

A MODEL OF TEAM EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, CONFLICT, TASK COMPLEXITY AND DECISION MAKING

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ABSTRACT

This article considers how team Emotional Intelligence (EI) differentially influences the relationship between conflict and decision making performance in teams, depending on the complexity of the task being performed. For tasks higher in complexity, it is proposed the primary influence of team EI is moderating the relationship between task and relationship conflict in teams. For tasks lower in complexity, it is proposed the primary influence of team EI is on team conflict norms developed over time. Thus, team EI indirectly affects the relationship between conflict and decision making performance in this context. Implications for theory and practice are discussed.

Keywords: team emotional intelligence, team conflict, task complexity, decision making performance.

INTRODUCTION

Team based work structures are increasingly common in organizations (Allen & Hecht, 2004; Orsburn & Moran, 2000). Research evidence suggests teams produce better performance outcomes than individuals for organizations, particularly for problem-solving, decision making, and concept mastery tasks (e.g., Gigone & Hastie, 1997; Hill 1982; Vollrath, Sheppard, Hinsz & Davis, 1989). This performance advantage emerges from the synergies created through the reciprocal interdependence of team members (Allen & Hetcht, 2004). Yet there are considerable challenges to working effectively within teams and achieving optimal performance. According to De Dreu and Weingart (2003), a major challenge for teams is resolving conflict—a process produced by tension between team members because of real or perceived differences (De Dreu, Harinck, & Van Vianen, 1999).

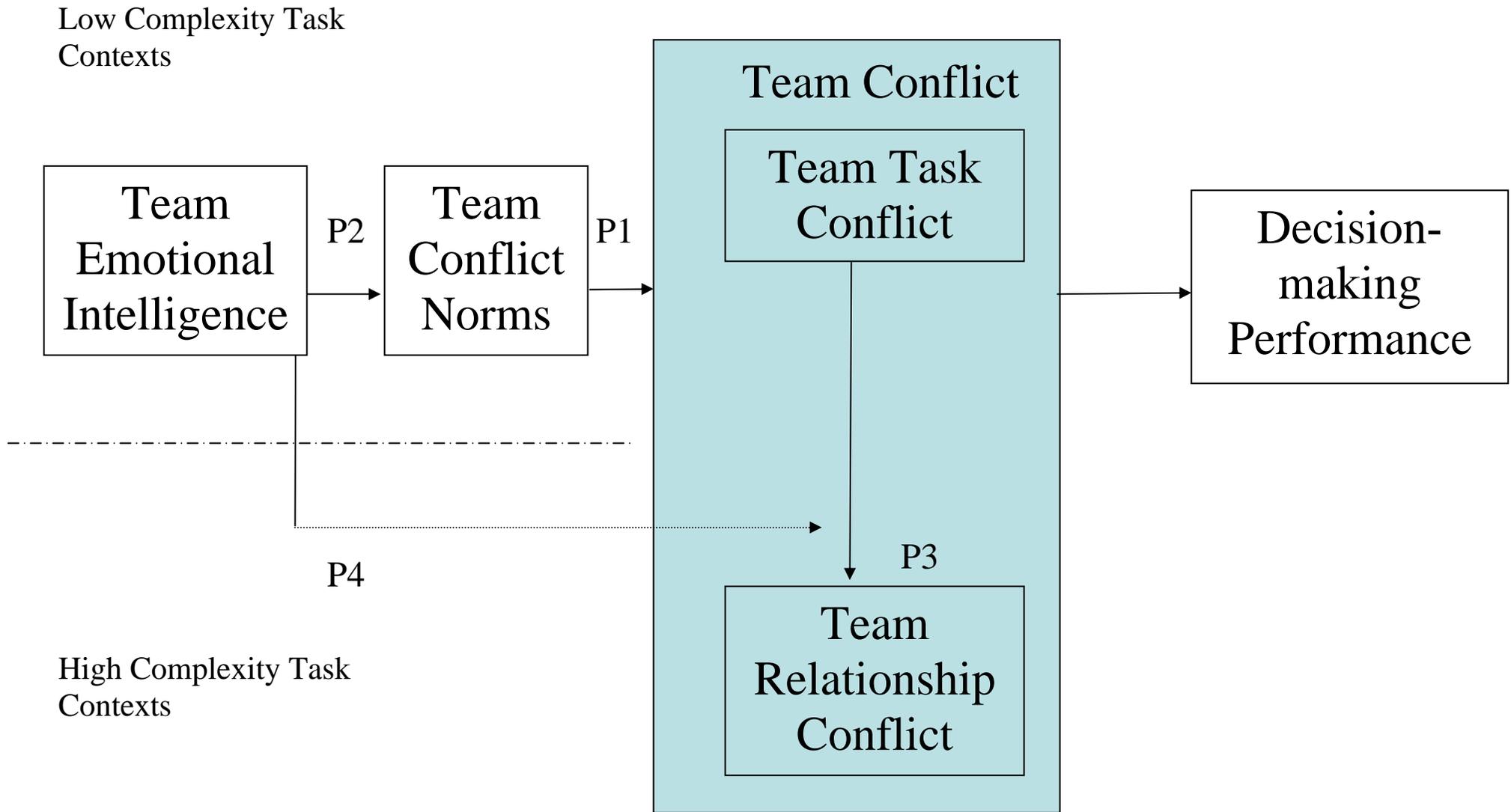
While conflict in teams and organizations is inevitable (Jehn, 1995), researchers have found conflict to be both harmful and beneficial to team performance (e.g., Tjosvold, 1991; Wall & Nolan, 1986). For instance, while Wall and Nolan (1986) show that conflict is associated with reduced productivity and satisfaction in teams, other studies have shown that organizations, where functional conflict is part of the culture within teams, can improve decision quality as different ideas are expressed and resolved openly (Bourgeois, 1985; Jehn & Chatman, 2000). The current consensus is that the relationship between team conflict and team performance outcomes depends on the type of conflict and the nature of the task, the interdependence of the team, and team norms about conflict (Jehn 1995).

