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"It's Not Conflict, It's Differences of Opinion": An In-Depth Examination of Conflict in Nonprofit Boards

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Abstract

To properly manage conflict, the mechanisms of the complex conflict process must be understood. Building on existing research, the purpose of this study was to develop a better understanding of the conflict process by examining nonprofit board member experiences with task, process, and relationship conflict, identifying latent conditions that influence the likelihood of these conflict types, and exploring the impact of conflict within nonprofit boards. Semistructured interviews were conducted with 20 provincial sport organization (PSO) board members. The findings revealed that board members downplayed conflict because of its negative connotation. Furthermore, task, process, and relationship conflict were each described according to continuums of intensity ranging from respectful and professional discussion to heated and rigorous debate. The intensity of each type of conflict was perceived to be influenced by specific latent conditions and

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to influence both group and individual outcomes. These findings highlight the complex nature of intragroup conflict in this setting and demonstrate the need to identify intensity when examining task, process, and relationship conflict. Implications for research and practice are presented.

Keywords

Intragroup conflict, intensity, nonprofit boards

Intragroup conflict is inevitable and as such research continues to focus on unpacking the complex conflict process. Conflict is widely considered to be a multidimensional construct (see De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; also Greer & Jehn, 2007; Jehn, 1997; Jehn, Greer, Levine, & Szulanski, 2008; Jehn & Mannix, 2001), and a variety of latent conditions are purported to increase the likelihood that different types of conflict will be experienced within a group (e.g., Amason & Sapienza, 1997; Jehn, 1995; Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999; Mooney, Holahan, & Amason, 2007; Vodosek, 2007). Furthermore, research continues to examine the "paradoxical effects of conflict" on individual and group outcomes like decision making (Mooney et al., 2007, p. 733), where conflict can force group members to consider and discuss multiple perspectives (functional conflict; e.g., Jehn, 1995; Tjosvold, 2006), yet can distract individuals from the task at hand (dysfunctional conflict; e.g., Jehn, 1995; Simons & Peterson, 2000). Interestingly, this research has had relatively limited consideration in the nonprofit context, and voluntary governing boards in particular (Grissom, 2010; Ihrke & Johnson, 2004). This is somewhat surprising given the importance of the board to nonprofit organizational effectiveness (Herman & Renz, 2008). In addition, research in the nonprofit context has tended to examine conflict as a universal rather than a multidimensional construct, thus further limiting our understanding of the conflict process in this setting.

One exception to this is a recent survey study of multidimensional conflict in nonprofit sport boards (Hamm-Kerwin & Doherty, 2010). The study found support for task (disagreement about what to do), process (disagreement about how to do it), and relationship conflict (personal disagreements) and revealed their negative influence, to different degrees, on perceived decision quality, board member satisfaction, and commitment to the board (Hamm-Kerwin & Doherty, 2010). The study further revealed that relationship conflict partially mediated the impact of task and process conflict (Hamm-Kerwin & Doherty, 2010), supporting the notion that the negative effect of task and

process conflict may, in fact, be a function of those conflicts escalating to relationship conflict (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Simons & Peterson, 2000). These findings were particularly illuminating for the nonprofit board context, given the support for the multidimensionality of the conflict construct and insight into the varying effects of the different conflict types.

However, Mooney et al. (2007) argued that to effectively manage conflict, a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms of the conflict process needs to be achieved, including the antecedents of conflict, interpretation of disagreements, and their effects on various individual and group outcomes. Indeed, Hamm-Kerwin and Doherty (2010) noted that continued examination of multidimensional intragroup conflict in nonprofit boards in general, and sport boards in particular, is required to enhance our understanding of the nature of conflict in these contexts. Thus, the purpose of the current study was to build on that research by exploring how board members experience task, process, and relationship conflict, as well as identifying latent conditions of these conflict types, and the impact of conflict on the group and its individual members in nonprofit sport boards. The findings are expected to contribute to the extant theory and literature by confirming and extending our understanding of intragroup conflict in this setting.

According to Patton (2002), achieving a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon stems from asking individuals what the phenomenon means to them, how it affects them, what they do about it, and so on. Several research questions guided the current qualitative investigation:

1. What are nonprofit sport board members' experiences with task, process, and relationship conflict?
2. What are the latent conditions of task, process, and relationship conflict in nonprofit sport boards? Do these conditions have a variable influence on each conflict type?
3. What individual and group outcomes do task, process, and relationship conflict influence in nonprofit sport boards? Does the impact on outcomes vary by conflict type?

An overview of the extant literature on the nature of intragroup conflict as a multidimensional construct, latent conditions of that conflict, and its impact on individuals and the group as a whole is presented next. Research on intragroup conflict in general, and in the nonprofit board setting in particular, is reviewed. Following that, an overview of the context of the study is presented.

Review of Literature

The Nature of Intragroup Conflict

Intragroup conflict research is largely based on task, process, and relationship conflict dimensions identified by Jehn (1995, 1997). Task conflicts are substantive disagreements among group members about the tasks being performed (e.g., group members disagree about where funding should be spent). Process conflicts are also substantive disagreements regarding how a task should be accomplished (e.g., group members disagree about who will do what tasks). Finally, relationship conflicts are personal rather than substantive disagreements and tend to be emotional, involving tension and friction among members (e.g., group members disagree about personal values). Research in the for-profit and experimental settings has focused almost exclusively on a multidimensional framework (incorporating at least two of the conflict types), finding support for its presence in different types of groups (e.g., Amason, 1996; Jehn, 1995, 1997; Jehn & Chatman, 2000; Jehn et al., 1999, 2008; Jehn & Mannix, 2001; Passos & Caetano, 2005; Pearson, Ensley, & Amason, 2002; Pelled, 1996), and for the discrepant influence of the different conflict types on various outcomes (see Jehn et al., 2008).

Research on conflict as a multidimensional construct has received very little consideration in the nonprofit context in general, and governing boards in particular. The focus on conflict as a unidimensional construct minimizes the complex nature of group conflict and compromises our understanding of the mechanisms of the conflict process. Thus, recent support for the multidimensionality of conflict in the nonprofit sector is encouraging. Specifically, Reid and Karambayya (2009) uncovered task, process, and emotional (relationship) conflict in qualitative case studies of leaders of nonprofit arts organizations and found that each conflict type had a differential influence on operational functions morale in the rest of the organization. As noted earlier, Hamm-Kerwin and Doherty (2010) found support for the three types of conflict in nonprofit sport boards and reported their differential impact on several outcomes. Their study provided further insight into the nature of conflict in nonprofit boards and helped to lay a foundation for continued research on multidimensional conflict in that setting. The current study builds on this preliminary work to better understand board members' perceptions of and experiences with the three different types of conflict.

