applied to determine the number of participants, as shown in the following steps:

1. Firstly, the population of employees was divided into two; those from University A (422 participants) and University B (188 participants). Then, the cross-multiplication approach was used to determine the sample size. For a sample size of 610, the appropriate number of participants was 242. Since University A had 422 members of the staff, the sample size derived from Eq. (3.1) gives 167 subjects:

$$\frac{422 \times 242}{610} = 167$$

In the same manner, if University B had 188 employees, the sample size was 75.

$$\frac{188 \times 242}{610} = 75$$

2. To test the relationship between the participant's nationality and their perception towards *krengjai*, the cross-multiplication approach was repeatedly applied with each group of participants. Prior to the calculation, the population from both international programs was divided into groups of Thais, Westerners and Easterners, as summarized in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2

The number of employees in each nationality group (N=610)

Group	Number	University	
		A	B
Thais	507	333	174
Westerners	82	73	9
Easterners	21	16	5
Total	610	422	188

Therefore, the stratified sampling technique and cross-multiplication were applied again to obtain the required total of 242 participants from the three nationality groups at the two international programs, as summarized in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3

Sample size in each international department by nationality group (N=242)

Group	Sample	University	
		A	B
Thais	201	132	69
Westerners	33	29	4
Easterners	8	6	2
Total	242	167	75

3. For the final step, the questionnaires were distributed until the quota for each group (shown in Table 3.3) was met. From the 242 participants who completed the voluntary questionnaire, two participants from each group (total of 6) were asked to participate in an interview. The questionnaires were first analyzed for the participant's willingness to participate in an interview. Then, purposive sampling, using the information regarding nationality and completion of the questionnaire, was applied. In the case of non-Thais, the length of residence in Thailand was an added factor to be considered as it was assumed to affect the participant's understanding of the definition of *krengjai*. However, the length of residence was not an included variable of this study but to be noted for future study.

3.3 Instruments

Data was gathered by (i) an online self-administered questionnaire and (ii) a follow-up interview. The details and implementations of each instrument are discussed as follows:

3.3.1 Questionnaire

The self-administered questionnaire was used to conduct both quantitative and qualitative data. The questionnaire was designed in both Thai and English language to elicit as rich information as possible from both Thai and non-Thai participants. Prior to the actual questionnaire distribution, the linguistic equivalence of its contents was evaluated and confirmed by a bilingual expert for its relevant contents. To meet the purposes of the study, the questionnaire was comprised of five sections: (i) demographic data, (ii) English definition of *krengjai*, (iii) effects of *krengjai* on communication practice, (iv) effects of *krengjai* on professional relationships and (v) comments and suggestions. Below is the elaboration of each section:

Section 1: Demographic data

This section was designed to obtain information that could be applied in the data analysis and discussion and included the nine items of gender, age, nationality, race, cultural orientation, highest education background, job position, duration of work in multicultural workplaces and length of residence in Thailand. While nationality was used to test its influence on the participants' perceptions towards *krengjai*, the other demographic factors were collected for further observation and implication. Several researchers have addressed that *krengjai* is commonly practiced by subordinates towards superiors or by juniors towards seniors (Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 1995; Klausner, 1993; Komin, 1990). Equally important, cultural differences are known to provoke conflicts and miscommunication, especially between people from vastly dissimilar cultures (Triandis, 1998). Therefore, a question regarding the cultural orientation of the participants was included in this questionnaire. However, only the non-Thai participants had to provide information on their length of residence in Thailand.

Section 2: English definition of *krengjai*

To investigate the various English meanings of *krengjai*, this study, in contrast to previous studies, did not adopt the filter question method

or provide a predetermined set of meanings. Accordingly, this section was comprised of a single open-format question to elicit as much rich and insightful information as possible from the participant.

Section 3: Effect of *krengjai* on communication within the workplace

Three questions were included in this section that were designed to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data. A Likert Scale (1-to-5 rating) was used to quantitatively measure the level of agreement regarding the effects of *krengjai* on communication via various communication practices. Based on a review of the literature, the list of communication behaviors used in the questionnaire contained four statements:

1. *Krengjai causes silence*
2. *Krengjai causes indirectness*
3. *Krengjai causes understatement*
4. *Krengjai causes lying*

In addition, an open-ended question was included as to what participants regarded the effects of *krengjai* on communication behaviors were, so as to observe if any more effects arise beyond the four points above, which had been taken from previous investigations.

Section 4: Effect of *krengjai* on professional relationships within the workplace

This section applied similar types of questions as in section 3 above, but they were designed to investigate the effects of *krengjai* on professional relationships at work. The first two questions adopted the Likert Scale to test the level of agreement to the given five statements on the effects of *krengjai* on professional relationships, which were based on the existing literature and are as follows:

1. *Krengjai helps save face of others*
2. *Krengjai helps show respect to others*
3. *Krengjai helps prevent conflicts with others*

4. *Krengjai helps not to violate feelings or emotions of others*

5. *Krengjai helps to be accepted by others*

In addition, in the same manner as in section 3 above, an open-ended question was also included to elicit each participant's additional opinion(s) about the effect of *krengjai* on professional relationships for further analysis and discussion.

Section 5: Comments and suggestions

Besides the English definition of *krengjai* (section 2) and the binary effects of *krengjai* (sections 3 and 4), this study attempted to point out tactics or solutions, if there were any, to cope with this unique Thai concept in a multicultural workplace. To this end section 5 was designed in an open format so that the participants could freely express their opinions, and should, in the researcher's expectation, provide truthful and novel suggestions for further contribution into both academic and practical contexts.

3.3.2 Interview

For the follow-up interview, the survey questions were replicated, especially the open-ended questions, in an attempt to obtain the participants' reflection on each answer as accurately as possible. Nonetheless, interesting points retrieved from the questionnaires were also addressed in the interview (See Appendix D)

3.3.3 Survey reliability

The authors have produced a tool for collecting quantitative data out of literature reviews which is a questionnaire. The questionnaire was created to help researchers understand the overview of the characteristics of *krengjai* (being considerate), and was modified after the consultation of experts. The validity of its content and reliability was evaluated as below using the SPSS for windows software.

1. Content was validated by taking advice from experts to consolidate and improve the questions in terms of the language accuracy, validity and content coverage.
2. Reliability was measured by conducting a pilot survey using the revised questionnaire and 30 samples, which resembled the real ones. All 30 samples (100%) were found to be valid with no deletions (exceptions) of the variables. The result from the questionnaire was then analyzed for its reliability using Cronbach's Method and Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient. The Alpha coefficient was calculated to be equal to 0.785 for 11 items, which was above the required level of ≥ 0.75 to be considered acceptable. Hence, this questionnaire was deemed to have reached an acceptable standard of accuracy and could be implemented further.

3.4 Data analysis

As previously discussed, this research adopted a mixed method to study the perceptions towards *krengjai* in the workplace. Accordingly, the collected data were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. Qualitative analysis was used to analyze the English definition, while quantitative analysis was adopted to investigate the relationship between the participant's nationality and their perceptions towards *krengjai*. Meanwhile, both qualitative and quantitative analyses were used to analyze the effects of *krengjai* on communication and professional relationships. The general demographic data of the participants was presented as the frequency distribution (*n*) and percentage (%). Subsequently, the information elicited from the questionnaires was analyzed in relation to each research question as detailed below. In parallel to the questionnaire analysis, the interviews were coded for the qualitative analysis. The details of data analysis are as follows:

Research question 1: How do Easterners, Westerners and Thais explain the concept of krengjai in English?

The first question aimed to evaluate the perceived English meaning of *krengjai* from the three different nationality groups of participants (Thais, Easterners and Westerners). To elicit the data, qualitative analysis was used as follows. First, the 242 questionnaires were reviewed to detect the number of answers, presented as a percentage. Subsequently, the answers from each nationality group were identified and observed for repetition of the data, then categorized and reported as a frequency (percentage). Then, the meanings from the three different groups were tested for any difference and presented as a Venn diagram. In the final stage, the data were analyzed in relation to the previous literature, and are narratively reported.

Research question 2: What are the impacts of krengjai on intercultural communications and professional relationships among Easterners, Westerners and Thais at work?

This question sought to further investigate the effects of *krengjai* on communication and professional relationships in the multicultural workplace. The data were collected from the opened-ended questions of sections 3 and 4 in the questionnaire of 242 participants and in the interview of six participants. In quantitative testing of the participants' agreement, each statement of communication-related effects was framed based on the literature review as agree or disagree with the negative value statements (section 3), while each statement of professional relationship-related effects was addressed as agree or disagree with the positive value statements (section 4). Univariate analysis was employed to interpret the data, which are presented as percentage frequencies. In addition to the effects of *krengjai*, the comments and suggestions elicited from the open ended question (section 5) of the questionnaire were analyzed in an attempt to not only address problems but also provide guidelines for coping with communication barriers due to the

practice of *krengjai*. These data were qualitatively analyzed and are presented in a narrative format.

Research question 3: How do Thais and non-Thais perceive krengjai in the context of communication and professional relationships?

To measure whether there was any difference in perception towards *krengjai* between Thais, Easterners and Westerners, the data was analyzed by the Pearson Chi-square test to ascertain the significance of any relationship between the independent variable (nationality) and the respective dependent variable (perceptions towards *krengjai*), the latter being separately evaluated for communication and professional relationships. The hypothesis was that Thai and Eastern participants have relatively more positive perceptions than Western participants, and this was tested using cross tabulation analysis to present the frequency distribution and to compare the relationship between variables as follows:

1. Nationality and perception towards *krengjai* regarding its effects on communication
2. Nationality and perception towards *krengjai* regarding its effects on professional relationships

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter outlined what approaches were taken to investigate the perception of Thai and non-Thai employees towards *krengjai* to achieve the three purposes of this study (section 3.1). With respect to the methodology, qualitative data collection was employed to retrieve the English definition of *krengjai* while aiming to additionally gain information on the *krengjai*-related effects on communication practices and professional relationships at work. However, quantitative data collection was best suited to test the quality of the participants' perception towards the effects of *krengjai*. In testing the participants' perception towards *krengjai*, the positive and negative value statements about *krengjai*-related effects were based on those reported in the

literature. Overall, this research adopted a mixed-method approach, where the data collection and analysis were conducted accordingly. The results and discussion will be further elaborated in Chapter 4.



CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results from the data collection phase. The findings, from both the questionnaires and interviews, are displayed and discussed for each of the research questions presented here:

1. How do Easterners, Westerners and Thais explain the concept of *krengjai* in English?
2. What are the impacts of *krengjai* on communication and professional relationships among Easterners, Westerners and Thais at work?
3. How do Thais and non-Thais perceive *krengjai* in the context of communication and professional relationships?

The chapter begins with the demographic information of the participants, and discusses the English definition of *krengjai* and the effects of *krengjai* on communication and professional relationships. Then, the participant's nationality and perception towards *krengjai* is analyzed. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the investigation.

4.1 Demographic information

4.1.1 General information

Of the 242 responding participants, the majority (69.0%), both faculty and staff, were female participants. Most participants were aged between 26–30 and 31–35 y of age, accounting for 36.1% and 32.8% of the total number, respectively. The minority group of the participants were aged below 26 and accounted for 3.7%. In terms of educational achievements, most participants (58.9%) held (as the highest qualification) a Master's degree, followed by those with a bachelor's degree (30.3%), while doctorate holders were the minority at 10.8%. More than 60% of the university staff and 30% of lecturers participated in this survey. Table 4.1 summarizes the general

information of the faculty members and staff who participated in both the paper-based and online questionnaires.

Table 4.1

General information of the surveyed participants (N=242)

General information	Number	% (of 242)
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	75	31.0
Female	67	69.0
<i>Age range (y)</i>		
Below 26	9	3.7
26–30	87	36.1
31–35	79	32.8
36–40	31	12.9
More than 40	35	14.5
<i>Education level (highest)</i>		
Bachelor' degree	73	30.3
Master's degree	143	58.9
Doctorate degree	26	10.8
<i>Job title</i>		
Instructor	74	30.6
Staff	168	69.4

4.1.2 Socio-cultural information

This section presents more specific demographic data, which is discussed further in relation to its influence on *krengjai*. Table 4.2 summarizes the nationality, race, cultural orientation, length of working experience in a multicultural workplace, and duration of stay in Thailand.

Table 4.2

Socio-cultural information of the surveyed participants (N=242)

Social and cultural information	Number	Percentage
<i>Nationality (by group)</i>		
<i>University A</i>		
Easterner	6	2.5
Westerner	29	12.0
Thai	132	54.6
<i>University B</i>		
Easterner	2	0.8
Westerner	4	1.7
Thai	69	28.5
<i>Nationality (University A and B)</i>		
Thai	201	83.1
Canadian	2	0.8
British	7	2.9
American	13	5.4
Danish	2	0.8
Polish	1	0.4
Latvian	1	0.4
Australian	3	1.2
French	1	0.4
German	2	0.8
Russian	1	0.4
Indonesian	1	0.4
Vietnamese	1	0.4
Japanese	1	0.4
Filipino	2	0.8
Malaysian	1	0.4
Chinese	1	0.4
Indian	1	0.4
<i>Race</i>		

Asian	18	7.4
White	33	13.6
<i>Cultural orientation</i>		
Born and raised in Thai culture	179	74.0
Born in Thai but raised in Eastern culture	9	3.7
Born in Thai but raised in Western culture	5	2.1
Born and raised in Eastern culture	10	4.1
Born in Eastern but raised in Thai culture	1	0.4
Born in Eastern but raised in Western culture	3	1.2
Born and raised in Western culture	30	12.4
Born in Western but raised in Thai culture	1	0.4
Mixed*	4	1.7
<i>Length of working in a multicultural workplace (for 235 of the 242 participants) (years)</i>		
Less than 6	112	47.7
6–10	82	34.9
11–15	26	11.1
16–20	7	3.0
More than 20	8	3.4
<i>Length of residence in Thailand (for the 39 non-Thai participants) (years)</i>		
< 6	8	20.5
6–10	10	25.6
11–15	9	23.1
16–20	6	15.4
> 20	6	15.4

*Note: It should be noted that the majority of participants were born and raised in either one or two cultures. Mixed refers to a person who was born and raised in more than two cultures.

As presented in Table 4.2, the majority of participants from University A and B, both faculty members and staff, were Thais (83.1%), which reflects that the largest group of reported university employees was Thai. Western participants were comprised of 13.6%, with the top two nationalities being American and British at 5.4% and 2.9%, respectively. Eastern participants, who consisted of Indonesian, Vietnamese, Japanese, Filipino, Malaysian, Chinese and Indian, came in at a very low level of participants (3.3%), with Filipino as the majority (0.8%). With regards to race, 78.9% were Thai, followed by 13.6% Caucasian and 7.4% Asian. The majority of participants (74%) were born and raised in Thailand, followed by those who were born and raised in a Western culture (12.4%). The minority (4.1%) were the participants born and raised in an Eastern culture. Interestingly, apart from the participants who were born in Thai/Eastern/Western and raised in one other culture, there were 1.4% of participants who had been born and raised in more than two cultures. The length of working experience in a multicultural workplace was mostly 5 y or 6–10 y at 47.7% and 34.9%, respectively, but 2.9% participants did not indicate their working time in a multicultural workplace. For non-Thais, most participants (25.6%) had resided in Thailand for 6–10 y, followed by an equal number of participants (15.4%) at 16–20 y and > 21 y, respectively. It is noteworthy that more than half of the non-Thai respondents had resided in Thailand for more than 10 y.

4.1.3 Interviewed participants' information

Of the 242 participants, a total of six participants, two from each group of Easterners, Westerners and Thais, were selected for an in-depth interview. Table 4.3 summarizes the demographic information of the six interviewed participants.

Table 4.3

Demographic information of the interviewed participants (N=6)

Pseudonym	Nationality	Gender	Age (years)	Working time in a multicultural workplace (years)
Mei Mei	Indonesian	Female	34	0.25
Wang	Vietnamese	Male	Unidentified	8
Blaze	Polish	Male	33	2.75
Dave	American	Male	> 40	24
Ying	Thai	Female	34	7
Sak	Thai	Male	30	2

The selected Eastern participants were Mei Mei and Wang (pseudonyms). Mei Mei was a 34-y-old Indonesian lecturer who was born and raised in Indonesia. Prior to working in Thailand, she had never left Indonesia and had been in Thailand for only 4 months prior to this study, yet this was long enough for her to have experienced *krengjai*. Wang, a Vietnamese lecturer, had been exposed to both Asian and American cultures, and had been living in Thailand for 8 y and working in a multicultural workplace for 7 y. With many years of residence and working in Thailand, he had experienced *krengjai* more often compared to Mei Mei.

Blaze and Dave were the Westerners selected to participate in the interview, and both were lecturers. Blaze was a 33-y-old Polish lecturer who was born and raised in South African and American multicultures. He had been living and working in Thailand for 2 y and 9 months and had only worked for one University. Even with only 2 y and nine months in Thailand, he seemed to understand the term *krengjai* quite well. Dave has been residing and working in Thailand for almost 30 y, the longest of all six participants. He is an American lecturer who was born and raised in both Western and Thai cultures. When asked about the definition of *krengjai*, he replied in the questionnaire as *fearful heart*, which is close to the morpheme to morpheme

meaning of *krengjai* (awe of heart). Considering this finding interesting, Dave's reported meaning was then incorporated into the interview question, which is analyzed in section 4.2.2

Ying and Sak were the two Thai participants who volunteered to participate in the in-depth interview. Ying is a 34-y-old Thai-Chinese lecturer, born in Thailand but raised in a Thai-Chinese culture. Given that Thailand and China have a long history of relationship, she did not find herself different from those who were born and raised in a Thai culture, especially with regards to her working context. In contrast to the others, Sak was the only non-lecturer in this research, being a 30-y-old Thai serving as an International Relations Officer with 2-y experience of working in multicultural workplace, Sak was born and raised in Thailand.

4.2 English definitions of *krengjai*

4.2.1 General findings

The first research question was how Easterners, Westerners and Thais differently define the Thai specific concept of *krengjai* in English language. To answer this question, this research used qualitative data elicited from two sources: paper and online self-administered questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire was designed in an open-format so that the participants could freely, and to my expectation, yield novel English definitions of *krengjai*.

Out of 242 collected questionnaires, the answers to this research question from 17 participants (7%) were incomplete, of which none were Easterners. Further investigation showed that most of these participants who did not fill up the first question, had a limited number of years of living in Thailand, and the participants stated that they were not sure or did not know the English meaning of *krengjai*. Meanwhile, some participants gave the meaning in Thai or as an incomprehensibly irrelevant or uncommon definition to a Thai person (including me), such as *krengjai* means *yes*.

To analytically present the English meanings of *krengjai* given by the three different groups (Easterners, Westerners and Thais), this research organized all of the different meanings into categories based on its redundancy and reference to the literature review. The top three classified definitions were emphasized in terms of their similarities and differences. Meanwhile, the unusual meanings (labeled as ‘other’) were not neglected, and were taken into consideration. In addition, conspicuous points from the questionnaires, which were then incorporated into the interviews, are then narratively reported.

As discussed earlier, the concept of *krengjai* is too complex to be described in a single English word. Moreover, the definition is mostly based on context and/or, in my view, the experience or subjectivity of an individual. Acknowledging this point, this research did not determine the correctness or misinterpretation of *krengjai* but rather observed the different meanings used by non-Thai and Thai employees in a multicultural workplace, specifically in a university context. In an attempt to explain the English concept of *krengjai*, most participants elaborated the term into morpheme(s), phrase(s) or sentence(s) creating lists of various meanings. Overall, the definitions from eight Easterner participants were categorized into 12 different English definitional dimensions of *krengjai*. Meanwhile, the group of Westerners provided 18 definitions giving two more meanings than the group of Thai participants’ (see also Appendix A for more details on given definitions). To classify the data in general, the results from the survey were broken down to the top three definitional categories for each of the Easterner, Westerner and Thai sample groups. Based on the percentage distribution, the top three ranked definitions are summarized below in Tables 4.4 to 4.6.

Table 4.4

Top three ranked krengjai definitions from Easterners (N=8)

Definition of <i>krengjai</i>	Easterners (N=8)	Percentage	Rank
1. Consideration, feeling considerate or having a considerate manner	3	37.5%	1
2. Fear of offending someone	2	25%	
3. Being indirect or not saying the direct truth	2	25%	
4. Feeling (e.g. worried or uncomfortable) to ask for or accept an offer from someone	2	25%	2
5. Being polite	2	25%	
6. Being afraid to cause trouble	1	12.5%	
7. Showing humility	1	12.5%	
8. Avoiding confrontation, anger or conflict	1	12.5%	
9. Being courteous	1	12.5%	
10. Reluctance to impose upon a particular person in Thai society	1	12.5%	3
11. Not wanting to cause any inconvenience	1	12.5%	
12. Having respect for others	1	12.5%	

As shown in Table 4.4, most Eastern participants defined *krengjai* as *consideration*. They also used various terms including *feeling considerate* and/or *having a considerate manner*. Meanwhile, in comparison with the Western and Thai participants, the Eastern participants had the highest number of 2nd and 3rd ranked definitions at a total amount of four and seven respectively. Westerners, on the other hand, had the top three definitions (based on percentage distribution) for the word *krengjai* as shown in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5

Top three ranked krengjai definitions from Westerners (N=33)

Definition of <i>krengjai</i>	Westerners (N = 33)	Percentage	Rank
1. Consideration or being/feeling considerate for other people	7	21.2%	1
2. Awareness of social hierarchy	7	21.2%	
3. Being aware of or concerned for another person's feeling	6	18.2%	2
4. Having respect or being respectful	5	15.2%	3

Similar to the group of Easterners, Westerners most commonly (21.2%) translated *krengjai* as *consideration*. However, the Westerners also defined *krengjai* as *awareness of social hierarchy* equally at 21.2%. Giving the least categorized definitions of *krengjai*, the top three definitions retrieved from Thai participants, based on the percentage distribution, are shown in Table 4.6. Likewise, the result showed that most Thai participants defined *krengjai* as *consideration*. In contrast to both non-Thai groups, Thai participants further defined the term as *not wanting to bother someone physically or emotionally* and *repression of feeling to not act or feelings that confine one's behavior*.

Table 4.6

Top three ranked krengjai definitions from Thais (N=201)

Definition of <i>krengjai</i>	Westerners (N = 201)	Percentage	Rank
1. Consideration	61	30.4%	1
2. Not wanting to bother someone physically or emotionally	26	12.9%	2
3. Repression of feelings to act or feelings that confine one's behavior	18	9.0%	3

The percentage distribution of *krengjai* definitions shown in Tables 4.4–4.6 exhibit a similarity in terms of rank between all three

nationality groups, where consideration was the most commonly defined English definition of *krengjai* with an average score of 30%. The analysis of each of the top three ranked definitions of *krengjai*, integrating the interview results where relevant, is as follows:

This investigation of the English definition of *krengjai* in relation to the non-Thai nationalities and Thais revealed that the non-Thai and Thai respondents provided both some similar and some different English definitions of *krengjai*. Interestingly, most participants from all three groups translated *krengjai* as *consideration* or *being/feeling considerate for other people*, which is often considered as the usual definition (appeared in the dictionary) of *krengjai* (Wyatt & Promkandorn, 2012). Approximately one-third of the Easterner and Thai participants (37.5% and 30.4%, respectively) and 21.2% of Westerners referred to this usual meaning.