This paper draws on a contingent view of the team conflict-performance relationship and considers the inherent emotionality involved in conflict. The major aim is to present a team level model that explains how team Emotional Intelligence (EI) differentially influences the relationship between team conflict and decision making performance, depending upon the complexity of the task being performed by the team .

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FIGURE 1

A model of team emotional intelligence, conflict, task complexity and decision-making



THE PROPOSED MODEL

In developing the model shown in Figure 1, Tannenbaum, Beard, and Salas's (1992) Input, Process, Output (IPO) framework is utilized to better understand team effectiveness. Tannenbaum et al., (1992) suggest team effectiveness outcomes, such as decision making performance, are determined by the effectiveness of team processes (e.g., conflict behaviour) during the performance task, as well as effective input characteristics (individual characteristics, work structure, team characteristics, task characteristics), and the interaction among these input characteristics. In essence, Figure 1 proposes that the inputs of individual characteristics (e.g., abilities such as team EI), work structure (e.g., team conflict norms), and task characteristics (e.g. task complexity) impact on team processes (e.g., conflict behaviour), and these in turn, determine team performance output (e.g., decision making). This model reflects the growing attention surrounding emotions in the workplace, and more recently work by Ashkanasy and Daus (2002), Yang and Mossholder (2004) and Bodtker and Jameson (2001), which suggest workplace conflict and emotions are tightly connected. It also builds on work by Jordan and Troth (2004) and Wolff, Pescosolido and Druskat (2002) that demonstrates EI has an impact on team performance and is connected to how teams manage conflict.

More specifically, the model presented in Figure 1 argues that, for situations where there are low levels of complexity regarding the team task (e.g., routine tasks, unambiguous goals, clear guidelines and procedures), the primary influence of team EI is on team conflict norms. It is proposed team EI indirectly affects the conflict and decision making performance relationship by influencing the conflict norms formed by teams over time as a heuristic to deal with conflict in the team. Teams with higher average levels of EI will be more aware of, and better able to manage emotions within their teams. As a consequence, they will more likely develop appropriate team conflict norms. Such conflict norms will enable teams to engage in more productive forms of conflict resolution behaviour (i.e., appropriate levels of task conflict and low levels of relationship conflict) during everyday team decision making tasks, and this in turn will impact favourably on team decision making performance. Thus, Figure 1 proposes that team EI influences the conflict processes that occur within teams indirectly by shaping team conflict norms when the tasks are lower in complexity. It is important to note that the model presented in Figure 1 focuses on established work teams in which members have had previous opportunities to engage in conflict behaviour and overtime establish norms regarding acceptable conflict behaviour within their teams (Bettenhausen & Murnighan, 1985).

