Managing Conflict for Effective Leadership and Organizations

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https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190224851.013.240

Published online: 28 August 2019

Summary

Leaders and employees deal with conflict as they collaborate in the everyday life of organizations and as they confront crises. Depending how they manage conflict, they can frustrate employees and provoke customer complaints but also stimulate their relationships and decision-making. The possibilities of constructive conflict are significant and documented, but the challenges to making conflict constructive are significant too. The practice of defining conflict as a win-lose battle has obscured ways of managing conflict constructively. Fortunately, researchers have developed concepts and findings that can help managers and employees manage conflict. A first step is developing a useful, unconfounded definition of conflict. Deutsch proposed that conflict occurs when there are incompatible activities. Team members are in conflict as they argue for different options for a decision.

Deutsch also theorized that how people believe their goals are related very much affects their interaction, specifically their conflict management. They can conclude that their goals are cooperative (positively related), competitive (negatively related), or independent. People with cooperative goals believe that as one of them moves toward attaining goals, that helps others achieve their goals. In competition, people conclude that their goals are negatively related and only one can succeed in the interaction. In independence, one person ‘s success neither benefits nor harms the others’ success. Researchers have found that the nature of the cooperative or competitive relationship between protagonists has a profound impact on their mutual motivation to discuss conflicts constructively. Cooperative and competitive methods of handling conflict have consistent, powerful effects on constructive conflict. Team members with cooperative goals engage in open-minded discussions where they develop and express their opposing positions, including the ideas, reasons, and knowledge they use to support their positions. They also work to understand each other’s perspectives. They are then in a position to combine the best of each other’s ideas and create effective resolutions of conflict that they are both committed to implement. Teams that rely on cooperative, mutual benefit interaction ways of managing conflict and avoid competitive, win-lose ways been found to use conflict to promote high quality decisions, to stimulate learning, and to strengthen their work relationships. What has an impact on constructive conflict is not so much the occurrence, amount, or type of conflict but how leaders and employees approach and handle their conflicts, specifically, the extent to which their discussions are cooperative and open-minded.

Keywords: incompatible activities, mutual benefit conflict, win–lose conflict, constructive conflict, open-minded discussions

Subjects: Organizational Behavior

Conflict is pervasive and greatly affects leadership and teamwork, the very drivers of organizations (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Jehn, 1995; Johnson, 2015). Conflict is part of the everyday life of organizations in making decisions, handling customer complaints, and managing performance; conflict is also part of dealing with dramatic events such as acquisitions, strikes, and bankruptcies. Conflicts have both constructive and destructive sides. Conflicts can sabotage alliances and relationships, but effectively managed conflict vitalizes partnerships and invigorates interpersonal bonds. Conflict challenges leaders and teammates and engages them in the full range of experiences that organizations offer.

Research on how to manage conflict is critical to understanding relationships and organizations as well as how to make them effective. Leaders and employees must learn to live with conflict; they have to deal with and resolve the many conflicts that threaten to divide them and frustrate joint progress.

We often blame conflict for our frustrations and give it power over us. We think that if we only had less conflict, our lives would be happy and productive. The goal is to be conflict-free, or at least to keep our conflicts minor and forgettable. However, how we approach and handle conflict greatly affects whether it is constructive or destructive. It's not so much having conflict or how much conflict we have that matters, but what is critical is how we manage our conflict that affects whether it is constructive or destructive.

Constructive conflict occurs when protagonists conclude that the benefits of their conflict management outweigh the costs; they believe that their investments made in handling conflict will pay off (Deutsch, 1973). The costs and wasteful investments of destructive conflict are typically well recognized. Angry feelings leave relationships fragmented and joint work stalled; both people and productivity suffer (Averill, 1983).

However, conflicts can have very constructive effects, so useful that we may hesitate to call them conflicts. Through discussing opposing ideas in conflict, protagonists can deepen their understanding of their own ideas as they defend their views (Tjosvold, Wong, & Chen, 2014a). They can also listen to and understand the views of their protagonists; they put themselves in each other's shoes. They open the possibility of combining the best ideas to create new solutions. In addition to enriching their learning, they can appreciate each other's feelings, motives, and commitments, making their joint life more personal and richer.

The possibilities of constructive conflict are significant and documented, but the challenges to making conflict constructive are significant too. Managing conflict constructively may sound straightforward, and it can be. But making conflict constructive often tests us intellectually, emotionally, and interpersonally. Managing conflict constructively gives a lot, but it takes a lot.