However, when referring back to the complexity of defining *krengjai* with a single English word, it was noted that Easterners and Westerners utilized more than one vocabulary, including the word *consideration*, while defining the word *krengjai*, whereas the Thais defined it with just the single word *consideration*. This distinction of a single word versus a phrase-based definition of *krengjai* may suggest that Thais are more accustomed to defining the word *krengjai* compared to other nationalities, thereby allowing them to be more aware of the definition of *krengjai*. Meanwhile, based on anecdotal evidence, most Thais have been trying to correlate *krengjai* into one single English word (Biggs, 2005; Klausner, 1993). It was also suggested by Wyatt and Promkandorn (2012, p. 376) that “consideration is one of the best English definitions of *krengjai* and the most often cited one in the national and international literature”.

This current finding is consistent with most previous studies that when requested to provide the English meaning of *krengjai*, from either a Thai or non-Thai individual, *consideration* is often regarded as the preliminary, closest or usual meaning (Biggs, 2005; Foreign Area Studies

Division, 1963; Klausner, 1993; Komin, 1990; Niratpattanasai, 2005; Wright, 2007; Wyatt & Promkandorn, 2012). The prevalent use of *consideration* as the definition of *krengjai* was further observed in the face-to-face interviews from each of the three groups (total of six people). The information will be later presented in the in-depth interview section (4.2.2.1).

Apart from *consideration*, *awareness of social hierarchy* also had an equal ranked distribution in the definitions by Western participants (21.2%), thereby making it part of the top-most used definitions. Interestingly, such a definition is not similar to any of the definitions in previous studies. The closest reported meaning is “performed at all social levels, with superiors, equals, inferiors, family, spouse and in phooyai-phoonoi (superior-inferior) relationships” noted in the studies of Holmes and Tangtongtavy (1995) and Komin (1990). Yet, it is quite comprehensible, especially when trying to correlate *krengjai* to Thai culture. To understand *krengjai*, most scholars relate *krengjai* to cultural characteristics. One of those was the hierarchical social system in which *krengjai* was then believed to be displayed as a symbol of respect to the elders (Klausner & Klausner, 1977; Komin, 1990; Niratpattanasai, 2005). The given definition in relation to *deference to authority* further, in my view, affirmed Niratpattanasai’s finding that non-Thais will usually experience the display of showing respect at all levels of contact (Niratpattanasai, 2005; p. 3). In this study, such a characteristic was revealed in the display of *krengjai*.

The second rank of findings on the definitional categories showed that while most non-Thai and Thai participants in this study similarly translated *krengjai* as *consideration*, they also provided different second most common meanings. As for Easterners, *krengjai* was also referred to as (i) *fear of offending someone*, (ii) *feeling worried or uncomfortable to ask for or accept an offer from someone*, (iii) *being indirect or not saying the direct truth* and (iv) *being polite*. The four given definitions correspond with the other

English interpretations of *krengjai* identified in previous studies (Mulder, 1985; Wichiarajote, 1973; Wyatt & Promkandon, 2012).

Studying the Thai culture in relation to *krengjai*, Mulder (1985) and Wichiarajote (1973), the early generation of Thai social investigators, embraced the concept of fear to explain *krengjai*. Used in later years, *feeling ... to ask for or accept an offer from someone* is a more contemporary meaning introduced without citations in previous studies (Wyatt & Promkandon, 2012). Unlike those meanings, *being indirect or not saying the direct truth* is the least common used explanation of the meaning of *krengjai*. In my view, the reason why it is the least used explanation of *krengjai* is simply due to the consecutive implications of feeling *krengjai* that lead the individuals to behave accordingly, thereby, being an act or an effect of feeling *krengjai*, but not explicitly being the definition of *krengjai*. As further demonstrated by Fieg (1989) that *krengjai* is to avoid open conflict, Thais are sensitive to indirect cues which are embodied in the concept of *krengjai*. It is interesting to note that the Easterners' interpretation of *krengjai* as *being polite* appears to be inconsistent with previous studies.

Despite variations in the English definitions given by Easterners, when considering the second-ranked meanings of the Westerner and Thai groups, no linguistic similarities among them was detected. While a number of Westerners (18.2%) referred to *being aware of or concerned for another person's feeling*, Thais (12.9%) indicated *not wanting to bother someone physically or emotionally*. Apart from not wanting to bother another party, to (feel) *krengjai* also included not wanting to talk, to speak up, to deny, to disappoint or to make someone feel bad. With respect to *krengjai* and feeling, Thais reported further that *krengjai*, when translated in English, engaged various feelings. They used the term fear, afraid and concerned. However, *krengjai* was not only used to feel or express feelings but also to repress them. Either way, it was found in relation with confining or restraining a *krengjai* person's behavior. One Thai participant interestingly defined

krengjai as “a kind of feeling of not being able to open up or express one’s feelings succinctly (the person who feels *krengjai*) because she or he is likely to care for the feelings of the other party if the words are spoken. She or he is concerned that if the words are spoken that they might cause some kind of negative feelings to others and, therefore, chooses to remain silent.” Given the differences in wordings, the meanings from all groups, however, mutually made explicit reference to particular concern for the feelings of either a speaker/sender or a listener/receiver. In addition, these meanings do not appear to be very different from the meanings retrieved from the literature review (Klausner & Klausner, 1977; Komin, 1990; Niratpattanasai, 2005; Wyatt & Promkandorn, 2012).

When considering the third ranked meaning, seven classified meanings of equal ranking (12.5%) were given by Easterners (Table 4.4). Meanwhile, the Westerners addressed *having respect or being respectful* as another English definition of *krengjai*. The third highest rank of classified meanings retrieved from the Thai participants was *repression of feeling to act or feelings that confine one’s behavior* (8.96%). The given meaning appears not new, as it is consistent with Holmes and Tangtongtavy (1995). As noted, when mentioning *krengjai* as *consideration*, most participants used a specific single word without any modifiers. However, for the second and third highest ranked definitions provided by Thais, they did use modifiers. That is, participants explained *krengjai* in phrases or sentences involving mixed behaviors and feelings.

As previously mentioned, some unusual meanings were also given, however, only from the group of Western and Thai participants (See Appendix A). The unusual meanings, which were listed in this study as *other meanings*, reported by the Westerners included *disturbing harmony among two or more people; wave heart; to pay difference to another person by refusing to be of any inconvenience to them or I feel sorry to do something*. Essentially, these given meanings were likely irrelevant and meaningless,

especially when back-translated into Thai. Similar to the Westerners, Thai participants also provided meanings that were quite unusual or meaningless, such as *sorry; quiet me; you must to [sic] accept another culture; someone who do not care anything; you first, I'm second; and it's commonly unpolite [sic] in Thai and welcome*. Furthermore, in the group of other meanings, while some participants reported the unusual definition, it seemed that some tried to interpret *krengjai* by shortening or reducing words into a single-word concept such as *toleration, private-zone* and *hesitate*. After the investigation, it is possible to assume that some participants may have a lower proficiency in English or insufficient word choice to describe *krengjai* in English.

4.2.2 Comparative findings on *krengjai*

In congruence with the literature review, the retrieved English definition of *krengjai* from the three groups were found to be emotion and/or behavior-based. As to further clarify, in this study, emotion-based refers to the intangible responses of the individual and are associated with feelings, thoughts and others that do not directly influence actions. Behavior-based meanings are, on the other hand, definitions that demonstrate a tangible response by the individual. The given definitions engaged further some specific cultural practices, which were in line with previous studies. Also, the results underlined the participants' perception towards such *krengjai* value(s). Prior to the specific analysis of definition, in order to get an overview of similar and different definitional and linguistic elements, the retrieved meanings are summarized into a Venn diagram in Figure 4.1.

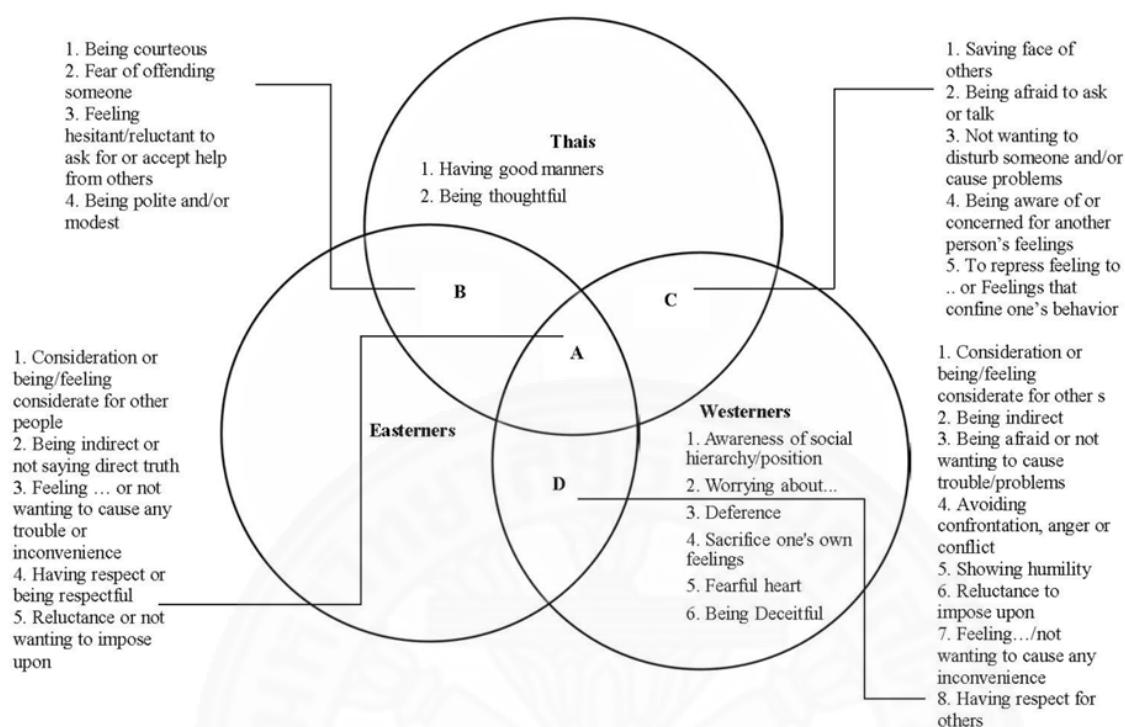


Figure 4.1 Summary of the similarities and differences in the various definitions of *krenjai* by Easterners, Westerners and Thais

The Venn diagram (Figure 4.1) contains all the retrieved meanings from the three participant groups. The part of each circle named as Thais, Easterners and Westerners represents the unique (non-overlapping) meanings provided by each respective group of participants. The intersection, or each shared zone, labeled as A, B, C and D in the diagram, represents the shared meanings between the intersecting groups, where intersection A contains the *krenjai* meanings provided by all three groups of participants, while intersections B, C and D represents shared meanings between (i) Thais-Easterners, (ii) Thais-Westerners and (iii) Easterners-Westerners, respectively. Based on the diagram, Easterners, Westerners and Thais shared five similar meanings: consideration or being/feeling considerate for other people, being indirect or not saying the direct truth, feeling...or not wanting to cause trouble

or inconvenience, having respect or being respectful and reluctance or not wanting to impose upon.

While the analysis showed that the retrieved English meanings of *krengjai* were revolved around the three elements of emotion vs. behavior, Thai social core value and quality of definitional trait, the meanings could be further summarized into eight categories as shown in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7

Summary of the definitional dimensions of krengjai

Definitional dimension	Easterners	Westerners	Thais
1. Consideration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration, feeling considerate or having considerate manner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration or being/feeling considerate for other people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration
2. Fear or being afraid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of offending someone • Being afraid to cause trouble 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being afraid to ask or talk • Fearful heart 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being afraid or not daring to truly behave or express feelings • Fear of offending
3. Communication behaviors (e.g. indirectness, conflict avoidance or lying)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being indirect or not saying the direct truth • Avoiding confrontation, anger or conflict 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoiding bad feeling, conflict and/or confrontation • Being indirect • Being deceitful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being indirect
4. Politeness merged with respect to defer authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being courteous • Reluctance to impose upon a particular person in Thai society • Respect others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of social hierarchy • Having respect or being respectful • Deference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having respect or looking up with great respect for elders or other people • Being courteous
5. Being polite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being polite 	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having good manners

			• Being polite and/or modest
6. Showing humility	• Showing humility	• Humility	
7. To express and or restraint from feeling or acting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not wanting to cause any inconvenience • Reluctance to impose upon a particular person in Thai society • Feeling (e.g. worried or uncomfortable) to ask for or accept an offer from someone • Reluctance to impose upon a particular person in Thai society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being aware of or concerned for another person's feeling • Repression of feeling to act or feelings that confine one's behavior • Worrying about • Sacrifice one's own feelings • Reluctance or Not wanting to impose upon • Not wanting to disturb someone and/or cause problems • Feeling (e.g. fear or worried) to cause inconvenience/trouble 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repression of feeling to act or feelings that confine one's behavior • Showing empathy/sympathy or being concerned for others' feelings • Being thoughtful • Feeling hesitant/reluctant to ask for or accept help from others • Feelings ... to impose upon someone or to accept things • Not wanting to cause any trouble or inconvenience
8. Saving face		• Saving face of others	• Saving face of others

Contrary to the hypothesis, the comparison (Figure 4.1) showed that although each group of participants provided different English meanings of *krengjai*, they had more shared meanings. In terms of emotional-based meanings, all three nationality based groups of participants similarly defined *krengjai* as consideration or feeling considerate for other people, which ranked the highest of all retrieved meaning (Tables 4.4–4.6). Additionally, they mutually provided other emotional-based meanings, which were mainly focused on feeling uncomfortable to cause others any trouble or

inconvenience. Eastern, Western and Thai participants also provided behavior-based meanings, with reference to an act of indirect communication. Meanwhile, they related the English meaning of *krengjai* with the social core value of deference to authority or showing respect for others. Most shared definitions given by the three groups did not, however, pose a negative trait, except for the behavior-based meaning of an act of indirect communication. Such a definition implies the impact of *krengjai* on the communication practice of indirectness, which is abhorred by most non-Thais (Fieg, 1989; Klausner & Klausner, 1977).

In terms of the different definitions, only the Western and Thai participants provided some definitions that did not overlap with any other groups. The Westerners provided a list of different definitions that included both emotions and behaviors. The given definitions involved suppression of feelings and/or concern for the well-being of others. Clearly, Western participants related the definition of *krengjai* to the social milieu, the hierarchical society. Such meanings were awareness of social hierarchy and deference. The result is congruent with many previous studies (e.g., Foreign Area Studies Division, 1963; Klausner, 1993; Mulder, 1985; Wichiarajote, 1973), where *krengjai* has been used as a key achievement in a hierarchical Thai society.

When compared with the two other groups, it was quite clear that Westerners provided some definitions which indicated a negative quality of *krengjai* as well as implied a negative perception towards the term and usage of *krengjai*. The definitions were *fearful heart* and *deceitful*. In fact, there have been arguments about whether *krengjai* should be related to the term *fear* or not. Many Thai and non-Thai scholars in particular, argued that translating *krengjai* as *fear* was unrealistically narrow and should be replaced with “feel concerned that the other person will be worried” (Komin, 1990; p. 167). In addition, Komin assumed that the non-Thai scholars’, Mulder (2000) and Sensenig (1975), use of fear was influenced by Wichiarachote’s (1973)

Affiliative society model, as previously stated. Her argument seems obvious and I agree with it on a certain level, but I also found that *krengjai* often refers to the feeling of *fear*. This interesting issue will be discussed later in the in-depth interview section below.

4.2.2.1 In-depth interviews

As presented above, this section has discussed some interesting findings retrieved from the questionnaires. Based on the findings and review of literature, two meanings, which were *consideration* and *fear* were further incorporated into the in-depth interviews.

Krengjai and consideration

In an interview with Mei Mei, a selected Easterner, she noticed while working with Thais that not only were students respectful but also her Thai co-workers, even some faculty staff at a senior level, always showed respect and never violated her feelings or emotions. Similar to her culture, it is usual that a lecturer or an educator is respected by the students. However, her curiosity about the kind behaviors was further aroused when her self-realized bad behaviors were still positively responded or reacted to by Thais. She decided to confront her co-workers by asking them why they seemed to be too polite, and she was told that the staff were *krengjai* as she is a lecturer. Looking for its definition, most Thais said “*krengjai* means consideration”. Based on her observation, she explained that:

I am trying to look for its definition. Due to my limited years in Thailand, I am sure that I do not understand fully the term “*krengjai*”. I am not sure if my definition could be used in other situations. I only know that, based on my friends’ information, some online resources and my personal experience, within this context it means consideration and respect. In other words, it is how Thais consider respecting others.

While Mei Mei learned the English meaning of *krengjai* from daily interactions with colleagues, one of the selected Westerners, Blaze,

found the meaning from various sources. With more experience compared to Mei Mei, that is, his 2.75 y in Thailand, he learned that *krengjai* has neither an exact meaning nor a single-word interpretation in English. In his opinion, it is one of the cultural characteristics deeply rooted in Thai culture. Given *consideration* as the English meaning of *krengjai*, he found the meaning is commonly used to define the term, either in popular media or academic literature. Based on his experience, he believes *consideration* gives the closest meaning to *krengjai*. Yet, *krengjai* appears to be related with other forms of behaviors or feelings as he explained:

To me it is consideration with respect or awareness of those around you. It is almost like a free pass or sacrifice of one's own feelings or opinion for the sake of another, either to not hurt the other person's feelings, or embarrass them or thyself, or to avoid conflict. More simply stated, *krengjai* refers to behaviors and/or feelings that are manifested in a verbal and/or non-verbal form from not wanting to cause discomfort and/or offend others in a social context that places great value on respecting the social position and pride of others.

Based on the interview result, the English definition of *krengjai* is clearly obtained from the process of mutual learning where its meanings were based on a sender (an interpretator) and a receiver (a questioner) within a certain context. According to Biggs (2005), *krengjai* was one of the Thai concepts for which its English interpretation was requested the most. Another interview candidate, Ying, supported this fact. Ying explained that she learned the English definition of *krengjai* as “consider the other person's feelings” from her non-Thai friends. She added:

Simply, when a Thai feels *krengjai*, s/he considers the other person's feelings. It is a very straightforward meaning of *krengjai* unless you classify in which situation the term is to be displayed. When interacting with non-Thai colleagues, growing up in Thailand, we cannot deny that such a value is deeply rooted in our mindset. It becomes part of our trait, our character even if we do not feel like displaying it towards some people.

Even though Thai society tends to increasingly absorb Western values, I believe value cannot be dissolved by the night. Yes, a gradual change I will not disagree. Thus, to explain *krengjai* simply to a non-Thai, I think “consideration” gives quite a moderate scope of the meaning of *krengjai*. However, a non-Thai should be aware of its variety.

From the interviews, non-Thais and Thais correspondingly stated that they learned such definitions from various sources, including anecdotes, previous literature and/or online resources. Furthermore, they opined that *krengjai* is related closely to the feelings or emotions of other people. Hence, based on the interview data, *consideration* is, in general, used in the context where there is concern for these feelings, clearly intertwined with the Thai characteristic of deference to authority, or in other words showing respect. This finding is consistent with Wyatt and Promkandorn (2012), who explored the trajectory of *krengjai* and found that despite its prevalent usage, consideration was not always felt by Thais when practicing *krengjai*. In addition, such a term was barely comprehensible in other contexts.

***Krengjai* and fear**

Dave, an American participant, when asked about the definition of *krengjai*, wrote in the questionnaire as *fearful heart*, which appeared close to the morpheme to morpheme meaning of *krengjai* (awe of heart) and has sometimes been used by some internet bloggers when they attempted to literally define *krengjai*. However, he pointed out that he felt to say *krengjai* is *fearful heart* is not quite wrong. Based on his experience at his workplace with his assistant, Dave described the way his assistant demonstrated *krengjai* that:

In one incident I gave a task to my assistant to be re-done several times, and it was always done. I was never given the impression that it could not be done, and it was weird because I still found the work not as good and wanted it to be re-done again. However, each time, instead of approaching me and asking me questions, my assistant decided to do it herself as an attempt to

impress me or as a way to not affect my feelings. It was noted that the assistant was fearful of me, of my professional position (superior to her). I believe that in this scenario the expression of *krengjai* is clearly noted. I think it rather reduced the productivity of the workplace, rather than improved it. Having work is one thing, but having it done wrongly is another. Being fearful, *krengjai* resulted in my assistant not asking me questions and also fearful of not having the work done”.

Giving the nuance of language, the linkage between the feeling of fear and *krengjai* was also found in group of Easterners and Thais. While Westerners referred to *fear* as a feeling that prohibit a *krengjai* person to act or behave, Easterners’ and Thais’ regarded such fear as a feeling or an act of not wanting to put someone into trouble or inconvenience. Wang, one of the selected Eastern participants, pointed out that:

I can sense the feeling of “fear” from a person who feels *krengjai*. I purposely wrote the term fear in the questionnaire because it is what I have experienced. Most Thai people or my co-workers tend to avoid uncomfortable confrontation believing it leads to heated arguments or conflicts. When feeling *krengjai*, they won’t speak up as they feel scared that their interlocutor or co-worker will become upset and stop liking them. Thus, *krengjai* can also be defined as “not saying the direct truth to avoid offending”, “avoidance of causing anger against oneself” or “avoidance of an uncomfortable confrontation”. I think such feeling is intertwined with another Thai cultural trait of a strong respect for elders and seniors. Exposed in both Asian and American culture, I don’t have, however, many problems with it.

In contrast, Ying preferred using the term *afraid*, believing the term *fear* is linguistically inequivalent. Furthermore, it seems to have “too high a level of intensity” as Ying explained that:

I found, especially in the superior-subordinate relationship, that some Thais who display *krengjai* are feeling afraid for an interlocutor’s or a co-worker’s negative response, such as displeasure or anger. I did not agree that the word could be replaced with *fear*. It’s

quite exaggerating and signals inferiority, which sometimes I don't think Thai people feel that way when expressing *krengjai*. Instead, a parallel term can be feeling *concern* or *worry*.

The detailed account from Ying is, however, consistent with some studies. For instance, Biggs (2005) using Sethabutra's as a reference, pointed out that '*I am afraid of offending you*' is an appropriate definition of *krengjai*. More recently, Wentworth (2010) suggested that the term *fear* seems to have a bit of a high level of intensity. Instead, one may use *being afraid* when referring to in awe of others' heart (เกรงใจ /kreng/-/jai/).

The Thai respondents, on the other hand, provided two different definitions: *having good manners* and *being thoughtful* that clearly pose a positive quality. The meanings are inconsistent with previous studies. In fact, I am confident that Thai people will have no doubt when explaining *krengjai* as *having good manners*. As previously mentioned, there was one well-known proverb tied in with Thai value that “*khwām-krēngjai-pen-sombat-khōng-phūdī*” or consideration (*kwamkrengjai*) is a characteristic of a well-bred person” (Chitrada, n.b.). Although the meaning was not used widely, the result in this study illustrated the significance of such value rooted in Thai people's mindset. It further affirmed the core value of ego-oriented as well as face-saving.