Latent Conditions for Conflict

Mintzberg (1973) suggested that managers spend a large portion of their time dealing with conflict, and conflict management often takes priority over other

activities. To effectively deal with conflict, it is important to understand the factors that may increase the likelihood for conflict to occur (Mooney et al., 2007). Research has indicated several conditions that lead to conflict, some with varying influence on the different conflict types (e.g., Jehn, 1995; Jehn et al., 1999; Mooney et al., 2007; Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999; Vodosek, 2007).

Group diversity has been the predominant focus of this research in the for-profit and experimental group settings. Jehn (1995) found inverse associations between demographic homogeneity in the work group and task and relationship conflict, whereas Jehn et al. (1999) found direct associations between value diversity and task, process, and relationship conflict, and informational diversity and task conflict. There is also evidence of cultural (ethnic) diversity and increased task, process, and relationship conflict (Vodosek, 2007). Pelled et al. (1999) and later Mooney et al. (2007) found that functional diversity in work groups, in terms of different backgrounds and experiences, was directly associated with task conflict but had no bearing on relationship conflict. Taken together, there is support in general for group diversity as a latent condition for conflict; however, the apparent influence of different forms of diversity on task, process, and relationship conflict, and the possibility of still other meaningful forms, warrants further investigation in different contexts (Jehn et al., 1999; Mooney et al., 2007; Vodosek, 2007).

There has been relatively less attention to a variety of other conditions for conflict. There is evidence that group size, tolerance for open discussion, goal uncertainty, and team-based rewards are directly associated with both task and relationship conflict (Amason & Sapienza, 1997; Mooney et al., 2007). There is also evidence that increased levels of task conflict trigger relationship conflict (Mooney et al., 2007; Rispens, 2009; Simons & Peterson, 2000; Tidd, McIntyre, & Friedman, 2004). The potential connection between process and relationship conflict has received limited consideration (Greer, Jehn, & Mannix, 2008). With the exception of some evidence noted below, it is unclear whether these or perhaps other conditions precipitate conflict in nonprofit boards. Mooney et al. (2007) noted that conditions for conflict may be specific to the context in which tasks and decision making take place, implying the need to explore conflict in a variety of settings.

A few studies have examined latent conditions for conflict in the nonprofit setting. Ihrke and Johnson (2004) found that boards characterized as reactive had increased potential for conflict, whereas boards that were more proactive, making informed decisions about short- and long-term issues, had lower perceived conflict. Ihrke and Niederjohn (2005) also found that reactive city councils experienced greater conflict, whereas leadership credibility was inversely associated with conflict on those councils. Grissom (2010) reported

that board size, racial diversity, and ideological diversity with regard to fiscal issues impacted directly on perceived conflict on school boards, whereas common vision among board members and professionalization were inversely associated with conflict there. In nonprofit sport organizations, Verhoeven et al. (1999) found that positive leader–member exchange, common interest, minimal time consumption, and less complex tasks reduced the likelihood of interpersonal or micro-level conflict. However, research in the nonprofit context is limited by its focus on conflict as a unidimensional construct, therefore possibly failing to address the complex nature of conflict in this setting and the determinants of different types of conflict. One exception was a study of nonprofit sport boards which found that decision complexity was directly related to perceived task, process, and relationship conflict (Hamm & Doherty, 2008).

The extant literature indicates that there is an important gap in the research with regard to latent conditions of multidimensional conflict in the nonprofit board setting. Theory and practice may be advanced by examining participant perceptions of the relevance of particular conflict conditions identified previously in the literature as well as allowing board members the opportunity to identify conditions that are particularly relevant to them and may not have been previously considered in this context.

The Impact of Conflict

There are contrasting arguments regarding the impact of intragroup conflict. Proponents of the interactionist perspective claim, and provide some evidence of, the positive impact of task conflict and negative impact of process and relationship conflict (e.g., Amason, 1996; Amason & Mooney, 1999; De Dreu, 1997; De Dreu & Van Vianen, 2001; Jehn, 1995, 1997; Jehn & Chatman, 2000; Jehn et al., 1999; Jehn & Mannix, 2001; Simons & Peterson, 2000). This perspective defends that task conflict is potentially functional because group members challenge the status quo and consider multiple perspectives. In contrast, relationship and process conflict are likely dysfunctional because group members are distracted from accomplishing the task at hand (Jehn, 1995). However, in their meta-analysis, De Dreu and Weingart (2003) found that claims of functional conflict were not empirically supported and that task conflict was just as likely as relationship conflict to have a negative impact on individuals and the group. De Dreu and Weingart argued that the information processing perspective better explains the impact of intragroup conflict, where increased cognitive load associated with conflict interferes with flexible thinking and creative problem solving. Simons and Peterson (2000) suggested

that task (and presumably process) conflict can, in fact, trigger relationship conflict which is consistently negative, thus explaining the negative impact of task conflict in the work place. As noted earlier, there is some preliminary support for this triggering effect, including one study in the nonprofit sport board setting (Hamm-Kerwin & Doherty, 2010). The equivocal evidence regarding the functional or dysfunctional impact of task conflict has increased debate about the utility of the interactionist versus information processing perspectives. Until the complex conflict process is better understood, it is possible that the potential positive impact of task conflict may be prematurely dismissed. Furthermore, Greer et al. (2008) noted that process conflict is often excluded from research examining the impact of different conflict types. This may be shortsighted as process conflict has been shown to have a meaningful impact on group functioning (e.g., Greer et al., 2008; Greer & Jehn, 2007; Passos & Caetano, 2005).

We have even less understanding of the potentially differential effects of conflict in nonprofit boards because of the limited research in that setting and the predominant focus on unidimensional conflict. That research has also been largely restricted to the consideration of the impact of conflict on broader organizational effectiveness (see Ihrke & Johnson, 2004). Beyond that, studies have examined nonprofit board conflict and innovation (Ihrke, Proctor, & Gabris, 2003), operations and morale (Reid & Karambayya, 2009), decision quality, satisfaction, and commitment (Hamm-Kerwin & Doherty, 2010). Thus, there is also a gap in the literature with regard to the breadth of possible positive and negative outcomes of multidimensional conflict in the nonprofit board setting. Research that confirms presumed outcomes (e.g., decision quality), and allows participants to identify other important outcomes, in nonprofit sport boards can provide valuable insight into the functional and/or dysfunctional role of conflict in the nonprofit setting.

