STUDYING CONFLICT IN WORK TEAMS.
A REVIEW OF THE SPANISH SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTION

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In the last years, we have observed an increasing interest in the analysis of conflict and work team effectiveness. This growing interest is shown in the many articles from Spanish research teams focused on the phenomenon of conflict in work teams. This paper provides a thorough analysis and classification of the literature on conflict at work, stressing the main research streams developed by prestigious researchers in the European and international scope. Our main goal in this review was to identify the most important variables involved in the conflict process in work teams, as well as the practical implications for professionals derived from this literature. To this end, we first focused on the Input-Processes-Output theoretical model, distinguishing between two types of conflict (tasks conflict vs. relationship conflict). Second, we adopted a contingent perspective to examine both positive and negative effects of these different types of conflict. Finally, we provided suggestions for future research on conflict to help the development of studies in this topic still incipient in Spain.
Key words: Relationship conflict, Task conflict, Work teams, Contingent perspective

En los últimos años hemos asistido a un creciente interés por el análisis de las consecuencias del conflicto en la eficacia de los equipos de trabajo, reflejándose en la publicación de un importante número de artículos realizados por equipos de investigación españoles. Este trabajo realiza un análisis y sistematización de esta literatura, partiendo de líneas de trabajo consolidadas por prestigiosos investigadores y desarrolladas en el ámbito europeo e internacional. Con este objetivo se ponen de manifiesto cuáles son los factores más importantes que intervienen en el proceso del conflicto dentro de los equipos de trabajo y las implicaciones prácticas para el ejercicio profesional que se derivan de estos estudios. Para ello: (a) nos hemos centrado en los modelos explicativos de la eficacia de los equipos utilizando una aproximación Input-Procesos-Output; (b) hemos hecho uso de la distinción entre tipos de conflictos (conflicto de tareas vs. conflicto de relaciones); (c) hemos adoptado una perspectiva contingente para determinar los efectos positivos o negativos de ambos tipos de conflictos. Finalmente, aportamos información mostrando la existencia de oportunidades para el desarrollo de futuros estudios en esta línea de trabajo aún incipiente en España.
Palabras clave: Conflicto de relaciones, Conflicto de tareas, Equipos de trabajo, Factores contingentes

Conflictive relationships in the workplace and their inefficient management constitute one of the most important psychosocial stressors for the quality of working life and organizational productivity (Roberts, 2005). Clear evidence of this are the indices of diverse studies that show that executives and team leaders dedicate more than 20% of their time managing these types of conflicts and looking for solutions to prevent or palliate their negative effects (Ursiny & Bolz, 2007). However, the presence of conflicts in organizations is considered to be an inevitable process (Munduate and Martínez, 2004; Thomas, 1992) and, on occasion, a necessary element for the production and renovation of knowledge thus preventing the appearance of groupthink (Medina, Munduate, Martínez, Dorado, & Mañas, 2004; Turner & Pratkanis, 1994). The studies carried out in Spanish organizations indicate, effectively, that current organizations need creative and innovative ideas that are demanded by nationwide and transnational transversal sectoral policies for competitiveness management (González-Romá, 2008). In this context, the discrepancies about work aspects are regarded as an opportunity for the generation of knowledge (Mañas & Díaz-Fúnez, 2009).

Therefore, conflict, in our context, is an intrinsic process in the dynamics of organizations, present as much at interpersonal levels as at group and organizational levels

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(Boz, Martínez, & Munduate, 2009; Medina, Munduate, Dorado, Martínez, & Guerra, 2005). Employees interact with colleagues, superiors, clients and employers and consequently, said interactional processes can become conflictive relationships (e.g., Benítez, Guerra, Medina, Martínez, & Munduate, 2008a; Martínez-Pecino, Munduate, Medina, & Ewema, 2008). This phenomenon implies an interesting paradox: in spite of having been empirically demonstrated that team work is one of the most efficient ways of reaching high performance levels – in comparison with those that can be achieved working individually (West, 2001) – it is also true that this new work dynamic is in need of a change in the way of thinking and high levels of coordination and interaction among its members (Peiró, 2001), which foments an increase in intragroup conflicts (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008). In this regard, the studies developed in Spain consider that conflict is a phenomenon that is present in the daily dynamics of work teams and is the key to understanding the relationships among its members (Gil, Rico & Sánchez-Manzanares, 2008; González-Romá, 2008).

