

CHALMERS



Conflict Management

How to manage functional conflicts within project teams

Master of Science Thesis in the Master's Programme International Project Management

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ABSTRACT

The role as a project manager comes with dealing with all kinds of conflicts with different level of emotional involvement. Since so much time is spent on resolving these issues, being able to resolve conflict efficient becomes essential for the project manager. Time, cost and quality are three major measures of value for a project, if conflicts can be managed professionally and effectively during the project process it will have a positive effect on these measures of value.

How one approach a conflict is very individual, conflicts where emotions play a big role are the ones that really can threaten the project and the relationships between project team members.

This thesis focuses on investigating different kinds of approaches and methods when dealing with conflicts. One area that has been highlighted is methods that can prevent conflicts and develop the behaviours of team members. Through methods like feedback, each individual can develop and get a chance to get to know themselves and their behaviours.

The project manager should ensure that emotional charged issues don't evolve to a conflict which could develop and become dysfunctional. In order to resolve a conflict a conflict competent project manager should be able to see the conflict from an independent perspective Through this study it has been revealed that conflict management can be divided into two areas, prevention of conflicts and management of functional conflicts.

Keywords: Conflict, Management, Project, Team

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	1
1.1	Purpose	1
1.2	Objectives	2
1.3	Background	2
1.4	Limitations	3
2	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	4
2.1	Conflict Forms	4
2.2	Approaches	5
2.2.1	Team Configurations	8
2.2.2	Task Interdependence	9
2.2.3	Self-efficacy	9
2.2.4	Conflict Culture	10
2.3	Conflict Escalation	11
2.3.1	The Dynamic Conflict Model	11
2.3.2	Hot buttons	12
2.3.3	The retaliatory cycle	12
2.3.4	Intensity levels	13
2.4	Conflict Resolution	15
2.4.1	Organizational Justice	15
2.4.2	The Role of Emotions	16
2.4.3	Conflict Dynamics Profile	17
2.4.4	Perspective Taking	18
2.4.5	Logical Argument Mapping (LAM)	18
2.4.6	Vaaland's improvement model	21
2.4.7	Active Conflict Management	22
2.4.8	Negotiation	22
2.5	Summary	26
3	METHODOLOGY	27
3.1	Type of Dissertation	27
3.2	Type of Research	27
3.3	Research procedure	28
3.4	Methods	28
3.4.1	Literature Review	28
3.4.2	Interviews	28
3.5	Data Sources	29
3.6	Reliability	29

3.7	Limitations	30
3.8	How is the data organized and analyzed?	30
3.9	Ethics	31
4	RESULTS	32
4.1	Interviews	32
4.1.1	Dealing with conflict	32
4.1.2	Triggers	33
4.1.3	Decision making processes	35
4.1.4	Feedback	36
4.1.5	Logical Argument Mapping (LAM)	37
4.1.6	Openness at the workplace	38
4.1.7	Negotiation	40
4.1.8	Conflict management skills	41
4.2	Summary	42
5	DISCUSSION	44
6	CONCLUSION	47
6.1	Further research	48
	REFERENCES	49
	APPENDICES	52
	Appendix A - Interview Questions	52

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1, Dynamic Conflict Model (Runde and Flanagan, 2007)	11
Figure 2, The Retaliatory Cycle (Runde and Flanagan, 2007)	12
Figure 3, Conflict Intensity levels (Runde and Flanagan, 2007)	13
Figure 4, Collateral knowledge (Hoffmann, 2005, p.313)	19
Figure 5, Key stages of the negotiation analysis approach, Murtoaro et al. (2007)	25
Figure 6, Methodology Structure	27

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The purpose with this thesis is to compare and link theoretical models and hypotheses with qualitative research that together will build up a strategic proposal for how to approach and manage a conflict before it develops into a dysfunctional issue. The reason why conflict management should be investigated further and developed for effective usage is because the people within the project are the ones that make it possible to reach the objectives; they are the key to project success. Therefore knowing how to successfully unite the team towards a common objective is one of the most essential skills for a project manager to hold. Further the study aims to be part of the author's own growth within the project management area when it comes to leadership, communicative skills and the ability to foresee and manage conflicts. Finally this thesis aims to contribute with further knowledge of how to effectively manage functional conflicts and to inspire others to do supplementary research and case studies within this area.

Research questions:

- 1) What triggers conflict and how does conflicts evolve?
- 2) Explore different conflict management approaches.
- 3) Identify and evaluate different tools and behaviours for how to manage and resolve conflicts within project teams.

1.2 Objectives

The objective with the research made in this dissertation is to explore the conflict management area further. Many project managers in different organisations are spending a lot of time on managing conflicts, time that could have been spent on adding value to the company. Developing an approach to conflicts that makes the solving process more efficient gives the project manager and the project team a bigger possibility to meet the project requirements. This report will also benefit the author in the means of new knowledge within conflict management, both on a professional level and in ordinary life.

1.3 Background

A project team is often defined as ‘two or more people with some shared purpose who assume different responsibilities, depend on each other, coordinate their activities, and see themselves as part of the group’ according to Boddy (2002, p.108). Project teams tend to include individuals with different background which means that more knowledge from various fields can be added to the project. Furthermore it inevitably comes with the team members having different perspectives on tasks leading to possible conflicts. According to Boddy (2002, p. 110) organisations can see these conflicts as an opportunity for renewal and productivity if it could be managed and kept within certain boundaries. Boddy (2002, p. 114) explains a high-performance team as a team where ‘members are deeply committed to one another’s personal growth and to a common purpose’. During the forming and development of a team Boddy (2002, p.136) brings forward a team development theory by Tuckman and Jensen (1977) where a team passes through five phases where the storming phase are seen as the most critical stage. It is explained that the differences in values and norms between the team members becomes more apparent and forces the team to deal with the differences and issues within the team. Successful conflict management and understanding becomes in the storming phase crucial for the survival of the team and a key for reaching the performing phase where the team delivers the objectives efficiently.

Hughes, Ginnett and Curphy (2009) highlights that research has shown that middle-level managers spend 25 % of their time resolving conflicts. Knowledge of conflict management should therefore be one of the manager's strongest characteristics. Increased understanding of how conflicts arise and what they depend on can contribute to conflict resolution in a more efficient manner. This can lead to more time spent on bringing the projects forward, time is money. Except the negative effects of conflict like reduced productivity, stress and decreased cooperation Hughes, Ginnett and Curphy (2009) claims that from a conflict, positive effects could arise as well. Positive effects worth pointing out are that feelings get aired, enhanced understanding of others, improved decision making and stimulation of critical thinking.

1.4 Limitations

This research will focus on conflict management within organisational boundaries and project teams. Further it will investigate conflicts that are functional and how to resolve a conflict before it becomes dysfunctional.

Differences between branches and organisations will not be a part of this research and organizational culture's impact on conflict management will not to be taken into consideration; instead the research will be done from a general perspective. Moreover the research will focus on project teams where most work and collaboration is done face to face and not virtually.

Cultural factors such as different national cultures, values and religious beliefs as a source of possible disagreements/conflicts within multi cultural project teams will not be investigated in this research. Instead of focusing on the sources for conflicts the research will investigate different approaches to conflicts and how to manage functional conflicts efficiently.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Conflict Forms

Kurtzberg et al. (2005) brings forward that research has proved that there are three main types of conflicts. Conflicts based on the work process, how work is performed and obligation of team roles and responsibilities. The second form of conflict is the relationship-based conflict, where relationships and interaction between team members are the source. Finally the third form is the task-based conflict where disagreements about the work task itself causes the issue. Kurtzberg et al. (2005) claims that there is a linear correlation between team performance and task-based conflicts, research has pointed out that in some cases task-based conflicts can actually be beneficial. Moreover Kurtzberg et al. (2005) expresses that process-based and relationship-based conflicts only can have negative effects on team performance. The positive contribution through task-based conflicts is according to Kurtzberg et al. (2005) the promotion and unveiling of different perspectives which could stimulate innovation and creative thinking. The possible negative effects of a conflict are thus always a threat, according to Kurtzberg et al. (2005) psychological affects and team member relationships are at all times very vulnerable. Kurtzberg et al. (2005) argues that ‘it is tremendously difficult for individuals to remain objective about a situation when they feel that others are disagreeing, or even disapproving, of their point of view’.

Ohbuchi *et al.* (2003) has a different perspective on conflicts and brings forward a different categorization. The first conflict form is called “conflict of interest” and concerns issues between people and their interests. “Cognitive conflict” is the second form which arises through people having different views on things. The third and last form is called “value conflict” and occurs through disagreements concerning different values or expectations. Conflict issues brought forward by Ohbuchi *et al.* (2003) that can be linked to these three main categories are:

Gain/loss issues – ‘We discussed my promotion!’

Correct/incorrect issues – ‘I was criticized for my work performance!’

Right/Wrong issues – ‘I asserted that the other person violated a rule!’

Ohbuchi *et al.* (2003) claims that research points out that gain/loss issues encourages “conflict of interest” while correct/incorrect issues demands collaboration and right/wrong issues encourages participants to confront the problem.

2.2 Approaches

Conflict Management patterns are often according to Desivilya *et al.* (2005) related to a dual concern model divided into concern for self and concern for others. Further different conflict management approaches are based on these two motives, some focusing more on concern for self or concern for others.

From these motives Desivilya *et al.* (2005) brings forward five main conflict management patterns:

Dominating - ‘High concern for self and low concern for the other’

Obliging - ‘Low concern for self and high concern for the other’

Avoiding - ‘Low concern for self and low concern for the other’

Integrating - ‘High concern for self and high concern for the other’

Compromising - ‘Moderate concern for self and moderate concern for the other’

(Desivilya *et al.* 2005)

Moreover Desivilya *et al.* (2005) stresses that project team members more often choose to use a passive approach. To passive strategies counts obliging and avoiding while integrating, compromising and dominating belongs is seen as an active strategy. In comparison with Desivilya *et al.* (2005) Hughes, Ginnett and Curphy (2009) have chosen to look at conflict management approaches from a slightly different perspective. They claim that conflict resolution can be divided into two independent dimensions, cooperativeness/uncooperativeness and assertiveness/unassertiveness. From this point of view Hughes, Ginnett and Curphy (2009) have described five common approaches to managing conflict:

Competition - ‘Reflects a desire to achieve one’s own ends at the expense of someone else. This is domination, also known as a win-lose orientation’.

