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Understanding the role of communication and conflict on reengineering team development

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Abstract

Purpose Aims to investigate the importance of communication and conflict on the development of reengineering teams and attempts to answer the following research questions: is the team development of a reengineering team affected by conflict and communication, and if so, what are the types of communication and conflict that do affect it?

Design/methodology/approach Presents a theoretical perspective with a literature review of such aspects as conflict and communication. Details research methodology and then utilises evidence from a single in-depth case study. Explains how the analysis occurred and discusses the findings.

Findings It was found that conflicts are not productive for the organisation and therefore conflict resolution is sought. In order to resolve the conflicts existent within the teams, the role of face-to-face communication was considered to be pertinent.

Originality/value For industry that is always searching for ways to curtail excessive costs, an understanding of the issues of conflict, team development and communication is offered. This means that by examining the guidelines offered within this paper, a convenient method of identifying and solving these issues is provided.

Keywords Team management, Teambuilding, Conflict, Communication

Paper type Case study

1. Introduction

Within the current turbulent business environment, organisations are searching for measures that will allow them to improve their performance and competitiveness (Dodd, 2003). There have been several change management approaches employed through the years including, total quality management (TQM) and just-in-time (JIT) manufacturing. However, through the late 1990s and earlier years of 2000, the most emphasised approach has been that of business process change (BPC). Kettinger and Grover (1998) found that: "business process reengineering (BPR), process improvement, business process redesign, process innovation and process improvement" are terms used interchangeably to represent the phenomenon of "business process change". Based on this observation, it can be noted that the research used the term BPR and business process change interchangeably.

There are varying definitions of BPC, but for the purpose of this research, we define it as: "business process reengineering is a total replanning and redesign of manpower consisting of individuals, internal system, structure and processes in direct or indirect response to external forces, in order to achieve some objectives which are usually not easy to achieve given conditions of an organisation" (Poh and Chew, 1995). When examining the normative literature it can be found that the role of reengineering teams



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is emphasised; however, when investigated in detail it can be found that there is minimal literature about their formation, the human aspects that affect them (Corrigan, 1997) and tasks. Specifically, when the implementation of the approach is discussed the role of a reengineering team is emphasised (Davenport, 1993; Hammer and Champy, 1993). However, although the role of a team was emphasised there was little detailed information about the manner that they could be formed, and what are their constituents. This provided a further incentive for this research to investigate the issues surrounding the development of reengineering teams. Further, it was ascertained that BPC is a management change approach that still holds the interest of both academics and practical researchers (Marjanovich, 2000). This can be confirmed by determining the number of articles still being published about the topic both within academic journals and projects on BPR being funded by various research bodies and reports.

The research questions that this paper is attempting to answer are: "Is the team development of a reengineering team affected by conflict and communication? If so, what are the types of communication and conflict that does affect it?"

Answers to these questions are offered using a single case study's reengineering team's experiences. This team was located in a large multinational organisation. This approach was adopted since a team existing in one organisation would have a shared, common goal, utilise the same definition of BPC and provide similar experiences (Sawyer, 2001). This way conflicts in the research findings was avoided.

Studying reengineering teams is particularly important as it allows us to contribute to theories regarding the teams' area within the information systems area. To date, there has been emphasis on virtual teams (Majchrzak *et al.*, 2001) and software development teams (Sawyer, 2001). Theories regarding conflict resolution in software development teams would be unsuitable for the reengineering teams due to the issue of user involvement. Choudrie and Hlupic (2001) found that at the planning stage of BPC in particular there is little contact between the developers and users of software packages and as such the theories applicable to such teams would be inappropriate for the reengineering teams.

To provide a theoretical perspective to the aforementioned topics, section two offers a literature review of the aspects such as, conflict and communication. Section three then details the research methodology that was used to obtain the results to this research. Section four describes the case study. Section five explains how the analysis occurred and the discussion of the findings is offered in section six. The conclusions, future directions and contributions of this research are provided in section seven.