While conflict norms might work for everyday problem solving and decision making, increasing levels of task complexity typically require a team to move beyond these norms to resolve any conflict that arises during complex problem-solving and decision-making (Doerner, 1980). Figure 1 proposes that, for situations where there are higher levels of task complexity (e.g., novel tasks, multiple alternatives, a lack of clear cause and effect in relation to the decision), the primary influence of team EI will be in terms of moderating the likelihood of task conflict becoming relationship conflict (in line with Yang & Mossholder, 2004). Task conflict concerns team members' disagreement about the content of the tasks performed and includes different viewpoints and ideas while relationship conflict involves differences in interpersonal style, attitudes and personality (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). The predominant type of conflict experienced in the team will then influence decision making outcomes. Thus, the rising complexity of the task increases the possible alternatives to resolve the problem (Campbell, 1988) and either neutralises or makes less salient established team conflict norms.

The nature and relationships between the constructs of team EI, conflict norms, team conflict behaviour and team decision-making will be discussed further below. A series of research propositions depicted in Figure 1 will also be discussed.

EMOTION AND CONFLICT IN TEAMS

An underlying assumption throughout this paper is the inherently emotional nature of conflict. According to Gayle and Preiss (1998), very little research has investigated the emotional and cognitive antecedents of conflicts in the workplace. One exception is Jehn (1997) who suggests emotions are an important element of conflict. Others include Thomas (1992), Ashkanasy and Daus (2002), and Bodtker and Jameson (2001) who all suggest workplace conflict and emotions are tightly connected. Their argument is that conflict is often associated with stress and threat, which increase emotional responses and negative arousal (Thomas, 1992). In a study of disputants' interpretations of conflict, Pinkley (1990) found a distinct intellectual versus emotional dimension to conflict resolution frames. Emotional frames tended to consist of feelings such as jealousy, hate, anger and frustration (Thomas, 1992). Team members in this emotional state tended to work less effectively because emotions overran and oversimplified rational and instrumental reasoning (Thomas, 1992).

Jehn (1997) proposed that the level of emotionality experienced within a team might help us better understand the curvilinear relationship often found between task conflict and performance, such that low levels of task conflict inhibit performance, moderate levels enhance performance, and high levels decrease performance (Jehn, 1995). An aspect of Jehn's (1997) qualitative study was to assess the degree of negative emotionality associated with both relationship and task conflict, and the effect this has on team performance. She reasoned that both task and relationship conflict could contain high levels of emotion. The results showed negative affect, although present during task conflict, was not connected with interpersonal animosity.

Yang and Mossholder (2004) applied Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) to team settings at work and suggested emotions and emotional expression act as cues to influence team members' attitudes towards conflict episodes and their subsequent behaviours. More specifically, they presented a theoretical model that considered in detail the relationship between task and relationship conflict within a team and the moderating role of collective EI in reducing the negative emotionality responsible for transforming task conflict into relationship conflict. The team level model presented in Figure 1 builds on this work by considering the influence of task complexity in this relationship, as well as the subsequent impact on decision making performance in teams.

EI AND TEAM CONFLICT

Mayer and Salovey's (1997) definition of EI is used as a set of four related emotion processing abilities: a) emotional awareness of own and others' emotions, b) knowledge of emotional cycles and patterns, c) emotional facilitation or creating the right emotional environment to achieve goals, and d) emotional management of self and others'. EI has been increasingly linked to team performance in the literature as it is recognized that emotional awareness and management skills are key skills involved in the productive interactions that occur within teams (Druskat & Wolff, 2001). EI has also been linked empirically to conflict behaviour in team settings during decision making tasks (Jordan & Troth, 2004). Despite this, the literature lacks a model that explains how team EI influences the conflict and decision making performance relationship in teams. Specifically, this paper proposes that team EI is more salient when the team is engaged in tasks of increasing complexity for which existing team conflict norms do not apply.

The Mayer and Salovey (1997) model acknowledges that emotion and cognition are virtually inseparable in an individual's reaction to situations and this is very relevant in the interactions that occur in teams. The four branches of EI are examined below and considered in relation to resolving conflict in teams.