While the two meanings of *having good manners* and *being thoughtful* were rarely noted in the literature regarding *krengjai*, both meanings were extensively used to explain *krengjai* on internet blogs or other non-reviewed sources. Based on anecdotal evidence, while at work, quickly and easily, some Thai employees usually use Google-Translate to find unknown words or sentences. Accordingly, the Google-Translate tool was used to search for the meaning of *krengjai*, where the term came out as *thoughtful* and *looking up with respect*, the latter of which also appeared in this research from the Thai participants.

The attempt to understand *krengjai* at a linguistic and functional level revealed its significance, especially to an individual with an opportunity, intended or unintended, to deal with Thai culture. In this study, to understand the English interpretation of *krengjai* from various sources or perspectives, I found that *krengjai* mainly involves two elements, either emotions or actions, which are manifested verbally and/or non-verbally from not wanting to be of an inconvenience and/or offend others in a socially collectivist context that places great value on respecting the social position and pride of others.

In addition, social core values are engaged to define the term *krengjai*. This is congruent with Wyatt and Promkandorn (2012), who indicated that the original interpretation of *krengjai* appeared to be related to certain social practices (p. 381). While many previous researchers (e.g., Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 1995; Komin, 1990; Niratpattanasai, 2005) included various factors (i.e., status, familiarity or situation) necessarily for one to be able to translate *krengjai*, Wyatt and Promkandorn (2012) pointed out that linguistic efficiency affects the correctness of any English interpretation of *krengjai*. Furthermore, the use of critical discourse analysis is considered one of the best approaches to understand *krengjai*. More simply stated, the English meaning of *krengjai* is context-based or contextualized. Based on previous studies and current findings, I agree with such claims. Yet, within the communication context, to understand the English concept of *krengjai* unavoidably involves, in my view, *a personal reflection on culture*.

This study did not determine the misinterpretation of *krengjai* but rather observed the different meanings used by Thai and non-Thai employees in a multicultural working context. It was primarily assumed that there would be significant differences in the meanings between non-Thais (Easterners and Westerners) and Thais, which was not supported by the results. Rather this study clearly demonstrated that instead of significant differences, there were significant similarities. However, this finding is

contradictory to the study conducted by Sirimahawan (2003), who found that Thais and Easterners defined *krengjai* differently. Based on his findings, Thais viewed *krengjai* as *don't want to bother others*, which was further described as an unrelated act of mind and brain, yet contained no negative feelings. Meanwhile, non-Thais, in particular Chinese, Korean and Japanese, viewed *krengjai* as *smiling, no complaints* and *expression of empathy*.

Taking into consideration that non-Thai flight attendants have a different interpretation of *krengjai*, the results of this study showed no consistency with Sirimahawan (2003). However, when it comes to factors that affect the participants' perception of their understanding of *krengjai*, it was evident that there was a difference in this research. In contrast to Sirimahawan (2003), this current study examined the English interpretation of *krengjai* in a workplace with a multicultural environment of an academic nature. The finding of this study is consistent with Wyatt and Promkandorn (2012), who concluded that the meaning of *krengjai* was comprehensible in a given social situation. They also pointed out a disposition of factors (i.e., farmers-wholesalers, employees-employers, government leaders-government workers) as another explanatory factor to be able to describe *krengjai* in English. However, Wyatt and Promkandorn's study (2012) is different in that the present study took a more multi-cultural context in which nationality was considered a main factor, compared to the homogenous setting in the study of Wyatt and Promkandorn (2012).

As stated earlier, I partly support Komin's rejection of *fear* as an equivalent meaning of *krengjai*. On the one hand, the current findings support Komin's claim that the use of *fear* as an English definition of *krengjai* is limited to certain interactions in which there is hierarchical order. It is subsequently consistent with Wyatt and Promkandorn (2012), who concluded that the meaning of *krengjai* is comprehensible in a given social situation. On the other hand, within the same context, it was affirmed that *krengjai* referred to *fear* even when displayed towards one's equal. Thus, it is

not able to explicitly claim that *fear* is an English misinterpretation of *krengjai*, but to my observation it is a personal reflection on culture, or an experience-based definition.

It is evident from previous studies that the term *consideration* appears to be the usual definition of *krengjai*. Even in this research, the highest number of participants from all groups reported this term. However, when considering other given definitions, it was noted that the given definition was *experience-based*, a mutual reflection on the cultural practice of *krengjai*. Thus, definitions, such as *consideration* or *being aware of or concerned for another person's feelings* are the usual definitions simply because *krengjai* is experienced in a general and common context.

An individual in Thailand is more likely to experience *krengjai* within the context that allows this individual to consider defining *krengjai* as *feeling considerate for someone's feeling* or *being considerate*. However, in some subjective and isolated cases, an individual might experience cases that allow him or her to create or understand the definition of *krengjai* outside the norm, such as *being deceitful* or *having good manner*. Even though these definitions within isolated contexts are unusual, it demonstrates that the experience-based learning an individual faces within a societal context allows one individual to be subjectively influenced differently from another.

4.3 Effects of *krengjai* on communication practices and professional relationships

The second question was framed to identify the impacts of *krengjai* on intercultural communication and professional relationships among Easterners, Westerners and Thais. To answer the question, both quantitative and qualitative data were derived from two sources: questionnaires that utilized both close-ended and open-ended questions, and interviews that followed a semi-structural format. The questionnaire provided the quantitative data,

whereas the open-ended questions (in questionnaires) and interviews provided the qualitative data. The quantitative data attained from the Likert Scale-based questions were analyzed by univariate analysis to investigate the participants' perceptions towards the effects on communication and professional relationships, respectively. All (100%) of the participants responded to this research question.

The results were examined and analyzed for the level of agreement of the effects of *krengjai* on communication and professional relationships at work. *Krengjai* is noted to hinder the success rate of communication process over the disposition of various communicative practices, whereas *krengjai* tends to have a positive impact on maintaining and preserving professional relationships, thereby securing a social harmony within the workplace setting.

Since one's cultural differences may not be acceptable or understandable to others, based on the evidence in previous literature, the researcher first gained a holistic perspective on *krengjai* that it negatively affects communication and professional relationships between non-Thai and Thai employees. Overall, 38.9% of all participants agreed that *krengjai* negatively affected overall communication behaviors, 32.6% were neutral and 28.5% disagreed with the statement. A higher level of agreement was found for a negative effect on working relationships, where almost half of the participants (44.2%) had the opinion that *krengjai* adversely affected relationships with others. The participants' overall perception towards each effect of *krengjai* on communication and professional relationships is summarized in Table 4.8

For the overall perception towards each effect of *krengjai* on communication practices, interestingly three out of the five negative effects were strongly (14–30%) agreed with, namely that *krengjai* causes silence, indirectness and understatement.

The highest agreed effect was that *krengjai* caused indirectness (79%), while the least agreed effect reported by the participants was that *krengjai*

caused lying (36.3%). As for the effects on professional relationships, four out of five effects were strongly agreed with at 10.7–16.1%. Based on the ranking, the majority of participants (69.4%) positively perceived *krengjai* in that *it helps to not violate the feelings or emotions of others* followed by *it helps prevent conflict with others*, *helps show respect to others* and *helps save the face of others* (59.1%, 55.7% and 44.2% respectively). Meanwhile, a minority of the participants (35.5%) agreed that *krengjai* helps them to be accepted by others.

Table 4.8

Overall perceptions towards the effects of krengjai on communication and professional relationships at the workplace (N = 242)

No.	Perception of <i>krengjai</i>	Level of agreement						
		Mean	S.D.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<i>Effect of krengjai (kj) on communication behaviors</i>								
1.	<i>Kj negatively affects communication</i>	3.3	1.1	8.7	30.2	32.6	19.4	9.1
2.	<i>Kj causes silence</i>	3.6	1.0	14.0	52.1	16.1	14.5	3.3
3.	<i>Kj causes indirectness</i>	4.0	0.9	30.2	48.8	12.4	6.6	2.0
4.	<i>Kj causes understatement</i>	3.8	1.0	20.2	52.1	15.7	8.3	3.7
5.	<i>Kj causes lying</i>	3.0	1.2	11.2	25.2	25.2	25.2	13.2
<i>Effect of krengjai (kj) on professional relationships</i>								
6.	<i>Kj negatively affects relationships with foreign colleagues</i>	2.8	1.0	10.7	33.5	33.0	17.8	5.0
7.	<i>Kj helps save the face of others</i>	3.3	1.0	10.7	33.5	33.0	17.8	5.0
8.	<i>Kj helps show respect to others</i>	3.4	1.0	10.7	45.0	22.7	16.1	5.5
9.	<i>Kj helps prevent conflict with others</i>	3.5	1.0	14.1	45.0	25.2	12.4	3.3
10.	<i>Kj helps avoid violating the feelings or emotions of others</i>	3.7	1.0	16.1	53.3	18.2	9.1	3.3
11.	<i>Kj helps one to be accepted by others</i>	3.0	1.0	6.2	29.3	34.7	21.5	8.3

The following sections attempt to integrate both the quantitative and qualitative findings attained from the Easterner, Westerner and Thai groups, respectively. This will allow the reader to immediately notice the correlation between the survey results and interview results.

4.3.1 Easterners' perceptions of *krengjai* at work

There have been few studies on the Easterners' perception towards the practice of *krengjai* at work, but the results of the current study are consistent with those few previous studies that investigated cultural values and the problems related to communication and relationships at work (Sirimahawan, 2003; Sriussadaporn, 2006). The hypothesis, formed from the second research question that "non-Thais are adversely affected by the practice of *krengjai*", was tested by examining the participant's perception separately. All of the participants from the Easterner, Westerner and Thai groups responded to all the questions on the effects of *krengjai* on communication and professional relationships. The Easterner's perceptions towards the effects of *krengjai* are presented in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9

Easterners' perceptions of the effects of krengjai on communication and professional relationships at the workplace (N = 8)

		Level of agreement						
No.	Perception of <i>krengjai</i>	Mean	S.D.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<i>Effect of krengjai (kj) on communication behaviors</i>								
1.	<i>Kj</i> negatively affects communication	3.8	1.2	37.5	12.5	37.5	12.5	0.0
2.	<i>Kj</i> causes silence	4.5	0.8	62.5	25.0	12.5	0.0	0.0
3.	<i>Kj</i> causes indirectness	4.1	0.8	37.5	37.5	25.0	0.0	0.0
4.	<i>Kj</i> causes understatement	4.3	0.7	37.5	50.0	12.5	0.0	0.0
5.	<i>Kj</i> causes lying	4.4	0.7	50.0	37.5	12.5	0.0	0.0

<i>Effect of krengjai (kj) on professional relationships</i>								
6.	<i>Kj negatively affects relationships with foreign colleagues</i>	2.9	1.5	12.5	25.0	25.0	12.5	25.0
7.	<i>Kj helps save the face of others</i>	3.6	1.2	25.0	37.5	12.5	25.0	0.0
8.	<i>Kj helps show respect to others</i>	3.6	1.4	25.0	25.0	12.5	25.0	12.5
9.	<i>Kj helps prevent conflict with others</i>	3.3	1.3	25.0	12.5	25.0	37.5	0.0
10.	<i>Kj helps avoid violating the feelings or emotions of others</i>	3.8	1.3	37.5	25.0	12.5	25.0	0.0
11.	<i>Kj helps one to be accepted by others</i>	3.5	1.4	37.5	12.5	12.5	37.5	0.0

As revealed in Table 4.9, most Eastern participants (50%) had a strong negative perception towards the effects of *krengjai* on “communication behaviors.” An equal number of Easterners strongly agreed that *krengjai* caused indirectness, understatement and lying (87.5%). Also, the participants (75%) agreed that *krengjai* caused silence. Even though only half of the Eastern participants agreed that *krengjai negatively affects communication*, it is noteworthy that the Easterners did not have positive perceptions towards the effects on all communication behaviors in this study.

With respect to effects on professional relationships, the Eastern participants, in contrast to this research’s hypothesis, did not rate a strong disagreement level to the positive traits, but rather they equally agreed to the positive values of *krengjai* that it *helps save the face of others* and *helps to avoid violating the feelings or emotions of others* (62.5%) followed by it *helps show respect to others* and *helps one to be accepted by others* (50%). Although the positive perception towards each effect of *krengjai* on

professional relationships by Eastern participants was not statistically significant, the result is not in agreement with the statement *krengjai negatively affects relationships with foreign colleagues* either, where the proportion of participants who agreed with that statement (37.5%) was equal to the number who disagreed with it.

4.3.1.1 Qualitative analysis of the Easterners' perceptions of *krengjai* at work

While the quantitative data revealed the Easterners' agreement on the disadvantage of *krengjai* with respect to communication, the qualitative data also indicated consistent responses that understatement, silence and lying, except for indirectness, were repeatedly given as to elaborate *krengjai* effects (from seven out of eight participants who completed this open-ended question). To support the quantitative data, the participants who indicated that *krengjai causes understatement* explained that most Thais tend to not like having to explain things, particularly when in a meeting or conversing with someone of an older age or a higher status.

Meanwhile, the manifestation of silence was interpreted as *an act of not telling, speaking or asking when necessary*. Some of the findings of this study coincide with the study of Sirimahawan (2003) on *krengjai* practices between Thai and Eastern flight attendants, where non-Thai flight attendants (Chinese, Japanese and Korean) encountered communication-related effects of *krengjai* during their duties on board. Non-Thai flight attendants pointed out that Thai flight attendants display what they considered to be the *bad behaviors of krengjai*. These behaviors included *not giving an opinion or helpful comment when it is required or when there was a mistake during a conversation*. The absence of talk on the other hand signified *silence*. In this study, supported by the qualitative data, the Eastern respondents explained various behaviors or forms of silence they had encountered. As previously stated, such forms of silence included not telling, speaking or

asking when necessary. Similar to the study of Sirimahawan (2003), these forms of *krengjai*-related responses were viewed by Easterners as negative. As for indirectness, understatement and lying, this study is not aware of any relevant previous studies that provide similar or supportive findings.

The Easterners evaluated that when a Thai person feels *krengjai* her/his feeling coexists together with the mixed feelings of fear, lazy or respect. These mixed feelings hinder and even stop the person from speaking out or clearly expressing ideas or thoughts and, to certain extent, from telling the truth. However, not telling the truth, or to a certain extent lying, caused by *krengjai* was perceived to have both positive and negative values. On the positive side, the Eastern participants indicated that a *krengjai* Thai will lie to save one's feeling or to not cause discomfort to the interlocutor or others. On the negative side, the term *krengjai* is used or said aloud to save the face of the speaker or the user of it. For example, when a colleague is going shopping during their lunch break, s/he may ask if anyone wants anything. The experienced participant explained that in this situation a *krengjai* Thai will first refuse by saying '*krengjai*' to either save face or to stop being a burden on her/him. Once the lying or tricking is successful the Thai will then accept such an offer. In Sirimahawan's findings, the display of *krengjai* by Thais towards non-Thais, in particular Easterners caused both positive and negative effects. Nonetheless, unlike the negative effects in Sirimahawan's findings, which were similar to those in this present study, his findings on the positive effects were not related to the positive effects identified in this research.

When specifically analyzing the two selected Eastern participants, Mei Mei's and Wang's point of views, communication practices with negative traits rather received positive responses. In line with her English definition, Mei Mei opined that out of concern for the feelings of others, *krengjai* causes the person to refrain from speaking. She explained that:

At work, I know that my work performance is sometimes not good, not to mention my bad behaviors or unfavorable reviews. Yet, I've never got negative feedback from my Thai colleagues. In fact, I know that my "little bit of bad behavior" affects them. Since they remain silent, I decide to change instead. Not saying anything on the other hand makes me *krengjai* them. This behavior is very similar to my culture. So, I don't think it's negative or anything. I know it is quite frustrating for those from dissimilar culture but for us, Asian, silence helps minimize unnecessary confrontation as well as conflict.

In his attempt to explain *krengjai*, Wang found, on the one hand, that feeling *krengjai* is equal to fear and this feeling of fear causes lying. Similar to Mei Mei, he often, on the other hand, experienced that *krengjai* causes silence. In the particular scenario, he explained that:

My Thai colleagues, especially someone of a lower status or junior, tend not to explain the whole truth clearly. They seem to not like explaining things, especially when they make a mistake. It's not due to ill-intention but high effort and courage requiring. In fact, the language barrier along with a dislike of confrontations could be the cause of such communication behavior that seems like lying.

Unlike Mei Mei, who had emphasized a positive feeling of consideration, Wang found that a negative feeling drove the communication practice of silence. Apart from lying, he added that:

Krengjai often causes people to be afraid or fear of offending or causing discomfort to others. It results in a preference for silence among my Thai colleagues. Aside from the working context, I also found the use of silence among my students. They will very often not tell me if I am making any mistakes.

His opinion seems to indicate negativity towards *krengjai*-related communication practices. However, when asked, Wang did not think such practices should be viewed negatively as they are intertwined with the Thai culture of showing respect to someone older or of a higher status, which is considered a significant value to Asian or Eastern people. To

the non-Easterners, these may, however, appear an unfavorable or ineffective way of communication.

The participants experiencing *krengjai* found on the other hand that it not only affected the communication strategy/practice of Thais but that it also distorted or interrupted communication processes. In addition, it affected the individual job performance and the organization. Within the particular working environment of an educational institution or university, the practice of *krengjai* was then addressed by the participants in two types of relationships: colleague-colleague and lecturer-student, even though this study is limited to professional relationships. When a *krengjai* Thai uses a communication behavior of understatement, indirectness, silence or lying in the workplace, some non-Thai participants (in particular Westerners, as discussed in previous studies and further elaborated in the next section), found such behavior annoying or frustrating and unnecessarily time-consuming (Sriussadaporn, 2006).

When sending an unclear message, and in particular information about work, the assignment is procrastinated until the last minute or else cannot be completed. If *krengjai* is practiced in the meeting, it hinders productivity and creativity. Meanwhile, for the practice of *krengjai* by a student towards a lecturer in a classroom context, it was found to be related with fear and thus stopped students from pointing out any mistakes made by the lecturer. Overall, the practice of *krengjai* is not an effective strategy for personal achievement and so does not help move the organization forward, said one of the Eastern participants.

As far as professional relationship effects are concerned, the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires indicated that a higher number of Eastern participants in this study agreed to all of the positive relationship-related effects. When testing the research hypothesis, the level of disagreement on each positive effect was not statistically significant, and so Easterners did not adversely experience negative relationship-related

effects. In addition, considering the qualitative results on the effect of *krengjai* on communication practices, the Eastern participants offered a glimpse of the influence of *krengjai* on professional relationship, implying an important and reciprocal relationship between communication practices and professional relationships.

Given this finding, face-saving was indicated as one of the outcomes when a *krengjai* person uses particular communication practices. In addition to face-saving, most Eastern participants experienced other acts of maintaining a professional relationship displayed by a *krengjai* colleague, which they mostly regarded as *positive* or *favorable behaviors*. The data from the open-ended questions confirmed that the Easterners tended not to have a negative view of *krengjai*-related effects on professional relationships and they reported more positive acts, including *showing respect, not violating the feelings or emotion of others* and *minimizing emotional discomfort*. Interestingly, an Eastern respondent explained that *krengjai allows total strangers to be able to relate to each other in peaceful harmony, with minimal discomfort*. Supporting this finding, both Mei Mei and Wang agreed with the positive effects of *krengjai* on professional relationship-related acts. Based on his experience, Mei Mei noted during the interview that:

Thais always show respect, never violate my feeling and emotion, and they are very kind and very good at maintaining relationships. Frankly, I really like to work in Thailand because Thai people always *krengjai* me. Such feeling somehow affects my bad behavior that I myself have to *krengjai* them for being concerned about my feeling. In addition, when changing my behavior, I can maintain a good relationship with my Thai colleagues. If I have to resettle, I will never forget this positive cultural value. So far, it has been an unforgettable moment in my life.

The only negative act reported by the Easterners in this study was “distancing relationships among co-workers.” One participant experienced that *krengjai* distanced professional relationships among

employees, especially when the individual could not voice her/his opinion. Accordingly, an organization cannot improve if the employees' voices are not valued. The interview data was also in line with the result from the open-ended questions. Even though Wang likely had a positive view towards the binary effects of *krengjai*, he noted that *krengjai*, in some situations, evokes instead a negative feeling. He explained that:

Sometimes I find that a person of a higher rank takes *krengjai* for granted. Knowing that *krengjai* is related to feelings of fear combined with respect, s/he exercised his power wrongly. For example, in Thailand not only are students required to wear a proper uniform, lecturers are likely to dress in polite attire. Even though it's not compulsory for the lecturer, polite dressing is a sign of respect to the University as well as to the profession*. Once I was wearing sandals, due to my sprained ankle, to work. Someone from a higher position saw me and gave me such obvious unpleasant facial expression, which I did not totally understand. In this situation, I rather expected her/her or him to display *krengjai* towards me as well as respect my decision as it was so obvious that I had a health issue. Instead, the people of higher status implied that I should *krengjai* or respect the University and/or individual, including him, by wearing a better uniform.

Notwithstanding the rejection of the hypothesis, the results were consistent with the study of Sirimahawan (2003), who stated that *krengjai*-related behaviors were divided into good and bad behaviors. With respect to relationships with colleagues, displayed towards the boss, he found non-Thai flight attendant's *krengjai* helped to minimize conflict and show respect and deference as well as humility. However, with respect to the negative effects of *krengjai*, Sirimahawan's findings yielded different results to this study. In his study, *krengjai* did not cause 'distant relationships', but rather "displaying too much *krengjai* towards the boss tends to lead to unfair treatment, rather than *krengjai* by the boss". However, the results did conclude that there are negative influences of *krengjai* on professional relationships.

As previously stated, the results of this study appear to be beneficial to the understanding of *krengjai*-related effects. When *krengjai* is displayed during a conversation, it affects the sending message. From the Easterners' perspective, *krengjai* causes an unclear message and so can cause work-related problems. This finding is consistent with the study of Sriussadaporn (2006), who explored communication problems in the international business sector. In her study, a Japanese expatriate complained about Thai employees' commitment to the task. This behavior was explained in relation to *krengjai* that Thai participants who feel *krengjai* communicate with ambiguous expressions and/or lack of explanation leading to misunderstanding and so problems at work.

4.3.2 Westerners' perceptions of *krengjai* at work

Similar to the Eastern participants, the Westerners' level of agreement on the effects of *krengjai* on communication and professional relationships did not indicate significant negative perceptions. Only 39.4% and 27.2% of the participants agreed with the negative statements that *krengjai negatively affects communication behavior* and *negatively affects relationships with foreign colleagues at work*, respectively. However, *krengjai* was perceived to have a negative implication on communication behavior, since the reported data was significant. But, in the context of *krengjai* negatively effecting relationships, it was insignificant since a lower number of participants agreed with the negative implications of *krengjai* on professional relationship than those who were neutral and/or disagreed.

With respect to the effect of *krengjai* on communication practices, Western participants mostly agreed on three out of the four negative statements (Table 4.10), being that *krengjai* causes indirectness, silence and understatement (87.9%, 75.8% and 69.7% respectively). Although previous evidence to support *krengjai*-affected communication practices is not available, there are ample previous studies that suggest that *krengjai*, from the

perspective of Westerners, affected the communication practices of Thais at work (e.g., Andrews & Chompusri, 2013; Blanchard, 1958; Cavanagh, 2008; Fieg, 1989, 1989; Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 1995; Klausner & Klausner, 1977; Klausner, 1993; Niratpattanasai, 2005; Bangkok-Real, 2012; Sriussadaporn, 2006). For example, Fieg (1989) presented Thai culture in comparison with American culture and concluded that from a Westerner's perspective, Thai people use evasive or indirect communication strategies to avoid direct confrontation, which is an unfavorable trait to most Americans. Furthermore, the Thais' preference for indirect communication appeared rather insincere to the Westerner's eyes. However, in contrast to this study, Fieg (1989) did not indicate silence, understatement and/or lying as communicative strategies caused by *krengjai*.