Consequently, the emergence and relevance of this phenomenon has provoked diverse national and international researchers to be interested in knowing how conflict arises, what consequences it has in the development of work teams and, which factors and strategies could prevent negative consequences and promote the benefits of its positive consequences. Contained in this theme, research developed in our cultural context has not made innovation possible on its own, but it has been incorporated into lines of research consolidated by prestigious researchers and promoted from the European and international spheres. In this regard, the study of team work conflict has been approached taking the following aspects into account for its analysis: (a) the consideration of conflict as another process of the theoretical models explicative of the efficacy of work teams (e.g., Gil et al., 2008; González-Romá, 2008); (b) the need to distinguish between different types of conflict (Jehn 1995; 1997); (c) the adoption of a contingency perspective in order to understand the dynamics of its effects (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003).

Founded on previous lines, the present work will revise the most recent literature on work teams, as well as the practical implications for professional practice, making special emphasis on Spanish contributions.

FACTORS INVOLVED IN THE CONFLICT PROCESS

In order to study the factors involved in the conflict process, we will follow the theoretical models by Gil et al. (2008) and González-Romá (2008), who, founded on the contributions of diverse authors (e.g., Hackman, 2001; Janssen, van de Vliert, & West, 2004), developed two explicative models of work team efficacy based on the *Input-Processes-Output* model. In this framework, conflict is considered to be a motivational and affective process that influences the actions and results of work teams. Likewise, the models identify the composition of teams as one of the key antecedents in their efficacy. Moreover, they indicate that organizational and situational factors influence team structure as a whole affecting the rest of the variables (see Gil et al., 2008). In coherence with recent literature, in Figure 1, a model designed to structure and order the analysis of the most important factors involved in the conflict process in work teams is presented.

Conflict antecedents in work teams

A good part of the research carried out regarding work team conflict has attempted to determine which antecedents provoke its appearance. Research on team composition through diversity indicators stand out in this regard (Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999). In this sphere, it has been demonstrated that diversity provokes an increase in conflicts among colleagues, considering this relationship to be detrimental to the team. However, some studies indicate the need to elaborate more complex models that not only analyze the direct effects of diversity on conflict but also take into account diversity types and other group aspects in order to determine the nature of its consequences (van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007).

In this regard, researchers in our cultural sphere coincide in pointing out that it is necessary to distinguish between *social* or *demographic* diversity – differences in superficial aspects – and *functional* or *information* diversity – differences owing to work related characteristics – in order to determine the effects (positive or negative) of diversity (Osca & García-Salmones, 2010). It had long been thought that the diversity of superficial variables of the team members was what most influenced psychosocial variables such as conflict. However, in recent years, it has been observed that employees' non-visible or internal variables are those that have greater impact on intragroup conflict. Although it is true that the convergence of different skills, aptitudes, and

styles of thought may represent potential wealth for problem analysis, decision making and the carrying out of tasks of different natures, practice has shown that it is equally probable that, faced with this type of diversity, phenomena such as conflict, loss of team confidence, weakening of the social network and failure in task attainment appear (Arciniega, Woehr, & Poling, 2008)