This article has six sections. Conflict has been defined in confounded ways so that popular stereotypes have interfered with practice and research. The first section defines conflict as incompatible activities that may or may not have opposing goals. Arguing that what has an impact on constructive conflict is not the occurrence or amount of conflict but how we approach and handle conflict, the second section proposes that open-minded discussion and cooperative goals are key conditions to making conflict constructive. The third section reviews research on

task and relationship conflict that suggests that these types of conflict can be managed. The fourth section reviews how constructive conflict can strengthen leadership and thereby very much contribute to the relationship between employees and managers. Then research on how conflict can be managed across cultural boundaries is discussed. The sixth and final part suggests how training can strengthen constructive conflict, leadership, and organizations.

Understanding Conflict

Researchers typically have not considered defining conflict critical for understanding it; indeed, they have tended to define conflict by including several notions (Barki & Hartwick, 2004; Rahim, 1992). However, popular definitions have tended to define conflict in terms of opposing goals and interests. This definition of conflict has greatly frustrated research progress in identifying the many ways conflict can constructively contribute to individual learning and organizational performance. Defining conflict as incompatible actions, we propose, is a much more solid foundation for research than defining conflict as opposing interests.

Conflict as Opposing Interests

Traditionally, conflict is defined in terms of opposing interests involving scarce resources and goal divergence and frustration (e.g., Pondy, 1967). Defining conflict as opposing interests is consistent with the prevalent assumption that conflict involves not only differences but is win–lose and reinforces the popular thinking that conflict is typically dealt with harshly and competitively. For many people, conflict is a win–lose battle over goals that they want to win, not lose.

However, defining conflict as opposing interests frustrates effective operations and measures. Conflict is confused with win–lose ways to manage it. For example, the Interpersonal Conflict at Work Scale measures conflict with such items as “people do nasty things to me at work” (Spector & Bruk-Lee, 2008). This item measures a competitive, win–lose way to manage conflict, not conflict itself.

The popular assumption that conflict is competitive and a fight over opposing interests underscores the difficulties of measuring conflict with items including the term “conflict” in them. For example, research scales that measure types of conflict, such as task and relationship conflict, typically include the term “conflict.” Including the word conflict is likely to contribute to the common finding that both relationship and task conflicts contribute to team ineffectiveness (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; DeChurch, Mesmer-Magnus, & Doty, 2013; Tjosvold, Law, & Sun, 2006). Conceptual and operational definitions of conflict should help us appreciate both the constructive as well as the destructive sides of conflict and should avoid confounding conflict with popular confusions and stereotypes.

Conflict as Opposing Activities

Deutsch (1973) proposes that conflict occurs when there are incompatible activities (Tjosvold et al., 2014a). Team members are in conflict when they argue for different options for a **team** decision as they perform actions that interfere with each other's actions. They express their various reasons for the joint action their team should take. Different parties arguing for their different positions are incompatible actions that block each person from getting their option accepted; they are in conflict.

They may express their views to reflect that they have cooperative goals as well as conflicting activities. They argue for their favored option as they put forth their reasons for this option. They may defend their preferred position vigorously and conduct additional research to support their option. They want team members to consider their proposed option seriously. Their goal with protagonists is a cooperative one, however: they want to make the best decision for the team as a whole.

Alternatively, team members may have opposing goals when they argue for different options; they are in competition as well as in conflict. They argue that their option must be accepted and other options should be rejected. They express their arguments for their favored option in win–lose ways. Only one option can be accepted and it should be theirs.

Expressing one's view can be done both cooperatively and competitively. Studies indicate that these different ways of expressing one's options often have dramatic effects on the dynamics and outcomes of conflict (Tjosvold et al., 2014a).

Approaches to Conflict

This article argues that research on how team members manage and deal with their conflicts very much contributes to understanding and developing constructive conflict. It is not so much the frequency, amount, and type of conflict as it is how team members discuss and work out their conflicts. Cooperative and competitive methods of handling conflict have been found to have consistent, powerful effects on constructive conflict.

Researchers recognize the value of a contingency perspective that holds that managers and employees should have alternative ways to deal with a conflict so that they can select the one most useful and appropriate in their situation (Rahim, 1992; Thomas, 1976). Pretending that there is no conflict and avoiding discussing conflict are useful in some situations, but generally conflict avoidance is not useful, indeed is often destructive (De Dreu & Van Vianen, 2001; Friedman, Chi, & Liu, 2006; Liu, Fu, & Liu, 2009; Lovelace, Shapiro, & Weingart, 2001; Ohbuchi & Atsumi, 2010). Without direct discussion and action, conflicts seldom disappear by themselves; they can fester and intensify, becoming more complex and destructive (Bacon & Blyton, 2007; Eisenhardt, Kahwajy, & Bourgeois, 1997; Nemeth & Owens, 1996).

This section argues that studies conducted using different theoretical frameworks together indicate that open-minded discussion between protagonists results in constructive outcomes in many situations (Johnson, 2015; Tjosvold et al., 2014a). In open-minded discussions, protagonists develop and express their opposing positions, including the ideas, reasons, and knowledge they use to support their positions. They also work to understand each other's perspectives. They are then in a position to combine the best of each other's ideas and create effective resolutions of conflict that they are both committed to implement.

