

Abstract

While various scholars have examined the multi-level properties of conflict and leadership, fewer studies have investigated simultaneously the influence of leadership on differing forms of conflict across multiple levels and cultures. This paper advances research in this area by developing a theoretical framework of the impact of leadership on conflict across multiple organizational levels and cultures. Specifically, we draw from existing work on transformational, authentic and servant leadership to illuminate the various links between leadership behaviors and various types of conflict (cognitive and affective conflict) at the individual and team levels. We argue that differing national cultures will moderate the impact of these leadership styles on conflict and outcomes (individual and team). Finally, we offer a research agenda and discuss the implications of our theoretical framework.

Introduction

There is a large body of evidence in support of the positive impact of leadership behaviors such as transformational (Avolio & Yammarino, 2002; Bass, 1985), authentic (Hannah, Walumbwa & Fry, 2011) and servant (Hu & Liden, 2011) leadership on followers. Additionally, a large portion of this leadership research is focused on one organizational level at a time (e.g. Ayoko & Callan, 2008; Hannah et al., 2011). However, research investigating the multilevel properties of leadership (e.g. Dansereau, Yammarino & Markham, 1995; Charbonnier-Voirin, El Akremi & Vandenberghe, 2010; Yammarino & Dansereau, 2008) on organizational processes is now emerging. We argue that such organizational processes include conflict and argue that leadership behaviors have a critical role to play on conflict across organizational levels.

In this respect, researchers have also begun to conceptualize conflict as having multilevel properties (e.g. Korsgaard, Jeong, Mahony and Pitariu, 2008). Likewise, recent research findings elucidate how differences in leader behaviors could impact differing types of conflict (a process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party, Wall & Callister, 1995:p. 157) among group members (Gallenkamp, Korsgaard, Picot, Welpé & Wigand, 2010; Kotlyar & Karakowsky, 2006). For example, Bradley, Postlethwaite, Klotz, Hamdani, and Brown (2012) demonstrate that the relationship between conflict and team performance could be moderated by other factors emanating from organizational support systems, including psychological safety climate and empowering leadership. This recent research further indicates that although dysfunctional conflict at the individual, group, and organizational levels may be inevitable, support systems such as organizational management, could exert a great deal of influence on workplace conflict development and resolution (Kotlyar & Karakowsky, 2006, 2007).

In particular, scholars propose that leadership may alter the way employees perceive, react to and manage conflict (Kotlyar & Karakowsky, 2006, 2007). Empirical research also shows that leader inspiration and communication of vision (transformational behaviors) made a large difference when team's destructive reactions to conflict were high (Ayoko & Callan, 2008). However, studies on the connection between leadership and conflict are just evolving with recent findings pointing to the need for more studies which encapsulate the theoretical pathways through which this relationship is possible (Kotlyar & Karakowsky, 2006, 2007). In this paper, therefore, we contribute to the study of leadership and conflict by integrating three streams of literature (leadership, conflict and culture) to propose that leadership behaviors are likely to impact conflict at multiple organizational levels. We also propose that national culture might moderate the influence of leadership across these multiple levels.

Overall, we believe that our current research has the potential to contribute to leadership, conflict and culture in three ways. First, we extend Korsgaard and colleagues (2008)'s work by investigating the intersection between conflict and leadership at multiple levels. Our paper is one of the first to propose an integrative theoretical framework in which we propose to examine concurrently three effective forms of leadership (i.e., transformational, authentic and servant leadership behaviors) and their relationships with conflict processes at multiple levels. Second, our research framework contributes to theories of two emerging conceptualizations of effective leadership (e.g. servant and authentic leadership). A budding body of recent research (see Avolio & Yammarino, 2002; Bass, 1985; Hannah, Walumbwa & Fry, 2011; Hu & Liden, 2011) indicates that authentic, servant and transformational leadership are related to many positive organizational outcomes. Our paper attempts to extend this area of research by proposing that different leadership behaviors will have varying impacts on differing types of conflict and at varying levels. Finally, we extend the literature on national culture by

proposing the influence of leadership behavior on conflict will be moderated by national culture of the followers at multiple levels.