When investigating the effects on professional relationships, as evidenced from the Likert scale, the Western respondents showed a low agreement with the statement that *krengjai negatively affects relationships with foreign colleagues* (27.2%), but a higher agreement with the four statements that *krengjai* helps (i) *save the face of others*, (ii) *show respect to others*, (iii) *avoid violating the feelings or emotions of others* and (iv) *helps one to be accepted by others* (45.5%, 57.6%, 60.6% and 45.5%, respectively).

Similar to the Eastern participants, most Western participants (60.6%) agreed with the statement *krengjai helps to avoid violating the feelings or emotions of others*, which is consistent with some previous studies (Sirimahawan, 2003). With respect to the high agreement level that *krengjai* helps show respect to others and to avoid violating the feelings or emotions of others, the retrieved data are consistent with Niratpattanasai (2005), despite using different survey methods and subjects. In his article, Niratpattanasai evaluated the impacts of *krengjai* on the business world workplace from the Westerners' perspective, where two of the impacts were the *failure to fulfill the promised delivery* and *nearly bankrupt the company*. Both situations were

caused by a *krengjai* employee feeling respect for others as well as afraid of offending another person, especially an employer.

An example of the *failure to fulfill the promised delivery* is the *krengjai* salesperson who, in showing respect to the customer, committed to delivery demands that were impossible to fulfill. For *nearly bankrupt the company*, a *krengjai* employer was afraid of violating her/his employer's feeling and so gave up convincing the employee that the company was going to be hit by a financial crisis. These scenarios of *krengjai*-related behavior exhibited towards Westerners indicate a negative value on relationships. The findings of Niratpattanasai (2005) are consistent with the findings of this current study that question the positive value of *krengjai* on professional relationships.

Table 4.10

Westerners' perceptions towards the effects of krengjai on communication and professional relationships at the workplace (N = 33)

No.	Perception of <i>krengjai</i>	Mean	S.D.	Strongly agree	Level of agreement			Strongly disagree
					Agree	Neutral	Disagree	
<i>Effect of krengjai (kj) on communication behaviors</i>								
1.	<i>Kj</i> negatively affects communication	3.0	1.0	3.0	36.4	30.3	21.2	9.1
2.	<i>Kj</i> causes silence	3.8	1.0	18.2	57.6	12.1	9.1	3.0
3.	<i>Kj</i> causes indirectness	4.3	1.0	51.5	36.4	3.0	6.1	3.0
4.	<i>Kj</i> causes understatement	3.7	1.1	18.2	51.5	15.2	9.1	6.1
5.	<i>Kj</i> causes lying	3.5	1.1	18.2	33.3	30.3	15.2	3.0
<i>Effect of krengjai (kj) on professional relationships</i>								
6.	<i>Kj</i> negatively affects relationships with foreign colleagues	2.9	1.0	3.0	24.2	39.4	24.2	9.1
7.	<i>Kj</i> helps save the face of others	3.2	1.2	15.2	30.3	27.3	15.2	12.1

8.	<i>Kj</i> helps show respect to others	3.4	1.2	12.1	45.5	21.2	9.1	12.1
9.	<i>Kj</i> helps prevent conflict with others	3.1	1.0	12.1	18.2	42.4	24.2	3.0
10.	<i>Kj</i> helps avoid violating the feelings or emotions of others	3.5	1.1	18.2	42.4	15.2	24.2	0.0
11.	<i>Kj</i> helps one to be accepted by others	3.2	1.1	6.1	39.4	27.3	18.2	9.1

4.3.2.1 Qualitative analysis of Westerners' perceptions of *krengjai* at work

The qualitative analysis of *krengjai* revealed that the Western participants had both positive and negative perceptions towards its influence on communication practices and professional relationships. Interestingly, with respect to communication practices, the Westerners added the two new communicative strategies of *gossip* and *politeness*. Gossip is considered negative and socially undesirable. Some Western participants noticed that a *krengjai* Thai frequently restrains from face-to-face talking but rather gossips later when they have an opportunity. From the Westerners' perspective, *krengjai* often leads to *too much back talking*, *gossip* and *a series of imaginary dramas*. However, with respect to the avoidance of heated face-to-face arguments, the Western participants found that prior to gossip, a *krengjai* person may respond in *silence* or *indirectness* to create a seemingly friendly working environment.

The other new communication practice due to *krengjai* was *politeness*. A Western participant noticed that the practice of *krengjai* encouraged politeness in communication, where a *krengjai* person can show respect to the interlocutor, especially towards one from a higher status or position. This is in broad accord with the study of Intachakra (2012) who observed *krengjai*-motivated attributes similar to politeness, including

“consideration for others’ feelings” as well as “attention to face or facework”. However, it was presented only from a Thai point of view. None of previous studies were found to support both findings, especially from a Westerner’s perspective. Thus, the potential link between *krengjai* and politeness is still unclear and requires further investigation.

With respect to the relationship between *krengjai* and Thai social hierarchy, some Western participants, however, did not agree with the visible practice of *krengjai* towards a person from a different social status. They found it related to the superior’s misuse of power. Knowing a lower rank *krengjai* Thai person or a junior will follow in silence, a superior takes advantage of her/him. Wrong doings or mistakes are then made without comment or direct criticism. One Western participant commented further that “the Pee/Nong system and the implied hierarchy or caste system will continue to hinder Thailand’s development as the practice leads to inefficiency in the workplace.”

In comparison with the quantitative result, the Western participants also provided details on the four given communication strategies. Similar to the Easterners’ accounts, the Westerners noticed *krengjai* is often practiced in a meeting; where the Thai employs understatement, indirectness or silence (more simply stated as not talking or discussing directly). As for lying, one Western participant also experienced a similar situation of some Thais using *krengjai* to take advantage of others. S/he called a certain act as “a social game” in which “the Thai person actually plays *krengjai* but nevertheless wants one to do what s/he needs”. Another interesting point added to *krengjai* and lying was that an act of *krengjai* affects the habit of saying “yes” and “no” of most Thais, where a *krengjai* Thai purposely answers a question or says “yes” instead of “no” and vice versa. *Krengjai* and lying can cause distrust and upset any non-Thais that are not used to it. One Western participant remarked that it interferes with “the development of close

relations and then makes it difficult to openly resolve problems in the workplace.”

Based on the current literature, I found very little information on the *krengjai*-related effects of the use of silence, understatement and lying from a Westerners’ point of view. Meanwhile, such findings were mostly found in different contexts. This research found *krengjai*-related communication practice lied in Holmes and Tangtongtavy’s study of fundamental Thai values. In particular, communication practices were embedded in their attempt to describe the concept of *krengjai* in English, where different situations were given to help explain the English concept of *krengjai*, which were detected in this study as silence, indirectness, understatement and hesitation.

However, the practice of lying detected in this research was not reported in Holmes and Tangtongtavy (1995). Meanwhile, this study found that the Westerners’ perspective on *krengjai* and lying was also reported in non-reviewed Internet blogs, written in various contexts, from simple contexts, like travel guides, to more serious contexts, like a law forum. Bangkok-Real (2012) presented *krengjai* from a Westerner’s point of view as a guide to Bangkok, where s/he explicitly associated *krengjai* with Thai lies. Additionally, in an attempt to understand such behavior, Bangkok-Real (2012) found cultural influences in Thai *krengjai*-related communication, where she/he associated *krengjai* with the Thai culture of *face-saving*. In so doing, Thai people tend to lie or tell something untrue. Even though Bangkok-Real’s finding confirmed the association between *krengjai* and lying, her/his explanation was different from this research’s findings. As previously presented, the Western participants found *krengjai* in association with lying was to take advantage of, not to save face, from others. In addition, it was found to affect the habit of using yes or no by Thais.

Supporting the findings from the Eastern respondents, *krengjai* was noticed by the Western participants to influence the process of

communication. Though none of the Western participants experienced communication failure related to *krengjai*, some of them found it caused stagnation to the communication process. It then led to confusion, a waste of time and resentful situations or, in terms of working performance, stops a Thai from taking any initiative. In addition to reporting the use of *krengjai* between colleagues, one Western participant (a lecturer) addressed their experiences of *krengjai* in a teaching context. Surprisingly, in contrast to the Easterner, the Western participant expected the practice of *krengjai* from Thai students and indicated that “some students in international programs through cultural misunderstanding assume unwanted familiarity and do not show *krengjai* where it is normally expected.” The positive perception was not, however, limited to only in a classroom context. Apart from *politeness*, as stated earlier, the Western participants presupposed that *krengjai* created a good friendly atmosphere in workplace. The given communication behaviors of indirectness, understatement, silence or lie, rather helped curve criticism that could be too frank or aggressive. Thus, it reduced conflicts or smoothed social relations between the interlocutors.

Given these interesting new evidences, the open-ended results were added to both interview sessions. Based on the questionnaires, Blaze provided qualitative data indicating both negative and positive traits of *krengjai* effects on communication practices. In particular, he experienced two communicative practices caused by *krengjai* which were “silence” and “understatement.” For silence, he found on the positive side, that being silent could build stronger relationships, a good atmosphere and mutual trust and respect. Meanwhile, on the negative side, remaining silent resulted in not asking for help or giving your opinion or advice. The use of silence in his opinion can build up unnecessary anger and stress between Thais and non-Thais, especially with a Western interlocutor. He explained the positive and negative trait of communication practices as:

It can lead to a waste of time and a resentful situation, but that being said, it could be vice versa whereby not being “*krengjai*” could lead to these situations as well. I think there is a very fine line between the positive and negative values. Due to the conservative Thai culture, Thais choose to be “*krengjai*”. It is their true nature, that’s a positive, but I also think in certain situations, especially in business or work environment, communications should be more open and positive, for the avoidance of doubt or sake of clarity. I think most of these problems arise in work environments but not so much in personal relationships/friendships, where there isn’t any form of formalities and communication is more free and open.

Being asked about his view on “gossip” and “politeness”, Blaze agreed that there was a possibility. Yet, he was not sure if what he experienced was caused by *krengjai*. Considering *krengjai* in a cultural aspect, he felt gossip, could be explained as follows.

Contrary to Western culture, Thai culture highly values “social harmony” though this tends to change. *Krengjai* is already used as a mechanism to preserve or maintain interpersonal relationships revealed in communication practices as I said earlier. Gossip is essentially a subsequent effect of other communication practices. Silence is one of them. When a person has to refrain from talking or especially criticizing, the only way to release this hidden message is, of course, to gossip. A gossip, in general, has both a positive and negative function, but not in the working context where professionalism is required. Being direct and taking the initiative is rather required in a multicultural workplace.

His opinion, especially on the second-effect of each communication practice, is clearly in line with the other Western participants. Blaze’s view on politeness was also not significantly different. However, he noted that “not only is the politeness of Thais reflected or revealed through *krengjai*, it is expressed, based on my experience, with linguistic markers”. For example, he noticed that a Thai person will carefully select a proper

pronoun when conversing. Different pronouns will be used based on the social class of her/his interlocutor.

When Dave was asked how he experienced *krengjai*-affected communication practices, he reaffirmed his answer to the open-ended question in which he found that *krengjai* refers to the feeling of fear and so causes the speaker to be silent. In his point of view, the use of silence is perceived as an ineffective strategy since it leads to unresolved problems and to not be able to gauge a person's true feelings. In this way, he supported the negative trait of the use of silence caused by *krengjai*. With regards to gossip and politeness, he opined that:

Westerners also gossip but not to avoid simple work-related criticism. I have seen my Thai co-workers many times rather communicate what is in their mind or especially what is required for better task outcomes. They act seemingly polite, physically and verbally, in the presence of not only Thais but also non-Thais. Minutes later I found them rudely talking about unspoken issues. Sometimes I found most of the unspoken points are useful, especially in this working context.

While the use of politeness is viewed in Thai culture as positive and socially desirable, Dave noted that to a Westerner, who places value on frankness, the use of politeness displayed in accord with *krengjai* is instead viewed as ineffective and undesirable, especially when discussing work.

Clearly, the elaboration on communication practice revealed the influence of *krengjai* on professional relationships. Likewise, for the group of Western participants, communication practices were seen to affect various patterns of professional relationships in both positive and negative ways. As stated above, some Western participants experienced a positive side of *krengjai* through particular communication practices that helped to show respect to another interlocutor. The given information corresponded with the quantitative result, where more than half of the Western

participants (57.6%) agreed with *krengjai helps show respect to others*. The Western participants did not, however, elaborate further on *showing respect* in the open-ended question regarding professional relationship.

Another positive influence on professional relationships that corresponded with the quantitative result was that *krengjai helps avoid conflict*. One Western participant with experience of *krengjai* stated that it is positive because you will not be involved in any shouting encounters. While in this study, *saving face* was regarded as a positive influence of *krengjai*, some Western participants reported its negative influences. The following example reflects the Westerner's responses to *krengjai* and its influences on professional relationships:

This whole thing about “*krengjai*” is a bit ridiculous in the eyes of some foreigners because it can be carried too far. “*Krengjai*” may sometimes mean that subordinates will not let a supervisor know about a problem and this creates more problems instead of solving the original one. About saving face, the person whose face is saved knows the real cause for what happened, and if it was a personal mistake then he or she will feel equally bad about it despite other people saving their face at some point. I think “*krengjai*” often refers to lower classes interacting with higher classes or rich people. This is an old concept in Thai culture that is losing its power as the culture gets more modern. You see this very well with young people, aged 18–30.

While face-saving can be regarded as either positive or negative, some participants reported impacts that were solely negative. They reported that *krengjai* causes mistrust in relationships as one of the respondents stated “*krengjai* makes me not believe or trust most things my Thai colleagues say to me”. Another impact was a distant relationship. Some Westerners felt a gap when communicating with *krengjai* colleagues as there was too much ambiguity and vagueness. Thus, it is difficult for a close relationship to develop.

The interviews with Blaze and Dave showed concurring results of both positive and negative values for *krengjai*. Blaze first pointed out in his answer to the open-ended question that the value of each professional relationship-related effect depended on the situation in which both parties were interacting. In his interview, Blaze agreed with the given statement that “*krengjai* helps avoid violating the feelings or emotions of others”, but disagreed with the fact that “*krengjai* helps save face or that it helps one to be accepted by others”. The rest was selected as neutral. When asked to explain, Blaze stated that:

Although *krengjai* means respect merged with consideration, comparing all *krengjai*-affected professional relationships, I felt it is a mechanism which is obviously meant to save a person's feeling. Meanwhile, it may or may not subsequently show respect and/or prevent conflict. As already mentioned, I think you cannot say it produced only a positive or negative effect. For me, I think it depends on the situation each of which is unique and different involving different personalities of different individuals for different outcomes and results.

On the one hand, he strongly agreed with the statement “*krengjai* has negative effects on the working relationship with Thai colleagues”, while on the other hand he agreed with four out of the five statements indicating a positive trait of *krengjai* effects on relationships, being neutral only towards “*krengjai* helps prevent conflict”. When asked for his explanation, he indicated that:

Indeed, there is a positive intention behind *krengjai* as I agreed with most given statements. Yet, it is more like sweeping the problems under the carpet. Why is that? As I talked about *krengjai* and communication practices, *krengjai* makes people bottle up their feelings. It temporarily produces positive effects and afterwards disasters. I agree with the other respondents. As stated earlier, when people repress their feelings, they find other outlets, including gossip, to relieve their pressure, which finally leads to unhealthy or possibly broken relationships. That's why in the first place I

agreed with “*krengjai* has negative effects on the working relationship with Thai colleagues.

Considering consistency with previous studies (e.g. Jongudomkarn et al., 2012; Niratpattanasai, 2005; Sirimahawan, 2003; Sriussadaporn, 2006), this current research confirms the claim from some studies. The high level of agreement that *krengjai helps show respect to others* and *helps to avoid violating the feelings or emotions of others* are consistent with Niratpattanasai (2005), as previously discussed.

4.3.3 Thais' perceptions of *krengjai* at work

The number of Thai participants that agreed that *krengjai* negatively affected communication practices and professional relationships with foreign colleagues were low (38.4% and 25.4%), yet compared with the level who were neutral or disagreed then the level of agreement was higher. However, for the effect of *krengjai* on communication practices the Thai participants highly agreed with three out of the five negative effects of *krengjai* on communication practices. The most agreed effect was that *krengjai causes indirectness* (77.1%) followed by *krengjai causes understatement* (72.1%) and *silence* (64.1%). However, compared with the non-Thai groups, Thai participants appeared to agree least with *krengjai causes lying* (31.9%). Thus, the current study failed to support the assumption that Thai respondents disagree with *krengjai* producing negative impacts on communication between them and Easterners or Westerners.

The results of the Thais' responses to the effects of *krengjai* on communication practices and professional relationships are summarized in Table 4.11.

Table 4.11

Thais' perceptions towards the effects of krengjai on communication and professional relationships at the workplace (N = 201)

No.	Perception of <i>krengjai</i>	Mean	S.D.	Level of agreement				
				Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<i>Effect of krengjai (kj) on communication behaviors</i>								
1.	<i>Kj</i> negatively affects communication behaviors	3.1	1.1	8.5	29.9	32.8	19.4	9.5
2.	<i>Kj</i> causes silence	3.5	1.0	12.4	51.7	16.4	15.9	3.5
3.	<i>Kj</i> causes indirectness	3.9	0.9	25.4	51.7	13.9	7.0	2.0
4.	<i>Kj</i> causes understatement	3.8	1.0	19.9	52.2	15.9	8.5	3.5
5.	<i>Kj</i> causes lying	2.8	1.2	8.5	23.4	24.9	27.9	15.4
<i>Effect of krengjai (kj) on professional relationships</i>								
6.	<i>Kj</i> negatively affects relationships with foreign colleagues	2.8	1.0	3.5	21.9	34.3	27.4	12.9
7.	<i>Kj</i> helps save the face of others	3.3	1.0	9.5	33.8	34.8	17.9	4.0
8.	<i>Kj</i> helps show respect to others	3.4	1.0	10.0	45.8	23.4	16.9	4.0
9.	<i>Kj</i> helps prevent conflict with others	3.6	1.0	13.9	50.7	22.4	9.5	3.5
10.	<i>Kj</i> helps avoid violating the feelings or emotions of others	3.7	0.9	14.9	56.2	18.9	6.0	4.0
11.	<i>Kj</i> helps one to be accepted by others	3.0	1.0	5.0	28.4	36.8	21.4	8.5

The current results are in accordance with previous studies (e.g., Andrews & Chompusri, 2013; Sirimahawan, 2003; Sriussadaporn-Charoenngam & Jablin, 1999; Sriussadaporn, 2006). However, those previous

studies were mostly in a business work setting and reflected the Thais' point of view towards *krengjai* or primarily emphasized cultural aspects tied to the concept of *krengjai* regardless of any particular context (e.g., Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 1995; Komin, 1990).

Notwithstanding that there is no previous research on the effect of *krengjai* in the similar context of within educational institutions with a multicultural working environment; the finding of Sriussadaporn-Charoenngam (1999) appeared relevant to this current study. By observing intercultural competence, she incorporated cultural practices to explain the communication of Thais by employing Hofstede's theory, similar to in this research. In so doing, she found that *krengjai* is used as a mechanism to preserve social harmony when in contact with others. Accordingly, Thais tend to use communication practices similar to the reported ones. However, the implication was not solely from her perspective. Sriussadaporn-Charoenngam & Jablin (1999) included both Thai and Western scholars' points of view to present the communication practices of Thais, including Komin (1990) and Fieg (1989). In addition, this current study found that the three *krengjai*-related communication practices of indirectness, silence and understatement were in accord with Fieg's (1989) findings. More relevant, was the finding of Sriussadaporn (2006), whose target participants combined both Thai employees and Western and Eastern expatriates. Even though she did not directly observe the effect of *krengjai*, her study revealed that *krengjai* was perceived by the Thai employees negatively for communication practice, in particular for silence and understatement that were negatively perceived by both Thais and non-Thais. For silence, Sriussadaporn (2006) reported that Thai participants tend to not refuse something or do not speak up for themselves, while for understatement, they were unwillingly committed to work even though they realize that they could not meet the timeline.

The findings from this group of Thai participants also corresponded with Sirimahawan (2003), where silence was reported to be used

in association with *krengjai*. Different types of feeling were also attached to *krengjai*, including being afraid. Similar to the Easterners, the Thai participants categorized *krengjai*-related behaviors into bad and good ones, where silence was perceived to be a bad behavior, as reported previously (Sirimahawan, 2003). The use of silence was also echoed in a study of communication competence between Thai and Westerners in which shyness was a variable (Chaidaroon, 2003), where *krengjai* was found to be equally defined as “shy” (e.g., requesting and responding to request, conflict resolution and negotiation). In addition, it caused Thais to remain silent by not speaking or asking for help in some certain situations. However, in contrast to this research, Chaidaroon (2003) reported that such communicative behaviors, including silence, are not perceived as negative by Thai people.

Compared with communication practice-related effects, the statistic results from each effect on the relationship with colleagues correlate with the level of agreement on *krengjai negatively affects relationships with foreign colleagues* (Table 4.11). When considering each effect, the retrieved findings are consistent with the hypothesis, that is, most Thai participants agreed with three out of five given statements of which the most agreed statement was “*krengjai* helps not to violate feelings or emotions of the others” (71.1%), followed by “*krengjai* helps show respect to the others” and “*krengjai* helps prevent conflict with the others” (64.6% and 55.8 %). Similar to the study of communication practice, this current study partially addresses the lack of relevant research to support *krengjai*-related professional relationship effects, especially in the multicultural working environment of the university.

4.3.3.1 Qualitative analysis of Thais' perceptions of *krengjai* at work

To further evaluate the findings of Thai participants, the qualitative data gained from Thai participants was incorporated and found to

provide both positive and negative perceptions towards *krengjai*. Apart from the effects on communication practices and relationships at work, which this research aimed to investigate, Thai participants also related *krengjai* effects to other elements they experienced during communication when the sender felt *krengjai*.

With respect to communication practices, Thai participants did not provide much information to confirm or contradict the quantitative result. Instead, they additionally reported the two new communication practices of “hesitation” and “negation”. While the use of hesitation ranged from “complete silence or lengthened continual sound to pauses” (Fuki, 2002), in this research some Thai participants saw the relationship between *krengjai* and hesitation when communicating with someone older or from a higher status. Such practice was believed to have both positive and negative influences. While hesitation will positively allow the *krengjai* person to consider the pros and cons of a message before sending it, it will negatively slow down the process of communication. This study, however, found the information retrieved from the participants did not indicate such behaviors. Rather, the participants tended to focus more on feeling “hesitant” or “reluctant”, which is too vague to conclude the effect of *krengjai* on the use of “hesitation”. Therefore, the discourse convention shall be observed in further studies.

