Title

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Supporting Resolution:

The Impact of Supervisors on Workplace Conflict Management

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Supporting Resolution:

The Impact of Supervisors on Workplace Conflict Management

Abstract

In this study we investigate the role of supervisors in managing workplace conflict, with a focus on introducing and empirically testing a new construct called Supervisor Conflict Management Support (SCMS). The results confirm preliminary theory of how SCMS influences conflict resolution and organizational outcomes, including contextual factors such as conflict severity and expression norms. The results demonstrate that SCMS significantly improves conflict resolution outcomes and enhances organizational commitment while reducing employees' intent to stay. Moderating analyses revealed that SCMS is most effective under lower conflict severity and restrictive expression norms. By examining supervisor conflict management support in a high-stakes organizational context, the findings contribute to advancing conflict management theory and offer practical insights for supervisory training aiming to improve workplace conflict resolution.

Supporting Resolution:

The Impact of Supervisors on Workplace Conflict Management

Conflict with co-workers can be distressing, involving tension, anxiety, and feelings of exploitation and depletion (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Frone, 2000). A recent survey of over 5,000 employees found that those who reported experiencing workplace conflict were 42% more likely to also report exhaustion and 33% more likely to leave their job within the year (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2024). Conflict may stem from differences of opinion, tussles over workplace resources, or personality clashes. These confrontations can escalate and become distractions until resolved (Hershcovis, et al., 2018). However, research suggests that conflict is not always detrimental; it can provide opportunities for group-members to express differences, voice concerns, and deepen commitment to team goals (Simons & Peterson, 2000, Tjosvold, 2008; De Wit, Greer, & Jehn, 2012). From this perspective, working through conflict fosters a culture of openness and collaboration. Further, through conflict, groups can achieve higher levels of performance (Behfar et al., 2008). Taken together, the impact of conflict within workgroups is complex and multifaceted. In this paper, we aim to disentangle a key factor that determines whether conflict yields positive or negative results-- conflict management.

This study leverages a rare opportunity to examine conflict management within the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), an organization with a high-stakes context where teamwork, precision, and effective communication are critical. The unique environment of air traffic controllers, who work under extraordinary pressure and interdependence, offers a compelling lens to investigate the dynamics of supervisory intervention in resolving workplace

conflict. By studying this population, our findings have broader implications for conflict management in similarly demanding and safety-critical workplaces.

Specifically, this paper builds and tests a theory of supervisor intervention, showing when it helps resolve conflict at work and the role it plays in managing co-worker conflict. We examine whether the involvement of a supervisor in a workplace conflict is a constructive and helpful step toward resolution and allows conflict to be addressed earlier than would be the case with a third party or leaving employees on their own. To this end, we introduce a new concept and measure; supervisor conflict management support (SCMS), which is as an employee's perception of their supervisor's willingness and ability to assist in matters of conflict management and resolution. It is an extension of trust in supervisor, defined as the extent to which an individual is confident in the behavior of their supervisor (McAllister, 1995) and yet distinct from related ideas, such as Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) and perceived supervisor support (PSS) in scope and context (Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988; Graen, & Uhl-Bien, 1995). This study builds and tests a theory of supervisor intervention, with SCMS as the focal construct for conceptualizing the supervisor's role. More specifically, we examine whether supervisor conflict management support addressing co-worker conflict, is associated with increased employee conflict resolution, organizational commitment, and intent to stay.

Employee Conflict

Conflict in the workplace has been extensively studied across various domains. Classic frameworks often categorize conflict into intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, and organizational levels (Sharif, 1958; Jehn, 1997; Pondy, 1967). Each level is characterized by distinct features, with interpersonal conflict frequently involving clashes between individual employees over values, power, or influence, while group and organizational conflicts stemming from resource

allocation or goal misalignment (Lewicki et al., 1992; Thomas, 1992). A well-established body of literature highlights the dual nature of conflict (Guetzkow & Gyr, 1954), recognizing its potential to yield both negative and positive outcomes, as well as the importance of distinguishing between types of conflict; task, process, and relationship (Jehn, 1997; Jehn, Greer, & Levine, 2008). While unresolved or poorly managed conflict can generate stress, reduce productivity, and harm relationships (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jehn & Mannix, 2001), there is also evidence that conflict, when effectively managed, can foster innovation, enhance team collaboration, and promote organizational growth (Tjosvold, 1991; Simons & Peterson, 2000). Even though some types of conflict improve performance (Jehn, 1997), it can still be emotionally taxing for employees. Many employees and supervisors are not comfortable being in direct, daily, face-to-face conflict with co-workers. These contrasting possibilities underscore the importance of conflict management strategies tailored to the specific context.