This section further proposes that cooperative relationships, but not competitive ones, are an effective foundation for open-minded discussion and constructive conflict. These relationships orient protagonists to identify and express their own ideas and proposals. They trust that others will try to understand their ideas and positions accurately (Hempel, Zhang, & Tjosvold, 2009). They feel they can rely upon each other to use these views to promote each other's benefit. Their concerns that others will use their ideas and positions against them are minimized. They recognize that they can all gain from the conflict as each protagonist's goals are promoted.

Open-Minded Discussion

Open-mindedness is the willingness to actively search for evidence against one's favored beliefs and ideas and to weigh such evidence impartially and fully (Baker & Sinkula, 1999; Cegarra-Navarro & Sánchez-Polo, 2011; Mitchell, Nicholas, & Boyle, 2009; Sinkula, Baker, & Noordewier, 1997). Open-minded discussion occurs when people together seek to understand each other's ideas and positions, consider each other's reasoning for these positions impartially, and work to integrate their ideas into mutually acceptable solutions.

In open-minded discussion, protagonists express their own views directly to each other, listen and try to understand each other's positions and arguments, and work to combine their ideas into new agreements acceptable to all. They are open with their own views, open to those of others, and open to new solutions to resolve the conflict. Evidence indicates that these aspects of openness are reinforcing and together constitute open-minded discussion (Johnson, 2015; Tjosvold, 1990a; Tjosvold, Dann, & Wong, 1992; Tjosvold & Halco, 1992).

Survey items to measure open-mindedness give a specific understanding of open-mindedness (Chen, Liu, & Tjosvold, 2005; Wong, Tjosvold, & Yu, 2005). These items include: (a) express our own views directly to each other, (b) listen carefully to each other's opinions, (c) try to understand each other's concerns, and (d) work to use each other's ideas. These items are typically strongly correlated with each other and the scale has high reliability.

Open-mindedness in conflict is inherently interpersonal as people act and react to each other. It takes two to have a conflict and it takes two to manage conflict. One protagonist can make bold, persistent, and skilled actions that encourage an otherwise closed-minded protagonist to discuss conflict open-mindedly. Generally, though, open-mindedness by all protagonists is needed to make conflict constructive. Evidence also suggests that protagonists develop similar levels of

open-mindedness; one protagonist's open-mindedness encourages others to be open (Tjosvold, 1990a; Tjosvold et al., 1992; Tjosvold & Halco, 1992). Conflicts are more likely to be constructively managed when protagonists discuss their views directly and integrate them into solutions.

Researchers have used various terms to characterize the nature of discussion that results in constructive outcomes. These terms have their own historical roots, emphasize difference aspects of interaction, and provide various ways to measure and operationalize the interaction. These concepts and their operations help us understand the nature of open-minded discussion.

Open-Mindedness Research

Research conclusions are more fully understood and deserve more confidence when various researchers using different operations and samples develop consistent findings. Conflict researchers have used a variety of terms and operations to investigate open-mindedness. We propose that, although these terms are not identical, their differences should not obscure the considerable agreement among conflict researchers that open-minded discussion contributes to resolving conflicts in many situations. The operations of these terms further suggest the similarity of the concepts to open-minded discussion.

Integrative negotiation research provides indirect support that open-minded discussion is a foundation for developing constructive conflict. This research has examined the conditions that develop the creative process by which bargainers discover superior new options for both parties than those currently under consideration (Follett, 1940). Walton and McKersie (1965) propose that this integration is more likely when protagonists consider several issues simultaneously, consider the issues as problems to be solved, freely exchange accurate and credible information about their interests, avoid win–lose behaviors, and argue their own position unless and until they are convinced otherwise.

Experimental integrative negotiation researchers have argued similarly that problem solving interaction characterized by full information exchange results in mutually beneficial solutions (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993; Pruitt, Carnevale, Ben-Yoav, Nochajski, & Van Slyck, 1983; Pruitt & Lewis, 1975). The operations to measure this problem solving interaction include asking for valid information, requesting information about the other's interests, giving truthful information, showing interest in the other bargainer's welfare, and proposing mutual concessions. Integrated negotiators challenge each other's original ideas, dig into these positions to identify each other's underlying interests, endure the uncertainty of not finding a quick solution, and are only satisfied with solutions that promote the interests of all.

De Dreu and colleagues have drawn upon integrative negotiation research to develop the motivated information processing approach (De Dreu, 2007; De Dreu, Koole, & Steinel, 2000; De Dreu, Nijstad, & van Knippenberg, 2008). This research also proposes and measures constructive interaction in conflict in terms of problem solving and information exchange. The extent to which protagonists engage in thorough, systematic processing of information was found to induce them

to question perceptions that one protagonist can achieve their interests only to the extent that others cannot achieve their own; challenging this trade-off in turn results in more accurate assessments and more integrative agreements (De Dreu et al., 2000).

