The impacts of leadership on workplace conflicts

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the influence of managers' leadership styles (transformational, transactional and *laissez-faire*) on both the level and the nature of workplace conflicts (cognitive and relational in nature).

Design/methodology/approach – Data are collected from hospital employees in Canada. A total of 1,031 completed questionnaires are received, representing a response rate of 46 percent. The hypothesis is tested using confirmatory factor analyses and multiple regressions.

Findings – The results indicate that the two conflict dimensions do not derive completely from the same mechanisms, since only two out of the eight leadership dimensions evaluated influence both cognitive and relational conflicts. On the one hand, inspirational motivation has a negative impact on cognitive conflicts while intellectual stimulation and passive management by exception seem to foster it. On the other hand, inspirational motivation and individualized consideration negatively influence relational conflicts whereas management by exception-active and management by exception-passive impact it positively.

Research limitations/implications – The sample comprises a single organization and the data are collected at one point in time. Also, the model's variables are assessed by the same source (employees).

Practical implications – The results of this research highlight the importance of a supervisor's ability to introduce a common vision and demonstrate individualized consideration to reduce workplace conflict during periods of organizational change.

Originality/value – Although researchers stress that conflict management represents an important role for leaders, very few empirical studies have examined how leadership influences workplace conflicts.

Keywords Transformational leadership, Transactional leadership, Conflict management, Workplace, Performance management, Canada

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Over the last few years, several studies have examined how the transformational, transactional and *laissez-faire* leadership styles influence a wide range of variables, including satisfaction, commitment, employees' intention to quit and employee performance (Dumdum et al., 2002; Judge and Piccolo, 2004; Rafferty and Griffin, 2004). However, the relationship between leadership styles and conflict has been overlooked. This is surprising because some researchers stress that conflict management represents an important part of the role leaders play (Bass and Riggio, 2006).

In concrete terms, a leader may be involved in organizational conflicts in three different ways. First, a leader may be directly involved in a conflict. Her/his conflict management style (e.g. avoidance, confrontation, collaboration) would then have an impact on the outcome. Second, a leader must sometimes intervene in conflicts involving subordinates. In this case, her/his role is to get pat the impasse between the employees (e.g. informal mediator or arbitrator). Third, a leader can also have an

impact on conflicts through her/his leadership style, which then has a structuring impact on a context that is or is not propitious to the development of conflicts. It is this last angle that will interest us the most here.

This study is therefore intended as an exploratory endeavor to the extent that it constitutes a first step in understanding the role of managers' leadership with respect to conflicts in the workplace. More precisely, the purpose of this study is to empirically assess the link between the dimensions associated with transformational, transactional and *laissez-faire* leadership styles and workplace conflict.

Transformational, transactional and *laissez-faire* leadership

The transformational and transactional leadership theory, which is also referred to as the full range leadership theory (Avolio, 1999) or the multifactor leadership theory (Tejeda *et al.*, 2001), is among the theories that have received the greatest attention from researchers in the field over the last decade (Judge and Piccolo, 2004; Lowe and Gardner, 2000; Yammarino *et al.*, 2005). This theory comprises three broad forms or types of leadership, namely transformational, transactional and *laissez-faire*. The concept of transformational leadership, which was initially developed by Burns (1978), represents leaders who "stimulate and inspire followers to both achieve extraordinary outcomes and, in the process, develop their own leadership capacity" (Bass and Riggio, 2006, p. 3). They encourage their subordinates to develop their full potential and to transcend their individual aspirations for the good of the organization.

The four dimensions usually associated with this first leadership style are:

(1) idealized influence;

(2) inspirational motivation;

(3) intellectual stimulation; and

(4) individualized consideration.

Idealized influence characterizes leaders who exhibit exemplary behaviors and who go beyond their personal interests for the good of the organization (Bass, 1985). Employees identify with this kind of supervisor because he/she stands as a model, and is an example to be followed. Inspirational motivation is received from leaders who transmit a clear and inspiring vision to their employees (Podsakoff *et al.*, 1990). They thus motivate them by giving challenge and purpose to their work. Through intellectual stimulation, the leaders cultivate their employees' creativity (Avolio, 1999). They do not hesitate to question work routines and they help employees test new approaches and ideas. Finally, individualized consideration comes from leaders who are sensitive to the needs of each of their employees. This type of leader acts as a coach and as a mentor (Judge and Piccolo, 2004).

