

Method

This research paper is a conceptual review in which the literature review section follows the guidelines for an integrative literature review (Torraco, 2005). This conceptual review follows the related concepts for team conflict and team cognition/learning, then advances knowledge by introducing a new team conflict construct, *cognition conflict*, to the team conflict literature. This paper is conceptual, as opposed to theoretical, in the sense that the literature review focuses on the previously identified constructs rather than on specific theories (Rocco & Plakhotnik, 2009).

This conceptual review focuses on two primary fields of study, *conflict in teams* and *small groups*, and team mental models (TMM). I searched within the publication *Small Group Research* for the studies in this review that concentrated on conflict in teams and small groups. *Small Group Research* is a peer-reviewed journal that presents “research, theoretical advancements, and empirically supported applications with respect to all types of small groups” (*Small Group Research*), which provides a knowledge base that fits well with this conceptual review. Studies were first selected from the *Small Group Research* publication database with the search terms *team AND conflict* in the Abstract. This first search resulted in 16 articles. After reviewing the abstract for each of these 16 articles, a total of 12 articles were selected for this conceptual review. Exclusions for the four articles included articles relating to *school district reforms* and *sport teams*, since the focus of this review is on teams in the work place. Additional articles were collected from those that were listed in the bibliographical section of the 12 articles I found in the first search. These additional articles were selected by the researcher if they added additional information to the overall research project. At the time of this writing I had found a total of 19 additional articles that related to conflict in teams and small groups. In total I used 31

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One way to think about this is that active voice shows an entity and its action, as in "I rode the bus." Passive voice shows an entity that an action occurred to, as in "The bus was ridden by me."

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journal articles related to conflict in teams and small groups for this conceptual review. Table 1 shows a summary of these 31 articles. This table includes author(s), the types of conflict and theory addressed in each article, and the significant findings relating to conflict in team and small group settings.

Studies in this conceptual review concentrating on team cognition come from peer reviewed articles that relate to team mental models (TMM) and shared mental models (SMM). These articles were selected from the national database ERIC-EBSCOhost. Articles were selected from the timeframe between January 1, 1991, and April 4, 2012. Since the team cognition constructs TMM and SMM are relatively new, I believed that most of the research on TMM and SMM could be compiled by beginning the search on January 1, 1991. The search terms used for this inquiry were team mental models in abstract, and shared mental models in abstract, resulting in a total of 38 articles. Of these 38 articles, 25 were selected for this integrative literature review; however, 12 articles were not available at the time of this search. I believe these 25 articles provide adequate information on the constructs TMM and SMM, resulting in a total of 25 articles for the conceptual review for the construct TMM.

Limitations/Delimitations

Jameson (1999) identified two classifications of conflict: informal conflict and formal conflict. Informal conflict refers to conflict that occurs between co-workers, between managers and those managed, within or between groups, and within or between departments (Jameson, 1999). In contrast, formal conflict refers to conflict that relates more to legal issues such as alleged human rights violations (Jameson, 1999) or environmental regulatory policy issues. For purposes of this conceptual review the primary focus will be on informal conflict as opposed to formal conflict. Additionally, the focus will be limited to informal conflict as it applies to teams

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and the individuals who make up the team(s).

Teams have been classified in the literature in a number of differing ways. Cohen and Bailey (1997) recognized self-directed work teams, parallel learning teams, cross-functional teams, project teams, and executive teams. Virtual teams (Ebrahim, Ahmed, & Taha, 2009; Saunders, & Ahuja, 2006) have also received a lot of research attention due to recent developments in technology and the growing number of geographically dispersed teams resulting from globalization. Armor (2001) identified four types of project teams: tactical team, problem-solving team, creative team, and learning team. Hollenbeck, Beersma, and Schouten (2001) created a complete list and description of the various types of teams in the literature. This conceptual review does not generalize to any one type of team. I will present the team cognition conflict construct generally enough as to try to apply to a number of different types of teams.

Conclusion

Throughout this conceptual review one common theme occurred relating to the definitions of conflict. Team conflict was predominantly categorized as a multidimensional construct with the definitions provided by Jehn, and Chatman (2000) commonly agreed upon. Relationship conflict was commonly agreed to relate to disagreements at work, both personal and social. Task conflict commonly referred to disagreements about the task work that teams were performing. The third team conflict, process conflict, was commonly agreed to refer to task strategies, delegation of duties, and availability of resources (Jehn & Chatman, 2000). Any reference to cognitive conflict within teams was identified as being equivalent to relationship conflict or social conflict.

Research has shown that task conflict has a positive association with team performance, whereas relationship conflict and process conflict have negative associations with team

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performance. These findings **demonstrate** that as relationship and process conflict increase, destructive conflict grows. Alternatively, as task conflict grows, constructive conflict increases, at least up to a point. By incorporating cognition conflict, **it is proposed** that by reducing the level of cognition conflict among team members **an increase in constructive conflict could result.**

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Future research efforts should include each of the four team conflict constructs proposed in the current conceptual review as **a single multidimensional construct.** Utilizing this new multidimensional construct could better identify where and when conflict occurs in team and small group settings, allowing scholar-practitioners to manage conflict in a manner that maximizes overall team performance.

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