Conflict management styles researchers propose five alternative approaches to dealing with conflict (Rahim, 1983, 1995; Thomas, 1976; Van de Vliert & Kabanoff, 1990). Although arguing that all five can be useful in some circumstances, these researchers have concluded that the collaborative conflict management style, at times supplemented with other styles, is constructive under a wide range of conditions (Van de Vliert, Euwema, & Huismans, 1995; Van de Vliert, Nauta, Giebels, & Janssen, 1999). Research on collaborative conflict management styles and experiments on negotiation support that being open with one's own views as well as being open to other ideas and integrating them contribute to constructive conflict (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993).

Diverse researchers have found that open-minded discussion contributes to resolving conflicts within and between organizations (Johnson, Johnson, & Tjosvold, 2006; Tjosvold, 1985). Conflict involves incompatible actions, specifically the intellectual aspects of proposing and reconciling opposing ideas that temporarily disrupt reaching a resolution. Fortunately, research by various scholars supports that open-minded discussion very much contributes to effective conflict management.

Cooperative Relationships for Open-Minded Discussion

When do protagonists discuss their conflicts open-mindedly? Researchers have theorized that the nature of the relationship between protagonists has a profound impact on their mutual motivation to discuss conflicts open-mindedly. Open-minded discussions occur when both participants are motivated to work together to manage their conflicts constructively.

Theory of Cooperation and Competition

Deutsch (1948, 1973) theorized that how people believe their goals are related very much affects their interaction and thereby their outcomes. They can conclude that their goals are cooperative (positively related), competitive (negatively related), or independent. People with cooperative goals believe that as one of them moves toward attaining goals, that helps others achieve their goals. In competition, people conclude that their goals are negatively related and only one can succeed in the interaction. In independence, one person's success neither benefits nor harms the others' success.

Deutsch (1973) further proposed that cooperative goals are a useful way to understand when protagonists are able to manage their conflicts constructively. Both survey and experimental studies confirm that with cooperative goals, managers and employees discuss their differences directly and open-mindedly (Alper, Tjosvold, & Law, 1998; Poon, Pike, & Tjosvold, 2001; Schei & Rognes, 2003; Tjosvold, 1988). Teams are considered cooperative to the extent that members rate that their goals go together (Alper et al., 1998); they are considered competitive to the extent that members rate that they favored their own goals over the goals of others (Alper et al., 1998); teams

are considered independent to the extent that members rate that one member's success is unrelated to the success of their teammates (Alper et al., 1998). Competitive and independent goals have been found to lead to conflict avoidance or to conflict escalation or both (Alper, Tjosvold, & Law, 2000; Tjosvold et al., 2001). Protagonists with cooperative goals promote each other's benefit because doing so is to their own advantage.

Protagonists typically have mixed interdependencies as well as more "pure" cases. Galinsky and Schweitzer (2015) note that social relationships contain both competitive and cooperative aspects. This co-opetition has been thought to leave protagonists more flexibility in how they manage conflict (Landkammer & Sassenberg, 2016).

Antecedents to Open-Mindedness

A key dynamic of having positively related goals of cooperation is that by helping others reach their goals, one also reaches one's own goals. In cooperation, people promote their own goals and others' goals simultaneously. Researchers have used other theoretical frameworks to capture this idea of positively related goals where self-interests are mutual in that promoting one's self-interest promotes the self-interest of the others. Researchers have used the dual concerns and pro-social motivation to capture positively related self-interests.

In dual concerns, theorists have proposed that conflict participants can be committed to promoting others' interests as well as their own (Thomas, 1976, 1992). Rahim and Bonoma (1979) and Rahim (1983, 1992) built upon Blake and Mouton's (1964) managerial grid. Concern for self describes the extent to which people attempt to satisfy their own interests. The second dimension describes the extent to which people want to satisfy the concerns of others (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). High concern for self and high concern for others resemble cooperative goals. Dual concerns occur when protagonists are motivated by their own interests and outcomes: they are willing to assert themselves to get what they want and they are also motivated to promote their partners' interests and outcomes.

Dean Pruitt and other integrative negotiation researchers have also developed the dual concerns model (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993; Pruitt et al., 1983; Pruitt & Rubin, 1986). Here protagonists committed to the interests of the other as well as themselves discuss conflict open-mindedly where they are only satisfied with solutions that promote the interests of both.