Conflict as a Source of Distress

Whether productive or not, conflict has important consequences for workplace behavior. It reduces satisfaction because it can produce tension and distract team members from performing their work (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). A well-documented negative relationship exists between conflict and productivity, decision quality, and satisfaction in groups (Wall & Nolan, 1986; Jehn, 1995; Janssen et al., 1999). Research on emotions and emotionality has played an important role in explaining the mechanism responsible. Thomas (1992) found that emotions tend to overrun rational cognitive processing and instrumental reasoning, which severely interferes with decision making. Negative emotions can then result in dysfunctional behaviors such as low job satisfaction (Derr, 1978; Robbins, 1978), reduced motivation, and decreased performance (Bergman & Volkema, 1989). Thus, conflict may have a negative impact on group performance through team member emotionality (Greer & Jehn, 2007).

According to Jehn (1997), the negative affective and emotional responses common in conflict about relationships detrimentally affect task-related effort. This research argues that during episodes of relationship conflict, group members become so focused on reducing personal threats and trying to re-build group cohesion that they often neglect the task. Thus, the conflict serves as a distraction, where group members are forced to spend time and energy trying to get along rather than focusing on how to best accomplish their goal (Evan, 1965; Jehn & Mannix, 1997). In sum, emotionality during conflict has negative consequences, either directly by limiting cognitive processing capacity or indirectly by serving as a distraction to the group (Ryan, Connell, & Plant, 1990; Prussia & Kinicki, 1996; Jehn, 1997), despite other scholars proposing that under the right circumstances, conflict can be beneficial for the performance of groups and teams (Simons & Peterson, 2000; Jehn & Mannix, 2001).

Conflict as an Opportunity for Voice

In addition to producing negative affective consequences, the presence of conflict can also create opportunities. Research from De Dreu and Jehn have shown that a link exists between conflict and team member satisfaction (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jehn, Greer & Levine, 2008). For example, conflict may lead to an increase in the perceived voice of group members, which has been associated with greater affective acceptance of group decisions (Greenberg & Folger, 1983; Lind & Tyler, 1988). Further, Amason (1996) argued that "a conflict indicates evidence that group members have had the opportunity to talk about their perspectives." From this view, the experience of conflict promotes higher levels of individual participation in a decision and more opportunity for individuals to voice their concerns, opinions, and express themselves.

Voice is an important part of feeling valued in a group. For instance, when group members believe they have "had a say" before a decision is reached, they tend to feel more satisfied and are more likely to want to remain in the group over time (Amason, 1996). Simons and Peterson (2000) add that even if not all group members agree on the outcome after a conflict, most group members will feel as if they have participated. Group members who feel comfortable expressing themselves, are more likely to accept the group decision (Simons & Peterson, 2000). Further, especially when it is directed toward a specific task, conflict encourages group members to voice their differing opinions, and therefore can be constructive (Kay & Skarlicki, 2020; Alvarado-Alvarez, et al., 2021). Thus, employee voice is an important outcome of constructive conflict and likely to have positive outcomes such as team member satisfaction.

Although these views about conflict may seem opposing, we propose that there is common ground. Building on the work of others, we suggest that a key difference pertains to how the conflict is managed and resolved. When group conflict is effectively identified, managed, and resolved it can play an important role in creating a collaborative workplace

culture, which minimizes conflict-related distress and leverages communication strategies that promote active listening and creative problem-solving.

Role of the Supervisor

Supervisors play a pivotal role in shaping the workplace context that determines how conflict is managed and whether it is resolved. By fostering trust, promoting open communication, and engaging in transparent problem-solving, supervisors create an environment where employees perceive conflict not as a threat to avoid but as an opportunity for growth, collaboration, and innovation (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2011; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003; Janssen, Van de Vliert, & West, 2004). This shift in perspective is essential, as unresolved workplace conflicts often lead to tension, diminished productivity, and strained relationships, whereas constructive conflict management can enhance team cohesion and performance. Supervisors serve as catalysts for this transformation by modeling behaviors that prioritize trust-building, fairness, and inclusivity. For example, managers who actively promote open dialogue and demonstrate a willingness to address issues head-on can alleviate the fear and anxiety that often accompanies workplace disputes, thereby fostering psychological safety within their teams (Gelfand et al., 2012; O'Neill, McLarnon, & Allen, 2018; Edmondson, Kramer, & Cook, 2004). Through these efforts, supervisors not only encourage employees to engage constructively in conflict resolution but also lay the foundation for a workplace environment where differences of opinion are leveraged as a source of strength and innovation.

Much scholarship has been devoted to exploring and conceptualizing the many ways supervisors influence their employees, from fostering employee engagement to enhancing team performance. For instance, research on Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) has demonstrated the critical role of high-quality relationships between supervisors and employees in promoting trust,

loyalty, and mutual respect, which are often associated with improved job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Scandura & Graen, 1984; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Similarly, more targeted constructs, such as participative leadership, emotional intelligence, and perceived supervisor support, highlight how supervisors' care and general supportiveness can positively influence employees' well-being and performance (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, & Sowa, 1986; Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988).