Rather than aligning individuals' interests with those of the organization, transactional leaders motivate their employees by focusing on their personal interests (Bass, 1985). They do so by using positive and negative reinforcement, depending on the employees' conduct and performance. In other words, transactional leaders trade resources valued by employees in return for behaviors such as increased effort or cooperation (Podsakoff *et al.*, 1990). Contingent reward, management by exception-active and management by exception-passive represent the three dimensions associated with transactional leadership (Judge and Piccolo, 2004).

Contingent reward portrays the image of a leader who clearly communicates the objectives to be attained and who then rewards employees who meet them (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2006). This constant positive reinforcement helps employees adopt the right behaviors and properly orient their efforts. Rather than focusing on the positive results achieved by subordinates, the two management by exception dimensions (active and passive) emphasize their mistakes and shortcomings. While the active dimension refers to a leader who scrutinizes the results of his subordinates and reprimands them as soon as they fall short of standards (Bass and Riggio, 2006), the passive dimension represent a supervisor that will wait for problems to become serious before rectifying the situation.

Finally, the *laissez-faire* leader, who is also referred to as non-transactional, is characterized by a relative lack of concern for his subordinates (Bass and Riggio, 2006). This third leadership style is composed of a single dimension representing supervisors who avoid managerial responsibilities, generally avoid taking decisions, are reluctant to take action and are not always there when they are needed (Judge and Piccolo, 2004).

Workplace conflicts

Researchers generally conceptualize interpersonal conflict as a multidimensional construct comprising two main dimensions (Rahim, 1983; Pinkley, 1990; Priem and Price, 1991; Jehn, 1995; Simons and Peterson, 2000). The first dimension is related to cognitive-type conflicts, assimilating them with task-related conflicts, incompatibilities related to interests or approaches to how work should be done (Jehn, 1995; Putnam and Wilson, 1982; Roloff, 1987; Wilmot and Hocker, 2000). The second dimension is related to relational-type conflicts, and considers disputes as caused by emotional incompatibilities (Thomas, 1992; Jehn, 1997; Jehn and Mannix, 2001; Rahim, 2002) and obstructive or interfering behavior (Alper *et al.*, 2000). A recent meta analysis concluded that both forms of conflict, cognitive and relational, have negative impacts on employee performance and workplace satisfaction (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003).

Studies by Jehn (1994, 1995), as well as by Jehn and Mannix (2001), provide typical examples of how cognitive conflict is conceptualized. According to these authors, cognitive conflict can be associated with an interest conflict or a task conflict. Interest conflicts refer to differences in goals and objectives, while task conflicts refer to the means required to reach objectives. Two parties may thus share the same goals, but not agree on the strategies necessary for reaching them. To distinguish between these two components, the authors measured these two aspects of conflict using two scales, which are, however, highly correlated. Some authors (Pearson *et al.*, 2002; Friedman *et al.*, 2000) have drawn attention to their psychometric weakness, thus asserting that that no discriminant validity justifies the use of two scales. These researchers postulate that we should only measure cognitive conflict with one scale; we decided to adopt this last strategy.

The studies by Jehn (1994-1995) and Jehn and Mannix (2001) also conceptualized the emotional dimension of conflict. A relational conflict occurs when parties experience aggression and resentment toward one another and interactions become strained and hostile. Furthermore, Cox (1998) allies hostile behaviors with emotions to form a relational conflict scale (i.e. emotional and behavioral). Although some authors have suggested that relational conflict should be split into emotional and behavioral conflict (Barki and Hartwick, 2001, 2003), a recent study has shown that this difference is not

significant enough to have practical value (Poitras and LeTareau, 2008), so the use of a relational scale is recommended.

Impact of leadership on conflicts

While some researchers (Bass and Riggio, 2006) stress the central role leaders can play in conflict management, research on transformational, transactional and *laissez-faire* leadership and conflict in situations of organizational change is rather scarce. The few studies that have addressed this issue remain mostly theoretical in nature.