2. Understanding the natures of conflict, communication and team development

The importance of teams

Although the BPC literature stresses the importance of teams, this research also attempted to identify whether teams are crucial in various disciplines. In the organisational change area, teams are considered to be important agents for obtaining change (Porras and Robertson, 1992). Change is a large transition and as such, cannot be undertaken and managed by only a lone individual and therefore, teams are viewed to be important agents for this purpose. Teams are also considered essential to overcome and supplement individual skill weaknesses (Appelbaum *et al.*, 1999),

subsequently promoting values such as co-operation, increased communication and multi-skilling (Robbins and Finley, 1997). For instance, if organisational change within the telecommunications area is occurring and the team undertaking the change consists of only the telecommunication specialists, who do not have experience of how a project is managed, then it is most likely that the project will fail. This is because the team has only one view or experience, that of the telecommunications area. Therefore, if a multi-functional team had been formed and utilised for the change, the composition of systems developers, telecommunication specialists, change management experts, would allow various opinions to emerge and more chances of success are likely (Robbins and Finley, 1997). In the information systems (IS) area, teams have also been viewed as imperative since they can cope with the management and implementation of systems in a better way than sole individuals (Yeates and Cadle, 1996). While the normative literature of various disciplines also emphasised the role of teams, it was found that generic research in the teams' area has reported that two-thirds of organisations are currently making use of teams (Lipnack and Stamps, 1997) and this has proved to be an added reason for examining the phenomena of teams in detail.

Team development

For a team to operate to its maximum potential, the development aspect has also got to be considered. However, it has been found that team development is a generalised phenomenon in the organisational change and information systems project management areas where emphasis is placed only on the roles of team development and performance (Yeates and Cadle, 1996).

When considering team development the comprehension of the dynamics of tasks when tackling a task is necessary (Tosi *et al.*, 1990). To explain this issue, one model that has been used is the team performance one (Drexler *et al.*, 1988). This model was used to understand the dynamics of teams, and involves seven stages (Warkentin and Beranek, 1999). However, research in the team development area found that to determine suitable candidates for a position, psychometric tests are also most suitable (Belbin, 1993). By identifying the information relating to the interaction that individuals have in a team, it is felt that the development of teams can be improved (Sommerville and Dalziel, 1998). When examining the normative models that are used to describe team development, it can be found that research has progressed from the days of the original Tuckman's (1965) development model to amalgamating the dynamics expressed in the model, to investigating some of the behaviours observed in organisations and providing a better understanding of team development (Vernelle, 1994). To investigate the impact of downsizing and the emergence of self-managed teams, Tuckman's model was considered well-matched (Appelbaum *et al.*, 1999). By using this model, it was found that communication is pertinent for the development of a team.

Identifying conflict in theory

To date, research in the area of conflict and teams within the BPC area is minimal. Within the information systems (IS) area literature has focused on interpersonal conflict and its role in software development teams (Sawyer, 2001) or on IS development (Barki and Hartwick, 2001).

Conflict exists in various forms, however, the two prevailing forms in the work psychology literature are “affective” and “substantive” conflict (Guetzkow and Gyr, 1954). “Affective conflict” refers to conflict occurring in interpersonal relations, while, “substantive” is conflict involving the teams task. Further, it was revealed that affective conflict refers to the relations between the individuals and is of a personal nature, while substantive is to do with the work at hand. These two taxonomies have also been referred to as “cognitive, task related and socio-emotional conflicts” (Priem and Price, 1991) and “goal oriented” and “emotional” conflict (Coser, 1956).