While SCMS shares conceptual ties with Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) and perceived supervisor support, it is distinct in scope and focus. LMX emphasizes the quality of the overall relationship between supervisors and employees, in terms of trust, loyalty, and mutual respect (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Gerstner & Day, 1997). In contrast, perceived supervisor support captures employees' perceptions of their supervisors' general supportiveness and care for their well-being (Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988). SCMS differs from both by specifically targeting employees' perceptions of their supervisor's willingness and ability to assist with conflict resolution. Unlike LMX, which centers on relational dynamics, SCMS focuses on the functional role of supervisors in managing conflict. Similarly, while perceived supervisor support considers broad supervisory support, SCMS narrows its focus to the context of conflict, addressing the unique challenges that arise in workplace disputes.

Thus, it is conceivable for employees to maintain a strong relationship with their supervisor, characterized by career guidance, encouragement of risk-taking, and opportunities for skill development, while simultaneously feeling that the supervisor expects them to independently manage their interpersonal conflicts with co-workers. This disconnect underscores a unique conceptual space for Supervisor Conflict Management Support (SCMS), which focuses specifically on employees' perceptions of their supervisor's willingness and ability to assist in

managing workplace conflicts. Unlike LMX or perceived supervisor support, which emphasize general relational quality or support, SCMS centers on the functional and contextual role of supervisors in navigating workplace disputes. By conceptualizing and empirically testing SCMS, this study introduces a novel construct that captures an underexplored dimension of supervisory influence, offering insights into the specific mechanisms through which supervisors impact conflict outcomes.

Supervisor Conflict Management Support

In this paper, we argue that supervisory intervention in co-worker conflict is an important step for effective conflict management. Even though it may be an expected part of the job, many supervisors avoid involvement in conflict due to the strong emotions conflict can generate. What happens when supervisors leave employees to resolve conflict on their own? If supervisors do intervene, what role should they play? Does their intervention help the team? We build and test a theory of supervisor intervention, showing when it helps in resolving peer conflict at work. Specifically, we look at the relationship between supervisor conflict management support and conflict resolution and examine how it is associated with the resolution of conflicts, employees' commitment to the organization, and intent to stay. We also propose that the impact of supervisor support on conflict resolution depends on certain characteristics of the conflict and the environment. Below, we test several hypotheses regarding supervisor conflict management support and offer a discussion of findings.

Employees develop perceptions about whether they are valued by and can trust their supervisor (Kottle & Sharafinski, 1988; Burt & Knez, 1995; Gambetta, 1988). Extending this idea, we suggest that employees likely also develop ideas about how helpful and supportive their supervisor will be in assisting with co-worker conflict. It builds on existing knowledge about the

impact of supervisor conflict handling on effective conflict resolution (Way, Jimmieson, Bordia, 2016; Min, et al., 2020; Kodikal, et al., 2014). However, a construct pertaining specifically to employee perceptions about supervisors' conflict management skills and their direct manager's openness to helping with co-worker conflict has not yet been proposed. The aim of the proposed hypotheses is to uncover how supervisory support mechanisms, as operationalized by SCMS, impact conflict resolution outcomes.

We define supervisor conflict management support as an employee's perception of their supervisor's willingness and ability to effectively handle and resolve conflict. This type of support, operationalized by the SCMS construct, involves the extent to which employees feel comfortable discussing co-worker disputes with their supervisor before, during, and after co-worker conflict occurs. High levels of supervisor conflict management support would indicate that employees feel their supervisor is willing and able to spend time on issues of co-worker conflict, open to counseling the team about dispute management strategies, capable of providing useful assistance during conflict episodes, and able to facilitate collaboration and effective conflict resolution. Therefore, we expect that conflict management support will have a positive influence on conflict resolution:

> *Hypothesis 1: Supervisor conflict management support will be positively associated with conflict resolution.*

Conflict Severity and Expression Norms as Moderators

Conflict severity or level of conflict relates to the size and scope of the conflict itself (Thomas, 1992; Jehn, 1997). A conflict is expected to be more severe as more people become involved, more conflict occurs, and those events have a larger influence on future interactions (Thomas, 1992). Prior research has indicated that certain factors increase the likelihood of

conflict severity, including status differences, a history of antagonism (Wall & Callister, 1995; Jehn, 1997), characteristics of the members (i.e. age, experience, personality, affective baseline), and group structure (Jehn, 1997). According to Peterson (1983), a conflict is very severe when it has a large impact on the ultimate outcome or anticipated consequences of the group. Also, group members themselves are easily able to differentiate between conflicts that are severe from ones that are not. For instance, Jehn (1997) reported that during a severe conflict, group members say that the conflict was "a big deal" and can readily distinguish important conflicts from less important conflicts.