Context

The nature of nonprofit boards brings together individuals who may possess diverse interests and agendas (Duca, 1996; Ihrke & Johnson, 2004). Duca (1996) stated that the right mix of people combined with a good operating structure that "clearly defines roles, expectations, functions, and processes will help any board of directors conduct its business more effectively" (p. 55). However, the reality is that nonprofit board members may hold multiple role identities as a result of different personal commitments, both within and beyond the organization (e.g., volunteers may hold several positions in one organization; some individuals may sit on a number of boards; Cuskelly, Hoye, & Auld, 2006;

Nicholson & Tunnicliff, 2009; Pearce, 1993); yet they are charged with making group rather than individual decisions, thus increasing the likelihood for conflict to occur.

The context of this study was boards of directors in nonprofit, voluntary sport organizations. Board performance has been of growing concern for sport management scholars and practitioners over the past decade (see Hoye & Cuskelly, 2007) in that effective board functioning is considered to be fundamental to organizational performance (e.g., Bayle & Robinson, 2007; Bradshaw, Murray, & Wolpin, 1992; Green & Griesinger, 1996; Herman & Renz, 2008; Papadimitriou, 2007). Inglis, Alexander, and Weaver (1999) defined three essential areas of sport board functioning as strategic activities, operations, and resource planning. These responsibilities are similar to other nonprofit organization boards (see Bradshaw et al., 1992). In Canada, provincial sport organization (PSO) boards play an essential role in the delivery of sport by overseeing the strategic development and delivery of programs, player and coach training, and allocating scarce resources. Consequently, understanding the nature of the groups responsible for these functions is critical to effective sport delivery.

Voluntary sport organizations are member benefit organizations where members of the organization are "directly and intimately involved in the governance of their organization through having an opportunity to either become elected or appointed to their respective boards or to vote at elections" (Hoye & Cuskelly, 2003, p. 114). In addition to individual interests and agendas, alliances or representative groups may form as a result of board members being chosen from the membership, leading to power imbalances on the board (Hoye & Cuskelly, 2003; Verhoeven et al., 1999). Furthermore, nonprofit sport boards operate within contexts where there are numerous opinions regarding the degree of expertise, the need for external advice, and policy development needed to ensure effective operations (see Inglis, 1997; Macintosh & Whitson, 1990). These conditions may increase the potential for conflict to occur in this setting (Inglis, 1997).

Method

Research Paradigm

A postpositivist–constructivist paradigm guided the study in that previous theory and research shaped the examination of the conflict process, and participant voices further defined the factors and their associations within that process (Ponterotto, 2005; Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007). This hybrid paradigm

holds that our understanding of a phenomenon can benefit from verification and explanation as well as further discovery of realities associated with the phenomenon. As such, extant research is used to guide the investigation "without limiting the discovery process" (Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007, p. 418). This approach was managed in the current study with the use of both focused and open-ended questions intended to generate data that may verify and reveal concepts associated with intragroup conflict.

Theoretical Sampling

Participant selection was based on theoretical sampling, where individuals were identified by the researchers based on "manifestations of a theoretical construct of interest so as to elaborate and examine the construct and its variations" (Patton, 2002, p. 243). Specifically, board members who had previously rated either notably high or low levels of conflict within their PSO board in a previous study (Hamm-Kerwin & Doherty, 2010), and who had given consent to be contacted further, were approached to participate. Their previous ratings were based on completion of the Intragroup Conflict Scale (Jehn, 1995; Jehn & Chatman, 2000), which measures task, process, and relationship conflict. Using the same rating scale of 1 = *low* to 7 = *high*, participants in that study were categorized into low (1 to 2.5), medium (2.6 to 5.4), or high (5.5 to 7) conflict groups based on the extreme-groups design procedure (Brawley, Carron, & Widmeyer, 1988). As described by Brawley et al. (1988), this design ensured that a comprehensive view of higher and lower conflict levels was represented. Participants were categorized as being in a low- or high-conflict group if they had rated at least two of the conflict types low or high, respectively. The design assumes that the associations between independent and dependent variables (high or low) are more evident for individuals whose perceptions of the variables are the strongest (Brawley et al., 1988). Thus, in the current study, participants with extreme cases identified in the previous study were solicited for the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding of the nature of conflict, latent conditions that influence each conflict type, and the influence of task, process, and relationship conflict on group and individual outcomes.

Of the 86 participants in the previous study (Hamm-Kerwin & Doherty, 2010), 41 consented to be contacted again. Of those, 34 individuals were classified as being from either a high ($n = 18$) or low ($n = 16$) conflict group based on the survey results. These individuals were contacted by the researchers 6 months after the first study and an interview time was arranged with those who agreed to participate. Three follow-up contacts were made by

e-mail or telephone to solicit participation from nonrespondents. The final sample comprised 20 participants (12 from low-conflict groups and 8 from high-conflict groups) from 14 PSO boards. Specifically, nine boards had one respondent, four boards had two respondents, and one board had three respondents. This sample allowed for a comprehensive exploration of patterns across a variety of different boards and board member experiences (Erbert, Mearns, & Dena, 2005). The interviews took approximately 1 h to complete and were audiotaped with the participant's approval. On completion of the interviews, the audiotapes were transcribed verbatim. A copy of the verbatim transcript was sent to each participant and feedback was requested to confirm authenticity.

Interview Guide

Consistent with the postpositivist–constructivist paradigm, a semistructured interview guide with open questions (Hill et al., 2005) was developed to provide participants the opportunity to discuss their experiences with each conflict type as well as their perceptions of the conditions that influence each conflict type and the impact of each conflict type in their board. The semistructured guide also ensured that each interview followed the same protocol (Patton, 2002).

Participants were given a brief definition of each type of conflict according to Jehn (1995, 1997) and asked, in turn, whether each type exists in their board and, if so, to provide examples and describe what happens. Participants were also asked to identify and discuss any factors (conditions) that contributed to each type of conflict. Given their relative attention in the literature, participants were additionally prompted to discuss any influence of board diversity (see Jehn et al., 1999; Vodosek, 2007) and decision complexity (Compare Hamm & Doherty, 2008; Verhoeven et al., 1999) as latent conditions for each type of conflict. Next, participants were asked to identify and discuss any impact of task, process, and relationship conflict on their board as well as any impact on themselves. They were also invited to comment on the impact, if any, of each type of conflict on decision quality as a key measure of board performance (see Amason, 1996).

During the course of each interview, strategies were used to reduce the likelihood of recall bias. For instance, participants were initially asked to reflect on the level of conflict within their board and, as a point of reference, were given a copy of their survey responses from the previous conflict study (Hamm-Kerwin & Doherty, 2010). As well, participants were consistently asked to provide examples to support their perceptions of each type of conflict,

antecedent conditions of conflict, and impact of conflict. The ability of the participants to recall specific experiences or cases of conflict suggests that the self-selected examples were particularly meaningful to the board members' definitions and interpretations of conflict in this setting (Yarrow, Campbell, & Burton, 1970).