Based on this evidence, the importance of exploring which conditions determine the success or failure of functional diversity in work teams is emphasized, highlighting task characteristics. Thus, it has been shown that diversity of experiences and skills, as well as the conflicts generated by them, are necessary in order for the team to be able to solve complex tasks requiring innovation and creativity (Gil et al., 2008). Following this line of work, it has been shown that the use of virtual means (e.g., video conferences or computer-mediated relationships), significantly alters interactions among group members, reduces communication efficacy, generates more problems for confidence building among its members, and as a result, promotes the development of team conflicts (Martínez-Moreno, González-Navarro, &
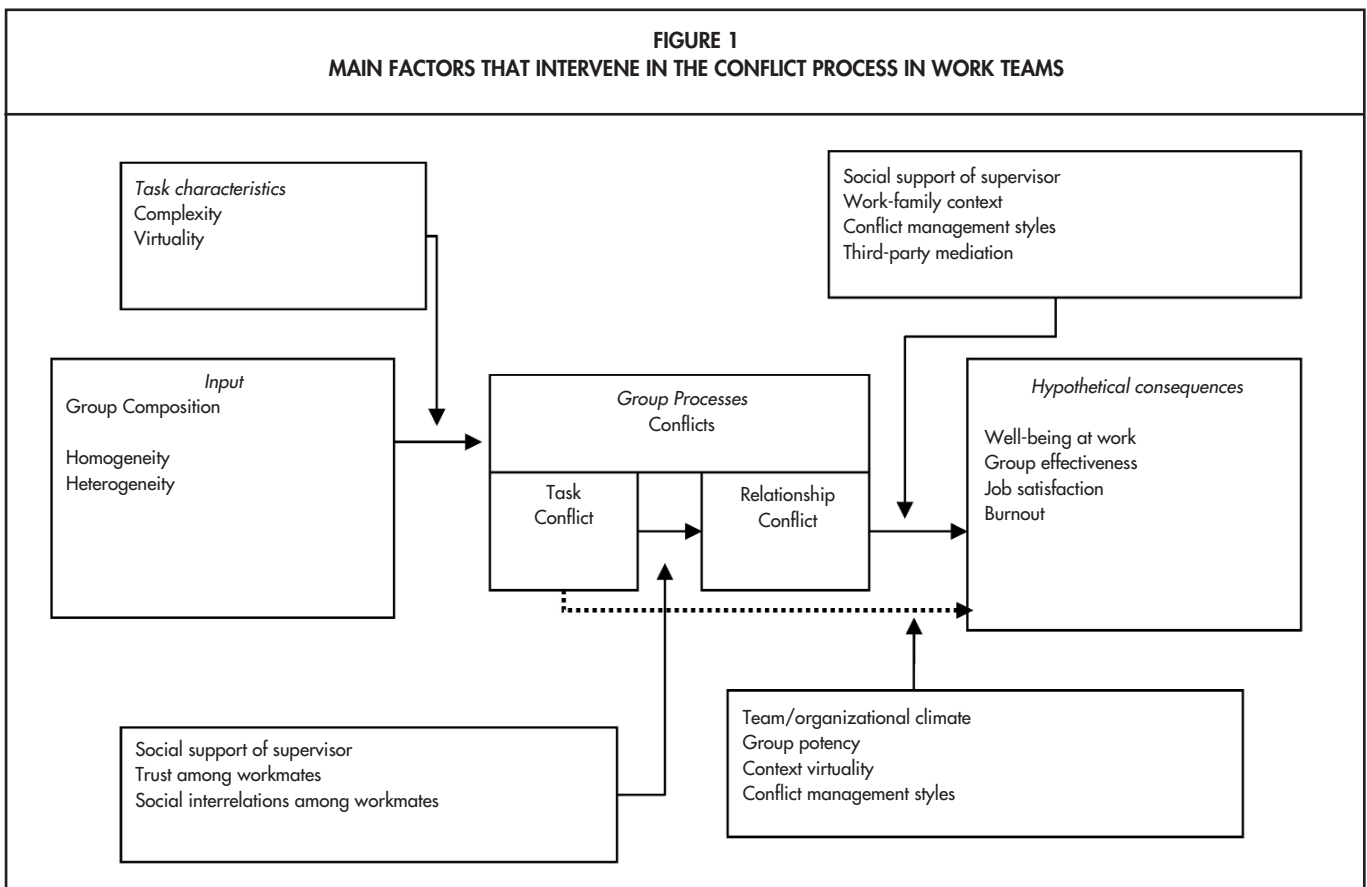
Orengo, 2005). However, it appears that these virtual effects, in turn, depend on the demands of the task; only when teams carry out complex and/or interdependent tasks is it recommendable to reduce virtual levels (using more traditional communication means) (Gil et al., 2008).

Consequences of conflict and contingent factors

The study of the consequences of conflict has basically been approached under two great totally opposing theoretical perspectives: the *pessimistic* perspective of conflict (e.g., De Dreu & Weingard, 2003; De Dreu, 2008) and the *optimistic* perspective of conflict (e.g., Jehn & Bendersk, 2003; Tjosvold, 2008). While in the *optimistic* perspective, conflict in work teams is considered to be a powerful means of generating greater performance; more *pessimistic* and critical focuses believe that the beneficial effects of conflict will only be given in exceptional circumstances, considering it to be more of a limitation than an advantage.

In this theoretical framework, we cannot ignore the contributions of relevant researchers indicating the need to distinguish between types of conflict and the adoption

FIGURE 1
MAIN FACTORS THAT INTERVENE IN THE CONFLICT PROCESS IN WORK TEAMS

of a contingent perspective in order to understand the dynamics of its effects (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). The traditionally accepted classification has been that proposed by Jehn (1995; 1997). This author establishes a differentiation between two types of conflicts: task conflict and relationship conflict. Task conflict is defined as "disagreements among the group members about task content or the way of performing it, including differences in viewpoints, ideas and opinions". However, relationship conflict is understood as "the discrepancies and incompatibilities that arise among the group members due to personal problems unrelated to work, tastes, ideas or values, which typically include personal tension, animosity and annoyance" (Jehn, 1994, p. 224; Jehn, 1995, p. 258).