Conflict severity also plays an important role in whether a conflict will be resolved, either by the disputants themselves or through third-party intervention (Jehn, Greer & Levine, 2008; Wall & Callister, 1995). As one might expect, the relationship between conflict severity and conflict resolution is inverse, meaning as a conflict becomes more severe it is less likely to be resolved (Jehn, 1997). Therefore, we would expect that supervisor conflict management support would be more likely to lead to conflict resolution when a conflict is less severe. We predict the ability of supervisor conflict management support to influence conflict resolution will depend on the level of conflict severity:

> *Hypothesis 2: Conflict severity will moderate the relationship between supervisor conflict management support and conflict resolution, such that the positive effect of SCMS on conflict resolution will be stronger for less severe conflicts.*

Aspects like competitiveness, respect, value consensus, communication norms, liking of other members, trust, and emotionality are features of a group that describe it as a unit, differentiate it from other groups, and can vary widely between groups (Jehn, 1997; Pruitt, 1981). One specific aspect of group environment includes its communication norms, which are the unwritten rules that determine how group members will talk to each other (Bettenhausen &

Murnighan, 1985). It establishes how they will interact with other members of the same group (Bottger & Yetton, 1988; Schweiger & Sandberg, 1991). These norms also dictate how various actions will be perceived by others, which makes them influential for group outcomes (Pruitt, 1981; Jehn, 1995).

Conflict expression norms regulate the acceptability of being in conflict and whether it is considered appropriate to disagree with co-workers and acceptable to talk about conflict. They represent the group's unwritten rules for communication (Jehn, 1997). For instance, some groups encourage members to express their doubts, opinions, and uncertainties openly, while others foster a more conflict-avoidant norm. If conflict is a topic that individuals feel comfortable with, then the group's conflict expression norms are referred to as open. Under open conflict expression norms individuals feel free to talk honestly about their views, challenge opinions, and express their concerns (Amason & Sapienza, 1997). On the other hand, if group members are discouraged from openly expressing their opinions and talking about issues that may lead to disagreement, then conflict expression norms are not open, and a group will more likely avoid conflict (Jehn, 1997).

Open conflict expression norms tend to make employees feel comfortable asking for help resolving disputes. On the other hand, if conflict expression norms are not open, we would expect that employees would be more likely to try to resolve the conflict on their own or ignore the disagreement. Therefore, as with conflict severity, we predict conflict expression norms will moderate the impact that supervisor conflict management support will have on conflict resolution, as shown in Figure 1. Specifically, under open conflict expression norms, we would expect that supervisor conflict management support would lead to higher levels of conflict resolution:

Hypothesis 3: Conflict expression norms will moderate the relationship between supervisor conflict management support and conflict resolution, such that open norms will strengthen the positive effect of SCMS on conflict resolution.

Insert Figure 1 Here

Impact of Supervisor Conflict Management Support on Commitment and Intent to Stay

According to Wall and Callister (1995: 524), "conflict is associated with negative feelings such as anger and hostility." It is also likely to foster social-emotional separation (Thomas, 1976; Retzinger, 1991), tension (Thomas, 1976), anxiety (Ephross & Vassil, 1993), and stress. These negative emotions can also have attitudinal and behavioral consequences for organizations, such as reduced motivation (Robbins, 1978), poor performance (Bergman & Volkema, 1989), low job satisfaction (Derr, 1978), and turnover (Filley, 1978). Conflict has been shown to reduce organizational commitment, affective attachment, and satisfaction (Wall & Callister, 1995).

On the other hand, supervisor conflict management support likely enhances employees' affective commitment to organizations and their intent to stay (Ng & Sorensen, 2008; Rhoades et al., 2001). This relationship is likely for at least three reasons. First, according to social exchange theory, intervening in conflict to help can initiate the norm of reciprocity which produces a feeling of indebtedness and felt obligation to return the favor. Therefore, supervisor support may lead employees to be more invested, not only in the fate of their workgroup, but also in the fate of the organization (Levinson, 1965). Thus, supervisor conflict management support most likely

will foster an employee's affective commitment to the firm and cultivate an increased willingness to stay.

Second, supervisor conflict resolution is a form of social support which may help fulfill the social and emotional needs of employees, making it more likely that employees will embrace the organization as part of their social identity. It enhances employees' sense of personal worth and perceived competence because it boosts positive feelings, which increases affective commitment (Rhoades et al., 2001). Because supervisor conflict management support conveys a level of concern and respect for employees, it contributes to the fulfillment of socio-emotional needs, leading employees to incorporate organizational membership into their social identity (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). According to Rhodes and Eisenberger (2002), when employees' organizational identity becomes part of their social identity, it increases their organizational attachment and reduces likelihood of turnover.

Finally, prior research indicates that social support, and specifically supportive leadership, helps foster high-quality team relationships which lead to improved team and organizational outcomes like satisfaction and affective commitment (Seers et al., 1983). We build on this research and add that supportive leadership amid group conflict, is especially crucial. Conflict resolution requires sympathy, caring, compassion, comfort, and encouragement (Ng & Sorensen, 2008). These empathetic responses may help create a supportive environment that buffers the stress and anxiety employees experience after co-worker conflict (Terry et al., 1993). Empathetic responses and social support are also linked to organizational attachment and commitment (Eisenberger, et al, 1986; Karakas & Sarigollu, 2013).