Transformational leadership and conflict

In this section, we expose how the four dimensions associated with transformational leadership can diminish conflict. In general, Bass and Riggio (2006) argue that by emphasizing the organization's interests over the individual's own interests, transformational leaders find ways to resolve conflict between subordinates.

More specifically, as of 1978, Burns has postulated that, although conflict is inherent to human relationships, a shared vision developed by the transformational leader could contribute to reducing conflict. Moreover, by acting as role models, transformational leaders are able to show how subordinates can gain from cooperating with one another rather than holding rigid positions. Through intellectual stimulation, these leaders can also move employees involved in a conflict situation toward integrative and collaborative solutions, thus transforming the conflict into a mutual problem to be solved (Bass and Riggio, 2006, p. 69). Moreover, some research studies have shown that transformational leadership is linked to higher rates of cohesion and that it strengthens the collective identity of a group of employees (Carless *et al.*, 1995; Shamir *et al.*, 1993).

Transformational leaders can also reduce conflict by being sensitive to their subordinates' needs. This individualized consideration could therefore encourage their employees to respect and understand the position and needs of others and, at times, overcome any rigid positions they may hold (Bass and Riggio, 2006). For their part, Parent and Gallupe (2001) argue that transformational leaders reduce conflict levels among employees involved in a group support system (i.e. an interactive-based tool that helps decision making and task completion in a group). Finally, Xin and Pelled (2003) established a negative relationship between emotional conflict and supervisors' emotional support and creativity encouragement, two leadership behaviors that are respectively similar to the inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation dimensions of transformational leadership. More specifically, they found that employees who experience this kind of conflict perceive their leaders as expressing less confidence in achieving goals and encouraging their creativity to a lesser extent. Consequently, we postulate the four following hypotheses:

H1a. Inspirational motivation has a negative influence on cognitive and relational conflict.

H1b. Idealized influence has a negative influence on cognitive and relational conflict.

H1c. Intellectual stimulation has a negative influence on cognitive and relational conflict.

H1d. Individualized consideration has a negative influence on cognitive and relational conflict.

Transactional leadership and conflict
By clarifying certain objectives and rewarding good performance, a transactional leader can maintain positive interactions among his/her subordinates, therefore reducing emotional conflict. Kotlyar and Karakowski (2006) argue that leaders who promote clear rules of conduct and are able to manage subordinates' expectations in a team could reduce the level of frustration that could emerge from their interactions. These two authors find that the behaviors of transactional leaders are associated with lower levels of affective conflict when compared with transformational leadership. For Bass and Riggio (2006) transactional leaders should reduce conflict because they look for expedient compromises that are rewarding. This search for neutral solutions could often be more satisfactory for both parties and therefore diminish potential conflicts. However, Parent and Gallupe (2001) find that, in a group support system environment, a leader who adopts a management by exception style tends to increase conflict among subordinates. As a result, we postulate the three following hypotheses:

H2a. Contingent reward has a negative influence on cognitive and relational conflict.

H2b. Management by exception-active has a negative influence on cognitive and relational conflict.

H2c. Management by exception-passive has a positive influence on cognitive and relational conflict.

Laissez-faire *leadership and conflict*
We found a lot less in terms of evidence in the literature respecting the relationship between *laissez-faire* leadership and conflict. The only study we identified was the one by Bass and Riggio (2006), who propose that *laissez-faire* leadership could sometimes be a good alternative as it allows conflicts to be resolved by themselves. This positive relationship between *laissez-faire* leadership and conflict could nevertheless be viewed in the opposite light, as it could be argued that not intervening in a conflict situation could effectively lead to higher levels of conflict. Indeed, if frustrations, problems or frictions are allowed to pile up, then even minor disagreements may very well degenerate into major conflicts and even expand, involving other individuals. Because it seems that *laissez-faire* leadership can go both ways on conflict, we postulate that this leadership dimension will have an overall non-significant impact on conflict.

H3. *Laissez-faire* has a non-significant influence on cognitive and relational conflict.

All of the above hypotheses are summarized in Figure 1, which presents our research model.