Motivational and social value orientation theory (Kelley & Schenitzki, 1972; McClintock, 1977; Messick & McClintock, 1968; Van Lange & Kuhlman, 1994) also found that preference for both self and other promotes constructive conflict (De Dreu & Van Lange, 1995; De Dreu, Weingart, & Kwon, 2000). Social motives refer to preferences for outcomes to the self and other: pro-social, pro-self, and competitive negotiators differ in attaching a positive, zero, or negative weight to the other's outcomes, respectively (De Dreu & Boles, 1998; De Dreu & McCusker, 1997; Van Lange, 1999).

Pro-social protagonists choose options that maximize joint outcomes; protagonists are pro-self if they select options where their own outcomes are higher than the other, and they are classified as competitive if they choose options that maximize the differences between the two, that is, their own outcomes are much better than the other's outcomes. Pro-social motivation has been found to develop the open-minded exchange of information that results in constructive conflict (De Dreu, Weingart, et al., 2000; Nauta, De Dreu, & Van der Vaart, 2002).

Researchers have developed the dual concerns model, pro-social and pro-self social motivation, and cooperative goals as theoretical perspectives to understand relationships that promote constructive conflict (De Dreu, Weingart, et al., 2000; Deutsch, 1973; Pruitt & Rubin, 1986; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). This section argues that these different terms obscure fundamental agreement that the commitment to promoting each other's goals facilitates open-minded discussion.

Managers and employees of course do not always discuss their differences open-mindedly and, according to the contingency perspective, under certain conditions it would be inappropriate and dysfunctional to do so. Commitments to competitive and independent goals are apt to lead to closed-minded discussions with an emphasis on promoting one's own interests without concern for the ideas and aspirations of the other. Indeed, with competitive goals they are apt to actively frustrate each other's goals as they understand this is a way of promoting their own.

This article refers to cooperative relationships as underlying open-minded discussion. Previous research has directly tested whether cooperative relationships promote open-mindedness, providing both experimental and survey data (Deutsch, 1973). Research has demonstrated both the causal relationship that cooperative goals promote open-mindedness and survey evidence that supports that cooperative relationships support open-minded discussion in a wide variety of organizational situations (Tjosvold et al., 2014a). In addition, many social psychologists and other social scientists have developed our understanding of cooperation and competition (Deutsch, 1973; Deutsch, Coleman, & Marcus, 2011).

Conflict Type Research

For more than two decades, organizational researchers have distinguished types of conflict and argued that the type of conflict determines how constructive the conflict is (Jehn, 1997; Jehn, Greer, Levine, & Szulanski, 2008). Whether the conflict is about getting tasks done or about the quality of relationships between protagonists, conflict type is thought to determine whether conflict is constructive or destructive. Theorizing on the role of conflict types has stimulated considerable research by many investigators.

Research findings on conflict types supports the traditional view that high levels of conflict disrupt teamwork, and refines this idea by indicating that this proposition is especially true when these conflicts are relationship-based. Relationship conflicts, as measured by such items as how much friction, tension, and personality conflict are in the team, have been found to make conflict

destructive (Jehn, 1994; Jehn et al., 2008). Reviews of literature, including several meta-analyses, have consistently found that relationship conflicts correlate with low levels of team productivity (Choi & Sy, 2010; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; DeChurch et al., 2013).

These results have straightforward practical implications for leaders and team members in reducing relationship conflict. Given the heavy reliance on correlational findings, it can be more cautiously concluded that relationship conflicts are signs of destructive conflict and are unlikely to contribute to constructive conflict. Researchers have, however, sought to identify boundary conditions that minimize the negative impact, and unlock the positive impact, of relationship conflict (Thiel, Harvey, Courtright, & Bradley, 2017).

Whereas relationship conflicts disrupt, it has been proposed that conflicts over tasks contribute to group performance (Jehn, 1997; Jehn et al., 2008). However, findings do not consistently support this theorizing that task conflict strengthens group performance (Choi & Sy, 2010; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; DeChurch et al., 2013). The inconsistent effects of task conflict indicate that expressing diverse views can be useful but not consistently. It appears that expressing opposing views must be done skillfully to contribute to constructive conflict, but task conflict theory does not directly suggest the conditions under which expressing opposing views contributes to constructive conflict.

Managing Task and Relationship Conflict

Researchers have worked to document the conditions that determine whether task and relationship conflict are constructive or destructive. For example, some evidence suggests that task conflict is apt to be more productive when it is in moderate amounts, is not closely related to relationship conflict, and when the outcomes are financial performance and decision quality rather than overall performance (De Dreu, 2006; de Wit, Greer, & Jehn, 2012; Farh, Lee, & Farh, 2010; Mooney, Holahan, & Amason, 2007; Shaw et al., 2011).