Further evidence from Ng and Sorensen (2008) show that when employees were asked to rate their level of organizational commitment, they specifically searched for memories of

positive encounters with their supervisor (Lakey & Drew, 1997). Positive experiences with managers as well as displays of empathy and compassion, strengthen employees' sense of commitment, leading to reduced turnover and greater job satisfaction (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Building on this, we suggest that effective supervisor conflict management support would likely also enhance positive commitment and loyalty-building with the organization. Thus, as shown in Figure 2, we expect supervisor conflict management support to be positively associated with employees' intent to stay through employee's cognitive and emotional attachment to the organization and organizational commitment to mediate the relationship:

Hypothesis 4: Organizational commitment will mediate the positive relationship between supervisor conflict management support and employees' intent to stay at the firm.

Insert Figure 2 Here

METHOD

Sample

The sample consists of 5,123 United States Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) employees. The items were taken from an employee attitude survey that the company has used since 1984. The survey was designed to assess employee attitudes, perceptions, and opinions regarding a variety of organizational issues that affect work performance and quality of work life. The FAA is the federal organization responsible for the safety of civil aviation in the United States. It employs over 35,000 controllers, technicians, engineers, and support personnel at roughly 300 service areas nationwide. Its mission is to regulate civil aviation and promote safe airline travel along with, developing and operating air traffic control and navigation systems for

both civil and military aircraft and regulating U.S. commercial space transportation. Studying conflict management within the FAA represents an extraordinary opportunity to examine conflict and communication dynamics in a high-stakes, safety-critical organizational context. Air traffic controllers and other FAA personnel operate in an environment characterized by intense pressure, collaboration, and interdependence, making it uniquely suited for exploring the impact of supervisory interventions on conflict resolution. Insights derived from this distinctive population have the potential to inform practices not only in aviation but also in other critical industries where effective conflict management is essential for performance.

Employees were encouraged to participate in the survey but did so voluntarily and were assured that their responses would be kept anonymous. The typical response rate for employee surveys at the FAA in past years was between 50% and 60%. In 2006, when this data was collected, 18,762 employees returned the survey, constituting a response rate of 42%. Because this is a study of conflict, a sub-sample of 5,123 respondents was selected based on whether or not employees reported experiencing co-worker conflict. This approach was necessary because the study's hypotheses focus specifically on the role of supervisor conflict management support (SCMS) and management of co-worker conflict. The means, standard deviations, and correlations for all study variables appear in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 Here

Data Collection Procedure

Responses were coded on a 5-point Likert scale, with strongly disagree on the far left and strongly agree on the far right. All attitudinal scale items were created using exploratory

principal component analyses. We refined the scales by dropping items based on three principles: 1) single items were dropped if they loaded as the only item of a component; 2) items belonging to components that were uninterpretable scales were dropped; and 3) items that cross loaded heavily in other components (more than 0.4) were dropped. Factor loadings for study variables are shown in Table 2.

To further evaluate convergent validity, we calculated the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct, with values ranging from .52 to .83, exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The AVE values for SCMS (.52), Management Trust (.83), Conflict Severity (.72), Conflict Resolution (.78), Organizational Commitment (.56), and Conflict Expression Norms (.69), indicate adequate convergent validity for all constructs.

To assess the discriminant validity of study constructs, we applied the Fornell-Larcker Criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. The Fornell-Larcker results showed that the square root of the AVE for each construct exceeded its highest inter-construct correlation (e.g., the square root of the AVE for SCMS was .72, which was greater than its highest correlation of 0.54 with Conflict Resolution). All HTMT ratios were below the conservative threshold of 0.85. These post hoc results confirm that the constructs met stringent convergent and discriminant validity tests.

Finally, to assess the potential influence of common method bias, Harman's single-factor test was also conducted post hoc. It revealed that the SCMS, the predominant factor, accounted for 46.7% of the total variance in the model, which is below the commonly accepted threshold of 50%. This provides evidence that common method bias is unlikely to have significantly influenced the study's findings.

Insert Table 2 Here

Measures

Supervisor Conflict Management Support (SCMS). Supervisor Conflict Management Support was assessed using six items, including: "My supervisor is effective in dealing with conflicts and disagreements within my work group," "I feel free to discuss with my immediate supervisor the problems and difficulties I have in my job without jeopardizing my position," My supervisor is effective in providing periodic coaching to improve my performance and that of my work group," "My supervisor takes effective action to counsel employees," "My immediate supervisor is an effective communicator," "Communications with my supervisor about my performance have helped clarify what is expected." The scale has an $\alpha = .90$ in this sample.

Conflict Expression Norms. This construct was measured using a scale composed of two items, including the questions, "Is it generally safer to say that you agree with management even when you don't," and "Some employees may be hesitant to speak up for fear of retaliation." This scale has an $\alpha = .80$.

Conflict Resolution. Conflict resolution was assessed using two items with an $\alpha = .87$. The items were, "To what extent have the conflicts or disagreements been resolved effectively?" and "To what extent did resolution of those conflicts or disagreements lead to improved working relationships?"