Methodology
Sample
In this study, which was conducted in January 2006 among employees of a hospital in Canada, we received 1,031 completed questionnaires, representing a response rate of 46
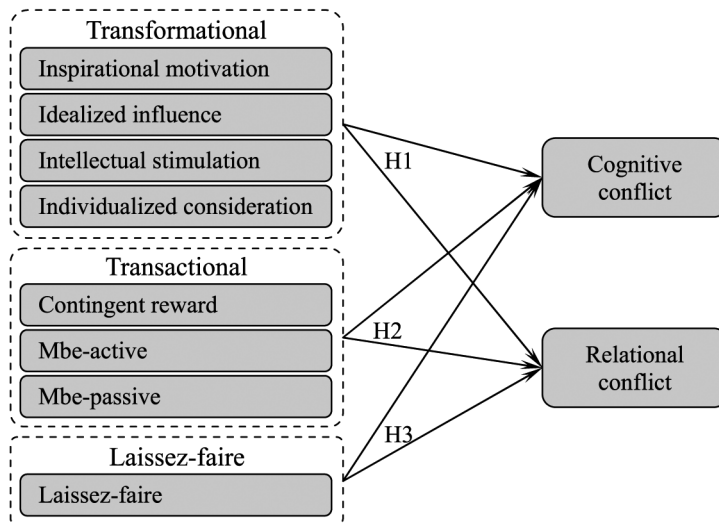
Figure 1.
Research model

percent of all the employees, an acceptable rate if we compare with the same kind of study. The information available indicates that respondents do not differ from the overall population in terms of sex, age and occupational categories. We chose this particular hospital because it was in the process of restructuring, which gave us the opportunity to observe a more conflictual context. For the study, we excluded managerial staff as well as physicians, and retained only regular salaried personnel with no managerial responsibilities (health care professionals: 57 percent; administrative support: 18 percent; auxiliary services and unskilled workers: 25 percent). The sample profile indicates that 68 percent of respondents were women, 41.5 percent were 55 and older, and that 50 percent had more than 20 years of seniority. Each employee received a questionnaire with a cover letter indicating that participation in the study was voluntary and that completing the questionnaire signified consent. The confidentiality measures taken allowed them to participate in this research project without prejudice because their answers were anonymous and only the researchers had access to the raw data.

Measures

Due to organizational constraints, such as the time available to employees to complete the questionnaire and the number of different concepts to be measured, some of the scales contained a reduced number of items. The selection of these items was based on the highest reliability coefficients in the original scales. Because the study was conducted in a French-speaking environment, all items were translated from English to French by a group of university researchers, and revised by a professional translator. Overall, 50 respondents were pre-tested in order to fine-tune the mechanism and thus ensure greater psychometric validity.

The leadership dimensions of inspirational motivation (2 items, α 0.90), idealized influence (3 items, $\alpha = 0.94$); intellectual stimulation (3 items, $\alpha = 0.85$), individualized consideration (3 items, $\alpha = 0.95$), and contingent reward (3 items, $\alpha = 0.94$) were

adapted from Podsakoff *et al.* (1990). The leadership dimensions of management by exception-active (3 items, $\alpha = 0.87$), management by exception-passive (2 items, $\alpha = 0.72$) and *laissez-faire* (1 item) were adapted from items presented by Avolio *et al.* (1999). For each statement, the employees had to indicate their level of agreement on a scale ranging from complete disagreement (1) to complete agreement (7). All items are provided in Table I.

In order to assess the level of conflict, we constructed scales based on Barki and Hartwick (2001), Jehn (1994, 1995), Cox (1998) and Jehn and Mannix (2001). However, items have been reframed to assess respondents' perceptions of the organization rather than of their individual situations. While the level of cognitive conflict is measured through two items ($\alpha = 0.83$), the level of relational conflict is measured through three items ($\alpha = 0.82$). Once again, the employees had to indicate their level of agreement on a scale ranging from complete disagreement (1) to complete agreement (7) for each statement. All items are provided in Table I.