Accommodation - ‘Reflects a mirror image of competition, entirely giving in to someone else’s concerns without making any effort to achieve one’s own ends. This is a tactic of appeasement’.

Sharing - ‘Is an approach that represents a compromise between domination and appeasement. Both parties give up something, yet both parties get something. Both parties are moderately, but incompletely, satisfied’.

Collaboration - ‘Reflects an effort to fully satisfy both parties. This is a problem-solving approach that requires the integration of each party’s concerns’.

Avoidance - ‘Involves indifference to the concerns of both parties. It reflects a withdrawal from or neglect of any party’s interests’.

(Hughes, Ginnett and Curphy, 2009)

Hughes, Ginnett and Curphy (2009) suggests that instead of trying to find a superior approach, focus should instead be on determining when a certain approach is appropriate. It is also highlighted that each approach comes with diverse advantages and disadvantages. Hughes, Ginnett and Curphy (2009) bring forward the following guidelines for when to use a certain approach:

Competing

1. When quick, decisive action is vital.
2. On important issues where unpopular actions need implementing.
3. In issues vital to company welfare when you know you're right.
4. Against people who take advantage of non-competitive behaviour.

Accommodating

1. When you find you are wrong
2. When issues are more important to others than yourself
3. To build social credits for later issues.
4. To minimize loss when you are outmatched and losing.

Sharing/Compromising

1. When goals are important, but not worth the effort or potential disruption of more assertive modes.
2. When opponents with equal power are committed to mutually exclusive goals.
3. To achieve temporary settlements of complex issues.
4. To arrive at expedient solutions under time pressure.

5. As a backup when collaboration or competition is unsuccessful.

Collaborating

1. When both sets of concerns are too important to be compromised.
2. When your objective is to learn.
3. To merge insights from people with different perspectives.
4. To gain commitment by incorporating concerns into a consensus.
5. To work through feelings which have interfered with a relationship.

Avoiding

1. When an issue is trivial or more important issues are pressing.
2. When you perceive no chance of satisfying your concerns.
3. When potential disruption outweighs the benefits of resolution.
4. To let people cool down and regain perspective.
5. When gathering information supersedes immediate decision.
6. When others can resolve the conflict more effectively.
7. When issues seem tangential to or symptomatic of other issues.

(Hughes, Ginnett and Curphy, 2009)

2.2.1 Team Configurations

Aritzeta *et al.* (2005) argues that team roles also play a big part when it comes to which way a team member approaches a conflict. It is claimed that a team role related to control behaviour is more likely to turn to a dominating conflict management approach. As a consequence team roles that accept lesser control are therefore according to Aritzeta *et al.* (2005) connected to a more avoiding passive approach. Aritzeta *et al.* (2005) believes that the link between team roles and conflict styles makes it possible to predict how a particular team role will approach a conflict.

Regarding performance and creativity Aritzeta *et al.* (2005) express the need for both collaborating and competitive styles within project teams. Relationships within the team can be negatively affected by competitive behaviour alone, which can lead to dysfunctional conflicts if not managed. Aritzeta *et al.* (2005) therefore advocates a mix of different roles within project teams.

Somech *et al.* (2009) explains that a cooperative team more often sees an issue as a common problem that needs to be dealt with. In comparison a team that's more competitive focused sees the problem as threat against their personal goals. Somech *et al.* (2009) also argue that competitive behaviour hinders communication, creativity and knowledge sharing which negatively affects the performance of the team. Somech *et al.* (2009) brings forward two hypotheses regarding team performance:

1. 'Team's cooperative conflict management style will be positively associated with team performance'.
2. 'Team's competitive conflict management style will be negatively associated with team performance'.

(Somech *et al.* 2009)

Eizen *et al.* (2005) supports these hypotheses when claiming that constructive conflict management patterns such as integrating, compromising and obliging can be linked to group identification and collaboration. Eizen *et al.* (2005) argues that team members with a high sense of identification with the team tends to be more open to cooperative and compromising approaches when it comes to conflicts and issues. Furthermore research made by Desivilya *et al.* (2005) also proved that 'a team member's positive

emotions toward teammates will be positively related to a preference for conflict-management patterns that are integrating, compromising and obliging’.

2.2.2 Task Interdependence

Somech *et al.* (2009) brings forward studies that shows that task interdependence demands team members to collaborate, followed by that ‘high task interdependence implies the need for intense interactions among members, creating more opportunities for conflict’ (Somech *et al.* 2009). On the contrary Somech *et al.* (2009) also found research that supported the belief that high task interdependence and intense interaction among team members promotes collaborative behaviour through increased communication and joint planning. Somech *et al.* (2009) expresses that competitive styles are most common in the early stages of team development and when there is a competition for project resources. Later on when the team has developed further and roles and relations have been created, cooperative styles tend to evolve. This theory can be closely related to the definition of a high performance team brought forward by Boddy (2002, p. 114) where members of a high-performance team ‘are deeply committed to one another’s personal growth and to a common purpose’.

2.2.3 Self-efficacy

Linking confidence to a high performing team, Eizen *et al.* (2005) defines an individual’s belief in being able to perform a certain task as global self-efficacy where he or she is confident to success and therefore will most certainly go ahead and perform the task. Eizen *et al.* (2005) applies this theory on conflict management where team members with high self-efficacy are believed to see a conflict as just another task which he or she will most likely try to resolve and manage. On the contrary, individual’s that doesn’t have that confidence will instead try to avoid the conflict since they according to Eizen *et al.* (2005) doesn’t believe themselves having the skills necessary. Moreover Eizen *et al.* (2005) brings forward the social self-efficacy theory that is defined as an ‘individual’s belief in her or his capabilities to create and maintain social bonds, cooperate with others and manage different types of interpersonal conflicts’. Eizen *et al.* (2005) has linked global self-efficacy and social

self-efficacy to the five main conflict management patterns presented by Desivilya *et al.* (2005) in the two following hypotheses:

1. 'Global self-efficacy will be positively related to engaging patterns of conflict management, such as dominating, integrating and compromising, and negatively associated with passive patterns, such as obliging and avoiding'.
2. 'Social self-efficacy will be positively related to conflict management patterns that entail both engaging as well as constructive elements (integrating and compromising), negatively related to the avoidance pattern, and unrelated to the destructive-engaging (dominating) and constructive-avoiding conflict management modes (obliging). The current study also addressed the role of team related variable group identification in dealing with internal conflicts'.

(Eizen *et al.* 2005)

2.2.4 Conflict Culture

De Dreu *et al.* (2004) investigated the sources for conflict at workplaces and found that there are tendencies of teams developing their own conflict culture. Team members are often according to De Dreu *et al.* (2004) affecting each other and the way different procedures and tasks are performed within the team boundaries. De Dreu *et al.* (2004) argue that some teams have developed a certain culture or a so called conflict management style such as for example open-minded debate or conflict avoidance. Different views on conflict is expressed by De Dreu *et al.* (2004) to be developed as well, some teams might see conflict as an opportunity while others see it as a threat.

2.3 Conflict Escalation

2.3.1 The Dynamic Conflict Model

The dynamic conflict model focuses on how different responds to conflict affects how the conflict process unfolds. The idea with this model is to help people becoming aware of how their responds affects conflict resolution in positive or negative ways. Runde and Flanagan (2007) explain that the model separates cognitive and affective conflicts. Cognitive conflicts is task focused which means that the involved parties puts their concentration on problem solving, therefore Runde and Flanagan (2007) argues that cognitive conflicts are less likely to escalate into a dysfunctional conflicts. On the contrary, affective conflicts are more emotionally charged because focus is put on the person. This increases the probability conflict escalation resulting in negative effects such as damaged relationships and reduced collaboration.

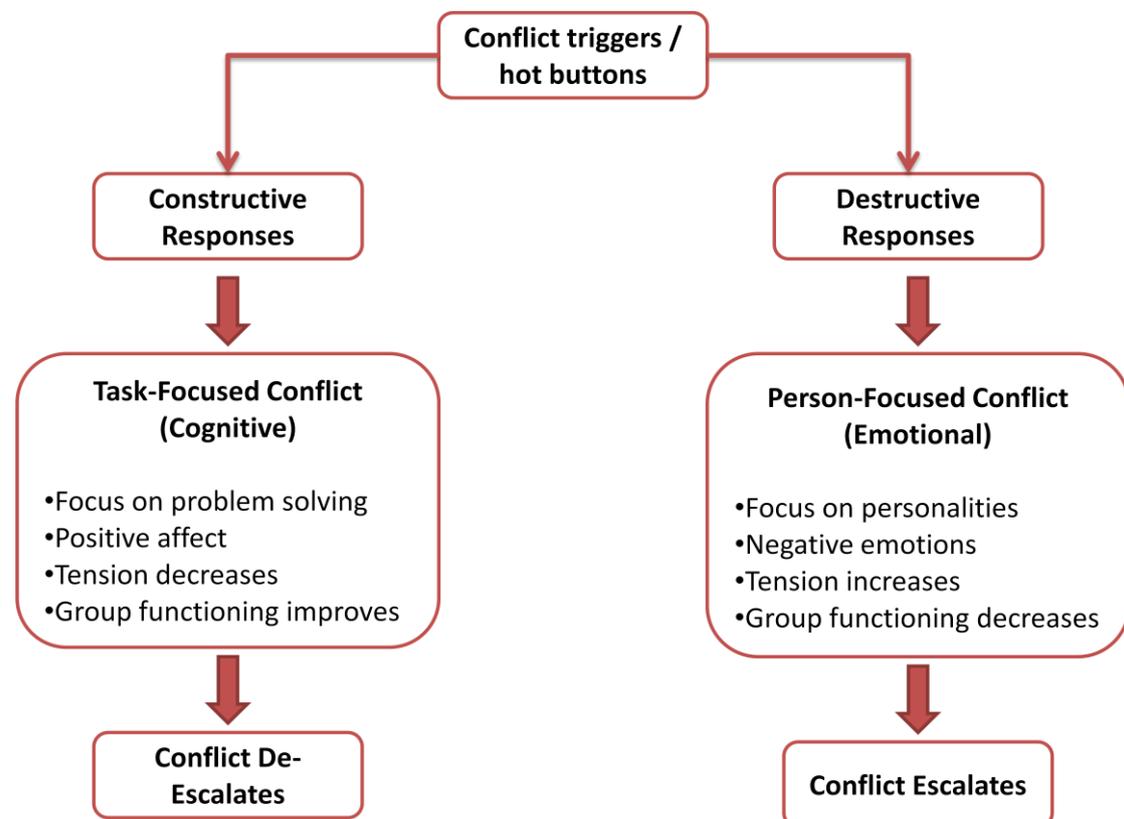


Figure 1, Dynamic Conflict Model (Runde and Flanagan, 2007)