Conflict Severity. Conflict severity was measured using two items, "To what extent have you experienced conflicts or disagreements at work in the past 12 months?" and "To what extent have those conflict negatively impacted your work?" The scale has an $\alpha = .77$.

Organizational Commitment. Organizational Commitment was not assessed using a traditional scale. It was measured using four items that captured components of both continuance and affective commitment. These items included, for example, "To what extent do you feel loyalty to the FAA?" and "To what extent do you care about the fate of the FAA?" The scale has an $\alpha = .88$.

Intent to Leave. Intent to Leave was assessed using a single item. This item was, "It is likely that I will leave the FAA in the next… (i.e. month, 3 months, year, etc.)" Responses of "Not planning to leave at all" were coded as 1, whereas all other responses were coded as 0.

Controls. Past research shows that age and education as well as other status variables (such as executive rank) can potentially affect intra-group conflict (Nieva, Fleishman & Rieck, 1978; Gladstein, 1984) therefore these variables were included as controls. Participants were asked, "How old are you?" and "To indicate their level of education." The executive variable is a dummy, coded as a 1 if the employee reported being among upper management (0 if any other rank).

Analysis

To test Hypothesis 1, we regressed conflict resolution on supervisor conflict management support (SCMS), controlling for age, education and executive status. To test Hypothesis 2, we created an interaction term for conflict severity and supervisor conflict management support (SCMS) and then regressed conflict resolution on the interaction, controlling for age, education, and executive status. We then plotted the interaction to assess directionality. To test Hypothesis 3, we created an interaction term for conflict expression norms and supervisor conflict management support (SCMS) and then regressed conflict resolution on the interaction, using the controls. Again, we plotted the interaction to assess directionality. For these tests of moderation,

the control variables were entered in Step 1, the main effect variables were entered in Step 2, and finally, the interaction variables were entered in Step 3, consistent with the recommendations of Cohen & Cohen (1983). Then, to determine whether conflict expression norms and conflict severity were moderators, we followed Baron and Kenny's (1986) guidelines, which state that moderation is met if there is a significant interaction between the moderator and the independent variable after the effects of covariates are controlled.

To test Hypothesis 4, we conducted a test of mediation, which consists of four separate steps according to Baron and Kenny's (1986) guidelines. In Step 1, we regressed intent to stay on supervisor conflict management support (SCMS) to show that the predictor is significantly associated with the outcome. In Step 2, we regressed organizational commitment on supervisor conflict management support (SCMS) to show that the predictor is also significantly associated with the mediator. In Step 3, we regressed intent to stay on organizational commitment to demonstrate that the mediator is significantly associated with the outcome. Step 4 is to show that the addition of the mediator to the full model eliminates the significance of the predictor on the criterion.

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1 proposed that supervisor conflict management support (SCMS) would be positively correlated with conflict resolution. As can be seen in Table 3, the regression coefficient for supervisor conflict management support was statistically significant, with a p-value of .00. The standardized coefficient is .60, which indicates that Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Insert Table 3 Here

Hypothesis 2 proposed that conflict severity would moderate the relationship between supervisor conflict management support and conflict resolution. In other words, we predicted that the effect of SCMS on conflict resolution would depend on the level of conflict severity. As seen in Table 4, the interaction term (scms*severity) has a standardized Beta coefficient of -.15 and a p-value of .00. Figure 3 indicates that the effect of supervisor conflict management support on conflict resolution increases when the conflict is less severe, meaning that for the most severe conflicts, the positive relationship between supervisor conflict management support and conflict resolution becomes weaker, which is what we expected. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported, and conflict severity was found to be a statistically significant moderator of SCMS and conflict resolution.

Insert Table 4 and Figure 3 Here

Hypothesis 3 proposed that conflict expression norms would moderate the relationship between supervisor conflict management support and conflict resolution, such that the effect of SCMS on conflict resolution would vary depending on the openness of conflict expression norms. Put another way, we expected the effect of supervisor conflict management support on conflict resolution to depend on the extent to which conflict expression norms were open. Table 5 indicates that the interaction term (scms*cen) has a standardized Beta coefficient of .11 and a p-value below .01. Figure 4 indicates that under open conflict expression norms, the positive effect of supervisor conflict management support on conflict resolution is strongest, providing support for Hypothesis 3.

Insert Table 5 and Figure 4 Here

Hypothesis 4 proposed that organizational commitment would mediate the relationship between supervisor conflict management support and employees' intent to stay. It was important to test the relationships of these two factors separately on intent to stay (as suggested by Baron & Kenny, 1986) because both would likely also correlate strongly with each other. Tables 6, 7, 8 and 9 indicate the results of this test of mediation.