The hypothesis that relationship conflict is detrimental, independently of the circumstances, has received wide support from both perspectives and in diverse national and international contexts (e.g., Benitez et al. 2008a; Boz et al., 2009; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). Nevertheless, the contradictory results on the consequences (positive or negative) of task conflict prompted an important debate that is ongoing in current research. This has led studies grouped under the *pessimistic* perspective to ignore the distinction between types of conflicts and to focus on the detrimental effects of relationship conflict. On the other hand, the *optimistic* perspective has advocated for the consideration of task conflict as a necessary and beneficial process for work teams. In Spain, a review of research on this topic reveals that their authors have based their work on these two traditional lines of conflict, emphasizing that although both lines of work are frequently separate, in our cultural context they have moved with notable interaction.

The pessimistic perspective of conflict. From this perspective, conflict is considered to be a limitation for work teams and does not comprehend differences based on their nature. Conflict is approached as a dynamic process that occurs between parties who suffer negative emotional reactions on perceiving discrepancies and interferences in the attainment of their goals (Barki & Hartwick, 2004). Therefore, in this current conflict theory, conflict - about personal or laboral aspects - cannot be understood in the absence of emotions or negative reactions between team members (Bodtker & Jameson, 2001).

In this sense, diverse studies have considered relationship conflict as one of the most important sources of stress in the work context (Giebels & Jansen, 2005; Spector & Jex, 1998). The mere experience of discordance, discrepancies in perceptions, values, or beliefs, involves emotional and affective processes that likely provoke emotional states of anger, disgust, aggressiveness, resentment and reproaches (Frone, 2000). In this situation, stress and anxiety levels increase (Jehn & Mannix, 2001), prosocial behavior is reduced and demonstrations of mutual support are attenuated (De Dreu & van Viannen, 2001). Thus, like any other stressor, conflict requires the generation of resources in order to mitigate the discrepancy situation that is produced (Spector & Jex, 1998). That is to say, an adaptive response is necessary when faced with a conflict situation. In this regard, when members of a work team disagree and the appropriate resources to cope with these cognitive demands are unavailable, conflict becomes an important source of stress for the work team (Benítez, Medina, & Munduate, 2011a, 2011b).

The consideration of conflict as a work stressor and its negative repercussions on wellbeing, productivity and team health has not gone unnoticed by Spanish researchers. In the past few years, under a *pessimistic* perspective, there has been a resurgence of interest in relationship conflict generating diverse studies that contribute knowledge about certain contingent elements proposed as protective factors of the harmful effects of this type of conflict. Among these factors, the importance of the following are underlined: (a) supervisor social support (Boz et al., 2009); (b) the adoption of conciliation measures of the work-family life in the work context (Boz et al., 2009); (c) conflict management styles (Benitez et al., 2011a, 2011b); and (d) third-party mediation (Martinez-Pecino et al, 2008).

Supervisor social support. The role of the supervisor, in particular the social support offered by the leader to team members, has been highlighted as a fundamental source for diminishing the harmful effects of relationship conflict in the affective responses of employees (Thomas, Bliese, & Jex, 2005). The results of these studies are sustained by the influence leaders exert on perceptions, affective responses, and the behavior of team members (González-Romá, Peiró, & Tordera, 2002; Schaubroeck, Lam, & Cha, 2007). Boz et al. (2009) emphasized the role of supervisor social support as a stress inhibitor caused by relationship conflict. Expressly, the results of this study revealed that in teams where members perceived that the supervisor supported them (emotionally

and instrumentally) work satisfaction was not hurt by this type of conflict. On the contrary, satisfaction decreased when relationship conflict was combined with the lack of immediate supervisor social support.

