

An introduction to this special issue on types of conflict

In this special issue of the *International Journal of Conflict Management*, we focus on important research questions that deal with different types of conflict. In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in studying the differences between two types of conflict: task and relationship conflict. Task conflict focuses more on the work that needs to be performed. Relationship conflict focuses more on interpersonal interactions. That stream of research has revealed important insights about how these two types of conflict function similarly and differently.

However, in this special issue we build on that stream of research and go beyond these two types of conflict to study other types of conflict and to study them in different settings as well. This special issue includes six articles that focus on the predictors, outcomes, moderators and mediators of different types of conflict. These studies examine many different conflict types, including relationship and task conflicts. We add to this literature by publishing studies on other types of conflict such as cognitive versus affective conflict, and even more refined types of conflict such as cognitive task conflict, emotional relationship conflict, intragroup, interorganizational and top management team conflict.

In addition, most of the research on types of conflict has been generated in Western countries and cultures. The studies in this special issue go beyond those settings to study types of conflict in other countries including China, India and Pakistan. By adding these settings to the literature on types of conflict, we not only facilitate the generalization of our knowledge, but also open the door to insights that can be gleaned from scholars in other cultures and settings. Listed below are brief summaries of each of the studies included in this special issue.

The study by Yousaf and Shaikut examined the impact of job burnout as a mediator of the relationship between relationship conflict and performance and turnover. Survey data from 306 telecom engineers in Pakistan were examined. Based on a resource depletion approach from the lens of Conservation of Resources Theory, the study found that relationship conflict reduced task performance, contextual performance and turnover intentions. However, three dimensions of job burnout (exhaustion, cynicism and interpersonal strain at work) mediated these relationships.

The study by Zhang and Chen examined types of conflict that arise during a reality TV show in China that deals with the mediation of conflicts. Many of these conflicts dealt with interpersonal conflicts of the type that might be brought before a small claims court. Content analysis of 166 episodes of this show was performed to create the data that were examined. It was expected that given the Chinese cultural context, successful mediation of the disputes studied would result from social pressure from the mediator and observer cohort to comply with the Chinese social norms of harmony and compliance with legal authority. However, it was more likely that the successful mediation resulted from disputant use of “secret talking” (caucuses) and willingness to compromise their rights. The role of the mediator in achieving resolution of the conflict was comparatively limited.

The study by Hjerto and Kuuvas examined intragroup conflict in teams. Survey data were obtained from 313 employees in 61 teams at 6 different companies in Norway using measures of cognitive task conflict, emotional task conflict and emotional relationship conflict. The results showed that cognitive task conflict reduced team performance, emotional relationship conflict reduced team job satisfaction and emotional task conflict increased team performance. Smaller teams were more likely to have higher team job



satisfaction when there was more cognitive task conflict. However, hedonic valence mediated the relationships between cognitive task conflict and team job satisfaction.

The study by Chen and Huang examined the role of leadership in moderating the relationship between task and relationship conflict and creativity in interorganizational teams. Data from 276 team members and their managers in 54 teams in China were analyzed. The study tested the general premise that when interorganizational teams are working together, shared leadership across the organizations should improve the functioning of the teams. However, the data showed that task conflict had an inverted U-shaped (curvilinear) relationship with team creativity. Stronger perceptions of shared leadership reduced the negative relationship between relationship conflict and team creativity. Yet, the inverted U-shaped relationship between task conflict and team creativity was stronger. The results indicated that shared leadership across interorganizational teams may not always be the most effective way to increase creativity.

The study by Tao-Sheng, Wen-Hai, Li-Chi and Wen-Chang examined conflicts with customers at restaurants based on service failure. The study examined the relationships between three types of organizational justice (distributive, procedural and interactional), psychological contract violation and intentions to say negative things to others about the restaurant and repurchase intentions. Data from 400 restaurant customers in the greater Taipei area were examined. Psychological contract violation did not have a significant effect on intentions to say negative things to others, but did reduce the likelihood of repurchase intentions. However, higher levels of distributive and procedural justice reduced the likelihood that negative things would be said to others.

The study by Praasad and Junni examined the relationships between top management team conflict, environmental uncertainty and firm innovativeness. Longitudinal survey data from 171 members of top management teams in India were examined. Upper Echelons Theory was used as the basis to predict that there would be different effects from affective and cognitive conflict on firm innovativeness. The results indicated that affective conflict had a negative effect on firm innovativeness. However, cognitive conflict had a curvilinear inverted-U relationship with firm innovativeness. This means that at high or low levels of cognitive conflict, innovativeness was lower, but at moderate levels of cognitive conflict, innovativeness was higher. However, environmental uncertainty increased the effects of both affective and cognitive conflict on innovativeness.

In summary, these studies show that there is much more to research on types of conflict than the study of task versus relationship conflict. Both task and relationship conflict can be broken down into more refined categories such as cognitive task conflict, emotional task conflict and so forth. There are also many other types of conflict such as cognitive and emotional conflict that need to be studied. In addition, conflict types based on the context or setting, e.g. restaurant customers, and top management team members also need to be studied. Finally, these studies illustrate that important insights about types of conflict can be gleaned from scholarship that originates outside of Western countries and cultures.

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