2.3.2 Hot buttons

Runde and Flanagan (2007) explain that hot buttons are events that trigger a person to initiate a conflict. Our hot buttons are very emotionally charged which can make us lose control of our actions and respond without thinking about the consequences. According to Runde and Flanagan (2007) it's essential to reflect about and try getting some understanding about our hot buttons, a suggestion that is brought forward is to think about a situation in our past where our hot buttons have been triggered. Runde and Flanagan (2007) points out that we often forget to reflect on whether the opposing party could have several reasons for their actions.

Runde and Flanagan (2007) express that understanding our own behaviour and trying to reflect on others are key factors when trying to prevent the outbreak of conflicts. A conflict competent leader is aware about his/hers hot buttons and in which situations they are triggered, therefore they are more prepared for situations that are emotionally charged according to Runde and Flanagan (2007).

2.3.3 The retaliatory cycle

Runde and Flanagan (2007) provide through the retaliatory cycle an overview of the way that conflict escalates in different steps.

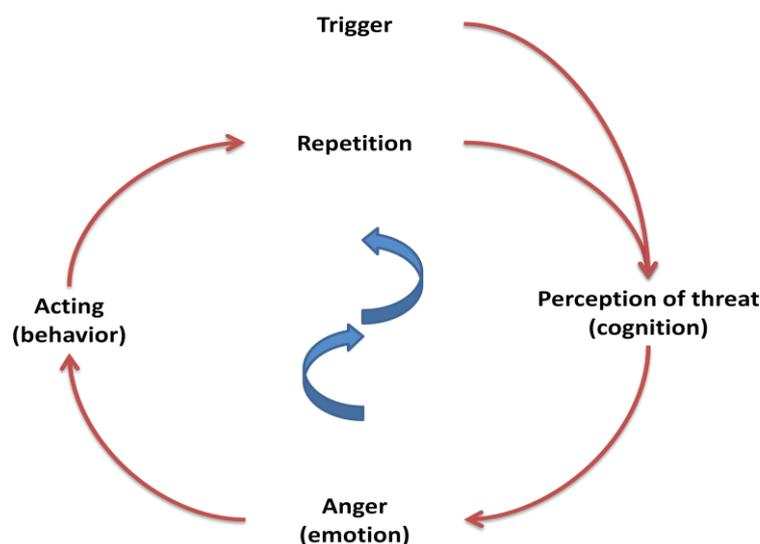


Figure 2, The Retaliatory Cycle (Runde and Flanagan, 2007)

When emotions has been triggered through our hot buttons for example, we enter what Runde and Flanagan (2007) calls the refractory period where emotions has taken control. For us to manage our emotions and get back control over our actions some time is needed, Runde and Flanagan (2007) explain it as the refractory period. To avoid emotions going into a retaliatory cycle we need to manage our triggers and shorten the refractory period. There are several techniques that can be used to remain calm when our emotions has been triggered, one example that Runde and Flanagan (2007) presents is breathing techniques used in Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) competitions.

2.3.4 Intensity levels

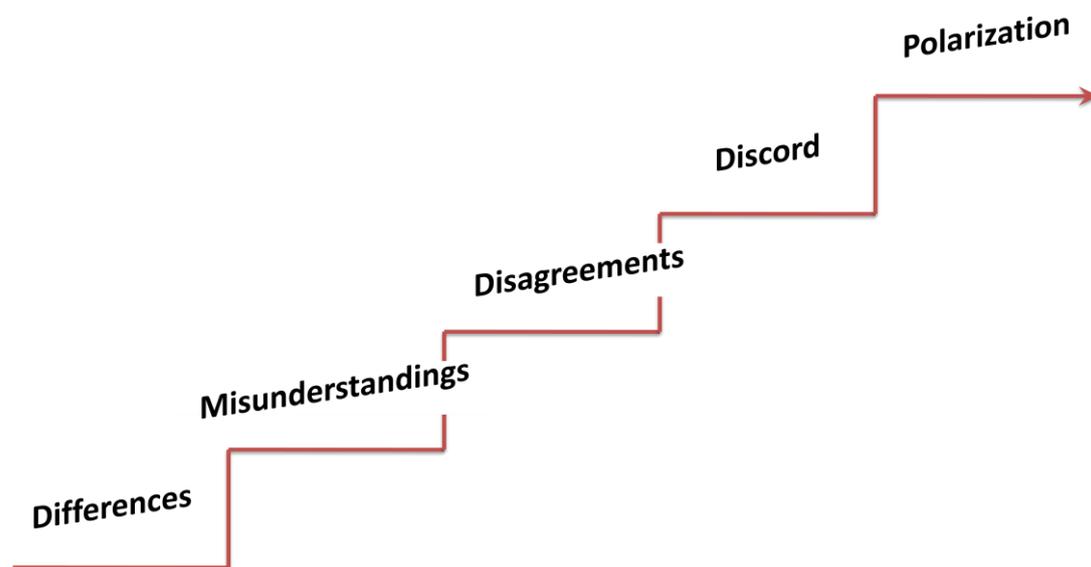


Figure 3, Conflict Intensity levels (Runde and Flanagan, 2007)

Level one – Differences

When the involved parties look at a situation from different perspectives but are at the same time aware of the other party's mindset and interests. Runde and Flanagan (2007) explain that it is very rare that this kind of conflict brings negative effects on relationships and productivity.

Level two – Misunderstandings

According to Runde and Flanagan (2007) misunderstandings are created when two or more parties interpret a situation differently. To avoid further escalation it's important to check for misunderstandings early in the process.

Level three – Disagreements

Runde and Flanagan (2007) defines disagreement as 'when two people see a situation differently, and regardless of how well they understand the other's position and interests, feel discomfort that the other party disagrees'. On the contrary Runde and Flanagan (2007) claims that disagreement can have a positive effect on innovativeness.

Level four – Discord

When reaching the level of discord, the conflict is starting to have negative effects on relationships between the parties' according to Runde and Flanagan (2007). Typical signs of discord are when the parties' starts to criticize, avoid and block each other.

Level five - Polarization

At this level the conflict has reached a critical level that in almost every case leads to unresolved conflicts and severely damaged relationships. Runde and Flanagan (2007) explain that at this stage the parties' starts to recruit others to join their cause. In the worst case scenario the involved parties' starts to use destructive behaviours, war is one example of extreme polarization.

2.4 Conflict Resolution

2.4.1 Organizational Justice

Rahim *et al.* (2000) argues that justice is one of the most important concerns for employees in organizations. Justice and fairness encourages positive attitudes and facilitates conflict management, Rahim *et al.* (2000) therefore present the following hypothesis that was supported in the research:

- ‘Employee’s perceptions of organizational justice will be positively associated with their use of the more cooperative (integrating, obliging and compromising) styles of managing conflict with their supervisors’.

(Rahim *et al.* 2000)

Rahim *et al.* (2000) is separating justice into three different categories, distributive, procedural and interactional justice. Distributive justice focuses on in which extent the employees believe that outcomes from a decision are fair according to Rahim *et al.* (2000). Procedural justice on the other hand looks at the fairness of the procedures leading to a decision and the fairness in the outcomes. Rahim *et al.* (2000) claims that when leaders are using fair procedurals they send a message to the employees that they are important for the organization through showing them respect with fair decision making processes. The third category, interactional justice focuses on how employees receive information about the decisions and how they are treated by supervisors.

Rahim *et al.* (2000) put emphasis on that when supervisors are interactionally fair; the employee’s are as a result less concerned about the distributional justice. Even though theorists and researchers claims that the different forms of justice is hard to separate from each other, the research by Rahim *et al.* (2000) demonstrates that the difference between distributive, procedural and interactional justice is distinct and clear. Moreover the research also showed that cooperative conflict management styles were strongly related to organizational justice, Rahim *et al.* (2000) therefore claims that organizations will benefit from using cooperative conflict management styles.

2.4.2 The Role of Emotions

Emotions are one of the biggest factors when it comes to conflicts and conflict approaches. Bodtker *et al.* (2001) highlights that emotions are mostly expressed through body language and facial expressions which is something that we cannot hide from each other. The source for conflicts is according to Bodtker *et al.* (2001) an event that doesn't benefit our personal goals or a disturbance in our planning which brings forward negative emotions. Bodtker *et al.* (2001) states that 'we become emotional because something personal is at stake for us'. Furthermore Bodtker *et al.* (2001) brings forward that the level of emotional intensity may go up and down throughout the conflict management process. The participants may also have different level of emotional involvement in the conflict, therefore the commitment of resolving the conflict may differ. The approach to the conflict and the conflict management style also depends on the participant's emotional involvement in the conflict according to Bodtker *et al.* (2001).

