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## Organizational Conflicts: The Effects on Team Effectiveness in a Malaysian Statutory Body

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### Abstract

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Conflict has been suggested to be positive and useful for organizations. However, conflict provide negative effects, interferes with team performance and reduces satisfaction because it triggers stress and negativity that steer team members away from performing task effectively. Therefore, the aim of the study is to investigate the effects of these conflicts toward team effectiveness in a Malaysian statutory body. Three (3) types of organizational conflicts will be studied: task conflict, relationship conflict and process conflict. It is also to explore which of the three (3) conflicts have the most implication on the team effectiveness in the organization. A survey was conducted among the employees in the Malaysian Statutory Body to explore their response towards organizational conflict (task conflict, relationship conflict and process conflict) and team effectiveness. The findings of this study highlighted the understanding of the organizational conflict, team effectiveness from the employees' perspective. Based on the findings of this research, both task conflict and process have a moderate positive relationship with team effectiveness while there are no relationship between relationship conflict and team effectiveness. The findings of this study offers recommendations that would help the organization to improve the situation.

© 2016 Published by Future Academy [www.FutureAcademy.org.uk](http://www.FutureAcademy.org.uk)**Keywords:** Organization conflict; team effectiveness; task conflict; relationship conflict; process conflict.

### 1. Introduction

In performing complex tasks, it does not only involve task performance and goal achievement, it includes team effectiveness as an important role. However, the greatest challenge for team effectiveness is conflict. In defining conflict, it is the strain that occurs among team members as a result of different view or perceptions (Thomas, 1992; Cohen and Bailey, 2001). In spite of conflict being associated with greater and effective work relationship, conflict also imposes a positive and negative impact on team

work (De Dreu, 2001). Additionally, workplace or organizational conflicts are usually caused by different perception, needs, interest and values of a few people working together. This results in conflict to be classified into 3 categories namely, tasks conflict, relationship conflict and process conflict (Jehn and Mannix, 2001)

Troth (2009) explains, task conflict among team players are usually caused by disagreement of ideas, opinion, viewpoint and even the task to be done. Relationship conflict however, includes tension, work pressure, frustration and personal differences which involves attitude, preferences, personality and interpersonal style (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003; Jehn, 1997).

Fransen et al. (2011) contended that, team effectiveness is influenced by structure of the team itself which includes the members' abilities, characteristics, team members' role, leadership skills and interdependency. However, there are various researches who conducted the research to test the relationship between task conflict and team effectiveness, of which, Jehn (1995), Bradley et al. (2012) and Lee et al. (2014). Jehn (1995) and Bradley et al. (2012) reported that under the condition of high psychological safety climate, task conflict and team performance are positively related. In a more recent study by Lee et al. (2014), the diversity of team plays an important role in between task conflict and relationship conflict relationship. Significantly, this study will address further on the issues by investigating the relationship between various types of conflict and the effects on team effectiveness in a statutory body in Malaysia.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1. Task Conflict*

Jehn and Chatman (2000) highlighted that the most favourable type of conflict is task conflict in comparison to relationship conflict and process conflict. As further explained by Jehn and Chatman (2000) task conflict usually occurs when different opinions, viewpoints, decisions and proposed changes arise. If task conflict is at a moderate level, it is deemed to be positive as it promotes creativity, healthy competition among team members that leads to a better outcome. The better outcome can be achieved as different perspective of team members will lead to discussions. As team members get to share and present their views and opinions, this provides the team members with the satisfaction and fulfilment feeling when working in team. This promotes team members' self-esteem, appreciation and job satisfaction. Therefore, task conflict often includes constructive discussion in which leads to better decision-making and work outcomes. Disagreements about the task that focus solely on content-related issues can improve team effectiveness and performance.

### *2.2 Relationship Conflict*

Relationship conflict is deemed to be harmful considering the volatility and counter-productive nature that provide a negative impact on the group or team members. Relationship conflict highlights the negative emotions and interpersonal relationships among team members that are not associated to the task (Thomas, 1992; Jehn and Chatman, 2000). This type of conflict leads to delayed projects and poor project outcomes. Relationship conflicts cause different personalities, attitudes and perceptions among team members. This is one of the contributors of workforce diversity that impose challenges to

the management. In addition, relationship conflict not only increases stress and anxiety levels of team members, it also limits team members' decision making skills.

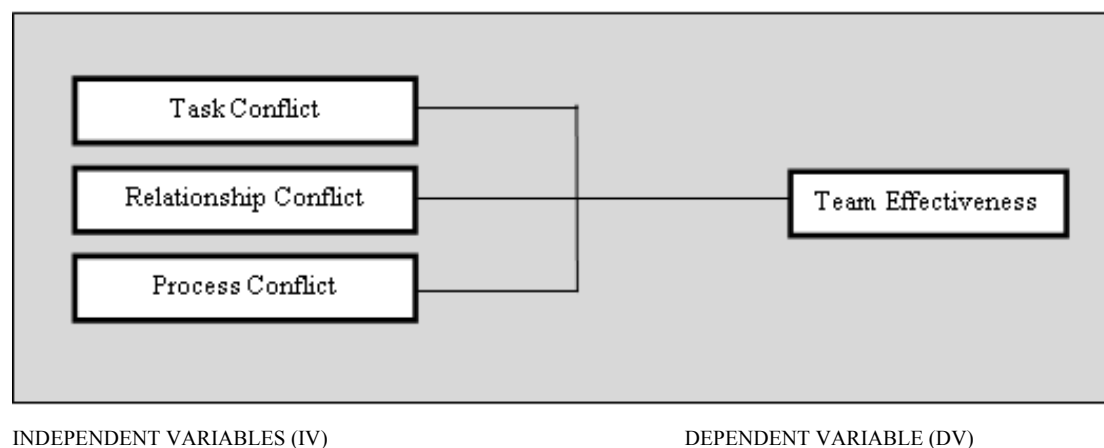
### 2.3 Process Conflict

Process conflict arises when dividing and delegating responsibility and deciding how to get work done (Behfar, Peterson, Mannix and Trochim, 2008). Process conflicts are usually observed in large groups or teams. This is due to the visibility of disputes and frustrations over responsibilities and assignments. For example, disagreements on work allocation and person in charged often caused delays and heated discussions about members' contributions and worth which leads to negativity among team members. However, low level of process conflict is an advantage as it promotes motivation and support positive competition among team members. Therefore, process conflicts should be kept at low level as it could trigger jealousy, loss of motivation and job dissatisfaction. This is where it should be controlled in order for managers and team leaders to obtain team effectiveness and satisfaction.