To unpack the relationships among leadership, conflict processes and national culture, we put forward a theoretical framework and research propositions which illuminates some potential pathways through which the constructs of leadership, conflict and national culture relate to each other. Specifically and as shown in Figure 1, we predict different pathways through which transformational, authentic and servant leadership behaviors could be associated with conflict at the individual, group and organizational levels. Building on some recent research (Chen, Sharma, Edinger, Shapiro & Farh, 2011; Kotlyar & Karakowsky, 2006, 2007), we expect that transformational, authentic, and servant leadership styles would be positively related to aspects of conflict at the workplace. We also propose that national culture is a moderator of the link between leadership and conflict. The article concludes by outlining a future research agenda for leadership and conflict in the workplace. We begin the discussion of our model in the next section.

Conceptual Background and Model Development

Effective leadership, conflict and organizational performance

In a bid to attain set organizational performance, modern organizations often form working teams and team leaders, and then task those teams to execute corporate strategies using resources at the individual, group, and organizational levels. Furthermore, as organizations shift away from the use of strict hierarchical structures and individualized jobs, there has been an increase in the implementation of autonomous team-based work structures that often augment the importance of individual employee's initiative and cooperation (LePine, Erez, & Johnson, 2002; Mathieu, Maynard, Rapp, & Gilson, 2008). Notably, the compactness of those teams is under great scrutiny, as organizations realize that team effort

calls for team interdependence which, in turn, enhances working environments that uphold cooperative behaviors. These working environments continually rely more and more on mutual dependence among employees, necessitating spontaneous give-and-take and accommodating gestures among parties. Consequently, the potential for dysfunctional workplace conflict becomes more pronounced (Kozlowski & Bell, 2003; Wall & Callister, 1995).

As previously established, Wall and Callister (1995, p. 157) define conflict as ‘a process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party’. Amason (1996) reports two distinctive types of conflict namely cognitive and affective conflict. However, following the refinement of the conflict construct, Jehn and colleagues (Jehn, 1994, 1995, 1997; Jehn & Mannix, 2001; Jehn, Chadwick & Thatcher, 1997) propose that groups experience three distinct types of conflict: task, relationship and process conflict. Furthermore, *task conflict* (sometimes refer to as cognitive conflict) emanates from disagreements on strategies and approaches to the group’s task, *relationship conflict* (also referred to as affective conflict) relates to personal and emotional disagreements within the group, whereas *process conflict* revolves around allocation of resources. Research suggests that all three forms can undermine group performance. Other studies emphasize that relationship conflict would damage team performance, whereas task conflict would improve performance under certain conditions (Bradley, Postlethwaite, Klotz, Hamdani, & Brown, 2012; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003, Korsgaard, Jeong, Mahony, & Pitariu, 2008). In another recent study, Gallenkamp et al (2010) found that relationship conflict negatively influenced team performance, while process conflict positively influenced performance. They also found that competitive conflict management moderated the relationship of process conflict and performance while relationship conflict was moderated

by collaborative conflict management. More recent organizational research has found that effective forms of leadership, like transformational leadership, were positively related to team members' motivation (Chen & Gogus, 2008), and likely to positively influence process and task conflicts.

Clearly, it makes intuitive sense to link effective forms of leadership to the various types of conflicts, as leadership is likely to directly influence conflict type or indirectly influence the relationship between the various types of conflict and team performance (Burke, Stagl, Klein, Goodwin, Salas & Halpin, 2006). To address the limited research on the relationship between effective leadership and conflict, this article proposes a theoretical framework and testable hypotheses on the interrelationships between leadership and workplace conflict. Specifically and as shown in Figure 1, this paper focuses on three effective leadership processes in a bid to provide broad potential research propositions to aid in a more future focused research. Furthermore, on the basis of the preceding discussion, we predict different pathways through which transformational, authentic and servant leadership behaviors could be associated with conflict at the individual, group and organizational levels. First, on the basis of some recent findings (Chen, Sharma, Edinger, Shapiro & Farh, 2011; Kotlyar & Karakowsky, 2006, 2007), we expect that transformational, authentic, and servant leadership styles would be positively related to aspects of conflict at the workplace.