(i) Awareness of own and others' emotions. Awareness of own emotion involves being in touch with our moment-to-moment feelings. Being aware of others' emotional displays and detecting false expressions of emotion is a basic ability involved in successfully dealing with other people (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Researchers have found emotional self-awareness contributes to the resolution of conflict in teams (Jordan & Troth, 2004) and predicts team performance (Jordan & Ashkanasy, 2006). Silvia (2002) demonstrated that high emotional self-awareness acts as a damper on individuals' experience of intense emotions. In other words, individuals with higher emotional self-awareness will experience lower levels of emotional reaction in response to emotion triggering situations, and will be better able to resolve conflict effectively with their fellow team members (Wolff, Pescosolido, & Druskat, 2002). For the purposes of this paper, it is argued that teams with higher levels of the emotional awareness dimension will also be able to recognize the increasing intensity of emotions in their fellow team members and address these before they affect cognitive functioning. Indeed, Elfenbein, Polzer, and Ambady (2007) found that the ability of a team to recognize teammates' emotions significantly and positively influenced their team performance approximately one year later. For the purposes of this paper, it is proposed that higher levels of emotional awareness will be useful in both establishing positive team conflict norms and in dealing with more complex situations where norms are less likely to be adhered to.

(ii) Knowledge of emotional cycles and patterns. In order to choose the right behaviours for resolving conflict, the team needs to be aware of emotional cycles and patterns that can emerge during conflict. Teams are emotional settings and the expression of emotions from frustration to anger, amusement to joy, and anxiety to fear are natural variations within a team (Thomas, 1992). Knowledge of the teams' emotional cycles and patterns allows team members to identify abnormal reactions and address those (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). The expression of emotions in the workplace is a stress-relieving action (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988) and is suitable if the expression of emotion is appropriate to the situation and if the intensity is low to moderate (Frijda & Mesquita, 1994; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). Again, understanding emotions and emotional cycles is important for developing team conflict norms and for dealing with unique situations that generate conflict (Jehn, 1995).

(iii) Emotional Facilitation. Emotional facilitation is about choosing the right emotional setting to gain the best out of a situation or the ability to set the right emotional tone for the task to be completed (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). For instance, during a complex problem-solving task, team members may choose a setting in terms of time or place to facilitate a more constructive solution to the problem the team is addressing (Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby, & Herron, 1996). EI may allow the team to recognize that a more relaxed setting in a public space may be more conducive to a collaborative outcome than remaining in a meeting room.

(iv) Management of own and others' emotions. The management of own emotions involves an individual's ability to connect or disconnect from an emotion depending on its usefulness in any given situation (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). This is an important skill in resolving conflict within high performing teams. In some circumstances,

emotions of other team members need to be managed to ensure that working relationships are maintained. For instance, uncontrolled anger in the workplace can have a negative impact on relationships, particularly if the anger is communicated to specific individuals (Davidson, MacGregor, Stuhr, & Gidron, 1999; Fitness, 2000). On this basis, managing own and other team members' emotions may be the key to avoiding these negative consequences during a conflict episode.

Team Emotional Intelligence

Most researchers have empirically considered the workplace importance of EI at the individual rather than the team level. There are a few exceptions (e.g., Bell, 2007; Côté, 2007; Elfenbein et. al, in press; Jordan & Troth, 2004). Yet team EI is a construct believed to contribute to workplace outcomes by a number of researchers (e.g., Druskat & Wolff, 1998; Wolff, Druskat, Koman, & Messer, 2006). This paper proposes, for the most part, that EI abilities will reflect consistent patterns of behaviour at the individual level that will collectively combine across team members to form stable patterns of behaviour at the team level (i.e., team level EI abilities; Stewart, Fulmer & Barrick 2005).