The reconciliation of work-personal-family life in the work context. The social and political changes in the business sphere, among which the incorporation of women into the labor force stands out, has favored the increment in family-work conflict in the past twenty years (Siegel, Post, Brockner, Fishman, & Garden, 2005). Faced with this situation, current research has recognized the critical role of the organization in the creation of a flexible work context adapted to family needs that promote balance between family and work (Andrade-Boz, Martínez, & Munduate, 2007; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), being considered a resource that can mitigate the negative effects of stress (Frone, 2002) and a relevant factor in the reduction of the negative effects of conflict (Rotondo & Kinkaid, 2008). The study by Boz et al. (2009) supports the proposed relationships, given that these authors observed that the relation between relationship conflict and work satisfaction was modulated by the perception of a work context that facilitated family-work reconciliation. That is to say, when employees perceived that their organization offered them personal, instrumental and affective resources to conciliate their family-work facets, work satisfaction was not hurt by the discrepancies that arose between team members about personal aspects.

Conflict management styles. From a stress and individual health perspective, it has been demonstrated that the manner conflict is managed can be a way of mitigating the negative effects of the stressor (De Dreu, van Dierendonck, & Dijkstra, 2004). Thus, diverse studies show that the consequences of conflict depend on how the opposing parties resolve the disputes (Tjosvold, 2008). In our context, two recent studies (Benítez et al., 2011a, 2011b) have demonstrated the importance of considering conflict management styles (integrating, compromising, avoiding, yielding and dominating) to determine the consequences of relationship conflict. On the one hand, in the first study, the harmful role of relationship conflict in the creation of a *service climate* in work teams became evident; that is, for the promotion of a work team climate where members had a shared vision regarding the policies, practices and procedures that are rewarded, supported and expected by the organization with respect to the quality of service offered to the customer. On the

other hand, the moderating role of integrating in this relationship was demonstrated. When faced with a relationship conflict, an elevated use of the integration style in the teams did not lead to a decrease in service climate, showing that it was integration and not avoiding that was the most effective management style for reducing the negative effects of relationship conflict on service climate.

In the second study by Benítez et al. (2010b), the moderating role of conflict management styles in the relation between relationship conflict and emotional exhaustion was examined. Taking the work team as the level of analysis, the findings confirmed, on the one hand, the negative effect of relationship conflict on emotional exhaustion in this group case. On the other hand and in accordance with results found by Gross & Guerrero (2000), the effective role of integrating in diminishing the negative effects of this type of conflict was demonstrated. It appears that behaviors in search of solutions that benefit the interests of all team members tend to promote a positive work ambience where mutual aid, empathetic listening, and the acceptance of opposing points of view are valued, reducing emotional exhaustion (Gross & Guerrero, 2000). Likewise, the moderating role of the avoiding style was shown, empirically supporting what was defended by De Dreu a& van Vianen (2001) and sustained by Zapf & Gross (2001). Effectively, these authors argued that avoiding could be considered to be the most successful management style in the face of relationship conflicts, especially when conflict intensity is high. While integrating and avoiding appear to exercise a positive effect, results showed that the use of compromising in teams is ineffective and harmful when faced with personal conflicts. Compromising requires a great deal of effort to solve discrepancies, supposes the rejection of some interests in exchange for the acceptance of others, and implies the search for quick solutions preventing the formulation of integrative solutions and increasing the level of emotional exhaustion in work teams (Gross & Guerrero, 2000). These results support the difficulty of pure negotiating styles of *give and take*, such as compromising, in the negotiation of issues associated with personal relationships, finding integrative styles which search for new points of encounter where parties can satisfy their interests in the dispute to be effective.

Third party mediation. Among the types of third party interventions is mediation, which has been the object of

the greatest attention as an alternative to labor conflicts (Munduate, Cisneros, Dorado, & Medina, 1999; Serrano, 2003). In this regard, present day organizations have begun to use mediation as an effective process in conflict resolution (Martínez-Pecino et al, 2008; Serrano, 2008), and the need of training efficient mediators in conflict resolution, in both family and workplace, has been shown (Serrano, Lopes, Rodríguez, & Mirón, 2006). Mediation permits the conflicting parties to enjoy a certain degree of freedom and they can cooperate mutually. Their results mean a more equitable perception of the results, greater commitment to them and more satisfaction for the parties involved (Munduate et al, 1999) and offer the possibility of going beyond an isolated conflict resolution, becoming a moderating tool in relationships and preventive of future work team tensions (Munduate, 2008).

The optimistic perspective of conflict. Under this perspective, it is argued that conflict *per se* does not have to have negative consequences, highlighting the beneficial effects of task conflict (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003; Tjosvold, 2008). Thus, this school of thought advocates the consideration of task conflict as a source which generates new knowledge, indicating the importance of knowing which contingent factors promote its beneficial effects and under which conditions their consequences can be prejudicial.