Results

Confirmatory factor analyses were initially used in order to ensure that the variables analyzed were truly distinct. We first tested our theoretical model, which specifies ten factors. The model provides a good fit for the data ($\chi^2 = 742.26$, Df $= 231$,

Variables	Items
Idealized influence	My supervisor provides a good model for me to follow
	My supervisor leads by example
	My supervisor leads by "doing," rather than simply by "telling"
Inspirational motivation	My supervisor has a clear understanding of where we are going
	My supervisor paints an interesting picture of the future for our group
Intellectual stimulation	My supervisor has stimulated me to rethink the way I do things
	My supervisor challenges me to think about old problems in new ways
	My supervisor has ideas that have challenged me to reexamine some of my basic assumptions about my work
Individualized consideration	My supervisor shows respect for my personal feelings
	My supervisor behaves in a manner thoughtful of my personal needs
	My supervisor treats me without considering my personal feelings (R)
Contingent reward	My supervisor frequently acknowledges my good performance
	My supervisor personally compliments me when I do outstanding work
	My supervisor always gives me positive feedback when I perform well
Management by exception-active	My supervisor often focuses on my mistakes
	My supervisor always tracks my mistakes to make sure there are no errors
	My supervisor concentrates on my failures instead of my successes
Management by exception-passive	My supervisor reacts to problems only when they are serious
	My supervisor reacts to problems only when they are chronic
Laissez-faire	My supervisor often delays responding to my requests
Cognitive conflict	There are many conflicts relating to work ideas
	There are often differences in opinion regarding what should be done
Relational conflict	There is a great deal of aversion among employees
	Dealings are frequently carried out in secret
	People often create obstacles for others

Table I.
Measurement items

CFI = 0.975, GFI = 0.940, TLI = 0.967, RMSEA = 0.048). To make sure that our solution was the most appropriate, we then compared it to two other factor structures. In both cases, our theoretical model provided a significantly better fit (Table II).

Based on these results, we created composite variables by calculating the averages of the items for each variable. The descriptive statistics and correlations of the variables studied are presented in Table III. We also observe low to moderate levels of correlations between the variables except for slightly high correlations between the leadership dimensions. However, several earlier studies report similar levels of correlation (Podsakoff *et al.*, 1990; Tejeda *et al.*, 2001; Whittington *et al.*, 2004). Multiple regressions were then used to assess the impact of the different leadership styles on the conflict environment. For each regression, we added the respondent's age and sex as control variables. Table IV illustrates the results of regression on cognitive and relational conflict. As we can see, the age and sex variables do not significantly influence the level of conflict, irrespective of the type of conflict examined. The global regression model accounts for close to 20 percent of the variance in both conflict types.

In regard to transformational leadership, we observe from Table IV that the inspirational motivation leadership dimension is negatively related to cognitive conflict (β = -0.22; $p < 0.001$). Moreover, we notice that this dimension is negatively related to relational conflict (β = -0.16; $p < 0.001$). *H1a* is therefore fully supported. *H1b*, which argued that idealized influence had a negative influence on conflict, is not supported, since we observe in Table IV that this leadership dimension has no significant influence on both cognitive and relational conflict. *H1c* is also not supported. While intellectual stimulation has no significant impact on relational conflict, it has a significant impact on cognitive conflict (β = 0.16; $p < 0.01$). This last result is in the opposite direction of what we predicted. Finally, *H1d* is partially supported. Although individualized consideration has no significant impact on cognitive conflict, it is negatively related to relational conflict (β = -0.15; $p < 0.01$).

Contrary to our expectations regarding transactional leadership, *H2a* is not supported, as it has no impact on both form of conflict. As we also see in Table IV, *H2b* is also not supported. While management by exception-active was not related with cognitive conflict, a positive impact was found on relational conflict (β = 0.14; $p < 0.01$). This last result is in the opposite direction of what we expected. Finally, *H2c* is fully supported since the management by exception-passive dimension is positively related to cognitive (β = 0.26; $p < 0.001$) and relational (β = 0.23; $p < 0.001$) conflict.

	Models	$\chi2$	$\Delta\chi2$	Df	Δ Df	CFI	GFI	TLI	RMSEA
1.	10 factors	742.26	–	231	–	0.975	0.940	0.967	0.048
2.	9 factors[a]	766.14	23.88[*]	240	9	0.974	0.939	0.967	0.048
3.	8 factors[b]	992.58	250.32[**]	247	16	0.963	0.922	0.955	0.056

Notes: [*]$p < 0.01$; [**]$p < 0.001$
[a]This model merges the two conflict dimensions; [b]this model groups together the inspirational motivation and idealized influence dimensions into a charisma factor, it also collates the management by exception and *laissez-faire* dimensions into a passive-avoidant leadership factor