While hesitation was viewed as being both negative and positive, negation was directly indicated to have a negative value. For *negation*, or the use of *no*, while some Westerners related the influence of *krengjai* on the use of *yes* or *no* to lying, the Thai participants provided a consistent point. Instead, there were two different ways to explain the effect of *krengjai* on negation. Some Thai participants explained that feeling *krengjai* leads a Thai to saying *no* to an offer or a request, while a *krengjai* person tends to use the term *krengjai* to (i) communicate “no”, and (ii) communicate “no” while indicating “yes”. This finding is in contrast to Niratpattansai (2005),

who revealed most Thais feeling *krengjai* rarely refuse or communicate “no”. This contradiction is likely to be due to the different scenarios, where the use of negation is context-based. A Thai tends to refuse when they are offered something that seems to cause discomfort to the giver, but tends to commit when requested to do something that lessens the discomfort of others. However, limited previous studies were found to support these findings.

To this point, the use of negation has been seen to have a negative effect on the communication practice of a *krengjai* person. However, the qualitative data offered a glimpse of a positive perception towards *krengjai*-related communication practice in the use of “politeness”. Interestingly, this finding is similar to the detailed account of the Western participants. However, only one participant (0.49%) reported this, where *krengjai*, in association with the use of politeness, involved appropriate words, good intonation and a softened tone of the voice. Similar to the group of Westerners, this current study lacks evidence, especially from the perspective of Thais working in a multicultural workplace, to support the use of *krengjai*-related politeness of Thais towards non-Thais. Regardless of a consistent context, Intachakra (2012) observed *krengjai* and linguistic politeness based on the aspect of Emancipatory Pragmatics, and found that in cross-cultural encounters a Thai manifested *krengjai* in the form of self-effacement. Politeness in his context was then found in accord with the behaviors or words that signal refusal.

However, when Ying was interviewed in this study, her view was in agreement with the quantitative result that *krengjai* causes indirectness, which was ranked the highest. Even though Ying felt neutral in the first place about if *krengjai* negatively affected communication with non-Thai colleagues, she agreed with most of the specific communication practice-related effects, being neutral to only that *krengjai* caused lying. When asked how she viewed if *krengjai* caused indirectness, hesitation and negation, Ying opined that:

As I already told you, *krengjai* is a feeling of concern about another person's feeling. It is sometimes regarded as feeling afraid. Therefore, when feeling *krengjai* we cannot say or express directly. The society is hierarchical. We have to think twice or more, otherwise our act may show disrespect which is not desirable, especially in the work setting of a University. For hesitation and negation, I think the use of both is similar to indirectness, and is intended to avoid negative feelings from someone of a higher status. As a lecturer, I mostly experience these communicative features from my students. When we are conversing, my students appear reluctant to speak and sometimes say no before proceeding to convey their intended messages. Yet, at the working level, I experience these similar behaviors from some Thai staff but never from non-Thai colleagues.

Interestingly from a perspective of university staff, Sak did not agree with any statements regarding communication practices. He clarified that:

Actually, I have experience of all the given communication practices but I don't view them as negative. First, in my view, *krengjai* is more or less part of Thai people's life. It's a core value that differentiates between a good or a bad person. Second, I don't display *krengjai* towards foreigners much. I don't feel it's necessary. I mean it gives a different feeling. When I interact with a Thai person, especially a lecturer, you know well that s/he expects you to be polite or respectful. I don't say it's bad or anything. But, for foreign lecturers, you feel less obliged. I am not saying that you should not *krengjai* or respect them but somehow I feel more comfortable to be open or frank when interacting with foreign colleagues and even with foreign lecturers. I think it's because of the culture that makes you face less pressure or formality from working with non-Thai co-workers or lecturers.

In an attempt to comprehend the given practices better, including hesitation and negation, the researcher asked for Sak's views. Sak agreed that *krengjai* does cause both hesitation and negation in Thai as he explained:

I think it's a habit. If you notice, when asked what you are doing, most Thais tend to answer "no" before telling what they are actually doing. I am not sure if it's the effect of *krengjai* or not but of course a person who feels *krengjai* usually says "no". Sometimes you may experience that a *krengjai* Thai says "no" while meaning "yes." As for hesitation, I also agree with this feature. When feeling *krengjai*, you hesitate or feel reluctant to respond to your interlocutor, especially when s/he is of a higher status or older.

In addition, he viewed hesitation and negation as positive and helpful. Such practices help maintain workplace culture and harmony, in particular among Thai employees.

Besides communication practices, other impacts that Thai participants experienced frequently, either as a user of *krengjai* her/himself or an experienced person, were on the quality of the message, job performance and professional relationship. When a *krengjai* person adopts a particular communication practice, such as indirectness or politeness, the message content (fact, idea, opinion, and in relation to this study's context, a daily assignment or the minutes) becomes distorted, unclear, indirect, incomplete, false and/or dishonest. However, some participants found that *krengjai* rather helped to reduce the seriousness of the message content or avoid negative emotions due to the content of the message, and so kept the communication going. When the message was distorted, Thai participants found it negatively affected the work performance.

Some negative outcomes were that a *krengjai* person tends to have "a work overload", leading to incomplete or delayed work. In addition, the *krengjai* person wastes more time finding other approaches to deal with the issue or work and so makes it more complicated. However, the

distorted message was found to positively influence professional relationships, and so the working environment, by helping to create a harmonious and peaceful workplace. The level of aggression and stress on others were lessened. However, too much *krengjai* caused a gap in professional relationships. Even a user of *krengjai* still received feedback from a receiver or an interlocutor with whom s/he communicated, and these feedbacks were both positive and negative. Thai participants found that non-Thai colleagues who understand the concept of *krengjai* perceived a *krengjai* Thai person as having kindness, humility and respect towards others, especially one with a higher status. Meanwhile, non-Thai colleagues with limited experience or understanding of *krengjai* negatively portrayed a *krengjai* Thai as being insincere, dishonest or two-faced, slow or talentless.

Interestingly, the qualitative observation of communication practices initially illustrated the impacts of *krengjai* on professional relationships at work. Questioned about communication practices, Thai participants narrated the effects of them in parallel with the effects on professional relationships, similar to the non-Thai groups. As aforementioned, *krengjai* can cause both positive and negative impacts on relationships at work. In addition to maintaining or distancing relationships, Thai participants revealed other different impacts that, interestingly, outnumbered the findings from the Eastern and Western participants. Corresponding with the quantitative results, Thai participants provided examples to support the positive value of *krengjai* on professional relationships, including that *krengjai* helps show respect, prevent conflict and avoid violating the feelings or emotions of others.

For the displaying of respect, Thai participants explained that there are various levels to practice this form of *krengjai*. Commonly, *krengjai* is practiced to show respect towards seniors. A Thai participant, for example, noted that “in Thai culture, a junior should respect or *krengjai* a senior, which is quite different from other cultures that treat

everyone at the same level.” Another participant, however, pointed out that a senior who practices *krengjai* towards a junior will gain trust and respect in return. In addition, the individual treated with *krengjai* feels a sense of equity. Thus, in this study, the showing of respect by *krengjai* was found in association with trust. This finding is consistent with the partial body of some previous studies (e.g. Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 1995; Komin, 1999; Niratpattanasai, 2005), but it is still unclear with regards to whom the display of *krengjai* is showing respect in a multicultural setting, although there was compelling evidence that *krengjai* was displayed towards seniors. Holmes and Tangtongtavy (1995) revealed that *krengjai* is commonly displayed towards seniors. In contrast to the finding of this research, *krengjai* was also displayed towards a Thai’s equal or even a Thai’s inferior/subordinate.

Conflict prevention was the second highest ranked effect of *krengjai* on professional relationships by the Thai respondents, which is consistent with some previous studies in different contexts (e.g., Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 1995; Sirimahawan, 2003). In particular, Holmes and Tangtongtavy (1995) attempted to define *krengjai* in all situations as a means to avoid discomfort and conflict, while Sirimahawan (2003) found that *krengjai* helped prevent conflict between Thais and Easterners in an airline work environment and so created a friendly working environment.

Finally, the *krengjai*-related behavior of avoiding the violation of the feelings of others was the most accepted positive effect of *krengjai* on professional relationships, and was also found in association with not offending or upsetting others. This finding is consistent with the limited prior research available (Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 1995; Sirimahawan, 2003), despite the different work environments between these studies. To illustrate, Holmes and Tangtongtavy (1995) revealed, in general, that *krengjai* is usually displayed in various behaviors with an overall aim to avoid both physical and emotional discomfort. In so doing, a Thai refrains from showing unpleasant feelings or even violates his/her own feelings. Meanwhile, in terms of stress-

relief, conflict-reduction and relationship-maintenance, Sirimahawan (2003) found that *krengjai* caused Thai flight attendants to control their emotions, give a positive feeling and not agitate others.

The result of this study showed further that Thai participants perceived some positive intentions of *krengjai* as being negative. For example, while “face-saving” is the concern of one’s feeling, it was found to lead to dishonest communication and so distant relationships. Interestingly, Thai respondents considered the mastering of *krengjai* revealed more positive and negative effects on *krengjai*-related behaviors with regards to professional relationships. For the positive effects, *krengjai* was found to help show gratitude, reduce tension, show humility and compromise with others. Meanwhile, for the negative aspects, *krengjai* was found to cause discomfort, distrust and blowing off steam. While this research was conducted in a university-based workplace setting, these findings were also mirrored in the airline-based workplace of Sirimahawan (2003) limited to the two positive effects; *krengjai* helps show humility and sympathy in the workplace.

As already mentioned, although the practice of *krengjai* adversely affected the quality of the message, it could produce a positive outcome in terms of helping prevent conflict. In a particular situation, it was noted by a Thai that *krengjai* helped to smooth the conflict between Thais and non-Thais, especially when the two parties were in total disagreement. Accordingly, the Thai will get cooperation from non-Thai employees, while the professional relationship within the workplace is maintained. With respect to *not violating the feelings or emotions of others*, some Thai respondents related this effect to other cultural Thai concepts: บัวไม่ให้ช้ำ น้ำไม่ให้ขุ่น (būa-mai-hai-cham-nām-mai-hai-khun, which means thinking before speaking diplomatically) and น้ำขุนอยู่ในน้ำใสอยู่นอก (nām-khun-yū-nai-nām-sai-yū-nøk, meaning biting your tongue). Both concepts were claimed to bring about positive effects on social relationships. The interview with Ying provided some interesting in-depth information as she noted that:

Krengjai is to preserve the words or talks and feelings of interlocutors, in other words “biting your tongue” (น้ำพูนอยู่ในน้ำใสอยู่นอก). Also it’s to show respect to your interlocutor. Thus, considerate people can blend into various situations. But if too blended in people will not be outstanding or stand out and finally become invisible in the workplace as well as not make good progress at work. To be accepted by colleagues, you should maintain the level of *krengjai*, not too little or too much, so you can blend in but stand out.

While the given situations indicated the positive effects of *krengjai* on professional relationships, some Thai respondents perceived “saving face” differently, where by saving face, a *krengjai* individual cannot tell the truth or make any remarks on her/his interlocutors’ mistakes that subsequently causes a gap or distance in the interpersonal relationship. This perception in my view may explain why saving face was rated the second lowest compared with other effects.

These unexpected negative feedbacks from Thai respondents were added to the interview sessions with Ying and Sak. Based on the questionnaire, Ying merely disagreed with the statement *krengjai helps one to be accepted by others*, the least agreed upon effect. Ying shared her view why she thought the effect received the least attention as:

As a Thai person, I don’t think we use *krengjai* to flatter ourselves. *Krengjai* is instilled in us from an early age as to be careful with our behaviors, physically and emotionally. That is to say, we have concern about others’ feelings not ours. Never once in my life have I heard that a Thai displays *krengjai* to be accepted by others. I think this might be the case but that is not the intended act of *krengjai*. I think this explains why this effect was agreed with the least. However, I believe displaying *krengjai* may cause a person’s interlocutor to have a positive feeling towards them and thus accept them better. Yet, it’s not in the first place that *krengjai* can help you to be accepted by others. In addition, this mindset can help you understand why the highest number of Thai respondents, including me, agreed with

the statement *krengjai helps to avoid violation of the feelings or emotions of others*.

In contrast to Ying, Sak who disagreed with negative trait of given communication practices also disagreed with each effect regarding professional relationship. Arguably Sak's perception was based on his working experience. As stated earlier, he felt less necessary to display *krengjai* with non-Thai colleagues. Likewise, Sak found *krengjai* did not appear influential or socially useful when interacting with non-Thais at work as he explained that:

It's the same with the effects on professional relationships. I even agreed with how *krengjai* negatively affects professional relationships as a whole. *Krengjai* is very special and complicated even for Thai people. Displaying it to a Thai is acceptable but I don't think we are getting the same response from non-Thais. Instead, displaying *krengjai* makes them rather think otherwise. For example, when a foreign lecturer asked for my opinion about the campaign to be raised in the University, due to *krengjai* merged with respect, I said that I agreed with his ideas. He didn't realize my intention at all. Even I explained later, he seemed to not get it.

Besides providing details in support of the quantitative data, Thai participants also yielded new data on both the positive and negative effects of *krengjai* on relationships. For the positive effects, it was found that *krengjai* helps (i) show gratitude, (ii) reduce tension, (iii) show humility, (iv) compromise with others and (v) show sympathy. Meanwhile, for the negative effects, there were that *krengjai* causes (i) discomfort, (ii) distrust and (iii) blowing off steam. From the results, Thai respondents yielded more qualitative data on both the positive and negative *krengjai*-related behaviors and professional relationships than non-Thai respondents. In my view, one obvious reason is that an individual Thai respondent is the master of his/her own cultural practice- *krengjai*.

According to a Thai participant, a *krengjai* person normally has bad feelings to accept help from another person and so s/he tends to repeat saying “thank you”. In this way, the *krengjai* person believes that the person offering help can feel her/his gratitude. With respect to reducing the tension, a Thai participant made the following observation that:

There is less tension when the entire office practices *krengjai*, or it is only expected from culturally Thai professionals. Non-Thais may be aware of the phenomenon but may not want to be involved as it takes active effort to constantly meter their interactions with *krengjai* in mind if they are not used to it. It is seen as a Thai thing that they are not really expected to commit to fully. However, being aware and even simply mentioning *krengjai* in certain situations can be positive towards the Thai staff as it shows you are culturally literate and sensitive.

Meanwhile, another respondent added that “besides helping reduce tension, in some situations a display of *krengjai* also helps develop intimacy between colleagues.” Another effect that some Thai respondents found associated with *krengjai* was that *it helps show humility*. Based on the result, it was believed that an individual Thai person who feels *krengjai* is perceived to be humble or that the display of *krengjai* is the show of humility itself. Given *krengjai* and conflict avoidance, some Thai participants stated that *krengjai* also helped compromise with others, especially when there were disputes between Thai and non-Thai colleagues. Compromising helps lessen the level of seriousness in an argument and so maintain the good relationship. Another reported positive effect was *krengjai* helped show sympathy. Some Thai participants commented that when feeling *krengjai*, a person showed sympathy or literally put her/himself in someone else's shoes. At work, the daily practice of *krengjai* can positively influence a foreigner who has a habit of bluntly speaking to become more considerate. Consequently, it creates intimacy between Thai and non-Thai employees.

On the other the hand, the display of *krengjai* can cause discomfort to both speaker/user and interlocutor. For the speaker, some Thai participants felt that a *krengjai* person is sometimes perceived as soft-hearted and, to certain extent, as weak. With such attributes, that person's feeling is easily neglected or taken advantage of. One Thai participant, for example, reported that feeling *krengjai* makes us care too much for other people's feelings. It then causes discomfort and an unwilling commitment to the task assignment. Meanwhile, a foreigner interacting with a *krengjai* Thai whose message contains vagueness, may not understand the unspoken cues and will feel discomfort and have difficulty working with that Thai.

While some respondents saw *krengjai* as a positive mechanism for maintaining relationships at work, there were some Thais who reported otherwise. As mentioned above, a *krengjai* Thai normally adopts a particular communication practice that affects the quality of messages, including not being able to communicate openly. One Thai participant, for instance, commented that "to feel *krengjai* is to mask his enmity under an appearance of friendliness." Such an act leads to a lack of mutual trust between Thai and non-Thai employees. Considering the effects of *krengjai*, most are interconnected with suppressing intended feelings or acts. This usually leads to negative outcomes. Some Thai participants reported consistent findings that feeling *krengjai* simply makes an individual repress her/his emotions. They elaborated that "when the tolerance level of anger is over, instead of figuring things out, the individual blows off steam or overacts while communicating with others. Such behavior weakens and even destroys the relationships between colleagues."

Similar to the non-Thai groups, the Thai participants reported subsequent impacts of *krengjai* on the quality of the message, job performance, professional relationship and an individual. While these subsequent impacts are unexpected, they are consistent with the study of Sriussadaporn (2006), who did not aim to explore *krengjai*. However, in this

intercultural communication, he found such impacts were important to workplace communication and so they were worthy to be explored. Consistent with this research's findings, Sriussdaporn (2003) posited that communication problems at work were related to various factors, including task assignments and personal/work relationships. Specifically, these problems were caused by the cultural traits of Thai people, one of which is *krengjai*.

4.3.4 Comparison of the perceptions of *krengjai* at work among Easterners, Westerners and Thais

When drawing comparison among the three groups of respondents, a larger proportion of Eastern participants agreed with the direct negative statements about the effects of *krengjai*. The Easterners strongly agreed with each negative effect of *krengjai* on communication, while the Westerners responded similar to the Thais to the three negative effects of *krengjai* on communication. However, the level of agreement on the effect of *krengjai* on professional relationships was different between the three different groups. Non-Thai participants only agreed with two positive values, while the Thai participants tended to have more positive perceptions, agreeing with three of the positive statements.

As indicated in Table 4.12, the highest level of agreement on the negative effects of *krengjai* on communication practices and relationships were 50% and 37.5%, respectively, while the lowest levels were 38.4% and 25.4%, respectively. It was noticeable that both groups of non-Thai participants agreed with such statements to a higher level than the Thai group, with the Easterners agreeing with both statements the most. The Thai group, who live in the country of origin of *krengjai*, showed the lowest level of agreement with the two negative statements about *krengjai*. Clearly, the level of agreement was not high enough to indicate that either effect was significantly negative.

Table 4.12

Comparison of the participants' responses to the negative effects of krengjai on communication and professional relationships within the workplace

Statement	Participant group	Level of agreement (%)	Level of disagreement (%)
1. <i>Krengjai</i> has negative effects on your communication with (Thai/Foreign) colleagues	Easterners	50%	0%
	Westerners	39.4%	30.3%
	Thais	38.4%	28.9%
2. <i>Krengjai</i> has negative effects on relationships with (Thai/Foreign) colleagues	Easterners	37.5%	37.5%
	Westerners	27.2%	33.3%
	Thais	25.4%	40.3%

With respect to the effect of *krengjai* on communication, Table 4.13 summarizes the comparative data on the agreement/disagreement level of the four negative effects of *krengjai* on communication. Comparing the non-Thais' and Thais' responses to each of the four individual effects of *krengjai* on communication, it was found that Western participants agreed that *krengjai* caused silence and directness the most (75.8% and 87.9%, respectively), while Eastern participants rated that *krengjai* causes understatement and lying equally the most (87.5%). Thus, the non-Thais largely agreed on the negative effects of *krengjai* on communication, except for the effect of *krengjai* on "lying", where only slightly more than half (51%) of the Westerners agreed with that statement. Interestingly, most Thai participants agreed with these four negative effects of *krengjai* the least, except for that *krengjai* causes understatement, which had a slightly higher level of agreement than by the Western participants (72.1% agreement from Thais, some 2.4% higher than Westerners).

Table 4.13

Comparison of the participants' responses to the negative effects of krenjai on communication practices within the workplace

Statement	Participant group	Level of agreement (%)	Level of disagreement (%)
1. <i>Krenjai</i> causes silence	Easterners	75%	0%
	Westerners	75.8%	12.1%
	Thais	64.1%	19.4%
2. <i>Krenjai</i> causes indirectness	Easterners	87.5%	0%
	Westerners	87.9%	9.1%
	Thais	77.1%	9.0%
3. <i>Krenjai</i> causes understatement	Easterners	87.5%	0%
	Westerners	69.7%	15.2%
	Thais	72.1%	12%
4. <i>Krenjai</i> causes lying	Easterners	87.5%	0%
	Westerners	51.5%	18.2%
	Thais	31.9%	43.3%

For the five effects of *krenjai* on relationships within the workplace (Table 4.14), the highest number of Easterners agreed with the statements that *krenjai* (i) *helps save the face of others* and (ii) *helps one to be accepted by others* (62.5% and 50%, respectively), while the Thais mostly agreed with the two statements that *krenjai* helps (i) *prevent conflict with others* and (ii) *avoids violation of the feelings or emotions of others* (64.6% and 71.1%, respectively). Meanwhile, the Western participants had the highest proportion of agreement with that *krenjai helps show respect to others* (57.6%). While the level of disagreement was not statistically significant, it was noteworthy that the Easterners had the highest frequency of disagreement level on three out of the five positive statements.

While the quantitative results clearly showed participants' perceptions towards certain communication practices, it should be noted that the value or quality of each communication practice can be binary. Based on the qualitative results, the value of communication practice is based on context and so can possibly be perceived as both positive or negative.

Table 4.14

Comparison of the participants' responses to the negative effects of krengjai on professional relationships within the workplace

Statement	Participant group	Level of agreement (%)	Level of disagreement (%)
1. <i>Krengjai</i> helps save the face of others	Easterners	62.5%	25.0%
	Westerners	45.5%	27.3%
	Thais	43.3%	21.9%
2. <i>Krengjai</i> helps show respect to others	Easterners	50.0%	37.5%
	Westerners	57.6%	21.2%
	Thais	55.8%	20.9%
3. <i>Krengjai</i> helps prevent conflict with others	Easterners	37.5%	37.5%
	Westerners	30.3%	27.3%
	Thais	64.6%	13.0% ^c
4. <i>Krengjai</i> helps avoid violating the feelings or emotions of others	Easterners	62.5%	25.0%
	Westerners	60.6%	24.2%
	Thais	71.1%	10.0%
5. <i>Krengjai</i> helps to be accepted by the others	Easterners	50.0%	37.5%
	Westerners	45.5%	27.3%
	Thais	33.4%	29.9%

4.4 Perceptions towards the effects of *krengjai*

In an attempt to evaluate how nationality affects one's perception towards the display of *krengjai* in a multicultural workplace, the third research question was formulated. To answer this question, data were collected from Five-Point-Likert scale questions that measured the Thai and non-Thai participants' perceived effects of *krengjai* on communication practices and professional relationships. Pearson's Chi-Square test was then used to test for the independence between nationality and perception towards *krengjai*.

The following section first demonstrates the holistic perception towards *krengjai* by nationality, followed by the individual nationality perception, analyzed based on Hofstede's cultural theory, but subject to the caveat of the extremely small sample sizes.

While *krengjai* is one of the cultural values deeply rooted and held for its positive values in Thai society, the participants in this study had different overall perspectives towards it. In this study, the researcher, in line with Hofstede's paradigm, suspiciously assumed that nationality had a significant effect on the perception of *krengjai*. The dependence analysis of nationality on the perceptions towards the effect of *krengjai* (Table 4.15) showed that most Thai participants positively perceived *krengjai* (79.1%), followed by the group of Eastern participants (62.5%), while the Western participants had the lowest positive perception (60.6%). Noticeably, of the three groups, the Thai participants had the highest positive perception. When testing the independence of nationality on perception, it was found that nationality correlated with perception towards *krengjai* ($cc = 0.257$, $sig. < 0.05$).