First, Table 6 shows the positive effect of supervisor conflict management support on intent to stay, with a standardized Beta coefficient of .10 and a corresponding p-value below .01. Second, Table 7 demonstrates the significant effect of the mediator, organizational commitment, on intent to stay. The standardized coefficient for organizational commitment is $\beta = .17$ ($p < .01$). Third, Table 8 highlights the positive relationship between supervisor conflict management support and the mediator, organizational commitment. The standardized coefficient for SCMS

is $\beta = .43$ ($p < .01$). Finally, Table 9 shows that the effect of supervisor conflict management support is reduced when the mediator (organizational commitment) is put in the model. Thus, there is support for partial mediation, as the effect of SCMS on Intent to Stay is reduced in Step 4 from $\beta = .03$ ($p < .01$) compared to Step 1 [$\beta = .10$ ($p < .01$)], but it remains significant. Hypothesis 4 received partial empirical support, and organizational commitment was found to partially mediate the effect of supervisor conflict management support (SCMS) on intent to stay.

Insert Tables 6, 7, 8, and 9 Here

DISCUSSION

Using a large sample of federal employees, this study developed and tested a new construct, supervisor conflict management support (SCMS), and examined its relationship with employee attitudes, conflict, and conflict resolution. Results indicate that supervisor conflict management support is distinct from related constructs and associated with important organizational outcomes. Specifically, supervisor conflict management support was found to be positively associated with conflict resolution, organizational commitment, and intent to stay. Also, conflict severity and conflict expression norms moderated the relationship between supervisor conflict management support on conflict resolution. Further, organizational commitment was found to partially mediate the relationship between supervisor conflict management support and employees' intent to stay. Taken together, this study has important theoretical and practical implications for our understanding of the supervisor's role in conflict management and resolution.

First, the proposed construct, supervisor conflict management support, is distinct from related constructs and associated with outcomes related to conflict as well as employee attitudes (i.e. commitment, satisfaction, affective attachment, etc.). The positive relationship between supervisor conflict management support and conflict resolution suggests that when employees believe their supervisor is willing and available to assist with handling co-worker conflicts, they are more likely to be successful in resolving them. This finding underscores the influential role of supervisors, and how their availability and support can make a significant difference in whether conflicts between co-workers are addressed and resolved. Supervisors' willingness to engage in conflict management support is not just a beneficial contextual factor; this study provides evidence of its direct impact on better conflict resolution among employees, thus highlighting its importance.

Second, understanding the relationship between supervisor conflict management support and conflict resolution represents an important first step in understanding how this type of targeted support influences conflict resolution. For instance, it is possible that supervisor conflict management support influences conflict resolution through participative management, which encompasses mediation-type methods for managing conflict. Participative management involves supervisors providing counseling or guidance to employees about work-related skills, like conflict management, and encourages managers to play a role in employee training and development. Interestingly, research has linked participative strategies of conflict handling with an increased likelihood of disputant satisfaction, but not yet with actual conflict resolution. This study builds on prior work on participative management to underscore the importance of conflict management support.

It also implies that the perception of support from supervisors may empower employees to take more proactive steps toward resolving workplace disputes on their own. The findings presented here show the influential role of supervisors in fostering a supportive environment where employees feel encouraged to identify, address, and manage interpersonal challenges. When supervisors demonstrate a readiness to assist in conflict, it may build trust and foster a sense of security among employees, promoting open communication norms and a collaborative problem-solving approach. This willingness to support employees likely acts as a critical psychological safety resource, providing them with the confidence and security needed to navigate conflicts.

Third, this study also indicates that conflict resolution support is not only associated with a higher likelihood of resolving co-worker conflicts but is also linked to greater organizational commitment and increased intent to stay. Specifically, organizational commitment acts as a partial mediator, serving as a mechanism through which supervisor conflict management support influences employees' intentions to remain with the organization. The connection between supervisor support and employees' intent to stay suggests that the attachment employees feel toward their supervisors may play a role in their decision to stay at a company, even when facing challenging co-worker conflicts. Given that conflict often brings anxiety, negative emotions, and stress, targeted support from supervisors can help alleviate some of these negative effects. While further research is necessary to clarify this mechanism in a causal framework, this study represents an initial step toward understanding how supervisor conflict management support uniquely contributes to employees' intent to stay through its impact on organizational commitment.

This study's fourth contribution is the insight that the effectiveness of supervisor conflict management support depends on conflict severity and communication norms. As conflicts become more intense, the positive impact of supervisor support on resolution diminishes, likely because less severe conflicts are easier to resolve. This finding highlights important boundaries on the usefulness of supervisor support, showing that its role is more limited when dealing with particularly severe conflicts. Additionally, the study reveals that open communication norms enhance the effectiveness of supervisor support, emphasizing the importance of creating a collaborative culture regarding conflict and prioritizing psychological safety. When open communication is normative in the workplace, employees find supervisor support more helpful. These insights emphasize the nuanced role of supervisor support in conflict resolution, such that its impact is shaped both by the nature and intensity of the conflict as well as the communication environment.