### 2.4 Team Effectiveness

A team is defined as a group of individuals who work towards common goals, with shared task and responsibility. According to Mahembe and Engelbrecht (2013), team effectiveness is when team goals are successfully achieved through the synchronization of both team members and the task done. Thus, team effectiveness should measure output of teams, the state of the group as a performing unit, as well as the impact of the group on its individual members.

Based on the literature discussed above, researchers proposed the following framework Figure 1 further explains the relationship between dependent and independent variable of the study.



**Fig. 1.** Theoretical Framework.

Based on figure above, the hypothesis are as follows :

- H1 There is a positive relationship between Team Effectiveness and Task Conflict
- H2 There is a positive relationship between Team Effectiveness and Relationship Conflict
- H3 There is a positive relationship between Team Effectiveness and Process Conflict

### 3. Research Methodologies

For this study, descriptive study method was adopted where studies are often designed to collect data that describe the characteristics of persons, events or situations. It also related to the correlation research between the types of conflict toward the team effectiveness in the organization. The unit of analysis for this study was the individual employees at one of a Malaysian statutory body. For the purpose of this study, purposive sampling was used as it is particularly relevant when it is concerned with exploring the universe and understanding the audience. The total of sample size is 50. The researcher had used interval scale which also known as likert scale for all variables in this study ranging from 1 = 'Strongly Disagree' until to 5 = 'Strongly Agree'. Data gathered from questionnaires will be analyzed using SPSS for Windows. Since descriptive method is being adopted for this research, descriptive statistic will be used to explore the data collected.

### 4. Results and Discussions

**Table 1.** Demographic Profile

Demographic Profile	Category	Percentage %
Gender	Male	26
	Female	74
Age	Less than 30 years old	16
	31 – 40	60
	41 and above	24
Position	Top Management	16
	Middle Management	34
	Executive	26
	Non-Executive	24
Division	Trade and services promotion	26
	Management services	26
	Exporters development	24
	Strategic Planning	24
Experience	Less than 1 year	2
	1-3 years	2
	3 – 5 years	6
	More than 5 years	90

As demonstrated in Table 1, the respondents consisted of 74% female and 26% male. The age group of the respondent showed that most of the respondents are between 31- 40 years of age, followed by 16% respondents who are less than 32 years old and 24 % of respondents who are 41 years and above. Most respondents work in Trade and services promotion division and Management service division (26%) and had work for more than 5 years 90%.

**Table 2. Coefficients<sup>a</sup>.**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.626	.559		2.908	.006
	MEANTC	.293	.141	.281	2.085	.043
	MEANRC	-.050	.094	-.071	-.530	.599
	MEANPC	.244	.120	.276	2.031	.048

Based on the results, the R<sup>2</sup> of the model is 0.20. The model which includes organizational conflicts namely, task conflict, relationship conflict and process conflict as independent variables explain 20% of the variance in team effectiveness. Of the three (3) independent variables, only task conflict and process conflict contribute moderately to team effectiveness where task conflict contributes slightly more to team effectiveness ( $\beta=0.281$ ,  $p<.01$ ) compared to process conflict ( $\beta=0.276$ ,  $p<.01$ ) (Table 2). Therefore, only hypothesis 1 and 3 are supported. No significant contribution was found between relationship conflict and team effectiveness. Therefore, H<sub>2</sub> is not supported. In addition, based on the F test, the model is considered significant (Table 3).

Table 3. ANOVA<sup>a</sup>.

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.845	3	.282	3.546	.022 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	3.652	46	.079		
	Total	4.497	49			

a. Dependent Variable: MEANTE

b. Predictors: (Constant), MEANPC, MEANRC, MEANTC

Results from the study indicated that organizational conflicts do exist in this organization. The four (4) major findings of the research are : (i) There is a moderate positive relationship between task conflict and team effectiveness, (ii) There is no relationship between relationship conflict and team effectiveness, (iii) There is a moderate positive relationship between process conflict and team effectiveness and (iv) Task conflict mostly effect team effectiveness.

## 5. Conclusion

A moderate task and process conflict can be constructive and healthy for the organization as it can aid in individuals development and team effectiveness improvements. Conflict steer people to face possible defects in a solution. It also helps in choosing a better solution by understanding the real interests, goals and needs is enhanced and ongoing communication around those issues is induced. Constructive conflict however, occurs when people personally transform and develop themselves from the conflict. Nevertheless, if not managed properly, conflict can be a damaging threat to an organization. There are few recommendations that would help the organization to improve the situation which includes: (i) developing appropriate strategies for conflict resolution, (ii) Encourage open communication and rewards and (iii) expose employees to organization conflict management through workshops and seminars. In conclusion, although conflicts have both negative and positive effects, the management and employees should work towards achieving the positive effect rather than the negative

especially in increasing organizational innovativeness and improving the quality of decisions in the organization. In addition, conflicts build the spirit of teamwork and cooperation among the employees or team members in the organization.

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