Table 4.15

Distribution of the participants' perceptions of krengjai by nationality group

Perceptions towards <i>krengjai</i>	Group		
	Thais (N=201)	Easterners (N=8)	Westerners (N=33)
Negative perception (< 31 points)	20.9	37.5	39.4
Positive perception (\geq 31 points)	79.1	62.5	60.6
Total	100.0 (201)	100.0 (8)	100.0 (33)
Pearson Chi-square = 8.154; Df = 2; p = 0.026; C.C. = 0.257			

From the available literature, the effect of *krengjai* was seen to be binary, that is both positive and negative. Accordingly, the distribution of the participants' perception towards each effect was tested. With regards to the effect on communication practices at work, the quantitative analysis of independence between the two variables showed that all the Eastern participants had a negative perception (100%), followed by the Western and Thai participants (90.9% and 76.6%, respectively). When testing for the independence of nationality on perception, it was found that nationality (as

these three groups) correlated with the perception towards *krengjai*-affected communication (Table 4.16).

Table 4.16

Distribution of the participants' perceptions of krengjai effects on communication

Perceptions towards <i>krengjai</i>	Group		
	Thais (N=201)	Easterners (N=8)	Westerners (N=33)
Negative perception (< 31 points)	76.6	100.0	90.9
Positive perception (\geq 31 points)	23.4	0.0	9.1
Total	100.0 (201)	100.0 (8)	100.0 (33)
Pearson Chi-square = 5.687; Df = 2; p = 0.048; C.C. = 0.252			

With regards to effect of *krengjai* on professional relationships at work, the Thai participants positively perceived professional relationship-related effects of *krengjai* the most (63.2%), followed by the Eastern participants (62.5%), and lastly by the Western participants (51.5%), who appeared to, in line with previous studies (Klausner, 1993), have a negative perception towards such effects (Table 4.17). It is noteworthy that the participants' perceptions were not dependent upon nor correlated with their nationality (as these three groups).

Table 4.17

Distribution of the participants' perceptions of krengjai and professional relationships

Perceptions towards <i>Krengjai</i>	Group		
	Thais (N=201)	Easterners (N=8)	Westerners (N=33)
Negative perception (< 31 points)	36.8	37.5	51.5%
Positive perception (\geq 31 points)	63.2	62.5	48.5%
Total	100.0 (201)	100.0 (8)	100.0 (33)
Pearson Chi-square = 1.362; Df = 2; Significance = 0.506			

In contrast with this current research's assumption, the results did not show a significant ($p < 0.05$) association between the grouped nationality and the perception of *krengjai* on professional relationships. However, participants with nationalities classified in this research as Westerners appeared to have a more negative perception of *krengjai* than the Eastern and Thai groups. Taking into consideration the fact that the Thai nationality group can also be classified as Easterners, the results are then consistent with earlier works (Gudykunst, 2001; Hall, 1959; Hofstede, 1980, 2001; Lewis, 1999, 2005).

By observing the perceptions towards *krengjai*, it is necessary to understand the strong connection between culture and communication and vice versa. *Krengjai* is essentially a specific element of Thai culture and so understanding *krengjai* and its detrimental effects cannot be acquired without studying Thai national culture. The prevalent theory used to study national culture in association with communication is Hofstede's cultural dimension, and so the results of this research were then discussed in that context. As stated earlier, the collectivistic nature of Thai society leads to the belief in social harmony. Apart from being collectivist, Thai culture is also characterized by a low level of masculinity, high uncertainty avoidance and high power distance. *Krengjai* is accordingly used as a mechanism to preserve these cultural characteristics (Fieg, 1989; Sriussadaporn-Charoengam & Jablin, 1999) creating particular impacts regarding communication practices and professional relationships, as listed in this study. According to Fieg (1989), the attribution of a harmonious Thai society led to the belief in *krengjai*, where its display shows respect and avoids personal conflict. His finding is clearly inconsistent with the qualitative findings for Research Question 2 of this study. These attributes are, however, not favorable by people from Western cultures in which individualism is valued (Gudykunst, 2001; Klausner, 1993).

Initially, this research evaluated nationality as three clustered groups: Easterners, Westerners and Thais. Yet, to avoid "generalization" and to

improve the validity of any nationality-perception-based dependence, nationality needs to be examined separately. The group of Easterners was comprised of seven nationalities (Indonesian, Vietnamese, Japanese, Filipino, Malaysian, Chinese and Indian), while the Westerners were comprised of ten nationalities (Canadian, British, American, Danish, Polish, Latvian, Australian, French, German and Russian). The number of each nationality within the respective group was varied, based on the proportion of the workforce at each of the two targeted international programs, but were all very low.

Further investigation, subject to the very low sample sizes, showed that for the group of Easterners, three (Vietnamese, Filipino and Malaysian) of the seven nationalities had a negative perception towards the effects of *krengjai*, but only the Vietnamese and Malaysian clearly indicated a negative perception, with only half of the Filipino participants having a negative perception of *krengjai*. However, it should be repeatedly noted that there were only one Vietnamese and Malaysian employee participating in this study. For the Westerners, five (Canadian, American, Danish, Latvian and Russian) out of the ten nationalities had a negative perception, with all of the Canadian, Latvian and Russian participants and approximately half of the American and Danish participants having a negative perception of *krengjai* effects. For the Thais (a much larger group), the majority appeared to have a positive perception towards *krengjai* (79.1%). The comparative perceptions, positive and negative, in compliance with each nationality are demonstrated in Table 4.18.

Table 4.18

Relationship between the participants' nationality and their perceptions towards krenjai

Perception towards <i>Krenjai</i>	Nationality																	
	Thai	Indonesian	Vietnamese	Japanese	Filipino	Malaysian	Chinese	Indian	Canadian	British	American	Danish	Polish	Latvian	Australian	French	German	Russian
Negative Perception (below 31 points)	20.9	0.0	100.0	0.0	50.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	53.8	50.0	0.0	100.0	33.3	0.0	0.0	100.0
Positive Perception (above 31 points)	79.1	100.0	0.0	100.0	50.0	0.0	100.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	46.2	50.0	100.0	0.0	66.7	100.0	100.0	0.0
Total	100.0 (201)	100.0 (1)	100.0 (1)	100.0 (1)	100.0 (2)	100.0 (1)	100.0 (1)	100.0 (1)	100.0 (2)	100.0 (7)	100.0 (13)	100.0 (2)	100.0 (1)	100.0 (1)	100.0 (3)	100.0 (1)	100.0 (2)	100.0 (1)
Pearson Chi-square = 32.804 Df = 17 Significance = 0.012 C.C. = 0.346																		

Given that participants gave a different reaction to each effect of *krenjai*, their individual nationality was subsequently evaluated (subject to the limitation of the very small sample sizes for all nationalities except Thais) to additionally gain more insight into the relationship between the employee's nationality and their perception of *krenjai* (Table 4.19).

With regards to *krenjai*-affected communication, it was noticeable that most Thai participants together with all the Eastern nationalities had negative perceptions of *krenjai*-related communication practices (76.6% and 100%, respectively), plus eight (Canadian, British, American, Danish, Polish, Latvian, German and Russian) out of the ten Western nationalities. Interestingly, the French were found to have a positive attitude towards communication practices, but note that the sample size was just one, while two thirds of Australians positively perceived *krenjai*-related communication practices.

From Table 4.19 it was evident that most employees from different nationalities appeared to have a negative perception towards communication practices. Meanwhile, in terms of professional relationships (Table 4.20), of the seven Eastern nationalities, three showed negative attitudes towards *krenjai*-affected professional relationships. The Vietnamese and Malaysian

participants both had a negative perception of *krengjai*-related professional relationships, while only half of the Filipino participants did.

Table 4.19

Relationship between the participants' nationality and their perception towards krengjai on communication practices

Perception towards <i>Krengjai</i>	Nationality																	
	Thai	Indonesian	Vietnamese	Japanese	Filipino	Malaysian	Chinese	Indian	Canadian	British	American	Danish	Polish	Latvian	Australian	French	German	Russian
Negative Perception (below 31 points)	76.6	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	85.7	100.0	50.0	100.0	100.0	33.3	0.0	100.0	100.0
Positive Perception (above 31 points)	23.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	14.3	0.0	50.0	0.0	0.0	66.7	100.0	0.0	0.0
Total	100.0 (201)	100.0 (1)	100.0 (1)	100.0 (1)	100.0 (2)	100.0 (1)	100.0 (1)	100.0 (1)	100.0 (2)	100.0 (7)	100.0 (13)	100.0 (2)	100.0 (1)	100.0 (1)	100.0 (3)	100.0 (1)	100.0 (2)	100.0 (1)
Pearson Chi-square = 14.045									Df= 17 Significance = 0.664									

For the Westerners, seven of the nationalities showed a high level of negative perception, which included all of the Polish, Latvian, French, German and Russian nationalities. Similar to the feedback on communication practices, only half of the Danish participants had a negative perception as also did the Canadian participants. The findings appear to confirm the idea that the perceptions towards variation in communication and interpersonal relationships are systematically different between Westerners and Easterners.

Table 4.20

Relationship between the participants' nationality and their perception towards krengjai on professional relationships

Perception towards <i>Krengjai</i>	Nationality																	
	Thai	Indonesian	Vietnamese	Japanese	Filipino	Malaysian	Chinese	Indian	Canadian	British	American	Danish	Polish	Latvian	Australian	French	German	Russian
Negative Perception (below 31 points)	36.8	0.0	100.0	0.0	50.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	50.0	28.6	46.2	50.0	100.0	100.0	33.3	100.0	100.0	100.0
Positive Perception (above 31 points)	63.2	100.0	0.0	100.0	50.0	0.0	100.0	100.0	50.0	71.4	53.8	50.0	0.0	0.0	66.7	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	100.0 (201)	100.0 (1)	100.0 (1)	100.0 (1)	100.0 (2)	100.0 (1)	100.0 (1)	100.0 (1)	100.0 (2)	100.0 (7)	100.0 (13)	100.0 (2)	100.0 (1)	100.0 (1)	100.0 (3)	100.0 (1)	100.0 (2)	100.0 (1)
Pearson Chi-square = 15.545 Df = 17 Significance = 0.556																		

From Table 4.20, all the Canadian, Latvian and Russian participants indicated having a negative perception towards *krengjai* (100%). Using Hofstede's dimension to determine the national culture of each, only the Canadian culture was evidently different from the Thai culture.

Meanwhile, Latvian and Russian cultures share some similarities with Thai culture. Figure 4.2 shows the comparison of the cultural dimension indexes of the PDI, IvC, MvF and UAI for the Thai, Canadian, Latvian and Russian cultures.

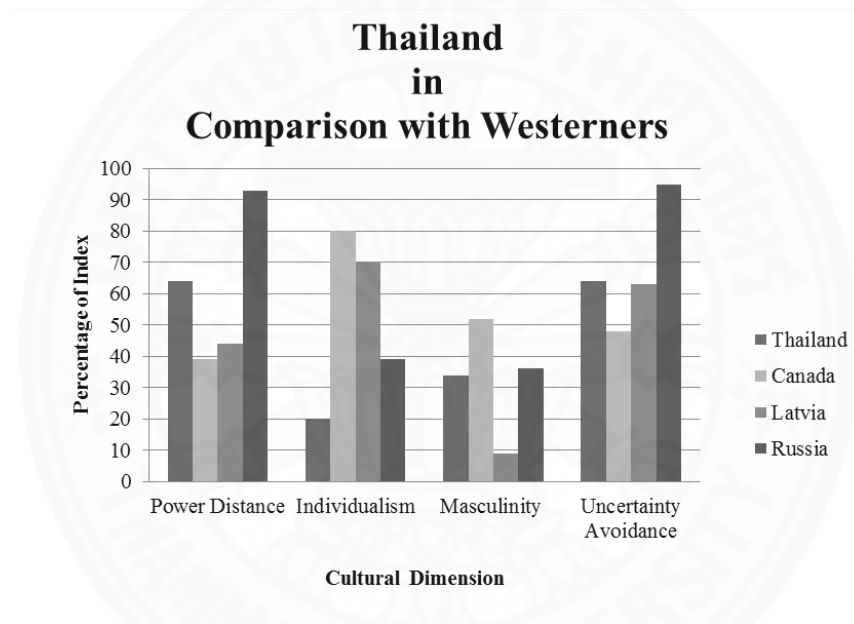


Figure 4.2 Comparison of Hofstede's cultural dimension index for Thai, Canadian, Latvian and Russian cultures

Essentially, when it comes to factors that affect the perception towards a specific cultural value, relying on one factor, in particular the national culture is insufficient to explain and understand the variation among cultures (Jacob & Jolly, 2012). Jacob and Jolly (2012) noted that when examining the relationship between nationality and the employee's perception towards HR management policy, there were various factors that needed to be considered, including national culture, race and country of origin. This current study also confirmed their claim. Based on the retrieved demographic data (Table 4.2),

the participants of similar nationalities have contrasting backgrounds. For example, a person of Eastern nationality may be born and raised in a different Western culture and consider her/himself as a Westerner, thereby making it complicated to specify that person's national culture. In addition, when interviewing a participant about the English definition of *krengjai* and its effects, it was obvious that various factors (e.g., job title and age) were influential and required to be included in any analysis in order to understand the different practices of dissimilar cultures.

However, in this current study, more Western participants or nationalities (including the British, Polish, French and German) showed positive perceptions towards *krengjai*. Interestingly, when investigating their national culture, only the French cultural dimensions appear closely related to the Thai culture. Of the four cultural dimensions considered, only the level of individualism (IvC) was comparatively higher, scoring 71. Polish and French cultures share two similar dimensions (PDI and UAI). Germany shares only one similar dimension (UAI), while England, as part of United Kingdom, shares no cultural similarity with Thai culture. Such findings reaffirmed the weakness of merely investigating the independence between nationality and perception towards one's specific cultural value. Several factors should accordingly be taken into consideration when investigating the perspective of one's nationality. Figure 4.3 demonstrates the cultural dimensions of nationalities showing positive perspectives towards *krengjai*.

When taking the Easterner's perception towards *krengjai* into consideration, the findings of this research supported the conclusion of some previous studies that Eastern cultures share consistency in their general patterns of behavior, and so it is assumed that they developed a positive perception towards each other's culture (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994). Even though some Eastern participants indicated a negative perception towards *krengjai*, the overall perception testing showed a higher frequency of positive perceptions. This finding affirms the claim from the previous investigation

that people from cultures with shared similarities appear to develop reciprocal opinions (Brewer & Campbell, 1976).

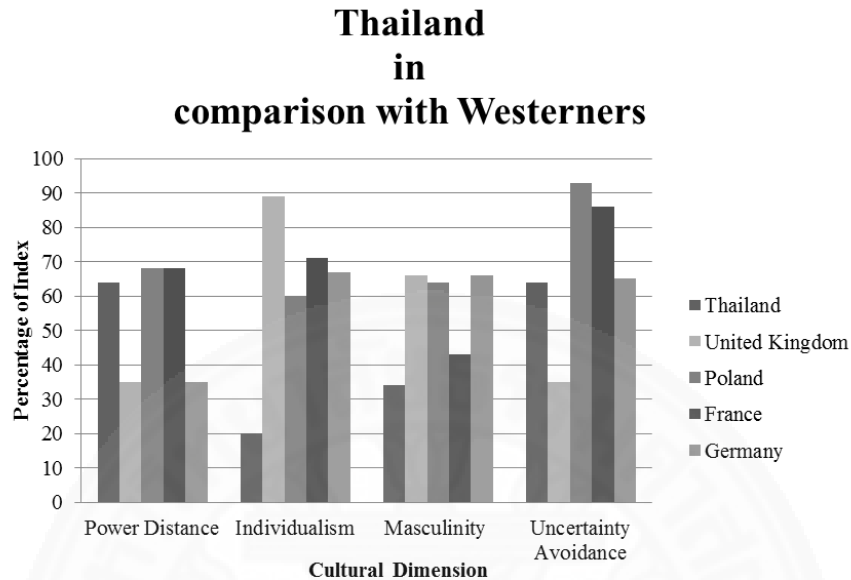


Figure 4.3 Comparison of Hofstede's cultural dimension index for Thai, British, Polish, French and German cultures

However, the researcher found there is a gap when it comes to separate details. That is the Easterners reported a different perception towards each effect of *krengjai*. None of the Easterners had a positive perception towards the effect of *krengjai* on communication, but a higher frequency of them perceived *krengjai* effects on professional relationships positively. Moreover, when taking each nationality into consideration, it was apparent that 100% of Vietnamese and Malaysian participants had a negative holistic perspective on the effects of *krengjai*. Based on Hofstede's dimension, Vietnam and Malaysia share the most cultural features, except that Vietnamese culture has a lower UAI preference. Meanwhile, Malaysian culture, in contrast to Thai culture, has an intermediate level of masculinity. Scoring at 50, this dimension cannot be determined.

These findings are interesting as these are not salient features dictating communication practices, especially in association with *krengjai*. Although all four cultural dimensions significantly contributed to the practice of *krengjai*,

collectivism (IvC) and PDI are rather more responsible for fostering belief in *krengjai* (Fieg, 1989; Sriussadaporn-Charoenngam & Jablin, 1999). The result is, in my view, compelling, especially when compared with the study of Awang, Maros and Ibrahim (2012), who studied “Malay Values in Intercultural Communication”. Although, their findings did not reveal a direct linkage, they noted that the similarity between Thai and Malay cultural values affected intercultural communication. That is, the Malays preferred conflict avoidance and adopted particular communication styles, including indirectness and politeness.

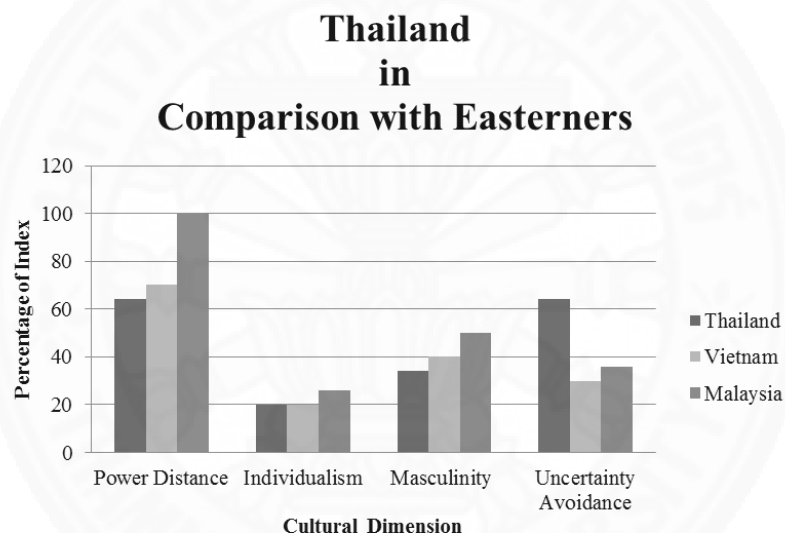


Figure 4.4 Comparison of Hofstede's cultural dimension index for Thai, Vietnamese and Malaysian cultures

However, the negative perceptions of the Vietnamese and Malaysian participants cannot be generalized as many factors are involved, while it should be noted that only one Vietnamese and Malaysian participated in this research. Figure 4.4 shows a comparison of the cultural dimension indexes of PDI, IvC, MvF and UAI for Thai, Vietnamese and Malaysian cultures.

4.5 Practical guidelines

In addition to the implications derived from the analysis of each research question, this research study unearthed some additional guidelines to help solve the communication problems associated with *krengjai*. In my view, it could be beneficial for both Thai and non-Thai employees to learn from real-life scenarios (general and workplace specific), and so to be able to cope with cultural issues arising from communication in a multicultural workplace. The solutions to the *krengjai*-related problems offered by the participants are presented below in Table 4.21.

Table 4.21

Solutions to krengjai-related problems

Nationality group	Problem	Solution
<i>Easterners</i> (Filipino and Vietnamese)	1. Indirectness 2. Disrespect right of others	1. Use an anonymous suggestion board 2. Respect others' choice 3. Treat people equally 4. Tell the truth 5. Be direct
<i>Westerners</i> (Canadian, German and British)	1. Delay and hesitation 2. Refusal of favor 3. Silence	1. Be direct and Truthful 2. Be insist 3. Be expressive
<i>Thais</i>	1. Hierarchy/social order 2. Criticism avoidance	1. Use written communication 2. Communicate in person

*Note: The vertical sequence of nationality in the table is irrelevant to the given sequence of problems and solutions.

As shown in Table 4.21, Eastern and Western participants provided different problems that they had encountered while interacting with *krengjai* Thai employees. Meanwhile, Thais reported how they perceived themselves while communicating with non-Thai employees. A narrative explanation of each participant's personal experiences with *krengjai* is provided below:

Easterners (Filipino and Vietnamese)

An Eastern participant experienced *krengjai* related to communication and so work performance. When her/his work performance had flaws and/or needed an improvement, *krengjai* likely prevented her/his Thai co-workers from telling her/him directly, thereby preventing her/him from being able to quickly improve her/his performance. To deal with this type of problem, a university workplace could have an anonymous suggestion board, either in the office or online, so the faculty staff can see suggestions for their own improvement without having *krengjai* kick in.

Another Easterner also had a negative experience with *krengjai*, in particular with relationship-related effects. S/he stated that:

“It is very surprising to me that *krengjai* co-exists with an extremely rude aspect of the character of some Thais. They may bow their heads when they walk in front of older or professionally superior people, they may speak delicately to them, but with people they see as peers, they are extremely rude. They greet them by saying how fat they are. They ask them about their salary, their rent, their weight! Why is *krengjai* only reserved for people older than oneself or in higher positions than oneself? Why is there no respect at all for someone around the same age and social status? *Krengjai* does not teach a general and true sense”.

To deal with these undesirable acts, the participant provided some suggestions as follows:

- Consider that the clothes a person chooses to wear is an expression of individuality and the needs of the person's health. It is never meant to be an insult to anyone else. It is rude of us to wield control over what other people wear. It also shows a thin sense of self-worth.
- Treat all people, whether younger, the same age, or older than oneself, with a general (equal) sense of respect.
- Always tell the truth. Have the courage to face its consequences. Many people can forgive incompetence,

mistakes and misunderstanding, but they hate it when someone tells them lies. Being known as a liar is what destroys face.

- Understand that sometimes, a non-Thai person needs to express feelings. I understand that it makes Thais uncomfortable, but in some cultures it is better to express how you feel, to be honest about your feelings, so that the ill-feeling can dissipate, rather than to keep hate and resentment hidden and alive.

Westerners (Canadian, German and British)

A Western participant pointed out that *Krengjai* is found in the general situation of interactions between university and support staff (who are lower in rank). The participant felt that these support staff could not fulfill her/his requests since they did not want to directly tell her/him. The requests included technical support for teaching or contractual details. *Krengjai* could cause a long delay in getting an answer to her/his request and required the Western participant to follow up directly to finally get the information s/he needed. Essentially, *krengjai* caused delay and frustration. In the participant's view, the use of *krengjai* is perhaps acceptable in the family or other cultural situations, but at a workplace it can worsen a problem. To cope with *krengjai*, direct and truthful answers are necessary from a Western perspective. S/he addressed that "Maybe other Thais can infer "the truth" behind *krengjai*, but Westerners, including myself, often misread the *krengjai* cues."