Analysis

Data analysis followed two strategies recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings: First, multiple coders were used to establish the framework for organizing and describing the data. This was undertaken by the authors of the preceding study (Hamm-Kerwin & Doherty, 2010) and a third, external coder who was involved neither with that investigation nor with the design of the current investigation. The intent of using that individual was to mitigate any threat to the validity and reliability of the coding, such as a priori hypotheses that may carry over from one study to the next. Second, systematic organization of the coding framework and data was achieved through the use of the NVivo data management program. This program allowed the researchers to extract lines of text and electronically store them in groups that represented the identified themes. This structured representation of the findings allows the researchers, as well as potential outside auditors, the opportunity to efficiently verify the authenticity of the coded themes in relation to the transcript data.

Once the transcripts were checked and confirmed for accuracy by the participants, a multistep coding process was undertaken (Hill et al., 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Open coding was used first to align the data into broad a priori themes that corresponded with the study's research questions and interview guide, namely, experiences with each type of conflict, latent conditions of each type of conflict, and impact of each conflict type. These themes provided a benchmark for extracting and grouping related lines of text, using the constant comparative method of confirming that each data point belongs in a particular theme and not another (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Axial coding was then used to further align the data according to a priori and emergent subthemes within the open code themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In line with the interview guide questions, the a priori subthemes within the open coding theme of experiences with conflict were task, process, and relationship conflict. The a priori subthemes within the open coding theme of latent conditions were board diversity and decision complexity. The a priori subtheme within the open coding theme of impact of conflict was decision quality. Further emergent subthemes were identified. Again, constant comparison

was used to verify that each data point was consistent with a given subtheme and not another. Support for themes and subthemes was based on common patterns in the data across participants from high- and low-conflict groups.

The multistep process of open and axial coding was undertaken independently by the first two coders. Any discrepancies were reviewed and discussed until consensus on a coding framework was reached. Few coding discrepancies were identified, perhaps due to the detail and examples participants provided to describe experiences with conflict and the conditions and outcomes of task, process, and relationship conflict in their boards. The third, external coder was then brought in to independently review the data according to the same open and axial coding process. Following this, the coders convened to scrutinize and discuss their respective frameworks. On review of the transcripts, there was 85.57% agreement between all three coders. Again, the few discrepancies that were noted were discussed and consensus on a final coding framework was established.

The findings represent a comprehensive examination of intragroup conflict in nonprofit sport boards. Themes regarding participant experiences with intragroup conflict as well as the conditions and influence of each conflict type are presented below, along with supporting quotations.

Findings

The following subsections describe the participants and their boards, outline participant experiences with task, process, and relationship conflict within the boards, describe the conditions perceived to influence the likelihood of conflict, and detail the perceived impact of each type of conflict. To enhance anonymity, selected quotations are referenced by a PSO and member code for each participant (e.g., PSO 1a).

Participant Profile

The sample of nonprofit sport boards (n = 14) ranged in size from 4 to 13 board members and generally met at least once every couple of months. Board activities were commonly described as policy and strategic planning, monitoring board finances, developing and managing programs, organizing competitions, and making decisions regarding athlete conduct (e.g., discipline). When asked whether their board was similar or diverse, most participants characterized their board members as having diverse priorities, personalities, and experiences. Half of the participants also defined their board as similar in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, and geographic location.

Thirteen of the participants were male, whereas seven were female. The average tenure of the participants was 5.50 years with their board ($SD = 4.24$) and their current role was president ($n = 7$), vice president ($n = 7$), or member-at-large ($n = 6$). From a previous survey study (Hamm-Kerwin & Doherty, 2010), 8 of the board members were initially categorized as perceiving high conflict, whereas 12 others were categorized as perceiving low conflict. Following analysis of the interview data, one slight modification was made. Specifically, in the current study, one board member who had previously rated low levels of conflict went on to describe frequent "disagreements" and "differences of opinion." Thus, he was recategorized as perceiving high conflict, and it was determined that 9 individuals described high conflict within their board and 11 participants perceived low conflict.

Task, Process, and Relationship Conflict

From the outset of the interviews, a negative connotation surrounding the term conflict was implied by 12 of the 20 participants who tended to correct the interviewer by stating that differences of opinion and debate occurred within their board, however "conflict" was not present; as one board member noted, "It's not conflict, it's differences of opinion" (PSO 10a). Another participant commented,

> Your questions that you posed in terms of relative level of conflict, I characterize it as a relatively low level in terms of using the word conflict. We disagree on some things. I mean, it is a discussion where the various points of view are respected and there is never any animosity. (PSO 1a)

These statements were echoed by other participants, yet most of these individuals went on to discuss circumstances consistent with discrepant views or interpersonal incompatibilities, thus describing situations that fit the definition of conflict (Jehn, 1995).

Participants were asked to discuss the nature of task, process, and relationship conflict. Notably, when providing examples of each conflict type, four participants confused task and process conflict. For example, in one board member's description of process conflict, he identified disagreements over what the board was doing, thus actually explaining task conflict. When inconsistent depictions of task and process conflict occurred, the researchers coded the data according to how each conflict type was defined in the study and the confusion was noted.

Of importance, participants described task, process, and relationship conflict according to continuums of intensity, ranging from respectful and professional discussion to more rigorous, heated debate. The continuums of intensity varied by conflict type, as noted below.

With regard to task conflict in particular, the majority of examples from the nonprofit sport boards included disagreements over funding (e.g., where money was going to be spent), the role of the board, and the ranking of athletes. Participants described task conflict as ranging from a "professional discussion" (PSO 8a) to more intense differences of opinion. The former was described by 10 participants who discussed experiencing low task conflict. For instance, one board member commented on a disagreement about where money should be spent:

> So there is a debate about whether we save that [extra money] for a rainy day or do we invest it in more games and activities for our athletes? That is a fairly respectful discussion and people have different views about it. (PSO 2a)

More rigorous differences of opinion were described by 10 participants who had experienced high task conflict. In particular, one board member acknowledged that disagreements regarding the ranking of athletes involved "really charged debate" (PSO 5a).

Relationship conflict was most often triggered by disagreements about funding and athlete participation (i.e., who could participate), although the disagreements were personal rather than substantive. Relationship conflict was characterized by animosity, heated discussion, and, sometimes, lack of respect. This was indicated by eight participants who reported a high level of relationship conflict in their boards. As one board member stated,

> There is back talking that is happening. This is either whispering in corners or after the fact you hear of people being upset and that there is further conversation happening . . . I think that that is one of the biggest conflicts and that is that people are not upfront. They sit there, they say absolutely nothing, and then bitch about it to everybody afterward. (PSO 3a)

The remaining participants indicated that relationship conflict was isolated or infrequent, or that conflict "never becomes personal." As such, relationship conflict was described by a narrow range of intensity when compared with the descriptions of task and process conflict.