Anecdotal evidence has always suggested that when people from diverse backgrounds and experiences work together, conflicts are bound to arise. However, this was also confirmed within the literature (Green and Taber, 1980) but what was also found was that in order to settle differences, there must be a method that includes having an understanding of an expression of differences and a negotiation of alternatives to develop a reasonable agreement or understanding (Walz *et al.*, 1993). If conflict is settled, then a benefit that arises is that multiple perspectives to solving a problem are obtained and perseverance is likely to occur in a more efficient and effective manner than only a sole one (Sawyer, 2001). This is a form of task-related conflict whereby conflict is considered to be a means of improving decision-making outcomes and group productivity by increasing the decision quality through constructive criticism and individuals adopting a “devils advocate” role (Amason, 1996; Schwenk and Cosier, 1980). Research has also found that task related conflict is beneficial since it allows the exchange of ideas and assists in better performance amongst the group members (Jehn, 1995). Other identified benefits include that it enhanced the identification and understanding of task issues (Putnam, 1994); improved group learning and accuracy of situation assessment (Fiol, 1994); promoted the development of new ideas and approaches (Baron, 1991) and achieved high quality decisions since individuals confronted problems (Schwenk and Valacich, 1994). However, this also depends on type of task undertaken (Van de Ven and Ferry, 1980; Gladstein, 1984).

A normative description of communication

Within the BPC area, Hammer and Stanton (1995) and Davenport (1993) emphasised the pivotal role of communication in BPC. From the undertaken literature review, it was discovered that not a lot of effort has been placed into further investigations of the topic.

Communication has been seen to assist organisations undergoing change by breaking down the resistance among workers and increasing their trust in the impending changes (Graham and LeBaron, 1994). Communication is also considered to be a means of resolving conflicts. When a group is meeting a goal, there are internal and external problems and one of the only ways to resolve the problem is via communication (Appelbaum *et al.*, 1999). Communication is considered to be particularly beneficial when new recruits enter a work place. To make sense and to settle into the new environment, communication is considered to be particularly important (Jablin and Krone, 1987).

In the BPC area, there are no distinctions between the types of communication existent when the approach is undertaken. This research went a step further and attempted to offer a distinction to practitioners. This was achieved by referring to the

organisational change area literature whereby authors have made two distinctions (Steers and Porter, 1987). Interpersonal communication is the communication primarily between two individuals. Organisational communication, on the other hand refers to the communication among several individuals or groups. Communication can take place in several forms and they are oral, written and non-verbal communications. Research in this area has tended to focus on determining the process of communication (Collins, 1990) or to determine the impact of the different forms of communication, namely computer-mediated communication versus face-to face (Introna and Whitley, 1996; Whitley and Scothern, 1997). Face-to-face communication is an orderly process and results in fewer interruptions or long pauses, there is a consistent distribution of participation and is a preferred method of communication (McGrath, 1990). On the other hand, computer-mediated communication is the time taken to transfer the data from one machine to another and causes interruptions and long pauses with a subsequent distortion of the pattern of distribution (Nunamaker *et al.*, 1991).

3. Research method

Since this topic is novel, a deeper understanding was required and qualitative research,(data in the form of words) rather than a quantitative one (research based on numbers) was considered suitable (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Qualitative research is also beneficial as it allows the close involvement of a researcher in the situation, resulting in a considerable insight into the events, actions and actors concerned (Miles and Huberman, 1994). As this research required an understanding of team development a close involvement was required, which is afforded by the aforementioned approach.

To collect the data for this research, a single case study strategy was used. This approach was followed as it also allows a deep understanding of the issue at hand (Yin, 1993). When selecting the organisation the researcher focused on organisations, which were or had recently undertaken BPC. This practice was followed as this research focused on BPC and not teams as a sole topic. Prior to beginning the research process, a pilot study had been undertaken and assisted in clarifying issues such as, if the research concentrated only on organisations with teams, then the BPC element would be missing and this would defeat the purpose of this research. For this research, contact with the respondents was made using the telephone. Initially 30 individuals were called and of these 11 responded. A total of 30 were called as the researcher wanted to ensure that as many respondents could be obtained. This was more a cautionary measure. It also has to be understood that the 30 consisted of several people from the same organisational level. For instance, there were four middle level managers and five lower level or end-user levels. This strategy was pursued so as to avoid being in a position whereby if one candidate drops out for some reason or the other then someone else could still assist in completing the research. Therefore, contingency plans and measures were utilised when the 30 were contacted. Coincidentally the respondents used for this research were all also working on another BPC project and could recall the experiences of the previous BPC project and compare to their current work experiences.