Bodtker *et al.* (2001) argues that a conflict is formed by three major elements:

1. Attitudes – 'Cognitive ideas and emotions'.
2. Behaviour – 'Evident behaviour and potential aggressive actions'.
3. Contradiction – 'Values and interests'.

(Bodtker *et al.* 2001)

Bodtker *et al.* (2001) argues that for a conflict to take place, these three elements must be present. Moreover to resolve a conflict one must identify and deal with all these elements, otherwise the attempt of managing the conflict will be unsuccessful. Bodtker *et al.* (2001) describes this process as 'conscientization' and brings forward the theory that conflicts have to be transformed, focusing too much on resolution will limit the perspective and for that reason the attempt will fail. What's more the potential of being able to transform the conflict elements are depending on the complexity of the conflict, the number of issues and actors are contributing to more possibilities for transformation. Although according to Bodtker *et al.* (2001) put emphasis on that the human mind can only deal with 7 elements at the time, in other words too much complexity reduces creative thinking. In this case Bodtker *et al.* (2001) suggests that one should try to simplify the conflict elements, with the objective to 'balancing complexity and simplification'.

Summarized, Bodtker *et al.* (2001) presents the following three steps when managing conflicts:

1. Identify the conflict elements, emotions, behaviours and contradictions.
2. Transformation – Changing the orientation of the conflict and making the different parties aware of the elements.
3. Solution – Changing the elements allows transformation of the conflict direction, which leads to the solution becoming apparent.

2.4.3 Conflict Dynamics Profile

The Conflict Dynamics Profile (CDP) is used to provide feedback about a person's behaviour. It is tool that measures how a person sees their own behaviour; the answers are then compared with the opinions from colleagues and managers. Runde and Flanagan (2007) explain that the behaviour is measured through questionnaires that focus on frequency of a certain behaviour and involvement in certain situations. The results are then used to get an overview of which behaviour a person tend to use more frequently.

Runde and Flanagan (2007) highlight a few characteristics that are essential for the conflict competent leader:

- 'The ability to stay calm'.
- 'Embracing constructive conflict'.
- 'The ability to be critical of ideas, not people'.
- 'The ability to separate personal worth issues from criticism of one's ideas'.
- 'An uncompromising focus on best outcomes, not winning'.
- 'Efforts to understand all sides of issues'.
- 'Listening to others'.
- 'Encouraging civility, fairness and safety'.

(Runde and Flanagan, 2007)

2.4.4 Perspective Taking

Runde and Flanagan (2007) argue that perspective taking is one of the most efficient tools that a project manager can use. Perspective taking is used to redirect the conflict against innovativeness and productivity and accepted outcomes for all involved parties'. When the conflict is task oriented, perspective taking means that one places oneself in the other person's position to be able to see the conflict from that person's viewpoint. When the conflict is emotion oriented, perspective taking advocates that one tries to understand how the other person feels about his or her viewpoint and the conflict.

Runde and Flanagan (2007) expresses that perspective taking demands that one makes the effort of putting oneself in others position and to look at conflicts from different viewpoint than just your own. Finally the biggest obstacle to deal with when it comes to perspective taking according to Runde and Flanagan (2007) is that it is only the opposing party in the conflict that can tell you if the perspective taking that you are using actually works.

2.4.5 Logical Argument Mapping (LAM)

Logical Argument Mapping (LAM) is expressed by Hoffmann (2005, p.318) to be a technique that can be used promote reflection and to improve communication and to share perspectives. By using this technique one should be able to create a map were argumentation weaknesses can be exposed and explored. Hoffmann (2005, p.318) claims that there are two major uses of LAM, to win an argument by forming an argumentation or through collaboration come to a mutual understanding and a settlement. Hoffmann (2005, p.329) expresses that LAM 'is based on the fundamental idea that anybody who wants something should be ready to provide a reason for it, that is, they should be able and ready to formulate an argument'. The core objectives with LAM are to make argumentation well-organized by:

- 'Motivating self-reflexivity'.
- 'Facilitating the incessant reconsideration of all the elements of a problem'.

- ‘Fostering the development of the structure and coherence of a problem representation’.
- ‘Challenge the creativity of those who engage in argumentation’.

(Hoffmann, 2005, p.318)

According to Hoffmann (2005, p.317) an argument can be turned into a *logical* argument through adding a principle which links together the motive and the claim of an argument.

When explaining this method further, Hoffmann (2005, p.313) uses the term ‘collateral knowledge’. A simplified definition is provided through the following example brought forward by Hoffmann (2005, p.313), ‘suppose somebody says to you "Napoleon was a lethargic creature." I guess you will be surprised to hear that the great conqueror should be "lethargic." But the point is, to be surprised by this sentence one must already know who Napoleon was and what he accomplished. If we do not know about Napoleon, we can only guess whether it is the name of a lethargic person. We are surprised only when our collateral knowledge about Napoleon contradicts what is said in this sentence’.

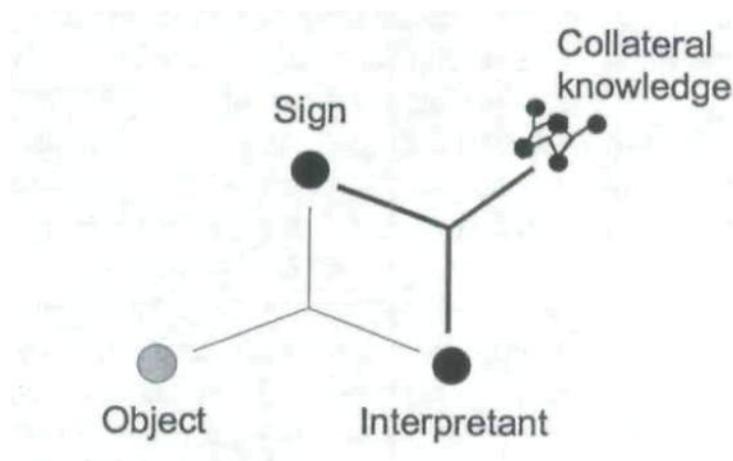


Figure 4, Collateral knowledge (Hoffmann, 2005, p.313)

Hoffmann (2005, p.317) exposes the ‘collateral knowledge’ by means of the following conclusions:

‘If A, then B; we can argue as follows: If it makes sense for a person to provide a certain reason A for claim B, we can assume that something like the material conditional "if A, then B" (2) is part of this person's collateral knowledge; (3) if (2) is true, then formulating this additional premise explicitly would allow to reflect on this part of the person's collateral knowledge’.

Furthermore Hoffmann (2005, p.313) states that LAM can be used in conflict resolution for the following reasons:

- ‘To protect positions and perspectives of the weaker party since whatever is represented in a diagram remains part of the discussion until it may be revised based on a new agreement’.
- ‘To document what has been reached at each step in a way that the conflict parties do not fall back time and again to positions and arguments that have already been overcome’.
- ‘To provide a means to communicate negotiation results to others since the arguments that lead to a certain decision can be reconstructed more easily’.
- ‘To reduce inequalities in power and argumentation styles if negotiators are challenged to use a shared representation system’.
- ‘To visualize the collateral knowledge of negotiators that determines the way they interpret and frame a conflict’.

(Hoffmann, 2005, p.323-324)

Hoffmann (2005, p.324) adds that LAM is based on the involved parties interest and will to resolve the conflict and it’s a technique that encourages communication.

Moreover Hoffmann (2005, p.324) argues that it is preferred that an independent negotiator is used that can mediate and organize the process.

Finally Changing our ways of thinking and making people more open-minded is at times crucial for conflict resolution, this is why LAM should be considered a valuable tool according to Hoffmann (2005, p.328).

2.4.6 Vaaland's improvement model

Vaaland's (2004, p.449) conflict resolution model is performed through a workshop where issues are identified and analysed. The process is divided into four different steps that are taking the conflict closer to a solution. The first step is to identify the issues that are the source for the conflict and to collect the different perceptions to get a clear overview over to conflict. The second step applies a collection of assessment criteria that links the conflict to destructive effects on the relationships within the team. Based on this criteria the conflict can be connected to formal procedures like for example poor routines, in-flexibility and bad scheduling according to Vaaland (2004, p.449). Next step is make the participants realize and get a view of what has to be done to develop the relationship. Vaaland (2004, p.450) puts forward that the parties can propose a step of how to proceed but that they also has to accept that it might be rejected by the other party.

The final stage of this model brought forward by Vaaland (2004, p.450) the process of balancing and to expose the reasons for the issues and to reach two reciprocally objectives. According to Vaaland (2004, p.450) there are a few alternatives of how to execute the process. The first option is to attempt to narrow the gap between the participants by eliminating contradictions, or alternatively put focus on straightening out the confusion and misunderstandings or finally try to control the extent and impact of the issues. Additionally Vaaland (2004, p.450) claims that when using this model, the process should be monitored and organized by a third party, avoiding any risk of chaos and dysfunctional conflicts. Vaaland (2004, p.450) stresses that the benefits of using this process is that it involves both parties, get them to understand and identify the conflict in order to achieve healthier relationships.

2.4.7 Active Conflict Management

DeChurch *et al.* (2001) expresses that active conflict management allows groups to openly talk about issues and disagreements, allowing them to share information and confront a conflict together. In addition Tjosvold *et al.* (2002) argues that openness makes it possible to contradict arguments and that research has shown that there is great possibilities in open conversation and argument confrontation. The positive effects of conflict management are according to DeChurch *et al.* (2001) a result of the active approach which benefits team effectiveness. Also there is potential innovativeness and development of ideas possibilities that will be lost when team members tend to avoid confronting each other. DeChurch *et al.* (2001) states that ‘The use of active conflict management will enhance team performance, and the use of passive conflict management will detract from group performance’. However the results of the research made by DeChurch *et al.* (2001) didn’t show indications of a strong relationship between active conflict management and team effectiveness.