The work carried out in the Spanish sphere under this perspective sustains that the negative results of task conflict can be explained by three motives: (a) by the high existing correlation between task conflict and relationship conflict (e.g., Benítez, Guerra, Medina, & Munduate, 2008b; Gamero, González-Romá, & Peiró, 2008); (b) by not taking into consideration the contextual factors where task conflicts arise and develop (Guerra et al, 2005; Lira, Ripoll, Peiró, & González, 2007; Medina, Munduate, Martinez, Dorado, & Mañas, 2003a); and (c) by an inappropriate approach to the study of managing these types of conflicts (Medina, Dorado, Cisneros, Arévalo, & Munduate, 2003b; Munduate, Ganaza, Peiró, & Euwema, 1999). We will now briefly analyze these three motives.

Task conflict and relationship conflict. The meta-analysis by Dreu & Weingart (2003) and the study by Simons & Peterson (2001) demonstrate the positive association between task conflict and relationship conflict, the strength of said correlation ranging between .34 and .88. These results suggest that the relationship between both types of conflict may depend on the conditions in which these arise and develop. That is to say, there may be contingent variables that explain such variability. In this way, recent studies have shown how certain group factors modulate the relationship between both types of conflicts in work teams, such as social support by the supervisor (Benítez et al, 2008b), social interaction and trust between work team members (Gamero et al., 2008; Peterson and Behfar, 2003) and the team's skills in managing emotions (Yang & Mossholder, 2004), among others. We highlight the study by Gamero et al, (2008) in which, besides showing the modulating role of social interaction in the relationship between both types of conflict, the mediating role of relationship conflict in the dynamics of the relationship between task conflict and affective climate was observed. This implies that the prejudicial effects of task conflict on employees' affective responses are only produced when teams, in addition to perceiving a task conflict, also experience a relationship conflict. These results are consistent with the study by Medina et al. (2005), in which the mediating or modulating role of relationship conflict in the association between task conflict and the affective variables of work satisfaction, wellbeing and the propensity to leave the job was contrasted. In a sample of 169 service organization employees, these authors observed that, in addition to the mediating effect of relationship conflict, it was relevant to consider the intensity levels of both types of conflicts in order to determine the positive or negative consequences of task conflict. In this sense, it was shown that task conflict had a dysfunctional effect on affective variables only when both types of conflicts presented high intensity levels.

Group climate and organizational culture. One of the reasons that work teams are able to work effectively together is that they create a positive group climate based on the personal relationships established among themselves and on certain norms and principles shared by all (Zander, 1993). In this regard, some authors suggest that teams could benefit from task conflict when they cultivate a climate that is tolerant to different points of view and where disagreements about the ways of performing a job are considered by the workers as a manner of improving it and of reaching team objectives (Jehn, 1995, Lovelace, Shapiro, & Weingart, 2001). Based on said considerations, Medina et al., (2003a; 2004) Medina, Guerra et al., (2005) found that task conflict was effective for the satisfaction and well-being of employees to the extent that in both teams and

organizations a culture of goals was promoted. That is to say, when activities and communications are oriented to the achievement of previously established goals making reference to rationality, performance indicators, goal achievement, and rewards contingent on work and effort, conflicts centered on work issues are beneficial for work teams.

Group potency   Another contingent motivational and affective process to emphasize in work teams is group potency. Gil et al. (2008) indicated that when team members share a belief in group efficiency, they are willing to make an effort to work hard to reach a common goal instead of aiming for personal goals. The study by Lira et al., (2007) supports said consideration. In a longitudinal study, these authors showed the modulating role of group potency in the relationship between task conflict and group effectiveness. The teams that worked under different experimental conditions based on the means of communication employed (traditional face-to-face *vs.* computer mediated communication) showed that, independent from the virtuality of the relationship, when high levels of group potency were perceived in the teams, they were able to benefit from the positive effects of task conflict. On the contrary, it was detrimental for teams that had a low belief in their group efficacy.

Virtual Context. The modulating role of virtuality was not appreciable in the previous study. However, it has been demonstrated that the use of virtual means to carry out certain tasks significantly alters interactions between team members, so that communication is less efficient and the appearance of conflicts is more frequent. In support of this consideration, the study elaborated by Martínez-Moreno, González-Navarro, Zornoza, & Ripoll (2009) affirmed the modulating role of virtuality. Through a longitudinal design, it was observed that after a period of teamwork, conflicts harmed group performance to a greater degree when group members used virtual communication means (video conference and computer-mediated communication) compared to those who communicated in a traditional way (face-to-face).