A different Western participant experienced that *krengjai* is related to one's refusal of favor. When favor is offered, most Thai colleagues are reluctant to demand something even if they have the right to do so. Often Thai staff are reluctant to demand non-Thai's to fulfill their duties. Based on her/his experiences, the participant suggested that "foreigners have to understand the mindset behind *krengjai* and then play along. You offer something and if the offer is refused then you offer it again and again. It will be accepted sometime. And if you hit a wall, then the person really does not want you to offer it and so then just let go."

Another Western participant also experienced *krengjai* on a daily basis or in most situations s/he has encountered. The participant felt that:

I think Thais should express their thoughts and feelings in an appropriate manner. Talk individually and solve the problem with the party involved only instead of smiling in front of the person you are having trouble with and talking behind their back. I am sure people will like to hear honest thoughts. I myself would like to know if other Thai people are offended by my words or actions so that I don't repeat the same mistakes.

Thais

A Thai participant explained that *krengjai* is particularly problematic when university staff are working with a lecturer/professor. The Thai staff member tends to keep quite even when a professor does something unseemly. In order to accomplish the task, the staff uses alternative methods of communication that avoid confrontation and/or gossip. With the lack of direct communication, s/he sorts the problem out by talking with a trusted friend or colleague and subsequently may request to relocate to another department instead of complaining about her/his boss. In this type of case the solution is to create clear communication-related policies that everybody must strictly follow. One of the policies is to incorporate written communication so that a person is still able to maintain the value of “face-saving”, especially within a university workplace, where a social hierarchical working environment is appreciated.

Most Thai participants agreed that signaling *krengjai* in a meeting is considered an ineffective means of communication in the view of most Thais and non-Thais. To illustrate, *krengjai* makes a staff member unable to voice her/his opinion, especially when the opinion is different from that of the boss or a person of higher position. One participant added that “If an offered opinion is against the boss's, the staff will be perceived as disrespectful. Yet, it seems that Western bosses are totally fine with employees suggesting ideas, but this is not the case for Asian bosses”. As a result, certain meetings may go nowhere and some problems can't be addressed. To solve the problem, instead of discussing in a big group, most Thai participants stated that they would like

to communicate in person with the boss. However, if necessary, and in addition, the boss should encourage the staff to speak up in meetings without making it personal or destructive. New corporate culture, such as encouraging regular meetings and/or constructive criticism, should be established.

4.6 Conclusion

Investigation of the English definition of *krengjai* of Easterners, Westerners and Thais revealed that *krengjai* was often associated with the single word “consideration” or the phrase “to be considerate about someone”. Considering each nationality group, it was clear that there was no direct relationship with nationality to similar or different definitions on *krengjai*, as the findings suggested that it was subjective from one context to another over an individual’s experiences. Nevertheless, the Westerners, in particular when compared to the Easterners and Thais, tended to express negative attitudes towards this specific Thai cultural practice. For example, some Westerners uniquely related *krengjai* to an act of deceit, which is clearly an unfavorable trait. They believed a Thai, regardless of any particular context, lies in order to avoid confrontation or an uncomfortable situation.

In addition, Western participants gave the most (six) non-overlapped definitions of *krengjai*, which were redundant (not found) in those given by either the Eastern or the Thai participants. When considering the essence of the reported English meanings of *krengjai*, I found that *krengjai* was reported in association with other core cultural values of Thais (e.g., saving face, showing respect or deference to authority). Meanwhile, several factors (e.g., cultural orientation, title and length of residence) were incorporated to define the concept, although they are not explicitly investigated in this current study.

In sum, the reported English meanings of *krengjai* reaffirmed that *krengjai* is likely a pattern of behavior. Reducing its meaning into a single word will simply deteriorate its essence. Moreover, all the reported English definitions with shared or isolated terminology indicated either a feeling or

action manifested in the form of verbal or non-verbal communication that is intended to preserve the harmony in the collectivist Thai society. Yet, its positive value is not always guaranteed.

The analysis of the definition of *krengjai* revealed the association of meaning with the binary (positive or negative) effects of *krengjai* on communication practices and professional relationships from all three groups of participants. For example, some Eastern participants defined *krengjai* as “being indirect” or “not saying the direct truth” for communication-related effects, while for professional relationship-related effects there were “fear of offending someone”, “respect others” and “avoiding confrontation, anger or conflict”. These given definitions were, interestingly, consistent with this study’s survey questions.

In order to understand more profoundly the binary effects of *krengjai*, I employed both quantitative and detailed qualitative analysis. Considering the effects of *krengjai* on communication, the quantitative analysis showed that most non-Thais perceived a negative effect for *krengjai* on communication, whereas they perceived a positive trait for *krengjai* on professional relationships (in contrast to this study’s hypothesis). The Thai participants agreed with most (3/4) of the negative effects of *krengjai* on communication and to all of the positive effects on professional relationships. The only affect on communication that the Thai participants disagreed with was “lying”, which is clearly a wrong act compared with the other three practices. Accordingly, Thai participants would be likely to be prone to disagree that *krengjai* causes lying regardless.

The qualitative analysis was further employed to gain more insight into both non-Thai and Thai participants’ responses. The analysis showed that the negative value of *krengjai* on communication practices, or the positive value of it on aspects of professional relationships, could be perceived otherwise. For example, some Thai participants believed that through “face-saving” *krengjai* leads to dishonest communication and thus a distant relationship.

Apart from discussing these given binary effects of *krengjai*, the participants of all groups yielded some new effects on communication and professional relationships, such as *krengjai causes* (i) *hesitation* and (ii) *politeness* and/or it *helps show* (iii) *humility*, (iv) *gratitude* and (v) *reduce tension*. The detailed qualitative analysis also revealed unexpected information that is likely to be beneficial to understanding *krengjai* as well as intercultural communication within a multicultural workplace. Surprisingly, both non-Thais and Thais noticed and reported that when displayed in the workplace, *krengjai* not only affected communication and/or professional relationships, but also other elements in the communication process, including the quality of the message and job performance.

While the responses to the binary effects of *krengjai* revealed that Westerners have a more negative impression towards such effects, the analysis of the relationship between the participants' nationality and perception reaffirmed this finding. The quantitative analysis essentially showed that the 10 nationalities clustered as Westerners had a higher percentage of "negative perception towards *krengjai*". Considering, however, the relationship between each nationality individually for its perception on *krengjai* employing Hofstede's theory, the data showed that not all nationalities clustered into the same group. For example, while most nationalities within the Eastern group were found to have a positive perception towards *krengjai*, the Vietnamese and Malaysian were reported to have a negative perception. However, the limiting caveat of the very small number of each nationality participating in this current study must be emphasized, and so these tentative results await confirmation from future studies with a larger dataset. Overall, various other factors of socio-cultural information, such variables as cultural orientation, social hierarchy or length of residence in Thailand, may also influence the perception towards *krengjai* of both Thai and non-Thai participants and awaits to be evaluated.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

This study aimed to further understand how *krengjai* is perceived in a multicultural workplace. The study examined how (i) *krengjai* was translated in English by participants, who in this study were employees from dissimilar nationality groups (surrogate cultures), (ii) how the participants perceived the effects of *krengjai* on communication and professional relationships and (iii) how nationality influenced their perception towards *krengjai*. This final chapter presents the conclusion of this study. The chapter begins by presenting a summary of the study. The practical implications are then put forward in compliance with the main findings and the previous discussion presented in the results (Chapter 4). In addition, possible limitations of the methodology and suggestions for further research are addressed. This chapter then concludes with an analysis of how a cultural value, and specifically *krengjai*, can help ease intercultural communication problems and so promote a better understanding between Thai and non-Thai employees in a multicultural university workplace.

5.1 Summary of the study

In order to investigate the perceptions towards *krengjai*, this study was designed as a mixed methods research using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The 242 participants were non-Thai and Thai employees from an international department at each of two Thai government universities. The three research questions were summarily addressed as follows:

1. How do Easterners, Westerners and Thais explain the concept of *krengjai* in English?
2. What are the impacts of *krengjai* on communication and professional relationships between Easterners, Westerners and Thais at work?

3. How do Thais and non-Thais perceive *krengjai* in the context of communication and professional relationships?

The results revealed that the term “consideration”, demonstrated in the form of behaviors or feelings, was the most frequently reported English definition from all three groups of participants, and so the hypothesis that the English interpretation of *krengjai* will vary among Westerners from Easterners and Thais was rejected. Thai and non-Thai participants shared five similar meanings (Figure 4.1), while completely different English meanings of *krengjai* came only from a group of Westerners and Thais who provided six and two different meanings, respectively. Interestingly, of these eight meanings, seven were not consistent with previous studies. These seven new meanings were “awareness of social hierarchy”, “worrying about...”, “sacrifice one’s own feelings”, “fearful heart”, “being deceitful”, “having good manners” and “being thoughtful”. However, when considering each of these English meanings of *krengjai* by direct morpheme-to-morpheme interpretation, each reported term was then not uncommon but rather intertwined with other fundamental characteristics of Thais. Interestingly, only Western participants perceived and so defined *krengjai* in a negative light. In sum, while a context is necessary to understand *krengjai*, some of the given definitions are comprehensibly defined and used regardless of any specific context. That is, the understanding is subjective and so the interpretation of *krengjai* can be experienced-based.

The second research question was framed to deal with the binary effects of *krengjai*. The results from the quantitative analysis showed that most participants from all three nationality groups agreed with a negative effect of *krengjai* on all communication practices, except for the statement “*krengjai* causes lying”, where only Thai participants disagreed. Meanwhile, with respect to the positive effect of *krengjai* on professional relationships, the participants of all three nationality groups agreed with nearly all the professional-related effects. However, the qualitative analysis revealed instead

that the quality of the binary effects was based on a context or scenario. That is, the value of *krengjai*-related professional relationship can be perceived negative in some circumstances.

The relationship between the participants' nationality group and their perception towards *krengjai* revealed a significant correlation and, therefore, supported the hypothesis. With respect to this third research question, the quantitative analysis revealed that a larger proportion of Western participants had a negative perception towards the binary effects of *krengjai*. Although their nationality significantly affected their perceptions, the Chi-square results were based on the data gathered from nationalities clustered as a group (Easterners, Westerners or Thais). Such clustering may create generalizations, and so the individual nationalities were then analyzed based in part on Hofstede's dimension of national culture.

The result showed mixed perceptual responses to the binary effects and, in addition, various cultural factors constructing an individual participant's identity (e.g., cultural orientation, country of origin or occupational status) were found to influence the participant's perception towards the binary effects of *krengjai*. It should, therefore, be concluded that the assumption of similarity/difference based on a generalization of nationality or national culture, especially of Hofstede's, can in this specific context deteriorate the quality of communication and so the relationship in which *krengjai* is displayed.

5.2 Practical implications for multicultural workplaces

The results reported in this study suggest a number of practical implications for Thai and non-Thai employees in a multicultural workplace. Many interculturalists (e.g., Samovar et al., 2006; Triandis, 1998) have stated that interactions between very different cultures can have a greater level of conflict. This study accordingly examined *krengjai*, a Thai cultural value, with ample evidence that has suggested it is one of the cultural practices that can be

difficult to understand in a non-Thai context, especially in terms of its influence on communication and professional relationships. Failure to understand such effects is likely to promote misunderstandings and conflicts in communication between people who do and don't practice *krengjai*. This study provided some practical suggestions for employees who already, or plan to, work in a Thai University whereby diversity or cultural differences are confronted on a daily basis. Such implications include a common understanding of the English interpretation of *krengjai* and its culture (nationality)-dependent influence upon the employee's perception and model of *krengjai*-related communication and professional relationships.

5.2.1 English definition of *krengjai*

The results of this study implied that an understanding of the term *krengjai* is significant, since it is in part related to not only the cultural values of *krengjai* but also to its binary impacts on communication and professional relationships at work. Furthermore, it can be argued that Thai and non-Thai employees or staff need to be exposed to not only the common but also the (randomly) subjective English definitions of *krengjai*. Although any given unusual definition may be incomprehensible in some specific contexts, the study showed that in part it reflected the subjective perception of an individual towards *krengjai* and culture. Therefore, the value of the response may be assumed in daily interactions, subject to the caution of generalization. To prevent conflicts caused by misconceptualizing the term *krengjai* and its values, it should be incorporated into manuals for employees and/or new-hire orientation training, whereby an individual employee can become aware of and address her/his perception towards the concept of *krengjai*. Therefore, relatively problematic issues can be raised and ultimately clarified.

5.2.2 Influence of nationality on the employee's perception of *krengjai*

According to Fieg (1989) and Klausner (1993), *krengjai* is used to ensure interpersonal relationships within Thais and affects their communication style. Accordingly, this can lead to problems when Thais interact with non-Thais, especially an individual from a Western culture. The results of this study showed that the impacts of *krengjai* on professionals supports its primary value of maintaining social harmony, where the response to the impacts on communication affirmed Fieg's and Klausner's claims. To minimize, or where possible to prevent, conflicts between Thai and non-Thai university staff in the workplace, an involved unit (most likely the human resources unit) should provide appropriate cultural training for both Thai and non-Thai employees in order to help them become aware of the cultural differences, particularly those related to *krengjai*. According to Holmes and Tangtongtavy (1995), scenarios help provide a more complete conceptual picture of *krengjai*. Thus, real-life scenarios should be created during training sessions so as to help the participants comprehend how *krengjai* can affect their communication practices as well as professional relationships within their multicultural workplace.

5.2.3 The binary effect: communication practice and professional relationships

The results of this study showed that nationality had a significant effect on the perception towards different cultural values, in this case *krengjai*. Therefore, in cultural training, the core values of each culture should be comparatively pointed out in order to ease issues or problems that otherwise would occur during day-to-day interactions within the workplace. In addition, ongoing training sessions should be maintained over prolonged sessions, since an individual's behavior cannot be simply changed by one training session (Koonce, 2001). Although the results of this study, based on

quantitative analysis, supported Hofstede's and Gudykunst's theories on cultural dimensions, there have recently been an increasing number of researches that argue against such theory. According to Tienprasertkij (2010), globalization and modern technology essentially make the theory obsolete, where each dimension (e.g., individualism vs. collectivism) of national cultures is no longer found on a contrast/similar measurement index but rather there are increasingly incorporated or shared cultural elements. While the quantitative analysis of the data of this study was consistent with Hofstede's theory, the qualitative analysis supported Tienprasertkij's statement. Therefore, in my opinion, any cultural training sessions should concentrate on these exceptional cultural elements. Then, the tangible exception of individual core cultural values may be raised or brainstormed during such cultural training session.

5.2.4 Model of *krengjai*-related communication

The qualitative analysis of *krengjai* not only broadens an individual's understanding of cultural and linguistic aspects of *krengjai*, but also yields valuable results (Chapter 4), which in my view are practical and become a key for effective communication in the workplace. As a result, a model of *krengjai*-related communication was developed and is summarized in Figure 5.1.

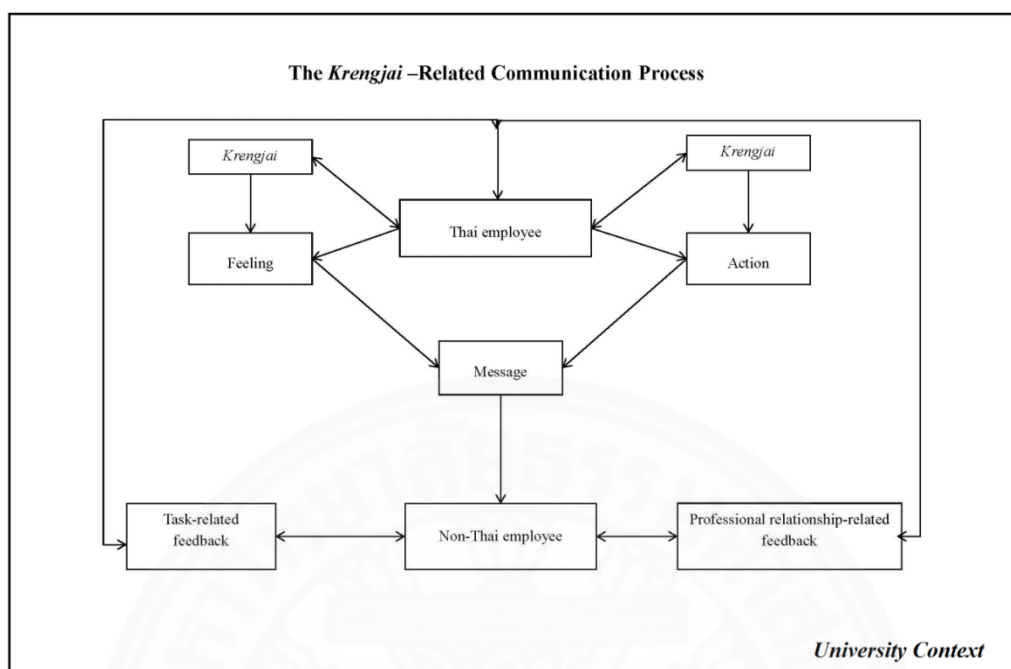


Figure 5.1 Model of *krenjai*-related communication process in an academic (university) context

The structure of the model can be understood by applying the simple “Shannon-Weaver model of communication” process (“Shannon & Weaver Model of Communication”, 2017), which was composed of the six elements of sender, encoder, channel, decoder, receiver and noise. However, in this study, the model was adjusted to help explain interpersonal communication in which *krenjai* is an influential factor. Briefly, a sender (Thai employee) sends a message that is interrupted with *krenjai* (noise) to a receiver (non-Thai employee). The noise (*krenjai*) is expressed in either the form of a feeling or an action. Upon receipt of the interrupted message the receiver then responds (feedback). In this workplace context the feedback response can be categorized into a task-related and/or a professional relationship-related feedback.

This model was essentially developed in the hope that it could be included in a manual for employee and/or new-hire orientation training.

Furthermore, it was intended and expected that the model (Figure 5.1) will help an interlocutor to have a clearer picture of how understanding *krengjai* is crucial to intercultural communication as well as professional relationships within a multicultural workplace.

5.3 Limitations of this study

The purpose of this study was to examine how *krengjai* as a specific cultural concept is perceived by Thai and non-Thai employees. The research questions and hypotheses were framed accordingly and the answers analyzed. Nonetheless, some limitations were revealed in this study and are discussed in the following section.

5.3.1 Limited sample size and context/scope.

The sample was confined to staff and faculty of two university workplaces and is, therefore, limited to certain socioeconomic groups of people. In addition, the number of non-Thai participants in this study was limited, and this was especially the case for the number of Eastern participants that was significantly small compared to the other two groups. Due to the small number of Easterners working at both University A and University B, the sample size justification and calculation resulted in a requirement of only eight participants to be representative of the population. With regards to the investigation of the binary effects of *krengjai*, the results were consistent with previous research (Sirimahawan, 2003) that people from a similar cultural background have a positive feedback on *krengjai*-affected communication or professional relationships. However, Eastern participants had a strongly negative attitude towards certain effects of *krengjai*. Therefore, the findings as well as the practical guidelines may not be generalized or applied in other contexts.

5.3.2 English interpretation of the definition of *krengjai*

The current study aimed to investigate how *krengjai* can be defined and perceived and to what extent in a multicultural academic (university) workplace in day-to-day interactions, and so without limit on the situation in which *krengjai* is displayed. The result yielded different aspects with respect to the English interpretation of *krengjai*, supporting an experience-based interpretation. However, the unspecific context leads to a scattered and extremely broad set of given definitions. Moreover, the findings revealed that the relationship between context (and other societal factors) and the use of *krengjai* was in part necessary to explain the term. More simply stated, the value of *krengjai* was explained more systematically and comprehensibly in a specific situation and not in general (Wyatt & Promkandorn, 2012).

5.3.3 Method of data collection

In an attempt to attain a deeper knowledge regarding the binary effects of *krengjai*, this research question employed a mixed method approach using quantitative and qualitative data collection. However, in practice such a mixed method can be tricky. In testing each participant's level of agreement on the effects of *krengjai* on communication and professional relationships, agreement with a negative and positive value, respectively, was asked. The analysis revealed useful pieces of information, where the qualitative analysis resulted in mixed responses to the binary effects, in contrast to this researcher's expectation. For example, a participant may agree with the negative value of *krengjai* to one particular communication practice but contradict her/himself by adding a positive value of that practice when s/he answered an open-ended question.

5.4 Suggestions for future research

In response to the aforementioned limitations that exist in this study (Section 5.3), this study proposed a number of suggestions. In addition, such suggestions also reflect some of the findings obtained from the investigation of perception towards *krengjai*.

5.4.1 Sample location and size

To cope with the limited sample size and scope, future studies should accordingly be conducted not only with larger sample sizes but also in comparison with other institutional contexts and not restricted to academia. In so doing, future studies could recruit a larger number of representatives of groups of non-Thai nationalities, especially of diverse Eastern nationalities, and so allow the results to be more realistically generalized.

5.4.2 Context-limited meaning of *krengjai*

In search for the different meanings of *krengjai*, the results showed that without a specific or given context(s), the English meanings of *krengjai* were too broad and even incomprehensible. Therefore, further studies might have to limit the context of communication from which the data needs to be specifically transferred, such as a meeting, a classroom or an office.

5.4.3 Effect of nationality

The current study aimed to investigate the relationship between the participants' nationality and perception towards *krengjai*. Even though the result revealed a significant relationship between the two variables, it should be noted that the assumption of national cultural similarity/difference cannot be generalized. Firstly, the analysis based on Hofstede's cultural dimension revealed a contradiction between national culture and perception towards *krengjai*. Secondly, it was found that other variables, such as age, cultural orientation, length of residence and work and social rank or job position,

influenced the individual perception. Thirdly, the clustering of different non-Thai nationalities in the “Westerner” and “Easterner” groups may include diverse and contradictory cultures within the same group. Thus, further research should take these variables into account or test these relationships, including how each variable affects or plays a role in the perception of participants (employees).

5.5 Conclusion

Even though this research could not establish whether “consideration (*kwamkrengjai*) is still a treasure of noblemen”, the findings reaffirmed the influential existence of its value. Besides globalization, the promotion of the regional integration of ASEAN has encouraged the studies of the impact and challenge of *krengjai* in relevant areas. While focusing on intercultural communication, this study investigated the purported core Thai value of *krengjai* and its influences in a workplace where it was assumed that there was an increasing interaction among people of Western, East Asian and Southeast Asian cultures. Through empirical evidence, this study revealed that the complicated characteristics of *krengjai* influences communication and professional relationships within a university-based multicultural workplace.

In addition to the common English definitions that have been widely used and accepted, this study revealed some subjective or experience-based definitions of *krengjai*. Although the English interpretation of *krengjai* revealed differences between the Westerner and Thai nationality groups, they essentially reflected the perception of individual user or the non-Thai learner of *krengjai* and, therefore, cannot be neglected, especially in social interactions. The similar definitions given by different nationality groups affirmed that culture is a mutual learning process that is shared and transmitted. Therefore, effective cross-communication within the workplace could engage mutually accepted terms and so related feelings and acts of *krengjai*. Lastly, the given definitions by Thais, a trait of a cultivated person or

not, reflect the primary value that *krengjai* is a cultural practice of manner and enthusiasm.