Finally, these findings have important practical implications for the training and development of supervisors. Given the significant role that supervisors play in conflict resolution and in fostering organizational commitment, it is crucial for organizations to develop them to have the skills necessary for effective conflict management. Training programs should focus on developing supervisors' ability to provide targeted conflict resolution support, maximizing their positive influence. By equipping supervisors with the skills to intervene effectively in co-worker conflict, they can help prevent conflict from escalating and disrupting work performance. Training programs should address this gap and teach specific strategies for managing conflicts of all intensities (i.e. mild to severe), while also recognizing the limitations of support in some cases. By emphasizing both the technical and interpersonal aspects of conflict management, organizations can help supervisors navigate the complexities of workplace disputes, such that

they increase employee satisfaction, reduce turnover, and foster a more collaborative work environment. These efforts can ultimately contribute to a culture of support and resilience, where employees feel secure in the knowledge that their supervisors can help them manage co-worker conflict more effectively.

In sum, although conflict research has made important strides toward understanding the antecedents, consequences, and mechanisms of conflict among co-workers, recently, the study of conflict management and supervisory third-party conflict resolution has received comparatively little attention. This is surprising given how crucial it is that organizational researchers understand how to leverage the positive aspects of conflict without falling victim to the potential detriments. Within the domain of conflict management, researchers have seemed to focus on how disputants themselves manage conflict internally (Ng & Sorenson, 2008; Langfred, 2007; Behfar, Peterson, Mannix, Trochim, 2008) and given less attention to the role of the supervisor in conflict management. This study draws attention to a neglected area, namely third-party intervention in conflict management and resolution, and highlights the important role that supervisors play in co-worker conflict resolution.

Limitations

This research is subject to some limitations. Although procedural and statistical approaches were used to mitigate the threat of common method bias, it is acknowledged that no single methodological can fully eliminate it. However, the observed moderation effects are less likely to be artifacts of common method bias, as such effects require interactions that go beyond simple linear relationships. Another potential methodological limitation is the use of a sample consisting only of employees who reported experiencing co-worker conflict. This parameter may limit the generalizability of the findings to a broader employee population that does not

experience co-worker conflict at work. While this sampling criterion was determined prior to data analysis and ensured alignment with the study's research questions, it is acknowledged that the results may represent employees who experience co-worker conflict.

A second potential limitation is that there was no way to identify which employees were associated with which work groups or which employees were associated with which supervisors. This limited the types of analyses that were possible with the data. Having group-level data and matched pairs between workgroups and supervisors would have allowed a more in-depth analysis, especially regarding the effects of supervisor conflict expression norms on group-level trust and conflict outcomes. It would have been useful for establishing a causal argument rather than relying on observed relationships. Furthermore, if objective team performance measures had been gathered, the supervisor conflict management support construct could have been analyzed in terms of its effects on performance, rather than focusing solely on its relationship with affective and cognitive dimensions such as trust and commitment. Despite these limitations, the study provides a useful first step toward understanding the impact of supervisory third-party intervention on employees.

Finally, future research is needed to address the above limitations and compare different methods of conflict resolution. For instance, a useful contribution of follow-up research would be to design a study comparing third-party conflict intervention with employee-led conflict management. A study that enables a direct comparison between these two methods of conflict resolution, would generate insightful information about the efficacy of supervisor-led conflict management compared to that of employee-led resolution. Even better, if these conflict resolution tactics could be compared over time and on several dimensions, including performance outcomes and team-member satisfaction, it would help inform present research on

conflict and conflict resolution, as well as providing important implications for managerial training and practice.

Future research could also explore the dual role of supervisors as both potential mitigators and contributors to workplace conflict. While this study highlights the positive role that supervisor conflict management support (SCMS) plays in resolving co-worker disputes, it is also important to recognize that supervisors may inadvertently exacerbate conflicts or even instigate them through biases, poor communication, or inconsistent behavior. Investigating the circumstances under which supervisors contribute to conflict would provide a more balanced understanding of their influence in workplace dynamics. For instance, longitudinal studies could examine how supervisory behaviors, trust levels, and management styles interact to either escalate or de-escalate conflict over time. Exploring these dynamics could yield actionable insights into how organizations can train supervisors not only to resolve conflicts effectively but also to avoid unintentionally creating or amplifying them. By further examining a supervisor's dual-role in conflict management, future research could add to our understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of conflict management in organizational settings.

Conclusion

In sum, this study explores the role of the supervisor in managing co-worker conflict in organizations. In recent conflict research, scholars have focused on creating models of classification and categorization as well as examining how teams resolve their own conflict internally. This study lends empirical support to the idea that supervisors play an important role in co-worker conflict resolution. Supervisor conflict management support is an employee's perception of their supervisor's willingness and ability to assist in matters of conflict management and resolution. It involves the extent to which employees feel comfortable

discussing co-worker disputes with their supervisor before, during, and after co-worker conflict occurs. This study shows that supervisor conflict management support in the context of co-worker conflict, is associated with increased conflict resolution, organizational commitment, and intent to stay, all of which have important implications for organizations.

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