When selecting the individuals to collect the data from, the key informants approach was used (Henderson and Lee, 1992). Key informants are members of the team selected to provide a broad sample of the views and perceptions of the entire

team. These individuals included managers, members of the Board, middle managers and lower level personnel. There were six managers, three middle level and two lower level individuals. In terms of gender, there were three females and eight males, who ranged from the ages of mid-50s to early 30s. The whole team consisted of graduates. A data source used at the outset was a survey, of which selected parts were also used for the interviews. This was pilot tested at both this and another site (Sawyer, 2001). The respondents were all ensured that there was confidentiality and anonymity.

The data collection strategy adopted was that of face-to-face and telephone interviews and observations. The telephone interviews lasted for approximately an hour, while the face-to-face interviews took two hours. A note at this juncture is that the telephone interview was used in several ways. One way that telephone interviews were used was as a means of verifying whether the interpretations made from the initial interview were correct. Due to the nature of the interview in this manner, the duration was shorter and did not constitute as the initial interview's results. This was because initially contact and familiarity were major requirement and therefore the face-to-face interview was selected in that instance. Telephone interviews were also used in instances when the individuals (the respondents) could not afford to leave the project, but were willing to speak of and reflect on their experiences. In both cases the interviews were recorded and then transcribed. In this cases a number of interviews, mainly about four were undertaken versus a shorter number when face-to-face interviews occurred.

In both the survey and interviews, the questions posed were initially close ended and gradually as the understanding into the area increased, they became open-ended. An example of a close ended question is: "How many members were in your team? 2-3; 4-5; 6-7; 8-9; 10 or above". An instance of an open question was: "When your team was not functioning smoothly, what were the reasons for such an action?" Once the interviews were completed, they were transcribed and sent back to the interviewees for verification that the obtained interpretations were true and accurate. Additionally a deadline for receipt of replies was established. An added way of verifying that the interpretations were true and accurate was to refer to published material provided by the organisation and attending meetings and workshops arranged by the organisation. This is a method is in line with triangulation (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994).

Triangulation was also used in another way. For this research, the team and not BPC as such is the level of theory, measurement and analysis (Klein *et al.*, 1994). This meant that the interview questions focused on the team formation process and data were analysed at the team level. Thereafter a comparison with the normative results obtained from the literature review was undertaken, thereby providing a triangulation of results.

4. The case of Pleasure Company

Pleasure Company is a drinks manufacturer in the private sector and is located in the Northern part of England. The company has been established since the late 1890s and began as a family concern, but since then has rapidly expanded to become an organisation that has shares listed on the London Stock Exchange. The company is customer focused and is dependent on both large and small organisations for its custom. The company has a reputation for providing excellent service and as such, is active in determining the preferences of its clients. This is achieved with the assistance

of questionnaires and telephone surveys. The company is also a holder of public houses and utilises this as another means of determining consumer preferences.

In the late 1980s and 1990s the organisation was in the process of forming an alliance with another very large manufacturer, however, the transaction was not approved on the grounds that this would allow Pleasure Company to obtain a monopoly. Not to be beaten, the organisation then decided to improve its performance measures and felt this could be achieved with the assistance of reducing unnecessary costs. This is where the potential for BPC was noted. The duration of the first phase of the BPC was approximately three years. However, this was considered successful and the company pursued another cycle of BPC. Their BPC was more focused on processes and tasks. Therefore it was felt that this research would be beneficial since it would allow the company to obtain a more balanced perception of the impending change rather than to focus only one aspect.