As shown in this study, the given value of *krengjai* on communication and professional relationships were challenged in this multicultural university setting. In contrast to previous studies, staff and faculty members indicated mixed responses to these binary effects, where the quality of response varied from context to context and was based on various and sometimes unclarified factors. However, previous findings were not completely negated. While nationality was not the only factor influencing how participants perceived the binary effects of *krengjai*, cultural similarities and differences (Gudykunst and Nishida, 1994) helped to explain in part their response to the definition of *krengjai* and its effects, including the negative as well as the positive values on communication and professional relationships.

Based on this research, I believe recognizing national culture or recurring patterns of cultural differences/similarities is still necessary to help both in a comprehensive understanding of *krengjai* and also to predict to a certain extent the likely response, in a given specific context, an individual has towards *krengjai*. According to Goman (2011), generalizations help predict differences and so to deal with communication problems influenced by such differences. However, given the complicated nature of *krengjai*, any given individual should not adhere to certain cultural assumptions, since they may not cause an understanding but rather cause stereotyping and/or conflicts. This study developed a *krengjai*-related communication process model (Figure 5.1) that can be seen as an effective guideline to intercultural communication, where *krengjai* is considered as an influential impact or barrier. There is no answer of whom consideration (*kwamkrengjai*) is considered a favourable trait, but you should take into consideration that everybody has heart (*jai*), even those from dissimilar cultures.

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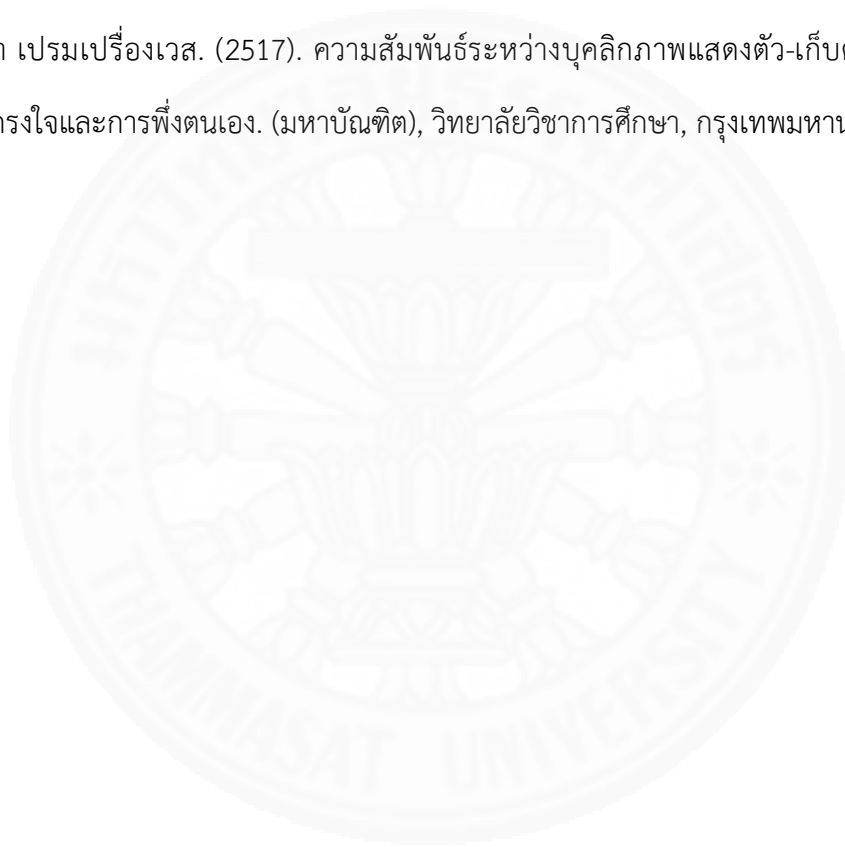
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

ENGLISH DEFINITIONS OF *KRENGJAI*

Appendix A presents all the English definitions of *krengjai* retrieved from Thai and non-Thai participants, so as to illustrate the linguistic variety that defines *krengjai*. However, as discussed above, these meanings are mainly emotional and behavior-based. Meanwhile, the meanings indicated the suppression of one's feeling or action as to maintain interpersonal relationship and therefore social harmony. The overall picture of meanings is displayed below in Table A1.

Table A1

Summary of krengjai meanings by nationality groups

English definitions of <i>krengjai</i>	Percentage
<i>Easterners (n = 8)</i>	
1. Consideration, feeling considerate or having considerate manner	37.5%
2. Fear of offending someone	25%
3. Being indirect or not saying direct truth	25%
4. Feeling (e.g. fear or worried) to ask for or accept an offer from someone	25%
5. Being polite	25%
6. Being afraid to cause trouble	12.5%
7. Showing humility	12.5%
8. Avoiding confrontation, anger or conflict	12.5%
9. Being courteous	12.5%
10. Reluctance to impose upon a particular person in Thai society	12.5%
11. Not wanting to cause any inconvenience	12.5%
12. Respect for others	12.5%
13. Others*	0%
<i>Westerners (n = 33)</i>	

1. Consideration or being/feeling considerate for other people	21.2%
2. Awareness of social hierarchy	21.2%
3. Being aware of or concerned for another person's feeling	18.2%
4. Having respect or being respectful	15.2%
5. Deference	12.1%
6. Reluctance or not wanting to impose upon	12.1%
7. To repress feeling or acting or feelings that confine one's behavior	12.1%
8. Avoiding bad feeling, conflict and/or confrontation	9.1%
9. Worrying about doing or not doing something	9.1%
10. Not wanting to disturb someone and/or cause problems	9.1%
11. Being afraid to ask or talk	6.1%
12. Feeling (e.g., fear or worried) to cause inconvenience/trouble	6.1%
13. Sacrifice one's own feelings	6.1%
14. Being indirect	6.1%
15. Being deceitful	6.1%
16. Saving face of others	3.03%
17. Fearful heart	3.03%
18. Humility	3.03%
19. Others*	15.2%
<hr/> <i>Thais (n = 201)</i>	
1. Consideration	30.4%
2. Not wanting to bother someone physically or emotionally	12.94%
3. To repress feeling or acting or feelings that confine one's behavior	8.96%
4. Having respect or looking up with great respect for elders or other people	7.46%
5. Feelings (e.g. fear or worried) to impose upon someone or to accept things	6.47%
6. Showing empathy/sympathy or being concerned about others' feelings	5.97%
7. Being thoughtful	5.97%

8. Being afraid or not daring to truly behave or express feelings	4.98%
9. Feeling hesitant to ask for or accept help from others	4.98%
10. Not wanting to cause any trouble or inconvenience	4.48%
11. Being courteous	3.48%
13. Having good manners	3.48%
13. Being polite and/or modest	3.48%
14. Being indirect	2.99%
15. Fear of offending someone	1.99%
16. Saving face of others	1.49%
17. Others	11.44%

*Note. “Other” refers to a group of English meanings of *krengjai* which are isolated or meaningless, especially when back-translated into Thai

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THAI PARTICIPANTS

ฉบับภาษาไทย

แบบสอบถาม

ประกอบวิทยานิพนธ์

เรื่อง

“การรับรู้คุณลักษณะของความเกรงใจในที่ทำงานที่มีความหลากหลายทางด้าน
วัฒนธรรม”

คำชี้แจง: ขอความกรุณาตอบแบบสอบถามนี้ตามความเป็นจริงโดยทำเครื่องหมายX หรือ
เติมข้อความลงในช่องว่างที่เตรียมไว้ให้ซึ่งข้อมูลที่ได้รับจะปกปิดเป็นความลับแต่จะนำมา
วิเคราะห์เชิงวิชาการเพื่อนำผลการวิจัยที่ได้มาใช้เป็นแนวทางเพื่อขจัดอุปสรรคในการสื่อสาร
ข้ามวัฒนธรรมต่อไป

ส่วนที่ 1: ข้อมูลทั่วไปของผู้ตอบแบบสอบถาม

1. เพศ

☐ ชาย☐ หญิง

2. อายุ.....ปี

3. การศึกษาสูงสุด

☐ ปริญญาตรี☐ ปริญญาโท☐ ปริญญาเอก☐ อื่นๆ

4. สัญชาติ..... เชื้อชาติ.....

5. สถานที่เกิดและเติบโต (**เช่นเกิดและเติบโตในประเทศไทยหรือเกิดประเทศไทย เติบโตในสหรัฐอเมริกา) (*สำคัญได้โปรดระบุ)

.....

6. ตำแหน่งงานที่ทำอยู่ในปัจจุบัน (*สำคัญได้โปรดระบุ).....

7. ระยะเวลาที่ทำงานอยู่ในบริษัทต่างชาติหรือบริษัทที่มีความหลากหลายทางเชื้อชาติ

.....ปี.....เดือน

ส่วนที่ 2: การให้คำนิยามหรือความหมายของคำว่า“เกรงใจ”เป็นภาษาอังกฤษ

1. หากคุณต้องอธิบายความหมายของคำว่าเกรงใจให้เพื่อนร่วมงานชาวต่างชาติเข้าใจ คุณจะแปลคำว่า“เกรงใจ”เป็น “ภาษาอังกฤษ”ว่าอย่างไร (*สำคัญโปรดตอบ)

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ส่วนที่ 3: ผลกระทบของ“ความเกรงใจ”ต่อ“การสื่อสาร”ในที่ทำงาน

****การสื่อสารในที่นี้หมายถึงการพูดคุยกับเพื่อนร่วมงานระหว่างการทำงานการมอบหมายงานหรือการอธิบายแลกเปลี่ยนความคิดเห็นในที่ประชุม**

1. ความเกรงใจมีผลกระทบแง่ลบต่อการสื่อสารกับเพื่อนร่วมงานชาวต่างชาติของคุณ

- () เห็นด้วยอย่างยิ่ง
- () เห็นด้วย
- () ไม่แน่ใจ
- () ไม่เห็นด้วย
- () ไม่เห็นด้วยอย่างยิ่ง

2. ผลกระทบของความเกรงใจต่อการสื่อสารลักษณะต่างๆกับเพื่อนร่วมงานชาวต่างชาติ
ของคุณ

การสื่อสาร	ระดับความคิดเห็น				
	มากที่สุด	มาก	ไม่แน่ใจ	น้อย	น้อยที่สุด
เกรงใจทำให้คุณเงียบไม่พูด					
เกรงใจทำให้คุณพูดอ้อมค้อม					
เกรงใจทำให้คุณพูดน้อยกว่าที่ควรพูด					
เกรงใจทำให้คุณพูดไม่จริงหรือโกหก					

3. นอกเหนือจากผลกระทบของความเกรงใจที่มีต่อการสื่อสารลักษณะต่างดังปรากฏในข้อ 2
คุณคิดว่าความเกรงใจส่งผลต่อการสื่อสารหรือพูดคุย ที่ดีและไม่ดี ระหว่างคุณกับเพื่อน
ร่วมงานชาวต่างชาติอย่างไรอีกบ้าง

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ส่วนที่ 4: ผลกระทบของ“ความเกรงใจ”ที่มีต่อ“ความสัมพันธ์”ในที่ทำงาน

1. ความเกรงใจมีผลกระทบแง่ลบต่อความสัมพันธ์ของคุณกับเพื่อนร่วมงานชาวต่างชาติ

- () เห็นด้วยอย่างยิ่ง
- () เห็นด้วย
- () ไม่แน่ใจ
- () ไม่เห็นด้วย
- () ไม่เห็นด้วยอย่างยิ่ง

2. คุณมีความคิดเห็นต่อบทบาทของเกรงใจในการช่วยรักษาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างเพื่อน

ร่วมงานชาวต่างชาติในหัวข้อดังต่อไปนี้หรือไม่

สถานการณ์	ระดับความคิดเห็น				
	มากที่สุด	มาก	ไม่ แน่ใจ	น้อย	น้อยที่สุด
เกรงใจ “ช่วยรักษาหน้าตาของคุณ” ต่อเพื่อนร่วมงานชาวต่างชาติ					
เกรงใจเป็น” การแสดงความเคารพ” ต่อเพื่อนร่วมงานชาวต่างชาติ					
เกรงใจช่วย”ลดความขัดแย้ง”ของ คุณกับเพื่อนร่วมงานชาวต่างชาติ					
เกรงใจช่วย”รักษาความรู้สึก”ของคุณ กับเพื่อนร่วมงานชาวต่างชาติ.					
เกรงใจช่วยให้คุณ”เป็นที่ยอมรับ”ใน กลุ่มเพื่อนร่วมงานชาวต่างชาติ					

3. นอกเหนือจากผลกระทบของความเกรงใจที่มีต่อความสัมพันธ์ในสถานการณ์ต่างๆดัง

ปรากฏในข้อ 2 คุณคิดว่าความเกรงใจส่งผลต่อการความสัมพันธ์ที่ดีและไม่ดีระหว่างคุณ
กับผู้ร่วมงานชาวต่างชาติอย่างไรอีกบ้าง

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.....

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ส่วนที่ 5: ข้อคิดเห็นและข้อเสนอแนะอื่นๆ

1. โปรดยกตัวอย่างสถานการณ์ต่างๆที่คุณมักจะแสดงความเกรงใจในที่ทำงาน

.....

.....

2. คุณมีข้อเสนอแนะหรือต้องการให้ชาวต่างชาติรับรู้เกี่ยวกับความเกรงใจที่สัมพันธ์กับการสื่อสารของชาวไทยในที่ทำงานอย่างไรหรือคุณอยากแก้ปัญหาที่เกิดขึ้นจากความเกรงใจระหว่างคุณและเพื่อนร่วมงานชาวต่างชาติอย่างไร

.....

.....

****ขอขอบพระคุณที่ให้ความร่วมมือในการตอบแบบสอบถามครั้งนี้****

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR NON-THAI PARTICIPANTS

English version

Questionnaire

Research title: Perception towards *kreng jai*: A Study on Thai and Non-Thai Employees in a Multicultural Workplace (Thai Universities)

Instruction: Please indicate your answer to each of the following questions by putting an X mark or writing down an answer. All answers will remain confidential and will be used only for scholarly purposes. The findings are to be used to further minimize intercultural communication barriers and to improve intercultural communication.

Section I: Demographic Data

1. Gender: Male Female.....
2. Age: less than 20..... 20- 25..... 26- 30..... 31-35..... 36- 40..... more than 40.....
3. **Nationality:..... **Race.....(please indicate)
4. **Cultural Orientation (**born and raised in that particular culture**)
 _____(please indicate)
5. Highest educational background: B.A.____ M.A.____ Ph.D.____ Others
 (Please specify)_____
6. **Job title/position: (please indicate)

7. Duration of work with Thais _____ years _____ months
8. Duration of residence in Thailand _____ years _____ months

*Please answer questions with ***

Section II: English Definition of *Kreng jai*

1. To your understanding, what does *kreng jai* mean in English? (**Please answer this question**)

.....

.....

Section III: Effects of *Kreng jai* on 'Communication' within Workplace

1. *Kreng jai* has negative effects on your '**communication**' with Thai colleague(s)

- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

2. Effects of *Kreng jai* on '**different communication behaviors**' of Thais

Communication Behaviors	Level of Agreement				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<i>Kreng jai</i> causes silence					
<i>Kreng jai</i> causes indirectness					
<i>Kreng jai</i> causes understatement					
<i>Kreng jai</i> causes lying					

3. Apart from communication behaviors given in No. 2, please provide **effects of *Kreng jai* on other communication behaviors**, both positive and negative that you have experienced while communicating with Thais at work.
-
-

Section IV: Effects of *Kreng jai* on Relationship within Workplace

1. *Kreng jai* has negative effects on your ‘**relationship**’ with Thai colleague(s)

- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

2. Effects of *Kreng jai* on different ‘**relationship**’ with Thais at work in your opinion

Situation	Level of Agreement				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<i>Kreng jai</i> helps Thais save face of others					
<i>Kreng jai</i> helps Thais show respect to others					
<i>Kreng jai</i> helps Thais helps prevent conflict with others					
<i>Kreng jai</i> helps Thais not to violate feelings or emotions of others.					
<i>Kreng jai</i> help Thais to be accepted by others					

3. Apart from situations given in No. 2, please provide '**other effects of *Kreng jai* on your professional relationship with Thais**', both positive and negative, you have experienced at work.

.....

.....

Section V: Comments and Suggestions

1. Please give some situations that you mostly experience the display of "*kreng jai*" in workplace.

.....

.....

2. Please provide solutions or suggestions to the problems related to "*kreng jai*" behaviorsthat you do not want Thai to act or behave in workplace.

.....

.....

****Thank you for your co-operation in completing this questionnaire****

APPENDIX D

GUIDED INTERVIEW FOR THAI AND NON-THAI PARTICIPANTS

ภาษาไทย

1. โปรดอธิบายเพิ่มเติมความหมายคำว่า “เกรงใจ” ในภาษาอังกฤษ
2. โปรดยกตัวอย่างเหตุการณ์ผลกระทบของความเกรงใจด้านลบที่มีต่อ “การสื่อสาร” ในที่ทำงาน ไม่ว่าคุณเห็นด้วยหรือไม่เห็นด้วยต่อผลกระทบดังกล่าว
3. โปรดยกตัวอย่างเหตุการณ์ผลกระทบของความเกรงใจด้านลบที่มีต่อ “ความสัมพันธ์ต่อเพื่อนร่วมงาน” ไม่ว่าคุณเห็นด้วยหรือไม่เห็นด้วยต่อผลกระทบดังกล่าว
4. โปรดเสนอแนะสิ่งที่ชาวไทยหรือชาวต่างชาติควรคำนึงเรื่องความเกรงใจในที่ทำงาน

English;

1. Please elaborate further on the definition of *krengjai*.
2. Disagree/agree with the negative effects of *krengjai* on communication; please provide an example of a situation you have experienced.
3. Disagree/agree with the negative effects of *krengjai* on professional relationship; please provide an example of a situation you have experienced.
4. Please comment or suggest what Thai/Non-Thai people should be aware of with respect to the display of *krengjai* in the workplace.

APPENDIX E

CONSENT FORM FOR THAI INTERVIEWEES

หนังสือแสดงเจตนายินยอมเข้าร่วมการสัมภาษณ์ในงานวิจัย

งานวิจัยเรื่องการรับรู้ค่านิยม “ความเกรงใจ” ในที่ทำงานที่มีความหลากหลายด้านวัฒนธรรม
วันที่ให้คำยินยอมวันที่.....เดือน.....พ.ศ.....

ก่อนที่จะลงนามในใบยินยอมให้ทำการวิจัยนี้ข้าพเจ้าได้รับการอธิบายจากผู้วิจัยถึง
วัตถุประสงค์ของการวิจัยวิธีการวิจัยรวมทั้งประโยชน์ที่จะเกิดขึ้นจากการวิจัยโดยละเอียด
และมีความเข้าใจดีแล้วซึ่งผู้วิจัยได้ตอบคำถามต่างๆที่ข้าพเจ้าสงสัยด้วยความเต็มใจไม่ปิดบัง
ซ่อนเร้นจนข้าพเจ้าพอใจและเข้าร่วมโครงการวิจัยนี้โดยสมัครใจอีกทั้งข้าพเจ้ามีสิทธิ์ที่จะ
บอกเลิกการเข้าร่วมโครงการวิจัยนี้เมื่อใดก็ได้

ข้าพเจ้ายินยอมให้ผู้วิจัยบันทึกบทสนทนาในการสัมภาษณ์เพื่อเป็นประโยชน์ต่อ
งานวิจัยในภายหลังทั้งนี้ผู้วิจัยรับรองว่าจะเก็บข้อมูลเฉพาะเกี่ยวกับตัวข้าพเจ้าเป็นความลับ
จะเปิดเผยได้เฉพาะในรูปที่เป็นสรุปผลการวิจัยการเปิดเผยข้อมูลของตัวข้าพเจ้าต่อหน่วยงาน
ต่างๆที่เกี่ยวข้องกระทำได้ด้วยเหตุผลทางวิชาการเท่านั้น

ข้าพเจ้าได้อ่านข้อความข้างต้นแล้วและมีความเข้าใจดีทุกประการและได้ลงนามใน
ใบยินยอมนี้ด้วยความเต็มใจ

ในกรณีที่ข้าพเจ้าไม่สามารถอ่านหนังสือได้ผู้วิจัยได้อ่านข้อความในใบยินยอมนี้ให้
ข้าพเจ้าฟังจนเข้าใจดีแล้วข้าพเจ้าจึงลงนามในใบยินยอมนี้ด้วยความเต็มใจ

ผู้วิจัยสามารถติดต่อข้าพเจ้าที่หมายเลขโทรศัพท์..... หรือที่อีเมล.....

ลงนาม.....ผู้ยินยอม

(.....)

ลงนาม.....พยาน

(.....)

ลงนาม.....ผู้วิจัย

APPENDIX F

CONSENT FORM FOR NON-THAI INTERVIEWEES

**Research Title: INTERCULTURAL ANALYSIS ON PERCEPTIONS
OF KRENGJAI AMONG THAI AND NON-THAI EMPLOYEES IN
ACADEMIC WORKPLACES**

Sign date: Date.....Month.....Year.....

Before I sign this consent form, I clearly understand the purposes of the study and its methodology as well as its benefits as explained by the researcher. Also, I have opportunity to ask questions concerning the study and receive clear explanation from the researcher. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from this research at any time.

During the interview, I allow the researcher to record the conversation. I agree to the use of anonymized quotes in publications and my data can be revealed to other organizations for academic purposes only.

The researcher can contact me at telephone
number.....or at e-mail

Above all, I agree to participate in the above study.

Signature of participant

(.....)

Signature of witness

(.....)

Signature of researcher

(.....)

APPENDIX G

EXPLANATORY LETTER

Dear Madam/Sir,

You are asked to participate in a research study of which the results will be contributed to a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in English Language Studies, Thammasat University.

The study aims to investigate the perception towards *kreng jai* value in intercultural interactions among Thais and non-Thais. The result of this study is expected to lessen misunderstandings and conflicts caused by different cultural values, herein *kreng jai* held in multicultural workplaces. If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to answer the questionnaire and (if any) an in-depth interview

Your participation in this research study would contribute to the success of this research study since representative sample of persons is essentially required as per topic to investigate individual perception towards *kreng jai*.

The result of this research study will be merely used for academic purpose. Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of participants that the findings obtained will not be identified individually. Please feel free to fully express your opinions on the matter.

Please be noted that you can stop participating in the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide to withdraw from this research study, all data received from the questionnaire or interview will be accordingly deleted.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the research study, please feel free to contact at katesara.b@gmail.com or telephone. (+66)89-670-3064

Sincerely Yours,

Ms. Katesara Boonprasert

BIOGRAPHY

Name	Miss Katesara Boonprasert
Date of Birth	July 15, 1985
Educational Attainment	2003–2008: Bachelor of Arts in Social Science, Concentration on International Studies with a German minor Mahidol University International College (MUIC)
Professional Experience	May 2014–Present: Project Assistant and Social Worker, International Organization for Migration (IOM) UN Agency November–May 2014: Academic Officer, Dusit Thani College September 2010–August 2012: Academic Affairs Officer, Chula Global Network (CGN), Chulalongkorn University November 2008–July 2009: Teacher, Meta International School