Several authors suggest a valid way to both conceptualize and assess a team's level of EI is through a summative composition approach (see Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002; Côté, 2007; Druskat & Wolff, 2001; George, 2002; Yang & Mossholder, 2004). A summative index (e.g., averaging) of team members' individual EI abilities is created to reflect EI abilities at the team level (Chan, 1998). Summative composition occurs when the team level construct represents a relatively simple linear aggregation of individual EI abilities that collectively emerge as a construct at the team level. The extent of emotional abilities may vary among individuals, but individuals have equal opportunities to influence each other. This in turn contributes to a team's level of emotional abilities that results in team level emotional ability constructs that are both similar to and different from the individual level emotional ability constructs (see Bliese, 2000; Chen, Thomas & Wallace, 2005). In support of the composition approach, Bell (2007) conducted a meta-analysis to examine whether the relationship between team members' deep level composition variables (i.e., personality factors, values, and abilities including EI) and team performance was moderated by how the construct was operationalised at the team level. It was hypothesized that more appropriate team level operationalisations would reveal stronger relationships between the team composition variable and team performance. In support, Bell (2007) found that teams carrying out additive or compensatory tasks are both theoretically and empirically more aligned to team mean assessments of composition variables.

In summary, it is believed teams with higher average levels of EI will be more adept at appraising various emotions and understanding their full meaning, which should allow them as team members to channel conflict in constructive ways toward performance outcomes. Additionally, teams with higher levels of EI can better use emotional regulation, which involves the ways teams influence the emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience these emotions (Gross, 1999; Yang & Mossholder, 2004).

TEAM CONFLICT AND TEAM PERFORMANCE

Research regarding conflict in teams over the last decade or so suggests that two general forms of conflict exist: task conflict and relationship conflict (Jehn, 1995, 1997). Cognitive task-related conflicts exist when there are disagreements among team members about the content of the tasks being performed, including differences in viewpoints, ideas, and opinions. On the other hand, relationship conflict involves perceived tension and frustration about personal differences such as interpersonal style, attitudes and preferences, and personality (Amason, 1996; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jehn, 1995, 1997). Many researchers argue that

relationship conflict has an affective element as it is centred on team members (Yang & Mossholder, 2004).

This division between task and relationship leads to different predictions about the effect of conflict on team outcomes (Simons & Peterson, 2000). Empirical research shows a negative association between relationship conflict, productivity and satisfaction in teams (Gladstein, 1984; Wall & Nolan, 1986). According to Jehn (1997), relationship conflicts interfere with task-related effort because members focus on reducing threats, increasing power, and attempting to build cohesion, rather than working on the task. Deutsch (1969) agrees noting that goodwill and mutual understanding decreases through relationship conflict, which blocks organizational task completion. In essence, there is no evidence demonstrating any positive effects of relationship conflict on team performance (Jehn, 1997).

Task-focused conflicts are perceived differently from relationship conflicts by employees (Pinkley, 1990) and have different effects on team and organizational outcomes (Kabanoff, 1991; Jehn, 1994; 1995). Task conflict can improve decision making quality and outcomes through incorporating devil's advocacy roles and constructive criticism (Amason, 1996). Jehn's (1995) work suggests moderate levels of task conflict are constructive, since they stimulate discussion of ideas that help teams perform better. Teams lacking task conflict may miss new ways to enhance their performance, while high levels of task conflict might interfere with completion of tasks.

CONFLICT NORMS AND EXPERIENCED CONFLICT IN TEAMS

The fact that conflict is a time consuming process, and that each conflict consumes energy from the team that is better spent on task completion, means that teams require a method for learning from each new conflict they experience. Over time, teams generally develop accepted ways of resolving conflict based on their experience with other team members (Feldman, 1984). We refer to these developed ways of responding to conflict as team conflict norms, or the normative way in which conflict is expected to be resolved in the team (Jehn, 1995).

Jehn (1995) argued that team norms about conflict affect the relationship between conflict within teams and team outcomes. For example, openness norms to task conflict (i.e., open confrontation, open discussion) encourage people to express their doubts, opinions, and uncertainties (Tjosvold, 1991) and thereby increase the beneficial aspects of task conflict on team performance. Amason and Sapienza (1997) also found that openness to task conflict norms led to less relationship conflict. Brett (1991) similarly believes a critical norm for teams to develop is tolerance of differing viewpoints. It follows that conflict openness norms to task conflict will encourage openness and acceptance to disagreement (i.e., task conflict is encouraged; disagreements are accepted that can augment the positive effects of conflict or decrease the negative effects). Other studies also suggest that teams benefit from task conflict when they cultivate an environment that is open and tolerant of diverse viewpoints and work with cooperative norms preventing those disagreements from being misinterpreted as personal attacks (Amason, 1996; DeDreu & West, 2001). By contrast, Jehn (1995) found that the less effective teams in her sample had relationship conflict norms that encouraged open discussion of relationship conflict.