Table II.
Confirmatory factor
analysis results

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Sex	–	–												
2. Age	–	–	–											
3. Inspirational motivation	3.89	1.54	0.05	−0.06	(0.90)									
4. Idealized influence	4.09	1.66	0.06	0.02	0.60	(0.94)								
5. Intellectual stimulation	4.19	1.46	0.03	0.01	0.57	0.78	(0.85)							
6. Individualized consideration	5.07	1.63	0.05	−0.01	0.52	0.71	0.64	(0.95)						
7. Contingent reward	4.01	1.82	0.04	0.01	0.46	0.67	0.61	0.74	(0.94)					
8. Mbe-active	2.77	1.55	−0.11	0.01	−0.20	−0.45	−0.29	−0.46	−0.47	(0.87)				
9. Mbe-passive	3.24	1.63	−0.07	0.04	−0.33	−0.50	−0.42	−0.52	−0.46	0.51	(0.72)			
10. Laissez-faire	3.06	1.84	−0.08	0.01	−0.32	−0.45	−0.38	−0.47	−0.41	0.49	0.61	–		
11. Cognitive conflict	4.07	1.58	−0.09	−0.02	−0.27	−0.23	−0.14	−0.25	−0.22	0.26	0.36	0.28	(0.83)	
12. Relational conflict	3.09	1.55	−0.08	0.02	−0.26	−0.23	−0.20	−0.30	−0.22	0.29	0.36	0.29	0.66	(0.82)

Notes: Cronbach's alphas are presented in the diagonal; correlations above 0.06 or below −0.06 are significant at $p < 0.05$; correlations above 0.07 or below −0.07 are significant at $p < 0.01$

Table III.
Descriptive statistics and correlations

	Cognitive conflict			Relational conflict		
	b	R2	F	b	R2	F
Step 1: control variables						
Sex	− 0.05			− 0.04		
Age	− 0.05			− 0.01		
		0.01	3.07***		0.00	2.29
Step 2: main effects						
Inspirational motivation	− 0.22*			− 0.16*		
Idealized influence	− 0.01			0.10		
Intellectual stimulation	0.16**			− 0.01		
Individualized consideration	− 0.03			− 0.15**		
Contingent reward	− 0.02			0.09		
Mbe − active	0.08			0.14**		
Mbe − passive	0.26*			0.23*		
Laissez − faire	0.05			0.04		
		0.17	18.36***		0.17	18.45***

Notes: *$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.05$

Concerning *laissez-faire* leadership, *H3* is supported. As we can observe in Table IV, leadership dimension has no significant relationship with both cognitive and relational conflict. We discuss these results in greater detail in the next section.

Discussion

Our study set out to examine how the transformational, transactional, and *laissez-faire* leadership dimensions influence employees' perceptions in terms of workplace conflicts. In that regard, our results indicate on the one hand that inspirational motivation has a negative impact on cognitive conflict, while intellectual stimulation and passive management by exception seem to foster it. On the other hand, inspirational motivation and individualized consideration have a negative impact on relational conflict, while management by exception-active and management by exception-passive impact it rather positively. Finally, as predicted, *laissez-faire* leadership was not significantly related to conflict. These results shine an interesting light on conflict management as well as on transformational and transactional leadership.

Right from the outset, we can make five observations respecting leadership. First, except for inspirational motivation and passive management by exception, which impact both cognitive and relational conflict, it is observed that these conflict dimensions are not impacted by the same leadership dimensions. It would therefore appear that cognitive conflict and relational conflict do not derive completely from the same mechanisms. In the same regard, a study conducted by Friedman *et al.* (2000) showed that conflict management methods (e.g. confrontation, cooperation and avoidance) do not all have the same impact on cognitive and relational conflict.

Second, except for intellectual stimulation, we see that the dimensions associated with transformational leadership reduce conflict levels. These results are probably in line with the theoretical anchoring of transformational leadership, which better clarifies the organization's collective interests versus the individual interests of

employees when significant organizational changes are brought in. Overall, these results are therefore in line with the proposals by Bass and Riggio (2006) and by Xin and Pelled (2003).