2.4.8 Negotiation

Donohue (2003, p.170) promotes an interaction-based approach when negotiating, enabling the negotiators to see the connection between the situation and the outcome. Donohue (2003, p.171) brings forward a cylindrical model of communication where different levels of interaction, motivational sources, intensity and regularity of expression are linked together. Donohue (2003, p.171) argues that through understanding how these factors affect each other and how they are functioning jointly is the solution how to approach the negotiation and come to an agreement. Further Donohue (2003, p.173) expresses the importance of how one should communicate when negotiating. Effective communication is according to Donohue (2003, p.173) based on the quality, quantity (only the quantity necessary), relevancy and the behaviour. Donohue (2003, p.173) states that you should ‘make your conversational contribution such as is required’, neither more nor less.

Fulmer *et al.* (2004) brings forward to influence of cognitive ability on negotiation processes. When negotiations become more complex and when the outcome is uncertain the cognitive ability becomes even more essential according to Fulmer *et al.*

(2004). An example brought forward is when negotiations have integrative possibilities, when the negotiators tend to look for as much of the share of the outcome as possible; this enhances the creativity of the negotiators. Furthermore Fulmer *et al.* (2004) claims that cognitive ability is an essential ability to hold as a negotiator and defines it as ‘the ability to predict behaviour and outcomes’. Fulmer *et al.* (2004) adds that emotional intelligence advances our understanding in negotiations. The ability to both predict behaviour, outcomes, to analyze emotions and control emotions both in self and others gives the negotiator great possibilities. Fulmer *et al.* (2004) claims that through holding both emotional intelligence and cognitive abilities the negotiator has a better opening of finding out the interests of the other party at an early stage at the same time as the risk of letting emotions hinder the negotiation decreases. Additionally Fulmer *et al.* (2004) brings forward four propositions regarding the relationship between cognitive ability, emotional intelligence and negotiations:

1. ‘Higher cognitive ability is associated with more rapid learning about the underlying interests of one's negotiation partner’.
2. ‘Higher cognitive ability is associated with more rational decision-making performance and less judgment error in negotiation settings’.
3. ‘Emotionally intelligent negotiators will more accurately evaluate risk, leading to better decision-making performance within a negotiation context’.
4. ‘Emotionally intelligent negotiators are more likely to perceive the opportunity to use and to actually choose negotiation strategies/tactics that involve manipulation of their own emotions or of the emotions of negotiation opponents’.

(Fulmer *et al.* 2004)

Murtoaro *et al.* (2007) has a slightly different view on negotiation and defines it as ‘communication, direct or tacit, formal or informal, between individuals who are motivated to converge on an agreement for mutual benefit’. In contrary Murtoaro *et al.* (2007) adds that the fear of the other party taking advantage of the other parties

collaborative and information sharing approach can hinder the undertaking of joint decision making and negotiation. Therefore Murtoaro *et al.* (2007) claims that the cooperative approach has to be mixed with competitiveness to ensure that neither party is being exploited and that the outcome is equally beneficial for both parties. According to Murtoaro *et al.* (2007) negotiations are composed by four mutual characteristics, independently of if it is in the personal or the professional life:

1. 'There are two or more parties'.
2. 'The parties can be creative and cooperate to arrive at a joint decision'.
3. 'The payoffs to any party depend either on the consequences of the joint decision or alternatives external to the negotiations'.
4. 'The parties can reciprocally and directly exchange information, honest or not'.

(Murtoaro *et al.* 2007)

Murtoaro *et al.* (2007) brings forward an analytical approach that analyses negotiations in a structured and theoretical approach. The approach is based on three main areas; game theory, decision analysis and behavioural decision theory which are all based on rational decision making.

Game theory is a tool for analyzing decision making, for example when the involved parties are to make decisions independently, but combine these choices to determine earnings for both parties. The decision alternatives that parties can choose are all part of a strategy, which enables the search for complete strategies. However the weakness with the game theoretical analysis is according to Murtoaro *et al.* (2007) that it is based on the assumption that all parties are fully informed of the choices made by the other parties.

Conversely, decision analysis is based on breaking down a decision in bits and pieces, in which earned dividend is not affected by the other parties' choices. Continuously the choices and events examined with respect to risks and probabilities. These factors are then ranked as a basis for making the most beneficial decision.

The third main area is the behavioural decision theory which basically is a tool for predicting the behaviour of the opposing parties. Moreover Murtoaro *et al.* (2007)

highlights that focus is mainly put on analysing how people act and think. Using this theory makes it possible to build up a negotiation strategy based on the knowledge of the opposing parties' blunders, agendas and behaviour.

When a project takes the wrong direction, it is very usual for schisms being built up between the parties. According to Murtoaro *et al.* (2007) this often leads to negative effects on collaboration even if there are beneficial compromise resolutions at hand. Murtoaro *et al.* (2007) explains that the so called psychological costs of putting things together are too high. In the end it often comes up to that neither customers nor contractors benefits from the outcome.

Furthermore Murtoaro *et al.* (2007) brings forward that when going into a negotiation, each party involved has a so called 'BATNA', which is a best alternative to a negotiated agreement. This underlines that each party has a limit for what is an acceptable outcome. Murtoaro *et al.* (2007) claims that the goal for each of the negotiators is to force the other as close to their 'BATNA' limitations as possible, to benefit their own payoff as much as possible. The problem though that is highlighted by Murtoaro *et al.* (2007) is that most of time the negotiating parties' are not aware of the 'BATNA' levels of the opposing parties', in some cases not even their own. Murtoaro *et al.* (2007) claims that negotiation is a game of balancing competitiveness and cooperation, if you give away too much the other party will take advantage of that opening and vice versa. In figure 2 below Murtoaro *et al.* (2007) illustrates the key stages of the negotiation analysis approach.

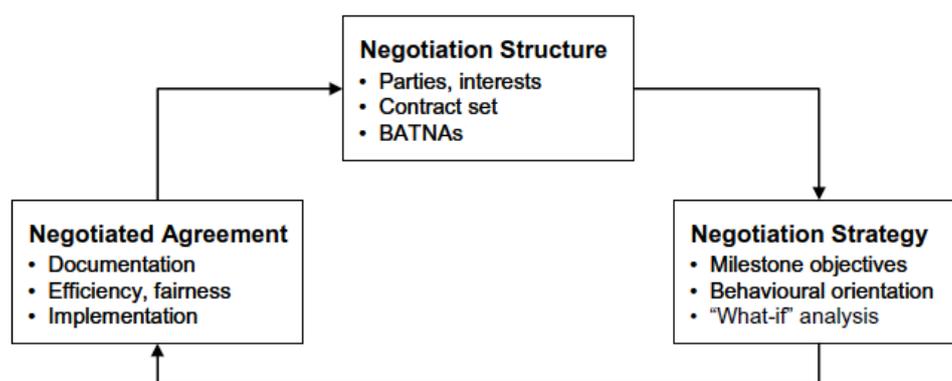


Figure 5, Key stages of the negotiation analysis approach, Murtoaro *et al.* (2007)

2.5 Summary

The theoretical framework focuses mainly on three areas which are different approaches to conflict, conflict escalation and conflict resolution. Depending on our personalities, confidence, styles etc we all approach conflict differently. One example is put forward by Desivilya *et al.* (2005) that highlights the theory of high versus low concern for others which results in five different conflict management patterns, dominating, obliging, avoiding, integrating and compromising. Moreover the way one approaches a conflict isn't only dependent on the individual's own characteristics. Concern is also taken to team membership and conflict culture that has been developed within organizations and project teams. Aritzeta *et al.* (2005) claim that studies has shown that team roles have a major impact on how an individual chooses to approach a conflict. Furthermore Aritzeta *et al.* (2005) advocates a mix of roles in project teams and expresses the need for both cooperative and competitive behaviour within project teams to enhance team performance.

Chapter 2.3 investigates how conflict grows and escalates over time depending on the nature of the conflict and emotional involvement. Runde and Flanagan (2007) explain the conflict triggering events as hot buttons and provide through the retaliatory cycle an overview of the way that conflict escalates.

The third major area that has been explored in the theoretical framework is how to resolve conflicts in an effective way. Rahim *et al.* (2000) argues the importance of organizational justice as a foundation for positive attitudes and conflict management. A number of theories about how conflicts can be managed have been brought forward, for example Runde and Flanagan (2007) presents the CDP tool that is used to measure behaviour through feedback. Perspective taking that advocates reflection and LAM that exposes argumentation weaknesses and enables argumentation mapping is other examples of conflict management tools that have been presented in chapter 2.4. Chapter 3 will present a methodology for how to analyse and evaluate theories and methods brought forward in theoretical framework for conflict management within project teams.

3 Methodology

This chapter will describe in detail how the research for this dissertation has been performed, the chosen methods and the reason why they have been used. Further it addresses the way data has been collected, reliability of the data, and the way it has been analyzed. Research limitations will also be highlighted, and what considerations that has been given to ethics and morality.

Figure 1 below illustrates a simplified overview of the structure and the research steps of this dissertation:

Research Questions – Theoretical Framework – Methodology Design – Analysis – Conclusion



Figure 6, Methodology Structure

3.1 Type of Dissertation

This dissertation will be based on a literature review, including relevant journal articles and books within the area of conflict management and project teams. As an ethnographic addition to the research, interviews with project team members will contribute with experiences about how to solve and manage conflicts.

3.2 Type of Research

The research in this paper is non-experimental. The data gathered from literature and interviews are analyzed and evaluated. Hypotheses and theories are compared thoroughly and related to each other. Information on the project team members experience was gathered through interviews were the experiences was analyzed and related to the theories that are highlighted from the literature review, in an attempt to explore the management of conflicts further.