PROPOSITIONS

Team Conflict Norms, Conflict Behaviour and Task Complexity

According to Kuhn and Poole (2000), task complexity is a composite variable defined by the number of goals the team has, the number of paths that can be taken to achieve those goals,

and the amount of cooperation among members required to carry out the task. Highly complex tasks are those that contain a large number of goals, have many paths to achieve those goals, and demand high levels of cooperation because of the amount of ambiguous information given to the team (Kuhn & Poole, 2000). It was argued earlier that conflict is more likely to escalate and decision making is more likely to be poor under these conditions, as there is no clear or correct path for the team to follow (Campbell, 1988). Teams are less able to rely on the everyday conflict norms they have established (e.g., decisions on the allocation of work within the team) and task conflict is more likely to transform into relationship conflict. By contrast, conflict behaviour is more likely to correspond to team conflict norms when making decisions relating to tasks of low complexity.

De Dreu and Weingart (2003) conducted a meta-analysis on the associations between relationship conflict, task conflict, team performance, and team member satisfaction. Consistent with past theorizing, results revealed strong and negative correlations between relationship conflict, team performance, and team satisfaction. However, analysis of the research also found negative correlations between task conflict, team performance, and team satisfaction. This negative result in relation to task conflict was strongest for team performance when teams were engaged in highly complex tasks (decision making, mixed projects) and was less evident when teams were engaged in less complex (production) tasks. In line with De Dreu and Weingart (2003), Figure 1 proposes that:

Proposition 1: Team conflict norms will directly influence team conflict behaviour and determine the extent of task and relationship conflict in a team such that:

Proposition 1a: During low complexity tasks, team conflict norms will determine how conflict is managed within teams.

Proposition 1b: During high complexity tasks, team conflict norms will have less influence on how conflict is managed within teams.

Team EI, Team Conflict Norms and Conflict Behaviour

As suggested earlier in this paper, researchers have begun to suggest how EI might impact on team behaviour. For instance, George (2002) argues that developing alternative solutions to disagreements, and the ability to avoid conflict escalation, is due to collective team EI. In line with George (2002), this paper argues that team EI abilities generate a series of team conflict norms that are developed to deal with emerging conflicts that occur during the team's working life. Each conflict experienced by the team contributes to new standards about how the team deals with conflict. Teams draw on these standards to assist in resolving future conflict. Because conflict is inherently an emotional process (Jordan & Troth, 2004; Yang & Mossholder, 2004), teams better able to recognize and manage emotions (EI abilities) that arise during these conflicts, will produce more robust and productive norms about how to deal with future conflict.

It is proposed that team EI has a role to play in determining the likelihood of teams adopting task or relationship conflict norms. In particular, Figure 1 suggests that team levels of EI will influence the extent to which conflict norms are present, and that this will translate into actual conflict behaviour within the team that has an impact on subsequent decision making performance. Specifically, it is proposed that:

Proposition 2: Team EI will indirectly influence conflict behaviour within teams and subsequent decision making performance, by influencing team conflict norms such that:

Proposition 2a: Teams with higher levels of team EI will be more likely to develop team conflict norms that promote optimal levels of task conflict. This will result in more effective decision making performance

Proposition 2b: Teams with lower levels of team EI will develop neutral or less effective conflict norms. This will result in less effective decision making performance.

Team EI, Team Conflict Norms and Conflict Behaviour in the Context of Task Complexity

Yang and Mossholder (2004) specifically discuss the concept of collective emotionality in connection to task and relationship conflict. In their theoretical paper, they propose that greater EI in teams will decrease the association between task and relationship conflict in work teams. The logic is that teams whose members are on average higher in EI will be more capable of recognizing downward emotional spirals and be able to act to avoid their potential damage. Better awareness of their own and others' emotions will also allow team members to keep task related conflicts from spilling over into personal relationships that, in particular, are linked to poor team performance.