Conflict management styles. The study by Chen, Liu, & Tjosold (2005) brought to light the importance and efficacy of a cooperative approach to conflict management. In a cooperative approach, the achievement of common goals and the orientation toward mutual benefit is sought, in such a way that the conflicting parties make an effort to understand the opinions of others and to elaborate solutions that incorporate diverse

points of view. On the contrary, the use of competitive strategies implies that the perception of conflict is a win-lose situation in which there is a tendency to use pressure and intimidation behaviors to obtain self-interests. In the same vein, integrating or problem solving has been considered to be most effective when facing conflicts on aspects related to work (van de Vliert, Euwema, & Huismaus, 1995). One characteristic of these studies on management conflict has been the tendency to analyze styles separately adopting an analytical perspective in which diverse styles are compared as if they were independent. Nevertheless, as Munduate et al. (1999) indicated, conflict is produced throughout an interaction process during which parties frequently change from one behavior to another in the same conflict episode. Thus, it was shown that it is not integrating itself that is the most effective behavior, but a combination of diverse styles that lead to the attainment of the best results (Luque, Medina, Dorado, & Munduate, 1998; Munduate, Ganaza, Peiró, & Euwema, 1999). Along the same lines, Medina et al. (2003b) analyzed the effectiveness of the combination of certain conflict management behaviors, studying in depth how these behavioral combinations occurred during the interaction process. Precisely, behaviors produced by conflicting parties in an escalating situation were analyzed as well as their articulation with the effectiveness of the negotiators. The results showed that the effectiveness of management styles depends both on the moment of conflict escalation and on the reciprocity of the other party with respect to the behavior produced. However, when facing escalating conflicts, both problem solving behaviors and accommodation behaviors had a great advantage with respect to other management behaviors: they were able to reduce the conflict intensity and, consequently, its escalation. In sum, the present study demonstrated that, on making proposals, effective negotiators must take into consideration the interests of the other party in spite of the fact that the response of the adversary is aimed at the attainment of personal interests.

PSYCHOSOCIAL INTERVENTION STRATEGIES WHEN FACING CONFLICT PHENOMENON

In the business world, the gradual demand to train workers and team leaders in efficient conflict resolution strategies (Nussbaum, 2009) exacts the awareness of society and future professionals about the importance of this phenomenon and the consequences of its deficient management. For this reason, and in agreement with the

training recommendations of the European Higher Education Area, it is necessary to begin the first training steps at university with the presentation of science-manuals (applied at the same time) that explain the basic content of this phenomenon, for its understanding and management, so that good team functioning is procured. Along these lines, we highlight the work carried out by the Human Resources Research and Development Team (INDRHO) (http://grupo.us.es/grupo indrho/), such as the Conflict, Negotiation and Mediation Manual coordinated by professors Munduate and Medina and reedited in three consecutive editions (2005-2009). This manual includes the contributions of prestigious researchers in the area of conflict, negotiation and mediation, who have attempted to transmit their theoretic knowledge on this subject matter to the requirements of what potential professionals will need in their professional practice.

Likewise, it is relevant to consider the impact that, for social improvement and innovation as well as the promotion of new projects in research and development, the results of the research in the area of Organizational and Work Psychology exercise. This requires the divulgation of knowledge, not only in journals and scientific forums, but also in popular manuals and communication means that satisfy the current social and political needs being lived in the country or region. Simultaneously, as indicated by Salgado & Peiró (2008), "A professional practice of quality, rigor and efficacy must have its foundation in scientific knowledge" (p.2), for which the fluid and permeable collaboration between research and professional practice is very enriching for social development. In this regard, they highlight the practical manuals and reports elaborated by the INDRHO Team, in collaboration with theOfficial Psychological College of Andalusia [Colegio Oficial de Psicología de Andalucía Occidental (COPAO)] (COPAO) and diverse public administrations, supporting the actions that the Official College of Psychologists have promoted since the 80s for the development of the Psychology of Work, Organizations and Human Resources. These manuals and reports detail, from a scientific point of view, the guidelines for specific interventions when faced with phenomena such as conflict, workplace harassment and burnout, such as ways of preventing or mitigating the negative consequences of these.