Transformational leadership, conflict and organizational performance

Within organizational studies, transformational leadership has been described as one of the most effective forms of leadership, having been studied extensively (Avolio et al., 2009; Bass 1985). Transformational leadership has been linked to various employee attitudes and behaviors (Bono & Judge, 2003; Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006) and its effects have been

reported around the globe, in a variety of contexts across cultures (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Kirkman, Chen, Farh, Chen, & Lowe, 2009; Walumbwa, Lawler, & Avolio, 2007).

Figure 1 about here

Transformational leader behavior focuses on broadening follower aspirations, goals and values, and providing them with confidence to perform beyond the expectations specified in the implicit or explicit exchange work agreement (Bass, 1985). According to Bass and Avolio (Avolio and Bass, 2002; Avolio, 2005; Bass, 1985), transformational leadership focuses on four leader behaviors that influence followers' values and aspirations and arouse them to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the organization. These four leader behaviors include idealized influence or charisma (serving as followers' role model such that followers seek to identify with their leaders and emulate them), inspirational motivation (inspiring followers with challenges and persuasion that provide meaning and understanding), intellectually stimulating (involves expanding followers abilities by questioning assumptions, challenging the status quo, and encouraging problem reformulation, and novel approaches to solving problems), and individualized consideration (providing the followers with support, mentoring, and coaching).

Furthermore, transformational leadership provides employees with confidence to perform beyond the expectations specified in the implicit or explicit exchange work agreement (Bass, 1985; Dvir, Eden, Avolio, & Shamir, 2002). Transformational leadership also emphasizes each follower's sense of self-worth in order to engage the follower in true commitment and involvement in her or his work. Thus, it is value-based aspect of leadership

that leads to exceptional performance by individuals and teams (e.g., Bono & Judge, 2003; Dvir et al., 2002; Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006; Schaubroeck, Lam, & Cha, 2007; Walumbwa, Avolio, & Zhu, 2008; Walumbwa & Hartnell, 2011). Consequently, we propose that transformational leadership will be positively related to process and task conflicts, and negatively related to relationship conflict. It is plausible to assume that the relationship between transformational leadership and task and process conflicts will enhance performance at the individual, team and organizational levels. We also envisage that national culture will influence the relationship among transformational leadership, conflict types and performance. First, we encourage researchers to examine the direct effects of leadership on conflict types (P1 in Figure 1). Second, researchers should examine how transformational leadership moderates the relationship between conflict types and performance (H5 and H6 in Figure 1). Third, researchers should examine how national culture influences the relationships among transformational leadership, conflict types and performance (P4, P7, P8, P9, P16, P17 and P18 in Figure 1). Thus,

Proposition 1a: Transformational leadership will be positively related to task, and process conflicts, but negatively related to relationship conflict.

Proposition 1b: Transformational leadership will moderate the relationship between conflict type (task, process and relationship conflicts) and performance outcomes at the individual/dyadic-, team/unit-, and organizational-levels.

Proposition 1c: National culture will moderate the relationship among transformational leadership, conflict type (task, process and relationship conflicts) and performance outcomes at the individual/dyadic-, team/unit-, and organizational-levels.

Authentic leadership, conflict and organizational performance

Avolio, Walumbwa and colleagues (Avolio, Walumbwa & Weber, 2009; Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008) describe authentic leadership as a pattern of transparent and ethical leader behavior that encourages openness in sharing information needed to make decisions while accepting followers' inputs (Avolio et al 2009, p.423). Furthermore, authentic leadership is "a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development" (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008, p. 94).