Several studies show that relationship conflict can hinder teams from capitalizing on the potential positive value of task conflict (de Jong, Song, & Song, 2013; de Wit, Jehn, & Scheepers, 2013; Shaw et al., 2011). Research has found that relationship conflicts encourage a competitive approach to managing conflict by leading people to make forceful demands, overstate their position to get their way, and in other ways treat conflict as a win–lose contest (Tjosvold et al., 2006). In contrast, to the extent that protagonists had few relationship conflicts, they resolved their conflicts in ways that supported mutual benefit; specifically, they encouraged a "we are in it together" attitude, sought a solution useful for all members, combined their best ideas, and treated conflict as a mutual problem to solve (de Jong et al., 2013; de Wit et al., 2013; Shaw et al., 2011).

Research suggests that how task and relationship conflicts are discussed, not just the amount of them, affects their constructiveness (DeChurch et al., 2013; Maltarich, Kukenberger, Reilly, & Mathieu, 2018; Rispens, Greer, Jehn, & Thatcher, 2011; Tekleab, Quigley, & Tesluk, 2009; Todorova, Bear, & Weingart, 2014). Recent studies have found that task conflict can be constructive when discussed open-mindedly and skillfully (Bradley, Klotz, Postlethwaite, &

Brown, 2013; Chun & Choi, 2014; Humphrey, Aime, Cushenbery, Hill, & Fairchild, 2017; Jiang, Zhang, & Tjosvold, 2012; Tekleab et al., 2009). Teams with members with high levels of openness as a personality characteristic were found to have constructive task conflict (Bradley et al., 2013; de Jong et al., 2013). Overall, evidence indicates that open-minded discussion contributes to making both relationship and task conflict constructive (Gibson & Callister, 2010; Lau & Cobb, 2010; Tjosvold, 2002; Tjosvold & Su, 2007; Weingart, Behfar, Bendersky, Todorova, & Jehn, 2015).

Conflict Management for Leadership

Leadership has long been considered a key contributor to effective organizations. Much of the power of organizations is that they motivate and coordinate the work of many people; for that to happen, managers must lead employees. Without leadership, employees may fail to face up to difficulties, allow problems to simmer, and just go through the motions. Research indicates that to have effective leadership, managers and employees must make conflict constructive (Chen et al., 2005; Chen & Tjosvold, 2007, 2013; Chen, Tjosvold, Huang, & Xu, 2011; Hui, Wong, & Tjosvold, 2007).

Conflict management research is updating our understanding of what it takes to be an effective leader and how to develop it. Studies indicate that by developing constructive conflict, managers can improve the quality of their leader relationships with employees. Managers can then orient and train employees so that they discuss their various ideas and improve the quality of their decision-making and their overall teamwork. Researchers have demonstrated that leaders can be effective by adopting various leadership styles; recent studies show that constructive conflict is very much needed to make these leadership styles effective.

Conflict for Quality Leadership Relationships

Leadership has long been thought to be "situational" in that the actions effective leaders take depend upon the situation; they monitor the situations and decide upon effective actions in the situation (Stogdill, 1974). In addition, though, researchers have found that successful leaders are consistent across many situations in that they develop quality relationships. Considerable research has found that successful leaders have quality relationships (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). It's not so much that managers have the "right" personal skills and characteristics but that they have high quality relationships with employees that help them influence employees and increase their productivity. With these relationships, leaders are able to engage employees, strengthen their teamwork, and in other ways convince them to contribute effectively to the organization.

Less recognized is that leaders and employees cannot allow frustrations to brew; they need to manage their conflicts to develop quality relationships (Chen & Tjosvold, 2007; Chen, Tjosvold, & Su, 2005; Tjosvold, Poon, & Yu, 2005). An important reason why quality relationships are useful is because they promote constructive conflict that in turn results in employee involvement and performance (Chen & Tjosvold, 2013; Tjosvold, Hui, & Law, 1998). Otherwise, relationship

conflicts are apt to undermine team productivity as they allow frustrations to fester (Chen et al., 2005; Chen & Tjosvold, 2007; Tjosvold et al., 2005). Leaders need to manage their conflicts to reduce relationship conflicts and develop and maintain quality relationships.

Conflict for Making Decisions

Leaders have traditionally been thought to make tough decisions and then use their power to implement them. But this is a misleading notion. Studies by diverse researchers have documented the contribution of conflict to making decisions (Amason, 1996; Anderson, 1983; Cosier, 1978; George, 1974; Gruenfeld, 1995; Mason & Mitroff, 1981; Mitchell et al., 2009; Peterson & Nemeth, 1996; Salas, Rosen, & DiazGranados, 2010; Schweiger, Sandberg, & Ragan, 1986; Somech, Desivilya, & Lidgoster, 2009; Tetlock, Armor, & Peterson, 1994; Tjosvold, Wedley, & Field, 1986; Wong, Ormiston, & Tetlock, 2011). Through conflict, conventional thinking is challenged, threats and opportunities identified, and new solutions forged. Discussing opposing views has been found to give teams the confidence to take calculated risks where they also are prepared to recover from their mistakes; with this preparation, they innovate (Tjosvold & Yu, 2007). Even in a crisis, leaders are typically more effective when they seek out diverse views (Tjosvold, 1984, 1990b). Rather than making tough decisions alone, effective leaders are oriented toward promoting the conditions and relationships for open-minded discussion of opposing views among colleagues and employees. They develop constructive conflict that helps employees make and implement decisions as a team.