Process conflict was disagreements about who does what or how a task should be carried out (e.g., how board members claim expenses). When asked to provide a specific example of process conflict, a participant stated,

> We had agreed to run a training camp and had decided to do that, but then it fell apart because from that point on it wasn't, "well this person will do this and that person will do that" . . . it fell down from there. Nobody took the ball and ran with it. (PSO 5a)

As with task conflict, process conflict was described along a continuum ranging from respectful discussion to more intense disagreements. The former was noted by 4 participants who experienced low levels of process conflict, whereas the latter was indicated by 11 participants who reported high process conflict.

Conditions Influencing Conflict

The participants described diversity, formalization, leadership, complexity of decisions, and escalating conflict as conditions that influenced the presence of task, process, and relationship conflict in their boards, noting the varying influence of these conditions on the intensity of all three types of conflict. Details are presented below and are shown in Figure 1.

Diversity. Diverse priorities, personalities, and experiences were identified as influencing the potential for intragroup conflict, yet the majority of participants indicated that demographic diversity (e.g., gender, age) was not a latent condition to conflict. Furthermore, there was variation in the influence of the different diversity conditions on conflict type. In particular, diverse priorities, where board members were characterized as having different concerns or agendas, were acknowledged as being associated with more intense task conflict characterized by rigorous debate by 10 participants. For example, one participant elaborated on how diversity influenced task disagreements within his board.

> Well, I would say people have different agendas, and in the back of their mind they might feel that this person has not experienced what it is like to be [an athlete], so maybe they do not understand the priorities there, and [others just see] it as recreation . . . of course there was lively discussion. (PSO 11a)

In turn, six participants noted that task conflict was a less intense professional disagreement as a result of individuals having similar priorities with

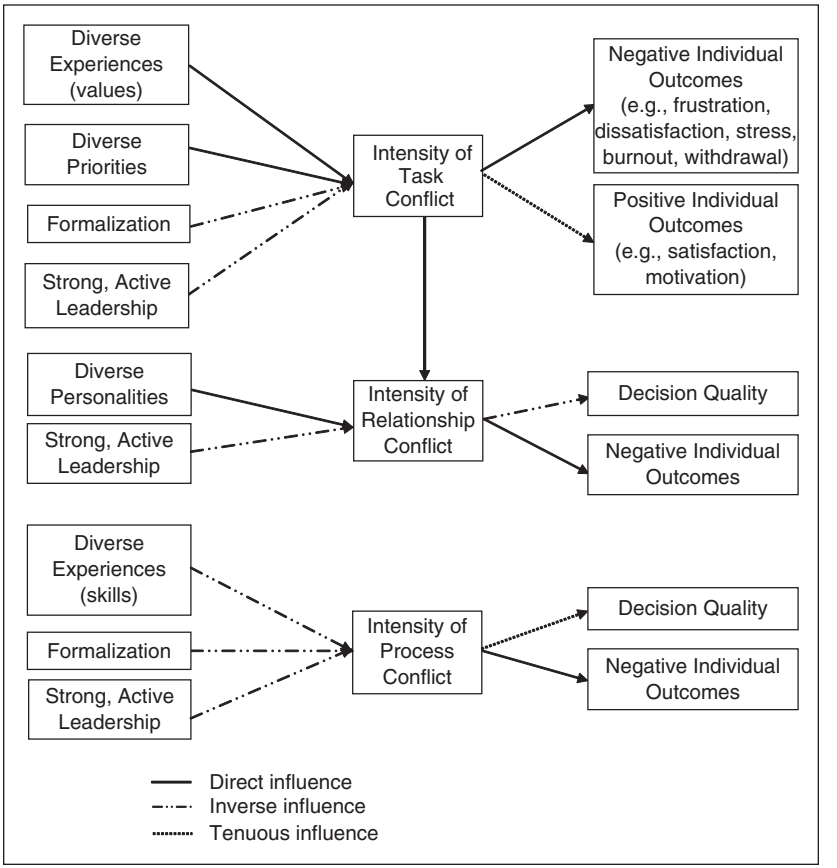

Figure 1. A model of the conditions that influence the intensity of task, process, and relationship conflict and the further influence on outcomes in nonprofit sport boards

regard to board tasks. As one participant noted, "the fewer personal agendas that are brought to the table, the better it functions" (PSO 6a).

Ten participants noted diverse personalities as contributing particularly to intense relationship conflict involving animosity and heated personal debates. When asked to comment, one participant emphasized,

> Part of that [conflict] may just be her personality in that she doesn't have the ability to [compromise]. She is somebody who is a very good

> worker and does a lot of things very well, we have commended her on those things, but it is this personality, it is the demeanour, it is the talking behind the back, it is the bitching to other board members, those are things that . . . well, something needs to happen. (PSO 3a)

Finally, eight participants discussed diverse experiences, and specifically the different skills and insights they produce, as a condition associated with less intense process conflict, that is characterized by more respectful disagreement. For example, one board member described the disagreements about who should do what on his board as a function of diverse abilities:

> . . . So I think what is happening on our board is that the work migrates to whoever has the expertise for it and I think people are generally happy with that because people are contributing where they feel comfortable contributing. I haven't really seen many instances where people are unhappy about that process or [are saying], "why do I have to do this or why are we letting someone else do that?" I never see that. (PSO 2b)

Interestingly, the same condition was linked to more intense task conflict. Nine participants indicated that experience diversity was associated with different values and perspectives surrounding tasks, thus causing more rigorous differences of opinion. For example, one participant stated,

> The other [conflict] relates to—where you can get into a really charged debate—relates to who can participate and where and how . . . some of the people on our board come from different areas and that really fuels that debate. I see it a bit here. (PSO 11a)

Formalization. The existence of formalized policies, regulations, and codes of conduct were discussed by nine participants as conditions associated with less intense conflict. Of those, 7 participants identified the influence on task conflict in particular, whereas 4 participants indicated that formalization was a latent condition to less intense process conflict, and none discussed formalization as contributing to relationship conflict. When asked to elaborate, one participant stated, "there are a lot of rules and regulations surrounding [our sport], and so we don't typically argue about most things" (PSO 14a). Another participant speculated on the effect of increasing formalization: "Once we have policies and procedures I think we will have a lower level of frustration and disagreement; but, that will not be for quite a while" (PSO 12a). The inverse influence of formalization on task conflict is indicated by a notched

line in Figure 1. The somewhat more tenuous link between formalization and process conflict indicated by the data is represented by a dotted line.