According to Walumbwa et al (2008), authentic leaders display four types of behaviors. First, they exhibit balanced processing and are less susceptible to denials, distortions, and exaggerations. Second, they have an internalized moral perspective and are guided by internal moral standards as opposed to those behaviors based on external pressure from peers and other organizational demands. Third, authentic leaders display relational transparency which is aimed at promoting trust through disclosures and openly share information and expressions of the true thoughts and feelings. Finally, authentic leaders display self-awareness and appear to understand their strengths, motives, and weaknesses and how others view their leadership. Based on the discussion above, we propose that authentic leaders promote a culture of authentic followership, where followers 'display internalized regulatory processes, balanced processing of information, relational transparency, and authentic behavior paralleling ... characterizing authentic leaders' (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 322). Consequently, we propose that authentic leadership will be positively related to process and task conflicts, and negatively related to relationship conflict. Further, the

relationship between authentic leadership and task and process conflicts will enhance performance at the individual, team and organizational levels. Moreover, we expect that national culture will influence the relationship among authentic leadership, conflict types and performance. First, we encourage researchers to examine the direct effects of leadership on conflict types (H2 in Figure 1). Second, researchers should examine how authentic leadership moderates the relationship between conflict types and performance (P5 and P6 in Figure 1). Third, researchers should examine how national culture influences the relationships among authentic leadership, conflict types and performance (P8, P12, and P14 in Figure 1). Thus,

Proposition 2a: Authentic leadership will be positively related to task, and process conflicts, but negatively related to relationship conflict.

Proposition 2b: Authentic leadership will moderate the relationship between conflict type (task, process and relationship conflicts) and performance outcomes at the individual/dyadic-, team/unit-, and organizational- levels.

Proposition 2c: National culture will moderate the relationship among authentic leadership, conflict type (task, process and relationship conflicts) and performance outcomes at the individual/dyadic-, team/unit-, and organizational- levels.

Servant leadership, conflict and organizational performance

According to Greenleaf (1977), servant leadership focuses on building trust through selflessly serving others first, while stressing personal integrity and focusing on long-term relationships with the followers. Liden, Wayne, Zhao and Henderson (2008, p. 162) propose that servant leadership aims to develop followers to their full potential in order to attain task effectiveness, community stewardship, self-motivation, and future leadership capabilities. Consequently, leaders rely on face-to-face communication with their employees in a bid to comprehend each employee's needs, abilities, goals and potential. Furthermore, leaders do

this by building self-confidence, serving as role models, inspiring trust, and providing information, feedback and resources (Liden et al., 2008, p. 162). Additionally, servant leadership emphasizes leader behaviors that focus on follower development, and de-emphasize glorification of the leader (Hale & Fields, 2007, p. 397).

Additionally, Liden et al (2008) describe servant leadership as a multidimensional construct (i.e., providing emotional healing, creating value for the community, using conceptual skills, empowering subordinates, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, and behaving ethically) which explains community citizenship behavior, in-role performance, and organizational commitment at the individual-level of analysis. Further, servant leadership emphasizes leaders' moral behavior, protecting followers from self-interested leaders pursuing ends for their own selfish gain (Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008; Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2010, Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santora, 2008). Servant leaders also recognize their moral responsibility to the success of the organization as well as to the success of their subordinates, the organization's customers, and other stakeholders (Ehrhart, 2004). Freeman (2011, p.125) distinguishes several attributes of servant leadership, including '*functional* attributes (vision, honesty, integrity, trust, service, modeling, pioneering, appreciation of others, and empowerment) and accompanying attributes (communication, credibility, competence, stewardship, visibility, influence, persuasion, listening, encouragement, teaching, and delegation)'.