3.3 Research procedure

The students on the masters program International Project Management was during the autumn of 2010 asked to hand in a master thesis proposal. The topic conflict management was picked because it could bring further knowledge on both a professional and private level. The proposal was during the autumn designed and narrowed down to the research questions presented in chapter 1.1. In January of 2011 the search for valuable and reliable articles and books started. After reading up on the subject the theoretical framework was written, containing thoroughly picked out material from chosen literature. The next step was to design a methodology for the research which is presented in this chapter. During the spring of 2011 interviews were conducted with project team members, contributing with their experiences of conflict management. The findings from the literature and the interviews were then analysed and interpreted with the objective of finding a pattern for effective conflict management.

3.4 Methods

3.4.1 Literature Review

A grounded theory research where secondary data were reviewed and critically evaluated, used for building up hypotheses and a methodology for effective functional conflict management. A grounded theory research is required to develop a theoretical base for this study and to back up findings. It also brings the opportunity to highlight the theories and models from renowned professors and researchers for comparison and correlation with the data that's been collected through the interviews.

3.4.2 Interviews

The interviews will be structured as a semi-standardized interview. Berg (2009, p.107) explains that by using semi-standardized structure it will be possible for the interviewed to more freely develop and elaborate their answers and explanations

further. Moreover Berg (2009, p.105) argues that a semi-standardized structure allows the interviewer to change the order of the questions and the wording. The interviewer also holds the flexibility to make clarifications and add information during the interview. Additionally qualitative one-on-one interviews adds more opportunities for reflection according to Silverman (2010, p.8-11), he also argues that one should have in mind during the interview that how you ask a question is more important than how many questions you ask. Qualitative research through interviews will provide insight in various industries and different perspectives on conflict management and the possible outcomes of functional conflicts. Furthermore it will offer both a reflective analysis and rigorous data.

3.5 Data Sources

The main sources for collecting data are Chalmers library, where books for this research are borrowed and Northumbria University's online search tool NORA where search for journal articles has been made. All the literature used for this dissertation has been in textual form, either through books or printed articles. Conducted interviews have been recorded to be able to go through it again afterwards.

3.6 Reliability

The literature used for this research was published in the 2000s, to assure that the information highlighted is up to date and reflect conditions in organisations today. Journal articles that have been used are all published through either the international journal of conflict management or the journal of organisational behaviour which is published by *Wiley* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2011). The international journal of conflict management is a member of and subscribes to the principles of the Committee on Publication Ethics and is published through the *IPMA* (International Project Management Association, 2011).

3.7 Limitations

According to Berg (2009, p.52) there is always a risk of the researcher ‘drowning in data’. Therefore the topic for this dissertation has been narrowed down, see chapter 1.4. Furthermore theories and hypotheses that are brought up in books and journal articles used for this dissertation that aren’t directly linked to conflict management and the research questions will be excluded from the grounded theory research and further analysis.

The literature is reviewed from the perspective of the research issues and with the research questions in mind. To enrich the research it is essential that a large amount of literature connected to the research questions is reviewed to get an overview of the problem areas and different approaches to conflict management. Literature used is carefully selected and the credibility of the sources is ensured.

3.8 How is the data organized and analyzed?

The analysis chapter interprets the data collected in the theoretical framework and through the interviews. By explaining and analyse the data collected one can relate it to the research questions according to Hart (2005, p.435). Furthermore Hart (2005, p.434) claims that ‘interpretation is a cognitive process consisting of making sense of something’. By analysing and interpret the data a conclusion is formed, built up by facts, theories, experiences, method proposals and views. By finding a pattern for effective conflict management one can present a way of thinking when approaching conflicts for the reader and propose methods for how to solve and negotiate their way through them.

This thesis gives in the beginning the reader an understanding of the basics about conflicts and behaviour which is then built on with presenting different approaches, theories, methods and solution patterns. The findings from the analysis and interpretations of the data collected are at first brought forward through a discussion where it is reviewed and examined. The conclusions will be presented in the results chapter where research questions are answered and where the recommendations and the research’s contribution to conflict management are delivered.

3.9 Ethics

Statements and recommendations brought forward in this thesis are all based on facts from literature and experiences expressed in interviews. All involved participants are informed about the subject and purpose of this research and have voluntarily agreed to participate. All the participants also have the choice of being anonymous. Theories and opinions put forward in the theoretical framework are all correctly referenced according to the citing rules provided by Northumbria University. Literature used has been analyzed with respect for the authors' works. Theories and methods that have been highlighted have been taken as they are without exceptions. Finally recordings are done in such manner that the person can't be identified.

4 Results

4.1 Interviews

This chapter brings forward the answers obtained from the interviews regarding the following eight areas. The objective with the questions was to find out how the interview participants approached conflict in different situations and their thoughts about presented methods when it comes to make conflict management more effective at the workplace. The interview questions can be found in the appendices.

4.1.1 Dealing with conflict

Interviewee 1- Team leader at an IT company

I approach conflict more strictly at the workplace and I am trying hard to bring forward my opinions and to make others understand them. I'm trying to be more formal and authoritative when I work with people that I don't know personally; when you work with people that you know you have the advantage of foreseeing their reactions.

Interviewee 2 – IT consultant

When dealing with conflicts at the workplace I tend to be very strict. My objective is always to solve the conflict as fast as possible since I believe that otherwise it can have negative effects on the projects in the future. I think that the most essential part in a conflict is to listen to all the different opinions and to let everybody express their will, enabling a compromise. To reach a solution all the involved parties has to give and take some more or less.

For me the environment at the workplace is very important and that the communication between the project team members is working, so often it is easier if you know the people that you are working with. My opinion is that the project manager is the one that is the outmost responsible for managing conflicts within the project team.

Interviewee 3 – Test leader at a telephone company

In a conflict I am usually quite forward when I feel that I am confident in my knowledge within the discussed topic. My objective in a conflict depends on the situation but often I try to 'win', especially if I don't know the person or the other party. When the conflict has an impact on the project I always focus in solving the issue to be able to move forward. My starting point in a conflict is always based on the knowledge that I have in the discussed topic, when I work with people that I know I tend to feel safer in my argumentation with helps in a lot of situations that can arise at my workplace.

Interviewee 4 – Project Manager at a car manufacturing company

At the workplace the conflicts that arises is often based on issues regarding the work tasks and my ambition in those situations is always to seek a win-win solution for both parties. I believe that a win-win compromise is better in the long run since a conflict could fester and have negative effects further ahead. I'm not seeking conflicts but I'm not afraid of them either. Often I feel that it is easier to discuss an issue with a person that you know without risking that the conflict escalates further.

Interviewee 5 - Project Manager at a travelling agency

I tend to be more objective at the workplace, being professional and trying to prioritize the option that suits the company best. My aim in conflicts is most of the time to get what I want and to win the conflict; however compromising may provide a way to move towards a solution. When I am working with people who I don't know personally, I usually tend to be more cautious. On the other hand I feel that it is easier to be disturbed by the little things in people that I know well but it is easier to be more efficient as a group when you know each other and what each person is good at.

4.1.2 Triggers

Interviewee 1- Team leader at an IT company

Sometimes the situation itself demands me to stay calm, especially in my role as a team leader. What triggers conflict for me however is when someone doesn't want to learn or try something; instead they are choosing to ask for help directly. My opinion

is that you can always try before you ask someone for help. The situation changes though when you don't know the person and what kind of knowledge he/she might possess.

Interviewee 2 – IT consultant

I find it quite easy to sort out unnecessary conflicts at the workplace. A situation that often bothers me however is when a promise is broken. An example would be when you have made an agreement at a project meeting on what will be delivered to the next meeting which is then not met by the other party.

Interviewee 3 – Test leader at a telephone company

I believe that there are several situations that trigger conflict for me. In my work role I attend a lot of meetings that deals with the progress of different testing projects. Something that often bothers me is when a lot of time during those meetings is spent on discussing what has been and why things should be as they always has been. It really bothers me when a person wants to use the old ways even though it takes much longer time. Finally I get really annoyed when the management department demands a lot of reports which consumes a lot of time to put together just so that they can create a colorful Gantt chart that we neither need nor use.

I often choose to approach the conflict at an early stage. I believe it gives me a bigger chance to control myself.

Interviewee 4 – Project Manager at a car manufacturing company

I often get very annoyed if someone tries to run over or trick me in one way or another. Pure stupidity can also be something that could trigger a conflict.

I haven't really reflected about conflict triggers so this knowledge hasn't helped me as far as I know.

Interviewee 5 - Project Manager at a travelling agency

Obviously if someone does not deliver what they promise and do not have any excuses or reasons for it.

I always try to point out to and remind them that you know usually doesn't deliver

4.1.3 Decision making processes

Interviewee 1- Team leader at an IT company

When it comes to decision making I prefer a fair process where everyone is allowed to participate. My opinion is that each person should have the opportunity to bring forward their arguments and viewpoints.

Interviewee 2 – IT consultant

How a decision is taken should be situational even though I prefer a decision making process where everyone has the chance to influence and participate. In some situations you know that you want a democratic decision but unfortunately it has a tendency to be a very time consuming process.

Interviewee 3 – Test leader at a telephone company

Which decision making process that should be used depends on the situation in my opinion. A lot of project managers that I have been working with have been afraid of taking decisions. People tend to ask their supervisor who is doing the same and so on. I believe that it is important for a project manager to step forward and make decisions; a lot of decisions within a project don't always concern everyone. I have also noticed that it is very common that project managers ask the wrong people for guidance. Instead one should focus on asking those with knowledge within the matter.

Interviewee 4 – Project Manager at a car manufacturing company

A fair decision making process is always to favor but in some cases you have to be effective. A democratic decision process takes a lot of time and time might be something that you do not have at the moment.

Interviewee 5 - Project Manager at a travelling agency

When it comes to decision making processes I believe that you can't always get what you want. My opinion is that the decision itself is the most important part. If you always have to vote for every decision you wouldn't have time for anything else. It is though important that the people concerned have the possibility to bring forward their input.

