
Conflict Management Vs. Group Cohesiveness

Cohesion has been defined very broadly as the total force keeping group members together (Tekleab et al., 2009). In light of this definition the assumption would be that group cohesiveness is an essential management tool in the efficiency of groups working effectively, due to the fact that keeping members together as a whole will encourage the participation of group members through “increased connectedness facilitating smooth group interactions and open communication” (Rodriguez-Sanchez et al., 2017). However, I see group cohesiveness as having the opposing affect and believe that conflict management is in fact the most important factor in understanding why groups work effectively. I broadly believe this because the process of limiting aspects of conflict that arise from groups working together will be the fundamental learning process groups must endure in order to develop into a state of group cohesiveness. Thus, making conflict management the underlying principle of group cohesiveness, diminishing the importance group cohesiveness has by being a secondary outcome. Using the case of conflict management and team cohesiveness I will establish arguments both concurring and disputing with my view in the aim of reaching a balanced conclusion on if group cohesiveness is as important as it is made out.

Writing by Tuckman in 1965 highlights the importance of both conflict and cohesion in achieving effectiveness; through his five stages of group development model, he established five stages that need to be achieved. The ‘storming’ stage is where conflict will take place; this is where the group seek to establish how to organise each other to achieve effectiveness (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2013). This process will involve conflict management by how groups have to delegate tasks to one another and try to respond to the needs of everyone is distributing roles. The next stage is ‘norming’ where the aim is to develop cohesion through establishing norms of behaviour and closer relationships. Thus, this model highlights the importance both conflict management and cohesion have in developing a group’s effectiveness (Tekleab et al., 2009). However, Tuckman’s writing can be criticised based on the matter of what happens if the storming stage does not end and teams become conflict-ridden (Richards & Moger, 2000, as cited in Bonebright, 2010) if this is the case groups would never reach a stage of cohesiveness and it would be based solely on conflict management as to if group effectiveness would be achieved. Nevertheless, this links to my thesis through the idea that facing conflict and overcoming such conflict is essential to developing group cohesiveness by diluting initial conflict stages and instead working together as a group to establish the same goals; this will lead to group cohesiveness. Although, this leans more towards group cohesiveness being an important factor, I believe that conflict management takes perdurance as without such practices in place there would be no overcoming conflict and no coping mechanisms in place thus, leading to continuing conflict with no progression to cohesion. In other words, without conflict management teams would not develop into the norming stage meaning, cohesion would simply never be achieved and for this reason it cannot be deemed as an important factor in group effectiveness as it is ineffective to have cohesion without conflict management. My belief can be supported by the idea that groups that can openly address conflict and develop appropriate, constructive strategies will benefit in the long run by their development of team cohesion (Tekleab et al., 2009). For this reason it is unfair for me to imply that team cohesiveness is not important in team effectiveness, as team cohesion should be an end goal that teams strive for and it is important for them to achieve this in order for them to meet their end goal; my belief is simply

that the importance of team cohesiveness would be inept without the dealing of inevitable conflict first, hindering its importance.

Conversely, the argument for the importance of team cohesiveness in the effectiveness of group work is substantial. Writing by Mayo and Feldman gives emphasis to the significance of group norms; expectations set by groups which enforce desired behaviour and requirements of one another. These group norms are vital to increasing the groups chance of being successful and maintaining a mutually agreed standard (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2013). It is this establishment and development of group norms that will lead to team cohesiveness through understanding a common consensus between the group and working together to achieve end goals by maintaining the expected standard. It is for this reason that team cohesiveness would be seen as an important factor in teams working effectively as team's with strong cooperative norms make team members more motivated to contribute to the team's collective goal and creative success (Rodriguez-Sanchez et al., 2017). This suggests that by teams having a set of commonly shared norms, members feel more involved in the team as the goals are agreed and shared with everyone meaning they are all working towards the same end goal which should encourage motivation through involvement of all members and encourage creativity through cooperation of everyone in the setting of norms that they want to achieve rather than being told what to achieve thus, evolving into a state of team cohesion. This differs from conflict management by how norms are established at the beginning of a team's relationship and through these norms, team cohesiveness should be established rather than, conflict management which uses conflict as a way of directing teams in a positive way by working against the conflict to develop team cohesiveness. I believe it is unrealistic for a team to establish cohesiveness simply based off a set of expected behaviours and goals and although it is important to have these in place, it is simply not enough to bring teams together and does not consider the implications of if conflict does arise and how such a situation would be dealt with.

Finally, I considered an alternative approach looking at the impact of team cohesion and conflict management for virtual groups compared to the previously stated physical groups. Research conducted by Peters and Karren examined if physical group presence had an effect on performance. In essence of their findings it was concluded that trust was the biggest factor affecting team performance and that lack of trust impacted upon teams due to members being less likely to share information and ideas. In relation to virtual teams it was concluded that trust was even more of an essential due lack of personal contact (Peters & Karren, 2009). Thus, in relevance to team cohesion trust is an essential element to building upon this and something that is unlikely to be achieved virtually; I believe it is more difficult to feel a connection and relationship without physical presence and establishment of a personal relation. This can be similarly applied to conflict management, where if conflict became apparent virtually it would be much more difficult to manage due to the inability of establishment of shared expectations and personal contact. It is for this reason I believe that for groups to work effectively there needs to be physical presence with physical conflict management to result in the overall aim of team cohesiveness and effective group work. However, the used source could be criticised due to the subjective nature of measuring trust and the differing meanings this may have to individuals which could ultimately impact upon both conflict management and group cohesiveness as what one group members identifies as trust could have an opposing effect on another member and this could lead to an establishment of conflict.

In conclusion, my original thesis still stands, and I consider conflict management to be a main driver of the team effectiveness. Throughout my research I gained a further understanding upon

team cohesiveness being an ultimate end goal that groups will want to aim for, and I see the real importance it has on a group's ability to work together. However, I stand with my thesis because conflict is inevitable and without the effective conflict management teams would simply be unable to work with one another and ultimately, they would not reach team cohesion. It is solely for this reason that conflict management cannot be ignored when writing about team effectiveness through cohesion and it is impossible to believe that groups would develop into a state of cohesion without initial conflict stages. I believe it is by how this conflict is managed and overcome which will reflect the overall cohesiveness a team holds, and this will be the deciding factor in the effectiveness of their group work. Ultimately teams want to develop into cohesion, but it is the steps they take into achieving this factor as to whether they will in fact reach this state.

References

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