Conflict to Implement Leadership Styles

Researchers have argued that managers can be effective by adopting leadership styles such as transformational, servant, and productivity and people values (Eisenbeiss, van Knippenberg, & Boerner, 2008; Xu & Thomas, 2011). Less appreciated is that these styles are effective by promoting constructive conflict. Recent studies have demonstrated that to be successful in applying these styles, leaders develop constructive conflict.

Transformational leaders are expected to stimulate superior performance by appealing to employees' higher aspirations (Bass, 2006). For example, they were found highly motivated not by unilaterally directing employees but by helping them manage their conflicts cooperatively and constructively (Zhang, Cao, & Tjosvold, 2011). This constructive conflict in turn resulted in high team performance in a sample of independent business groups. In a related study, government officials who exercised transformational leadership promoted cooperative conflict management that in turn resulted in strong government–business partnerships (Wong, Wei, & Tjosvold, 2014).

Leaders who value people and productivity have long been thought to be effective leaders, but the dynamics by which these values have beneficial effects have only recently been documented. In a study of international joint ventures (Wong, Wei, Yang, & Tjosvold, 2017), results support the idea that productivity and participation values strengthen the partners' beliefs that their goals are cooperatively related, which in turn reduces free riding and promotes performance; in

contrast, competitive goals appear to promote free riding and obstruct joint performance. The results have practical implications by showing that developing cooperative goals can strengthen the benefits of productivity and participation values.

Working in diverse organizations in India, team leaders indicated their people and productivity values and team members rated their open-minded discussion and their effectiveness and performance (Bhatnagar & Tjosvold, 2012). Structural equation analysis suggested that productivity values promoted open-minded discussion and thereby team effectiveness and productivity. Productivity-oriented team leaders challenge their teams to make high quality decisions and induce them to discuss issues open-mindedly, which in turn helps teams be effective (Bhatnagar & Tjosvold, 2012).

Servant leaders, as they emphasize service to others, team consensus, and the personal development of individuals, have been thought to lay the groundwork for cooperative conflict management in customer service teams (Wong, Liu, & Tjosvold, 2015). This constructive conflict helps team members resolve issues and in other ways effectively coordinate with each other; this coordination in turn helps these teams serve their customers. Findings indicate that to the extent that they have servant leaders, teams are able to discuss their disagreements, frustrations, and difficulties directly and work out solutions for the benefit of the team and its customers. These results provide support that improving the capacity to discuss opposing views open-mindedly can be a useful means for servant leaders to enhance teamwork and customer service in China and perhaps in other countries as well.

Ethical leaders want to act justly themselves but they also want employees to be committed to ethical principles and to act morally (Eisenbeiss, 2012; Mayer, Aquino, Greenbaum, & Kuenzi, 2012). A recent study indicates that effective ethical leaders and their employees engage in open-minded, cooperative conflict management where they express their ideas, work to understand each other, integrate their ideas, and apply their resolutions. Through this constructive conflict management, they work out arrangements that help them act effectively and morally in their situation as they also develop trusting, high quality relationships with each other. Ethical leaders and their employees were found to avoid competitive conflict involving trying to impose one's own ideas and resolutions on others. Results also confirm that effective leaders develop high quality relationships that help them influence employees as well as to be open and influenced by them (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

Researchers have identified a number of styles that have been shown to help leaders be effective. Although they are developed from diverse leadership theories, studies have found that constructive conflict, in particular cooperative open-minded discussion, is an important mediator of successful implementation of these leadership styles, whether they be transformational leadership, valuing people and productivity, servant, or ethical leadership. Managers can use different leadership styles to encourage constructive conflict that empowers them to lead effectively.

Cultural Differences

Theories of conflict management that can be applied in diverse cultures are increasingly relevant. In the global marketplace, many managers and employees must handle conflicts that cross cultural boundaries. Team members increasingly have diverse cultural backgrounds, even when all operations are in one country. Many managers have to work with suppliers and customers who are from other cultures and live in other countries. Research has shown that open-mindedness and cooperative relationships develop constructive conflict in organizations even when protagonists are from both Western and Eastern cultures (Chen, Tjosvold, & Pan, 2010; Tjosvold, Wu, & Chen, 2010; Tjosvold, Wong, & Chen, 2014a).