4.1.4 Feedback

Interviewee 1- Team leader at an IT company

As a team leader I believe that feedback is a crucial part, you want to keep a fair structure in your behaviour so it is very important that people let you know if you have forgot about involving someone in a decision that concerns them for example. I think that the feedback should be provided through a meeting but perhaps not always by the raw truth, but by a suitable version of it. In general feedback could be a useful tool because you want to know what the customers think about the service that is provided for example.

Interviewee 2 – IT consultant

At my workplace we are given feedback and I think that it is very valuable. It is in our company culture to give feedback on each other's work and to not be afraid of asking for opinions. At my company we aren't focusing that much on feedback regarding behaviour, instead we have a lot of social competent employees and we are given guidelines from the company about how to behave and treat our customers. For us it is about keep and care about our customers. In my opinion feedback is a must, you could always do things better and develop.

Interviewee 3 – Test leader at a telephone company

In those projects that I have been involved in I have noticed that we in Sweden is very afraid of giving feedback to each other, we are always avoiding the problems. A lot of people have opinions regarding others behaviour but doesn't have the courage to let them know, therefore there is a big risk of building up a lot of frustration. I feel that one instead should try to approach the problem at an early stage and to give feedback to each other about what in someone's behaviour that bothers others at the workplace. We are using scrum which is a methodology for system development at meetings every second week with retrospectives where things like behaviour is brought up. As a tool I think that feedback could help to improve project processes and to highlight the biggest issues that need to be solved.

Interviewee 4 – Project Manager at a car manufacturing company

Feedback is something that should be used when the time is right, not directly after a conflict. How the feedback is given is also a very important part.

At my workplace we had something called the hot seat where we were given both positive and negative feedback from each other. It can be difficult to take the criticism in the beginning and it may take a while to get used to it, but I think it is healthy and you can learn a lot from it. I sensed that after a while it affected the working environment in a good way.

Interviewee 5 - Project Manager at a travelling agency

I think that feedback is valuable; everyone wants to develop as a person. It is a great way to get an evaluation when working in a project and you can get the entire project process more effective. I believe that thanks to feedback we can utilize the resources we have more efficiently, we know about each other's disadvantages and advantages as well as our own. The team can become more cohesive.

4.1.5 Logical Argument Mapping (LAM)

Interviewee 1- Team leader at an IT company

The idea itself is good and would probably be very helpful at some workplaces. However where I work there is really no time for this kind of methods. If one ignores the time element, it would be useful and you could be able to solve conflicts smoother.

Interviewee 2 – IT consultant

Using an argumentation map could be useful if all the involved people in the conflict can get a better understanding through the map. However, a small problem can become bigger because of the map. It might bring in people who were not involved from the beginning to solve the conflict. On the other hand the argumentation map could bring forward more aspects, for example that there are underlying problems that needs to be taken care of. The leader has a very important role and should provide the methods to be used to resolve conflicts.

Interviewee 3 – Test leader at a telephone company

This kind of method can be suitable in a variety of situations but what I think is common for the conflict type is that it has to be big for this method to be taken seriously. It should be a conflict where the involved parties have misunderstood each other greatly. One could then bring up the arguments so that they can be discussed and to get rid of the misunderstandings that exist.

The method can also be helpful in personal conflicts where major problems have occurred, and then the problem can be solved in an orderly manner. In the larger context of conflict between groups such as in our retrospective meetings that we have every other week where people can get the opportunity possible to understand the conflict.

Interviewee 4 – Project Manager at a car manufacturing company

In major conflicts one can certainly benefit from the method the conflict is based on a substantive issue. On the other hand I don't think that the method would be very useful if the conflict is personal.

Interviewee 5 - Project Manager at a travelling agency

I think it's a very good method. It is often that you do not understand each other. Sometimes you do not know why the other person is angry or which his opinions are. Often when there is conflict it is because of not understanding each other or different interpretations. In these cases it can be a good thing to explain the arguments in depth so that everyone understands the purposes. Sometimes there is a lot to keep track of and then it can be useful to get it up on the board.

4.1.6 Openness at the workplace

Interviewee 1- Team leader at an IT company

I believe that openness would trigger efficiency and could encourage the project team members to look at problems from other perspectives and introduce new solutions. But on the other hand one must be careful not to criticize too much. Some people do not like to be criticized and it may be worthwhile to let it go in some cases. There is

always a risk that the criticism creates a personal conflict but I do believe that opened can be very good because then can express their feelings and there are very few people that can't take a little criticism.

Interviewee 2 – IT consultant

Openness at the workplace could be valuable to some extent. A job where you constantly are getting criticism for what you are doing will in the long run not be beneficial. It is the project manager's role to deal with that kind of information and then deliver it to the person concerned. Further it also depends on which kind of criticism that is brought forward, negative criticism is the project manager's role to communicate. Positive criticism is unfortunately rarely presented. I do not think negative criticism must figure between colleagues. Usually the project members have knowledge within different areas and therefore don't possess enough knowledge within the other areas of the project to be able to work with that form of criticism. You must have background information before you criticize and I think that it is the project manager's role to hand out criticism.

Interviewee 3 – Test leader at a telephone company

Open discussions could be good as long as you are using objective arguments and in an orderly form. It's important that people are open to discussions and willing to discuss their decisions and arguments. It should be alright criticizing each other as long as it is factual.

Interviewee 4 – Project Manager at a car manufacturing company

Transparency in the workplace is a good thing. Criticism as such does not need to be negative but can be given in a positive way, I think it will be a much better working environment if you can openly say what you feel and think. Constructive criticism can be very valuable and useful.

Interviewee 5 - Project Manager at a travelling agency

I definitely believe that one should be able to freely speak their mind, it creates a larger debate. But then I still think we should respect each other's arguments, one must see both sides; if you're going to criticize you must also try to understand others.

4.1.7 Negotiation

Interviewee 1- Team leader at an IT company

I wish that I had a plan when going into negotiations but I'm running on gut instinct and crash on.

To win a negotiation is not to get all my wishes met but to get away with as much as possible in a compromise. In the worst case scenarios the decision taker condense my point of view but come up with a counter-argument that might make me realize that my idea was not the best. If the other party are people that I know I always try to protect their interests as well, often it is possible to agree on a win-win solution. I usually tend to be shorter sighted when I don't know the people that I'm dealing with, trying to get most of my ideas realized.

Interviewee 2 – IT consultant

My strategy depends on what kind of negotiation I'm dealing with. If I feel I have an advantage, for example if I have a product that the opposing party must-have. When going into a negotiation I try to be well prepared to be able to bring strong arguments to be able to reach the objectives of my company. My opinion is that winning a negotiation means that I have succeeded in making a deal that both my company and the other party is satisfied with.

Interviewee 3 – Test leader at a telephone company

If I have time to think over how to negotiate I always try to read on the subject in order to come up with arguments and what counter arguments the other party might put forward. You can either obtain facts about the topic or person or you could try to provoke a reaction to see where the person stands. In a negotiation I am focusing on being very objective and present my arguments in a good way. To win, sometimes you have to accept a win-win situation. When I have a strong belief that I am right I don't accept anything else than getting what I want. Sometimes it can be a problem if both parties are too careful; leading up to that no one gets what they want.

Interviewee 4 – Project Manager at a car manufacturing company

I'm trying to prepare myself with as much factual arguments as possible and try to see from the other's point of view. I usually do not try to win at all costs but it is a matter of give and take, even though the ultimate goal always is to get a hold of as much as possible. If everyone is satisfied with the outcome of the negotiation I believe that is a good win-win solution.

Interviewee 5 - Project Manager at a travelling agency

I try to read on to understand the whole puzzle and I try to familiarize myself with the other party's situation in order to be able to have a lot of arguments when going into the negotiation. My strategy is to try to find the other parties weaknesses and to use them for my own advantage. For me winning is somehow to find a solution that works for both parties.

4.1.8 Conflict management skills

Interviewee 1- Team leader at an IT company

I would like to get better in order to see things more objectively and to in some cases ignore my own experiences and to see the conflict from an independent perspective. The most essential skill of a project leader is that you are patient and able to see things from another person's perspective.

Interviewee 2 – IT consultant

I would like to be better at negotiating and to see things from others perspective. Sometimes it is useful to understand how others view the conflict to be able to avoid the conflict from escalating.

A good conflict manager must be responsive and be able to see if anyone in the project group is unhappy, etc. It's important to be able to feel the atmosphere among the team members, for example help a new recruit into the group. The project leader's role is to deal with different situations that can arise in a project group.

Interviewee 3 – Test leader at a telephone company

If you are passionate about something, there is a tendency of arguing with feelings instead of facts which is very hard to change.

I think the most important skill is that you can listen to both sides to understand all the arguments and the contexts that parties are coming from. To get both parties to understand each other is a good start when trying to solve a conflict. Another important aspect of conflicts is to be factual and not to get stuck in old pattern and to be responsive and authoritative.

Interviewee 4 – Project Manager at a car manufacturing company

Argumentation and negotiation skills are something that I would like to improve on. Otherwise, there are certainly a lot of areas that I could improve within.

Interviewee 5 - Project Manager at a travelling agency

I think that there is room for improvement within almost everything. It's impressive when someone can find a solution where both sides think they've won and are satisfied, but that conflict manager has packaged it so well that the parties have been manipulated to believe that that is the case.

4.2 Summary

Through the interviews the participants has showed a tendency towards being more strict and objective at their workplaces compared to how they are acting in their private life. Three out of five of the interviewed was expressing the importance of acting in the way that's best for the project and the company.

When it comes to working with other's all the interviewed persons preferred in one way or another to work with people whom they know since it could be easier to discuss issues without risking a conflict and that through knowing each other's skills you could be more efficient as a team. Knowing your colleagues could also enhance the communication and give you the advantage of foreseeing their reactions according to one of the team leaders interviewed.