In the same vein, we underscore how the need for efficient conflict management on the part of organizations requires the incorporation of models and techniques of proven efficacy into the dynamic of organizational management itself. A good example of this is the collaboration between the INDHRO Team and the Andalusian Council for Labor Relations [Consejo Andaluz de Relaciones Laborales (CARL)] in the development of a labor mediation model, which is currently incorporated into the Extrajudicial System for Labor Conflict Resolution in Andalusia [Sistema Extrajudicial de Resolución de Conflictos Laborales en Andalucía (SERCLA)]. In this scientific-professional collaboration, the practice of labor mediation is presented as a preventive tool that helps to preserve the relations between the parties who interact daily in the work environment (Martínez-Pecino et al., 2008).

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE CHALLENGES IN THE STUDY OF CONFLICT

The aim of the present paper was to synthesize and integrate some of the results obtained in Spain on conflict and its management in work teams.

In order to do this, we used the theoretical and explanatory models of work team effectiveness developed by Gil et al. (2008) and by González-Romá (2008). Thus, conflict has been considered to be a motivational and affective process that influences team actions and results, and the notion of diversity has been identified (in superficial or visible aspects as well as in deep and invisible aspects) as a relevant antecedent to this group process. At the same time, the adoption of a more complex perspective to determine the consequences (positive or negative) of homogeneity *vs.* heterogeneity in work team dynamics has been insisted upon.

Addressing the suggestions of relevant researchers on the importance of considering conflict dimensionality, the accepted traditional classification has been used, in which task conflict and relationship conflict are differentiated (Jehn, 1995; 1997). Likewise, a contingent perspective for describing which factors the Spanish studies consider to be facilitators or inhibitors of the negative consequences of relationship conflict and of the positive consequences of task conflict (see Figure 1) has been adopted.

With regard to relationship conflict, it has been established as a source of stress in work teams, and diverse factors such as inhibitors of the negative consequences of these types of conflicts on the well-being and effectiveness of work teams have been identified: the social support of

the supervisor, the workplace context of labor, personal and family life reconciliation, conflict management styles (integrating and avoiding), and third-party mediation. With respect to task conflict, the importance of team members' ability to distinguish between relationship conflict and task conflict in order to be able to benefit from their effects has been determined and, the influence that certain group variables exercise, such as trust and social interaction, as facilitators in said process. In addition, task conflict has been considered to be an inevitable process, but, on occasion, healthy for team life. The promotion of an organizational culture focused on goals or on the achievement of group objectives, the teams' shared belief in their efficacy (team power) and, the adoption of a combination of management styles focused on the interests of others while addressing the state of the interaction process, and according to the responses of the other party, will help work teams not only to avoid the possible harmful effects of task conflict, but also to benefit from its functional effects.

As expressed in this article, the study of conflict in work teams is becoming a high- priority line of research in our cultural context. However, research by experts in other cultural contexts present new challenges that must be addressed simultaneously at a national level. In this regard, longitudinal studies are necessary, which cover the conflict process widely, analyzing how both labor and personal discrepancies arise and develop in the core of the teams and how different management strategies are adopted in function of the developmental process of these (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008). Likewise, the future of research on conflict requires the adoption of a multilevel perspective that allows the proposal of translevel models with the object of examining the influence of a higher level (e.g., work unit level) on variables of a lower level (e.g., individual level). A pioneer in this line of work has been the study carried out by Arizeta & Balluerka (2006), in which a longitudinal and multilevel perspective was adopted in order to analyze the influence of four cultural patterns, individualism-collectivism and vertical-horizontal, in the utilization of cooperative conflict management styles *vs.* competitive styles. In the same way, considering that teams work in a wider context (the organization), it will be necessary to use multilevel research designs that allow us to determine which organizational factors inhibit or facilitate the negative effects of conflict, in both individual wellbeing and performance, and in group results.

Finally, we must indicate that most Spanish studies have been based on the bidimensional concept of conflict, with a cognitive, functional or task component, and an affective, dysfunctional or relational component. However, international investigation has identified a third dimension called process conflict. This type of conflict arises when discrepancies are motivated by different opinions that team members have about how to perform an assigned task (e.g., distribution of responsibilities about who will perform each part of the task) (Jehn, 1997), their appearance being very frequent in present-day multidisciplinary teams. Faced with this reality, studies that delimit the consequences of this third dimension of conflict, on the individual, the group, and/or the organization, are needed (Jehn & Berdersky, 2001; Martínez-Moreno et al., 2009). This more integral concept of conflict and its consideration as an interactive, circular, non-lineal process, along with a multilevel approach that goes beyond a merely individual analysis of the phenomenon, is what is currently constituted as a guide for the development of this line of research in diverse cultural contexts.

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