Leadership. Eight participants discussed the influence of leadership on conflict in their board. Specifically, a lack of leadership was noted by four participants as contributing to more intense conflict. For example, one board member stated, "How would [the conflict] unfold? I suppose it comes down to leadership in that there is not clear direction or clear leadership in our board as to how things should get done" (PSO 5a). Conversely, another four participants emphasized the effect of strong, active leadership on less intense conflict that it is consistent with professional disagreement. In particular, one participant (the president in his/her PSO) recognized the influence of strong leadership:

> Everybody knows they are going to get a shot to say something. So really, unless there is a lot of passion, they really don't interrupt each other because they know they are going to get an opportunity to have their say. (PSO 6a)

When probed for variation by conflict type, the participants discussed leadership as having a similar influence on the intensity of task, process, and relationship conflict.

Complexity of decisions. The complex versus routine nature of a decision was perceived as a condition that influenced the likelihood of conflict. Eight participants noted that there was "less chance" of disagreement with standard or routine decisions. Here, the participants did not focus on intensity but rather simply the reduction of conflict experiences all together; thus, no association with intensity of conflict is noted in Figure 1. The influence of decision complexity was particularly emphasized with task conflict. One board member explained that disagreements were bound to occur during discussions of complex issues, such as suspending a player for 6 months, and less likely to occur during discussions regarding more routine decisions like scheduling. None of the participants discussed the influence of complex or simple decisions in regard to relationship conflict, and only one individual related complexity to process conflict.

Escalating conflict. There was some indication that task conflict was a latent condition for heated, emotional disagreement that describes intense relationship conflict. Four participants stated that disagreements about tasks tended to escalate and then trigger relationship conflicts that were personal in nature, whereas one participant remarked that increasingly intense process conflict lead to relationship conflict. For example, one board member discussed a particular task disagreement leading to relationship conflict:

> There was a large floor hockey tournament for [the organization] that was going to be run and we were short on teams and we were short on fundraising objectives and the conflicts were the tasks [and] who was going to be leading the charge in these certain areas . . . I found that the date [of the event] got very emotional and personalized and it wasn't becoming very productive. (PSO 2c)

Another example is the relationship conflict that was perceived to be triggered predominantly by intense task disagreements regarding athlete funding that resulted from divergent values among board members. The tenuous link between task and further relationship conflict that came out of the data is presented as a dotted line in Figure 1.

Impact of Conflict

In general, the participants stated that intragroup conflict could have both positive and negative impacts on the board. Specifically, 17 participants recognized the potential effectiveness conflict that ranges from professional disagreement to rigorous debate. For instance, one participant declared, "the principle that I live by [is, when] I went to a board meeting, if the whole board agreed on something there is something wrong with it" (PSO 10a). Another board member commented,

> When there is a lot of passion and when [board members] interrupt each other, I actually love it because if somebody cares enough about an issue that they just can't wait to speak their mind, that is a commitment. That is something that they appear to want to champion; and that is ok. I want board members to champion different directions, different events, and different policies. (PSO 6a)

In addition to specifically discussing decision quality, participants identified individual outcomes that are influenced by intragroup conflict. The association between the intensity of task, process, and relationship conflict and each outcome is presented below and indicated in Figure 1.

Decision quality. Participants perceived the impact of conflict on decision quality to vary by each conflict type. Notably, 11 participants perceived the full range of task conflict intensity to be functional for decision quality, with several participants detailing outcomes of idea generation, increased understanding of issues, and making decisions in line with the organization's mission. Both more and less intense disagreements about the board's tasks were

seen as potentially productive and as such no specific association is indicated in Figure 1. This is evident in the following commentary:

> Interviewer: Would you say that those task discussions impact the quality of your decisions in your group?
> PSO 7a: Yes.
> Interviewer: Ok . . . is that positive or negative?
> PSO 7a: I think positive.
> Interviewer: Can you provide a bit of an explanation for why you think that is?
> PSO 7a: The more opportunity to discuss an issue and bring in information that is varied and is based on different experiences and different perspectives, the better opportunity you will have to make an objective decision. If the information you have is very narrow, it doesn't give you a full view of what you might be looking at and I think you can make some poor decisions based on a very narrow view or limited information. Those are the knee jerk types of decisions that are made quickly without a lot of thought and usually those types of decisions can come back and bite you.

Notably, however, another participant stated that if task conflict was not viewed as a personal attack, then conflict regarding the task was always positive. Thus, task conflict may only have a positive influence to a certain point.

In comparison, five individuals viewed intense process conflict as detracting from decision quality; however, four participants indicated that process conflict that was respectful and less intense had no bearing on decision quality. This tenuous link between process conflict and decision quality is indicated in Figure 1 with a dotted line.

Eight participants viewed intense relationship conflict as detracting from decision quality and explained the reasons for this. For instance, heated personal conflicts were perceived to reduce information and communication and oftentimes resulted in decisions that were based on personal agendas rather than current strategy.

Individual outcomes. Participants revealed that conflict impacted their own attitudes and behaviors in various ways. That impact was attributed primarily to intense task and relationship conflict and to a lesser extent to process conflict. Ten participants noted they had been frustrated, stressed, less satisfied with their role, or had suffered burnout and withdrawal from board activities due to intense conflict within their group. Of those, four individuals indicated that they had considered leaving their board as a result of prolonged conflict.

Notably, three participants described the impact of task conflict on positive outcomes in particular. Specifically, less intense professional disagreements were associated with increased satisfaction and motivation. For instance, one board member stated that his satisfaction with the board increased with the presence of task conflict:

> I am more satisfied. I wouldn't say I am more committed because I look at those discussions as just a part of what goes on, but I think that when we have a board meeting, when we have a talk like that, I come out of the meeting feeling that it was a good board meeting. (PSO 2b)

Thus, all three types of conflicts were perceived to consistently result in frustration and stress; however, in a few cases, less intense task conflict resulted in positive individual outcomes.

Discussion

Building from previous work, the current study used a postpositivist–constructivist paradigm for an in-depth examination of individual experiences with conflict and an exploration of the latent conditions and impact of conflict within nonprofit sport boards. The extreme-groups design was used to sample participants who were identified as having perceived either high or low conflict in a previous survey study and thus were presumed to be able to make more meaningful connections between the variables of interest (Brawley et al., 1988). The results contribute to a comprehensive understanding of multidimensional conflict in the nonprofit board setting. Furthermore, the conceptualization of task, process, and relationship conflict according to continuums of intensity, and their links to latent conditions and outcomes, is an important contribution to intragroup conflict theory.