Regarding the conflict outcome three out of five participants preferred a win-win compromise meanwhile the others saw compromise as a possible solution if a more beneficial outcome was too hard to reach.

Through the interviews it was shown that conflict triggers was very individual. As a counter reaction to ones triggers one of the participants claimed that he tried to approach the conflict at an early stage since he believed that it could give him a bigger chance of getting control over the situation.

Concerning fairness and decision making the participants preferred a fair process where everyone could have their say. The results of the interviews did though point out that time was a big obstacle in this matter, having everyone express their opinion in each matter would be a very time consuming process according to most of the participants.

All the interviewed was speaking very positive about feedback in general. On the other hand only two out of five participants said that they used it as a tool at their workplace. One of the participants highlighted that most people are very afraid of giving each other feedback; instead we are avoiding the problems which enhances the risk of building up a lot of frustration.

The idea of using an argumentation map was met with different opinions. What was common for the answers given were that the method was argued to only be suitable for larger conflicts concerning the company structure and not for personal conflicts.

The responses to openness at the workplace were very mixed and even though the idea is good it also comes with an enhanced risk of building up a working environment that could increase the risk of personal conflict. The participants also argued that what kind of criticism that is brought forward plays a big part, objective arguments in an orderly form was preferred..

Four out of five interviewed tried to create a strategy before going into a negotiation if there was time. A win-win compromise were both parties were satisfied was an acceptable outcome in most cases. Common preparations that were mentioned in the interviews were to try finding the other parties weaknesses, obtaining facts about the topic and to come up with factual arguments.

When asking about what the participants would like to improve about their conflict management skills the answers were mixed. A few examples that were brought up were the ability of seeing conflicts from an independent perspective and improved argumentation and negotiation skills.

5 Discussion

Desivilya et al. (2005) and Hughes, Ginnett and Curphy (2009) explained different approaches to conflict which was brought forward in theoretical framework. The interviews performed have indicated that a mix between the different approaches is common although compromising and dominating patterns are the most prominent. A win-win solution to a conflict or a negotiation is amongst most of the participants in this research an acceptable outcome. Furthermore one could draw the conclusion that most people are in some extent expecting not getting all their wishes and demands met when going into a negotiation.

Regarding a working environment and a company culture that promotes openness and feedback between colleagues there are arguably several aspects that should be considered. To begin with one should decide how the feedback should be communicated, should the project manager mediate all positive and negative criticism or is open discussion a better alternative? There are also several methods for handling feedback like questionnaires or the hot seat that could be suitable alternatives. Anyhow one could easily make the claim that feedback is a crucial communication tool when it comes to personal growth and organizational development.

When asking about conflict triggers the participants hadn't reflected about what triggers conflict for them, which makes me realize that one should as a first step try to make people aware of their so called hot buttons. Knowing your weaknesses is the key for personal growth which in this kind of situation could be the use of for example a breathing technique. According to Runde and Flanagan (2007) a conflict competent leader is aware of his/hers hot buttons. Through the retaliatory cycle, Runde and Flanagan bring forward a pattern of how conflict escalates depending on emotional involvement in conflicts. In a project team where conflicts often is based on different opinions about how to solve a problem for example, the risk is less imminent compared to when a conflict focuses on personalities. Task focused conflicts could in many cases bring positive affects but when the conflicts turns towards personalities and when it becomes more emotional the project manager should step in and manage the situation before it escalates and the conflict becomes dysfunctional. This proposal is also supported by the answers brought forward by the interviewees who think the project manager's role includes resolving conflicts within the group. To avoid conflict

escalation within the project team the project manager should overview the atmosphere in the group and be aware of how emotionally charged situations that arise are. Runde and Flanagan (2007) highlight that when a conflict reaches the level of discord it starts to have damaging effects on relationships within the project team. Typical signs of discord is when members in the project team is starting to criticize and avoid each other, these signs are signals that the project manager must discover at an early stage in order to avert further conflict escalation.

Fairness and justice should be obvious and decisions making procedures isn't an exception. But as pointed out in some of the interviews performed in this study, involving everyone in each decision will make the processes very slow and time consuming. There is also a risk of building up a conflict and emotional discussion regarding a decision that would have gone unnoticed if the project manager would have taken the decision without involving others. This area is part of the project manager's role, to balance who should participate in decision making process and how much time can be spent while it must be fair to all concerned.

Tools

Using feedback as a tool was met very positively in the interviews. One could though argue that feedback is limited in the extent that it can only be used as a preventive measure. It is a tool for personal growth and a possibility to change behaviour that has a negative effect on the project team. Feedback can be communicated in many different forms like for example questionnaires, meetings or the hot seat. Which tool that is used can be decided by the project manager, the important part is the outcome and how the feedback is used for improvement which ultimately is based on each person's desire to develop.

LAM is not included in the daily activities of an organization. LAM can arguably be useful when the conflict involves a larger number of people, groups and perhaps primarily departments within the organization. LAM can effectively straighten out misunderstandings and give a clear overview of the issue. LAM is a tool that in itself requires a lot of time and analysis. Therefore LAM is a method that in firsthand is suitable for larger conflicts within the organization.

Openness and free discussion at the workplace is not a clear methodology, instead it is anchored in the company culture. The views that emerged from the interviews showed

that openness can have a very positive impact on efficiency within the group and encourages a healthier atmosphere where everyone can speak their mind. This study confirms that when conflicts are based on emotions, the risk of the conflict becoming dysfunctional is significantly greater. Transparency in the workplace allows for greater freedom of expression of emotions which can build up a more emotionally charged atmosphere. Positive criticism should be expressed openly while outlet for negative views should go through alternative channels of communication such as feedback.

A tool that we use on a daily basis is negotiation. According to Donahue (2003, p.173) effective communication based on quality, quantity, relevancy and behaviour is essential when negotiating. The results from the interviews indicated that preparing for negotiations were preferable if time were available. Nobody mentioned their 'BATNA' levels, the limit of what one can accept as an outcome. Instead focus was put on win-win solutions. From the interviews it can be seen that one often expects that the outcome will be a compromise. Furthermore, this approach suggests that the level of ambition is not placed higher than a compromise. However the approach to negotiations may vary between cultures and different industries.

The CDP is a tool that brings forward feedback about a person's behaviour and measures how one sees their own behaviour. A few characteristics that are essential for the conflict competent leader are according to Runde and Flanagan (2007) the ability to stay calm, listening to others, embracing constructive criticism and to encourage fairness and civility. In comparison when the question of which areas within conflict management one would like to improve was asked during the interviews, negotiating techniques and to see an issue from an independent perspective was the most common responses.

6 Conclusion

Research questions:

- 1) What triggers conflict and how does conflicts evolve?
- 2) Explore different conflict management approaches.
- 3) Identify and evaluate different tools and behaviours for how to manage and resolve conflicts within project teams.

This study has been shown that conflict triggers are very individual. The interviews also revealed that awareness on one's triggers aren't an area which is often reflected over.

Conflict escalation has according to this study it's foundation in emotional involvement. A person focused conflict has a higher risk of escalation and to evolve towards becoming dysfunctional. In comparison, task focused conflicts can lead to improved group functioning and decreased tension between members in the project team. Therefore the project manager should get involved in task-focused conflicts to the extent that it benefits the project.

Through this study it has been revealed that conflict management can be divided into two areas, prevention of conflicts and management of functional conflicts. Feedback and CDP can be counted as preventive tools to help develop project member's behaviour and to ensure that the opinions and feelings are passed on through controlled communication channels. The project manager's role includes working with preventive tools such as feedback and CDP. In addition, the project manager should monitor the work of the project team and ensure that emotional charged issues doesn't evolve to a conflict which could develop and become dysfunctional. In order to resolve a conflict a conflict competent project manager should be able to see the conflict from an independent perspective which was brought forward through the interviews and highlighted in the theoretical framework. In addition, the project leader has to be able to decide the design of decision making processes, to determine if a

quick time-saving decision should be taken or whether to involve the group and encourage fairness.

Finally the project manager should actively work with developing the project team through tools like feedback and to manage conflicts with emotional involvement. The first step to becoming a competent conflict manager is to be aware one's weaknesses, behaviour and conflict triggers. The second step is to be able to put oneself in others position and to see the conflicts from an independent perspective.

6.1 Further research

As further research it would be very interesting to apply the methods suggested in this thesis through workshops or when a conflict arises in a project team. Through a workshop with two opposing parties, negative and positive effects could be revealed but most beneficial would be to apply these methods in a real conflict.

Furthermore different organizational structures company cultures may be more appropriate for a particular method over another, this study can be diffuse and difficult to implement but can help with further development of conflict management. Finally developing a standardized feedback process based on questionnaires, meetings and perhaps even open discussion is another area that should be highlighted for further research.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Interview Questions

1. Describe how you approach conflict in your professional life and in your private life, are there any differences?
2. What is usually your concern/objective in a conflict?
3. Explain possible differences in your approach when dealing with conflict as part of a project team where you know all the individuals compared to dealing with people that you haven't worked with before?
4. What triggers conflict for you?
5. Explain how that knowledge has affected your behaviour in conflict situations.
6. Describe what is most important for you, a fair decision making process or the outcome?
7. In which way do you think that feedback from colleagues regarding your behaviour would be valuable for you?
8. In which way could feedback be a helpful tool at workplaces?
9. Explain how you reflect over a conflict that you are involved in?
10. Is there any area within conflict management where you would like to improve your skills?
11. What are your thoughts about putting up an argumentation map during a conflict to expose argumentation weaknesses and to get an understanding of the conflict?
12. What is your opinion about promoting openness at the workplace and that everyone should feel free to openly criticize each other's arguments?
13. How do you approach a negotiation?
14. What does 'winning' a negotiation mean to you?
15. Which are the most essential skills to hold as a conflict competent leader according to you?