De Dreu and Weingart (2003) reported that the negative impact of task conflict on team performance was dependant on the correlation between task conflict and relationship conflict. The higher the correlation between task conflict and relationship conflict, the lower team performance was. In support of this latter finding regarding the links between the two conflict types, Jehn (1997) considers the possibility that task-related conflicts may transform into relationship conflicts. She suggests, "if group members cannot agree on task issues, they may begin to dislike other members and attribute this task-related conflict to personality issues" (1997, p. 533). There is further empirical evidence from Amason (1996) and Yang and Mossholder (2004) to support this. Indeed, De Dreu and Weingart (2003) estimate that around 27 percent of the variance in relationship conflict might be due to task conflict. This suggests some teams are more prone to members personalizing task disagreements. In a similar vein, Jordan and Troth (2004) argue that all conflict (task and conflict) in teams is emotional as it involves threats to an individual's ideas and consequently their ego. Based on this view, it is easy to see how task conflict can degenerate into relationship conflict, and the potential role of team EI.

Figure 1 notes the different outcomes for the link between task and relationship conflict that emerge depending on the complexity of the task. The argument is that the escalation of conflict that can occur during completion of complex tasks results in increased levels of emotionality. Further, Yang and Mossholder's (2004) argument is extended to note that collective team EI becomes useful through two processes in relation to task conflict. That is, by directly moderating the relationships between task and relationship conflict for more highly complex tasks. Second, team EI indirectly promotes more constructive task conflict norms, and thus task conflict behaviour, in more routine decision making tasks. Based on the evidence above, it is proposed that:

Proposition 3: During high complexity tasks, when team conflict norms are less applicable, task conflict is more likely to transform into relationship conflict.

Proposition 4: During high complexity tasks, a team's level of EI will moderate the task conflict – relationship conflict link such that:

Proposition 4a: During highly complex tasks, teams with high levels of EI will be able to reduce the degeneration of task conflict into relationship conflict, and, in turn, produce more effective decision making outcomes.

Proposition 4b: During highly complex tasks, increased associated emotionality will exacerbate the degeneration of task conflict into relationship conflict for teams with low levels of EI, and in turn, produce less effective decision making outcomes.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEORY AND PRACTICE

A conceptual framework has been presented that considers how team levels of EI and task complexity might impact on conflict behaviour within teams and, via these mechanisms, team decision making performance. Team tasks vary in complexity, changing the inherent demands on team members and their ability to manage conflict within their team and make decisions effectively. This framework is an extension and further clarification of Yang and Mossholder's (2004) work regarding the influence of collective EI on the team task-relationship conflict relationship. It has been argued that the effect team EI has on the relationship between task and relationship conflict, and subsequently, decision making performance, is dependent on the complexity inherent in the task teams are working on. Moreover, it was suggested that in some circumstances, team EI does not independently influence the conflict processes within teams as Yang and Mossholder (2004) suggest. Rather the team level variable indirectly influences team conflict processes by shaping team conflict norms.

Clearly empirical work is required to test these links. Given the proposed role of conflict norms in Figure 1, a sample of intact teams with a working history would be optimal. It would also be beneficial if the teams performed a range of tasks varying in complexity so that the predicted moderating effects of team EI on task and relationship conflict could be examined in terms of complex versus routine tasks. As for all models proposing causal links, a longitudinal design assessing team EI and conflict behaviour prior to the decision making task would be ideal to fully confirm the direction of the proposed relationships.

The model presented in Figure 1 provides practitioners with strategies to optimise task conflict levels, minimise relationship conflict levels, and ultimately increase team decision making effectiveness. One recommendation would be to teach workers how to deal with the challenges of task conflict, and to prevent it transforming into relationship conflict, by focusing on workers emotional expression and management skills. Ashkanasy and Daus (2002) suggest these skills could be improved in the moment (e.g. deep breathing or visualization to reduce high emotional arousal) or via longer-term behaviour (e.g. building empathic co-worker relations) that may be more conducive to healthier emotional expression in the workplace. EI training is becoming more common in workplaces (Nikolaou & Tsaousis, 2002). Its use as part of a teamwork and conflict management workshop may have additive effects in terms of optimizing team decisions.

The proposed relationships between team EI, conflict behaviour, and decision making performance also need to be considered in terms of human resource applications. According to Nikolau and Tsaousis (2002), including an EI questionnaire in a battery of tests used in recruitment and selection might be a promising technique to improve the predictive validity of selection. Recruiting and selecting employees with high EI, and forming teams to maximise team EI, especially in work contexts requiring highly complex decisions, may have a positive influence on performance at work.

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