A Reconceptualization of Intragroup Conflict

Several findings enhance our understanding of the concept of intragroup conflict. First, although participants openly described "disagreement" and "differences of opinion" within their board, the use of the term "conflict" was rejected by over half of the board members. The apparent stigma surrounding this term suggests individuals may downplay its presence in their group and could explain why previous research has reported moderately low levels of conflict (e.g., Greer et al., 2008; Hamm-Kerwin & Doherty, 2010; Ihrke et al., 2003; Jehn, 1995; Jehn et al., 2008). Furthermore, the stigma of

conflict may make it difficult to identify the nature and functionality of certain types of conflict. The participants' varied acceptance of the term conflict highlights the importance of recognizing different realities that exist regarding experiences with conflict in groups.

Second, when describing experiences with conflict, a few participants found it difficult to distinguish between task and process conflict. Although this may be a limitation of the study, most participants did not appear to have these difficulties. Nonetheless, it warrants some discussion. Further analysis revealed that of the few participants who had difficulty distinguishing between task and process conflict, almost all had characterized their board as having low conflict and therefore may not have been able to distinguish the two substantive types. In contrast, another participant described very high conflict and considered it to be "overwhelming," thus potentially reducing his or her ability to discern the conflict types. The conceptual confusion between task and process conflict is consistent with previous research that has shown high correlations between the two conflict types (e.g., Greer et al., 2008; Hamm-Kerwin & Doherty, 2010; Jehn et al., 2008). Indeed, these factors are both substantive forms of conflict and overlap may be expected. However, the findings highlight the need to clearly distinguish the definition and measurement of task and process conflict to capture the unique nature and impact of each conflict type.

Third, an interesting theme uncovered was the continuums of intensity associated with task, process, and relationship conflict described by the participants. Task and process conflict were viewed on a wide spectrum of intensity, whereas relationship conflict was viewed as "all or nothing." The identification of a spectrum of intensity for each type of intragroup conflict posits additional insight regarding how conflict may be defined and measured within groups. This supports Jehn et al. (2008), who suggested a need to reexamine the definitions of conflict types to capture potentially neglected aspects of these constructs. Our findings indicate that these definitions should be adjusted to include the intensity of each conflict type. This is discussed further in recommendations for future research.

Insight Into Conditions of Conflict

The findings highlight factors that influence conflict in nonprofit sport boards. Although several conditions are consistent with what has been indicated in the extant literature (i.e., board diversity, escalating conflict), new insight into important conditions for intragroup conflict (i.e., leadership) was also uncovered. Perhaps, most notably, the conditions identified by the participants

were reported to have varying influence on the intensity of task, process, and relationship conflict.

Diversity characterized by demographic, value, informational, cultural, and functional differences has been shown to have different influences on task, process, and relationship conflict in a variety of settings (Jehn, 1995; Jehn et al., 1999; Mooney et al., 2007; Pelled et al., 1999; Vodosek, 2007). The current study revealed that diversity based on experiences (and the different values and skills that come from that), priorities, and personalities were meaningful conditions for intragroup conflict in the nonprofit sport boards examined here. Furthermore, these forms of diversity had varying influences on the intensity of the different types of conflict, with diverse experiences and diverse priorities associated with more intense task conflict, diverse personalities associated with more intense relationship conflict, and diverse experiences associated with less intense process conflict. The findings highlight the focus on conflict intensity, the multidimensionality of conflict in this setting, and the complexity of the conflict process.

The indication of existing conflict escalating into relationship conflict is consistent with previous literature that has found preliminary support for this phenomenon (e.g., Hamm-Kerwin & Doherty, 2010; Mooney et al., 2007; Rispens, 2009; Simons & Peterson, 2000; Tidd et al., 2004). Specifically, the finding here highlights that it is the intensity of task conflict that can escalate to more emotional conflict. The further negative impact of that relationship conflict on individuals and the group is discussed below. Only one board member described process conflict as a trigger, thus providing little support for this type of conflict as a condition for further relationship conflict. Nonetheless, given the increasing support for elevated task conflict as a condition for disruptive relationship conflict, process conflict warrants further consideration before it is rejected as a possible condition.

Another important contribution to the literature is the apparent association of strong, active leadership with less intense conflict and the association of weak, inactive leadership conflict within the nonprofit sport boards. In their extensive review of intragroup conflict literature and theory, Jehn and Bendersky (2003) did not specifically discuss leadership as an antecedent condition. In general, the link between leadership and task, process, and relationship conflict has received relatively little attention. Nonetheless, the findings here are consistent with the literature that notes the importance of leadership for establishing and maintaining a positive environment for discussion and regulating team processes (Marks, Mathieu, & Zaccaro, 2001; Marks & Zaccaro, 1997; Marks, Zaccaro, & Mathieu, 2000; Morgeson, DeRue, & Karam, 2010; Zaccaro & Marks, 1999). Furthermore, the nonprofit literature

suggests that effective board functioning is dependent on leaders possessing an active, facilitative leadership style and providing a common vision or direction for the organization (Bradshaw et al., 1992; Harrison & Murray, 2007). Thus, this likely explains why a strong, positive, and active group leader was identified as a latent condition for less intense task, process, and relationship conflict.

Outcomes of Conflict Intensity

The findings of this study corroborate and extend the literature on the impact of conflict, particularly in the nonprofit sport board setting. The acknowledgment of the positive impact of task conflict and negative impact of process and relationship conflict on decision quality supports the interactionist theory, which argues that all conflict is not necessarily dysfunctional (e.g., Jehn, 1995, 1997; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). Although a meta-analysis by De Dreu and Weingart (2003) did not support this claim, the current study suggests that many participants' experiences with task conflict were indeed defined as functional, particularly with regard to decision quality. Of particular note, task conflict was perceived to be a positive phenomenon regardless of the level of intensity, from less intense to more intense disagreements, as any level of task debate provides the opportunity for issues to be recognized and open for discussion. However, it was noted that if task conflict escalates to more personal and emotional relationship conflict, then decision quality is compromised. This phenomenon is consistent with the information processing perspective on the impact of intragroup conflict, which argues that an overload of (task) conflict can trigger relationship conflict that is inevitably negative (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Simons & Peterson, 2000). Implicit in the findings is the utility of both the interactionist and information processing perspectives and the notion that these perspectives complement, rather than contrast, each other as they explain the impact of intragroup conflict. Specifically, task conflict can be functional unless it escalates to the point that cognitive overload compromises flexible thinking and creative problem solving (and the positive outcomes that may be associated with that). Combining the tenets of these perspectives may be useful in building more representative conflict theory.