Research on conflict management has developed our understanding of the impact of cultural values, in particular collectivism and individualism. Western cultures have traditionally been thought to support open discussion of conflict consistent with their emphasis on individuals with their rights and proclivity to express their views. Eastern cultures have been considered collectivist where there is deference to their groups and leaders. Some studies support this traditional thinking. People from the West have indicated more preference for open handling of conflict, whereas those from the East prefer reticence (Kirkbride, Tang, & Westwood, 1991).

However, research suggests that this reasoning needs updating. Recent studies indicate that collectivist values induce open-minded discussion whereas individualistic values promote conflict avoidance. Collectivist values have been found in experiments to strengthen cooperative relationships that in turn promote open-minded discussion between individuals from collectivist and individualistic cultures (Chen et al., 2010; Tjosvold, Wu, et al., 2010; Tjosvold, Wong, & Chen, 2014a). Collectivist culture team members were found to believe their goals are cooperative and that they are expected to work effectively with each other, and they sought to and actually understood opposing arguments and combined ideas for integrated decisions.

Studies confirm that cooperative and competitive approaches to managing conflict, although developed from theory in the West, apply to organizations in collectivist China as well (Chen et al., 2011). Indeed, findings challenge stereotypes that Chinese culture and leadership are highly conflict-negative. Chinese people are not rigidly committed to conflict avoidance but have been found to manage conflict cooperatively and openly. Chinese collectivism, social face, and other values can be applied in ways that aid direct, open, cooperative conflict management (Tjosvold, Wong, & Chen, 2014b).

Cooperative conflict management can also guide the strengthening of cross-cultural interaction. Bond (2003) and Smith (2003) argue that cross-cultural researchers, in addition to the tradition of documenting cultural value differences, should study the relationship and interaction between culturally diverse people to identify how they work together effectively. Recent studies show that diverse people can work together when they manage their conflicts cooperatively (Chen et al., 2010; Chen & Tjosvold, 2007, 2008; Chen, Tjosvold, & Wu, 2008).

While the "genotype" (the underlying conceptual structure of the theory of cooperation and competition) appears to be similar, the "phenotypes" (how the theory is manifested in particular situations) often are not (Lewin, 1938). In particular, the actions that develop cooperative goals and communicate an attempt to discuss conflicts open-mindedly may be quite different in China than in North America, as may the general levels of cooperative goals and conflict. However, diverse people can use research to develop a common understanding and platform for how they can manage conflict cooperatively and productively (Tjosvold & Leung, 2003).

Training Teams

Employees, managers, and executives are more effective when they manage important conflicts open-mindedly and cooperatively. Research suggests that, when they study cooperative, open-minded conflict, plan how to approach their own conflicts, and reflect on their experiences, managers and employees are more effective at managing conflict and more productive (Lu, Tjosvold, & Shi, 2010; Tjosvold et al., 2014a).

A software company in Beijing used a cooperative team workshop and two months of follow-up of team feedback and reflection to develop open-minded conflict management (Lu et al., 2010). More than 150 employees from all the teams in the company participated in the workshop and the follow-up activities.

They had already organized cooperative teams to work on projects and satisfy customers. At the workshop, these groups studied the theory and reviewed the research in order to appreciate the value for them and their organization of strengthening cooperative, open-minded approaches to managing their conflicts. They decided that they wanted to improve their conflict management. They met regularly to assess their current level of cooperative conflict and developed plans for managing their conflicts more constructively. They practiced in their teams, met regularly to assess their current level of cooperative conflict, and developed plans for managing their conflicts more constructively. They reflected on their experience managing conflict within and between teams with consultants, and developed concrete ways to improve their conflict management.

Findings confirmed that open-minded discussion and cooperative relationships are a valuable basis upon which teams can strengthen their conflict management, collaboration among teams, and contributions to their organization. The training was found to heighten cooperative goals, develop open-minded discussion of conflicts, foster creativity within and between cultures, and produce higher group confidence and productivity.

Human resource personnel can apply conflict management findings by initiating professional development teams for managers and employees (Tjosvold & Tjosvold, 2015). They realize that becoming more effective requires the encouragement, feedback, and support of others. In these teams, managers and employees study cooperative, open-minded conflict management, reflect on their current experiences, and develop concrete ways to strengthen and practice conflict management skills. They remember not to expect perfection but to focus on reflecting on their experiences to improve.

Managers and employees confront a great variety of conflicts. With persistent pressures for them to rely on each other's resources and to work together as a team, they are likely to encounter increasingly difficult conflicts that spread across organizational and national boundaries. Yet they are expected to resolve them quickly. Theory and research such as that referred to in this article helps to focus our efforts to manage even our complex conflicts constructively. We have learned from research that we can profitably strengthen our cooperative relationships and discuss our conflicts open-mindedly. Our conflicts will not disappear, but we can engage our partners so that we manage our conflicts and work together to get things done.

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