Freeman (2011, p. 124) has recently clarified some values espoused by servant leaders. These, include a guiding vision and purpose, loving others, and trusting and empowering others. Further, servant leader behave in ways which reflect their values as they craft organizational vision, exhibit authentic behaviors, focus on relationships, and serve others (Freeman, 2011, p. 124). This leads to increased trust between leader and follower (Errol &

Winston, 2005), growth in followers (Rowe, 2003; Whetstone, 2002), empowerment of followers (Bowie, 2000; Lloyd, 1996; Wilson, 1998), and improved individual, team, and organizational performance (Bennett, 2001). Thus, servant leadership builds a servant culture which is compatible with conflict management literature. It is plausible that servant leadership will enhance a culture conducive for mutual respect and integrity among team members and this in turn would be expected to relate to the development and management of conflict within teams. It is also possible that national culture will influence the relationship among servant leadership, conflict and performance.

In general, the limited research findings indicate that servant leadership is positively related to ‘follower satisfaction, their job satisfaction, intrinsic work satisfaction, caring for the safety of others, and organizational commitment’ (Avolio, Walumbwa & Weber 2009, p.437), trust in the leader as well as trust in one’s organization (Joseph & Winston, 2005), and ‘followers’ ratings of leaders’ servant leadership were positively related to followers’ ratings of leaders’ values of empathy, integrity, and competence’ (Washington et al. 2006, p. 700). Accordingly, we propose that servant leadership will be positively related to process and task conflicts, and negatively related to relationship conflict. Further, the relationship between servant leadership and task and process conflicts will enhance performance at the individual, team and organizational levels. We propose that national culture will influence the relationship among servant leadership, conflict types and performance. First, we encourage researchers to examine the direct effects of leadership on conflict types (P3 in Figure 1). Second, researchers should examine how servant leadership moderates the relationship between conflict types and performance (P5 and P6 in Figure 1). Third, researchers should examine how national culture influences the relationships among servant leadership, conflict types and performance (P7, P15, and P16 in Figure 1). Thus,

Proposition 3a: Servant leadership will be positively related to task, and process conflicts, but negatively related to relationship conflict.

Proposition 3b: Servant leadership will moderate the relationship between conflict type (task, process and relationship conflicts) and performance outcomes at the individual/dyadic-, team/unit-, and organizational- levels.

Proposition 3c: National culture will moderate the relationship among servant leadership, conflict type (task, process and relationship conflicts) and performance outcomes at the individual/dyadic-, team/unit-, and organizational- levels.

Conclusion and some suggestions for future research directions

In this paper, we develop a theoretical framework illustrating how three forms of effective leadership would be related to various conflicts across multiple organizational levels and cultures. Through a series of testable research propositions, we suggest ways in which transformational, authentic and servant leadership would impact on various conflict (task, relationship and process) processes and management at the individual and team levels. We have also argued that differing national cultures would moderate the impact of these leadership styles on conflict processes (individual and team). Thus, our paper is designed to contribute to organizational theory and practice in three ways. First, our research framework extends stand-alone models which examine single leadership theories and their relationships to conflict processes. By proposing an integrative theory testing where three leadership theories are examined in a single model of conflict processes, we expect to find unique contributions from each leadership conceptualization, and improve models such that proposed by Chen et al. (2011). Thus, we believe that by empirically testing the research

propositions put forward in this paper, we will make major and noteworthy contributions to leadership, conflict and national culture literature.

Future research is required to shed light on how other effective forms of leadership relate to conflict processes. For example, we have focused exclusively on three leadership approaches and how they relate to conflict processes and the role of national culture. It is equally important for future research to examine the mechanisms through which other effective forms of leadership (like transactional and ethical) would be related to conflict processes and national culture. It is likely that ethical leader behavior may have far reaching effects on conflict processes than the three leadership styles discussed here. In closing, our paper advances work in the field of leadership, conflict processes and national culture by identifying some mechanisms through which leadership may influence conflict processes within the constraints of national culture. Future work should test the hypotheses put forward in this paper, in order to understand how conflict processes are influenced by both effective forms of leadership and national culture. Ultimately, this proposed study has the potential to provide some firm foundation upon which we could predict conflict processes as well as give us insights on the leadership-conflict- national culture relationship.

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Figure 1 Figure 1. A framework explaining relationships among leadership, conflict types, national culture, and performance.