There was, however, inconsistent support for the impact of process conflict on decision quality. This tenuous link contrasts previous, albeit relatively limited, literature that has shown consistent support for the negative association between process conflict and performance outcomes (e.g., Hamm-Kerwin & Doherty, 2010; Jehn, 1997; Passos & Caetano, 2005), where

that type of conflict may be perceived as a distraction to gathering information for quality decisions (Passos & Caetano, 2005) and achieving the group's goals (Hamm-Kerwin & Doherty, 2010). However, the findings in the current study suggest that this negative association is not always the case and that the intensity of the conflict may be a key factor. Some participants reported that less intense conflict about how to proceed with a task had no bearing on decision quality, whereas others said that more intense process conflict compromised the ability to make decisions that are based on the best available information. These findings provide further insight into the nature of the association that has been reported elsewhere in the literature.

The dysfunctional effect of each conflict type on individual outcomes has been noted elsewhere (e.g., Amason, 1996; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; DeChurch & Marks, 2001; Hamm-Kerwin & Doherty, 2010; Jehn, 1995; Jehn et al., 1999; Reid & Karambayya, 2009). However, participants in the current study specifically discussed intense task and relationship conflict, and to a less extent process conflict, resulting in negative individual outcomes that included frustration, dissatisfaction, stress, burnout, and withdrawal, thus extending our understanding of the impact of intragroup conflict. Furthermore, it is important to note that less intense task conflict resulted in satisfaction and motivation in a few cases. Together, the findings suggest that any degree of task conflict intensity may be functional for group performance but only less intense task conflict is positive for group member attitudes. Given the negative connotation surrounding conflict, a dysfunctional association between conflict and affective outcomes is often assumed (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). Thus, the identification of continuums of conflict intensity in the current study sheds light on the differential influence of conflict on individual and group outcomes and calls for further critical investigation in this area.

Concluding Comments

This study contributes to conflict research in general, and in nonprofit sport boards in particular, by creating a rich description of experiences with, the latent conditions for, and the impact of task, process, and relationship conflict. The identification of a continuum of intensity for each conflict type has the potential to make an important contribution to the conceptualization of task, process, and relationship conflict. Figure 1 illustrates the variables identified in this study and the links between them, both corroborating and extending the literature. The findings highlight, while providing further insight into, the complexity of the conflict process. The following sections include directions for future research as well as implications for nonprofit sport boards.

Future Research

The findings provide a catalyst for future examination of conflict in this context. Specifically, the identification of the continuum of intensity for each conflict type suggests that definitions of task, process, and relationship conflict should be reconceptualized and operationalized to include the notion of intensity. For instance, when asked to describe task conflict, participants distinguished less intense professional disagreement characterized by respectful differences of opinion and more intense conflict characterized by rigorous, heated debate. These distinctions should be captured in future considerations of intragroup conflict. Furthermore, given the confusion that some participants had regarding the differentiation of task and process conflict, and the high correlations between the two types indicated in previous literature (e.g., Greer et al., 2008; Hamm-Kerwin & Doherty, 2010; Jehn et al., 2008), it may be appropriate to reexamine how task and process conflict are measured. For example, when asked to describe conflict about how tasks are accomplished, some participants discussed the task itself (e.g., disagreements over athlete funding) rather than the mechanisms (e.g., disagreements over who does what). The same vagueness is apparent in, for example, the Intragroup Conflict Scale (Jehn et al., 2008) which has process conflict items that include asking respondents to indicate the extent to which there is "disagreement about the way to do things in our group" and "disagreement about task responsibilities," both of which could be misconstrued as more task than process issues. Thus, there may be a problem with how process conflict is measured and the focus on who does what and how it needs to be clearly distinguished.

A number of associations between various conditions and the intensity of conflict type, and between intensity of conflict and various outcomes, were identified in the study. Further research is required to test the veracity of those linkages in the nonprofit sport board setting. Although the findings of the current study are not generalizable beyond this setting, the model may provide a useful framework for examining the conditions and impact of conflict intensity in other (nonprofit) contexts. Quantitative and qualitative methods may be used to confirm and continue to provide deeper insight into the complex conflict process.

Several connections warrant particular consideration in future research. In the current study, further insights into several group diversity conditions were uncovered and point to the need to continue to consider group composition in the study of intragroup conflict. It also would be particularly interesting to examine the contrasting influence of diverse experiences on the intensity

of task and process conflict indicated in the nonprofit sport board context and potentially in other settings. In addition, the current study provided evidence of strong, active leadership as a critical condition for intense task, process, and relationship conflict. Building on these findings, it is important to further examine the nature of leadership that impacts on conflict and to account for the role of the leader in the conflict process.

Finally, concerning the potential for task conflict to become a personal attack, it is important to continue to examine whether and how task and/or process conflict triggers heated relationship conflict. There was some evidence of these links in the current study; however, it may be useful to determine whether the triggering effect is in fact moderated by particular conditions, such as conflict management strategies or intragroup trust (Hamm-Kerwin & Doherty, 2010; Simons & Peterson, 2000).

Implications for Practice

The findings highlight several implications for sport board leaders. First, the findings suggest that board leaders should encourage task conflict, which was identified as positive for decision quality. However, the intensity of these disagreements should be carefully monitored to ensure they do not escalate into debates that are more personal and emotional in nature. Second, given the negative connotation observed here, leaders may attempt to reduce the stigma surrounding at least task conflict. Doing so may help to increase discussion that challenges the status quo and encourages flexible thinking and creative decision making. Reducing the negative connotation of conflict may also help to reduce its negative impact on individual outcomes, although this is only speculative.

Third, leaders must recognize and manage the conditions that contribute to task, process, and relationship conflict. The discrepant impact of certain latent conditions on the intensity of each conflict type highlights the complexity of the conflict process, however, and the challenge of conflict management. Indeed, some conditions may increase the intensity of one form of conflict while reducing another. For example, board diversity based on members' experiences is likely associated with more intense task conflict yet less intense process conflict. This has implications for nonprofit sport boards that have increasing diversity because of greater task specialization as the board and organization evolves (Hoye & Cuskelly, 2007); the diverse values and skills that come with task specialization may be expected to generate rigorous, heated debate about what to do while reducing the intensity of disagreements about how to do it. Strong, active leadership is one

condition that was described as minimizing the intensity of all three types of conflict and, as such, it is incumbent on the board leader to take control of their board meetings and proactively create groups norms that include open communication and discussion. Finally, understanding the respective impact of more and less intense conflict of different types should help board leaders recognize the detriments and benefits of intragroup conflict in this setting.

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