Third, the positive and distinctive influence of intellectual stimulation on conflict with regard to other transformational leadership dimensions constitutes a result, which, at first glance, may appear surprising. Nevertheless, this result is in line with those obtained from other research studies, which have observed similar dynamics (Doucet, 2007; Podsakoff *et al.*, 1990). These authors explain this relationship by stating that constantly questioning the usual way of doing things and always looking for problems may create a certain degree of confusion among employees, which could lead to a higher perception of conflict. More specifically, Dionne *et al.* (2004) proposed that, through intellectual stimulation, transformational leaders could foster cognitive conflict. These results are in line with the opinions of Antonakis *et al.* (2003) respecting the need to study the effect of dimensions specific to leadership rather than general styles. According to them, the use of leadership styles provides an imperfect and oversimplified image of reality. As our results show, this practice can conceal precious information since the dimensions associated with a given leadership style do not necessarily carry the same weight in terms of influence.

Fourth, it seems important to nuance the positive impact of management by exception on the level of conflict. While both dimensions of management by exception create relational conflict, our results show that the active component does not generate cognitive conflict, contrary to the passive component. One possible explanation for this result is that, in the case of management by exception-passive, it is harder for employees to rationalize their supervisors' punitive actions, as they may seem more random. From this perspective, we can see that management by exception-passive creates more lasting conflict as it generates conflicts that are simultaneously cognitive and relational. Thus, management by exception-active seems less harmful in terms of conflicts at work.

Finally, we may note the absence of a significant relationship between *laissez-faire* leadership and either form of conflict. These results appear to be in line with other research studies that have established that this form of leadership is generally ineffective or often has a slightly negative effect (Judge and Piccolo, 2004; Dumdum *et al.*, 2002).

At the level of conflict management, two results in particular attracted our attention. First, the negative impact of inspirational motivation on cognitive and relational conflict fits in with the "superordinate goal" of Sherif *et al.* (1961). According to this principle, sharing a common objective with another person should moderate conflicts. Hunger and Stern (1976) validated this principle by demonstrating that a common objective has a negative impact both on the emergence and manifestation of conflicts. Our study thus indicates that, if leaders inculcate a common vision in their subordinates, they allow the subordinates to exceed their individual objectives and rally behind the common cause. Developing a joint vision thus appears to be one of the basic leadership skills needed for conflict prevention and management. It would thus seem that managers who propose a clear and common vision for the future considerably reduce the risk of conflict within their teams.

Second, the negative impact of individualized consideration on the level of relational conflict is consistent with Bush and Folger's (1994) principle of acknowledgment.

Developed in the context of conflict mediation, this principle stipulates that conflict resolution is facilitated when parties in conflict acknowledge their mutual needs. Furthermore, Mareschal's (2005) empirical study highlighted the importance of acknowledgment in introducing a climate of cooperation in a situation of conflict. Likewise, the results of our study seem to indicate that, when a leader takes the needs of his subordinates into consideration, the level of relational conflict is reduced. By demonstrating a degree of sensitivity to the needs of his subordinates, the leader probably introduces a climate of respect that is not conducive to relational conflict. As a result, individualized consideration represents another key behavior for leaders wishing to prevent and limit relational conflict and its negative consequences.

All in all, a leader's abilities to introduce a common vision and to demonstrate individualized consideration are complementary. Consequently, the results of this study thus highlight the importance of creating a common vision, which, as much as possible, incorporates the needs of employees with respect to conflict prevention and resolution in an organization undergoing restructuring.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study contains a number of limitations. We must first point out that our sample comprises just one corporation and this certainly affects our ability to extrapolate our results to other organizations. Furthermore, given our cross-sectional design, we cannot confirm causality between the relationships examined. Finally, because the variables in the model were assessed by the same source (employee), the strength of certain relationships may become somewhat amplified through the common variance. Finally, this study paves the way for several possible research avenues. First, it would be interesting to test these same relationships among corporations of various sizes or in various industries in order to test how far we can extrapolate our results. It would also be useful to test the analysis model in a context of high compliance with change as well as in an environment involving low compliance, in order to better understand the leader's role in the work climate in various situations of organizational change. Finally, testing the intermediary mechanisms between the leadership dimensions and conflict in order to better understand their dynamics would probably prove to be a promising avenue.

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