Reengineering teams in Pleasure Company

There were several teams formed to undertake the change – in total 20, but all of them did not operate at the same time. For this research a team that consisted of 11 individuals was selected. The other teams usually comprised eight individuals. The teams comprised mainly experienced, graduate calibre males, whose ages ranged between the 30s and the 50s. This is a reflection of the period when BPC was undertaken. “Nowadays, we can not consider having only a male-dominated team, since we have many experienced and educated females. We also have the Equal Opportunities Policy in operation now.” The team was formed on the basis of the tasks to be undertaken and whether the members could work with one another. Other criteria utilised were the interests, values and familiarity to the operations of the organisation. Overall, the managers and a director from the Board were selected to be part of the team. This strategy was adopted because at the initial stages it was felt that the lower level of the organisation did not need to be involved since this was still the planning and feasibility stages. Also at this point, the organisation felt that access to documents and departments would be easier with higher-level individuals and they were more involved in the decision making process than anyone else. The individuals had titles such as IT director, production manager, and so forth. The team members belonged to departments such as: production, sales, IT, finance or supply chains, since they were going to be initially impacted on. Once implementation occurred, the teams consisted of the lower level individuals.

5. Explaining the case analysis

For this research, the analytic stage was completed in three steps. Initially the interviews were reviewed to identify whether conflicts, communication and team development issues were evident. Therefore, if we noted within the interviews that a team was formed, this was identified as the forming stage of Tuckman’s model. There was no confirmation with the respondents undertaken at this time. We identified the issues and coded them accordingly.

Second, we examined the interviews in terms of the theoretical review that we had undertaken. If in our interviews it was stated: “When examining to see whether we had a process or task, each one of our team members consulted the notes that we had made during our workshop. However, some of us did not agree with the others about what a

task or process is. This led to disagreements.” We referred to our literature review and after several consultations concluded that this was work related rather than interpersonal conflict.

During the final and third stage of the analysis we identified reasons for the conflict to occur and also how they were resolved. We contacted the team and revealed our interpretations to them. If there were any differences in the interpretations, we iterated until we obtained concurrence. The results were reviewed to find similar patterns. Then we examined how conflict made an impact on team development and the steps that were taken to resolve conflict, but utilising only communication.

6. Discussions of findings

Tuckman's model was used to discuss team development since it is more prominent within many organisations and this research will also discuss the results in those terms. The model is described in terms of:

- forming;
- storming;
- norming; and
- performing.

When the teams initially formed, there was little resistance as the team members were prepared for their new roles. Training and education was provided and where vacancies arose, there were temporary promotions offered to subordinates. Once the teams began to familiarise themselves to their new project and surroundings, work on the project began. During the work stage, which involved the planning and feasibility study stages, conflicts arose since not all ideas were considered realistic or reasonable, or generally not suitable and this is the storming stage. A manager from the sales department commented:

I felt that the change should be undertaken within the sales department rather than in the finance department. However, the remaining team members were of the opinion that the change should be undertaken there since the process changes that should occur would be less dramatic than the sales one. They also said that fewer people would have to be prepared. Initially, I did not realise the basis of their arguments; however, after visiting the departments I did change my views and subsequently agreed with the rest.

Work was considered slow and tedious at that point. From the theoretical research, it was found that conflicts related to work are considered beneficial since they allow the exchange of ideas and the emergence of better solutions (Jehn, 1995) and from views expressed such as the above one, that reasoning can be substantiated.

Conflicts did not arise when the organisation's personnel were initially assigned to the team, even though this meant a change in the daily work activities. For instance, whereas an IT director would be working on designing of a new system or looking at the support provided to the organisation in his/her daily activities. In the new role, the activities could include conducting feasibility studies and planning the implementation of the new system. “I did not feel confident and comfortable enough to raise any issues initially. I am one who waits to observe what the likely outcome is and thereafter, I pursue any unsettled questions.” Personal rather than work-related conflicts arose

particularly when middle managers worked within a team. One middle manager stated:

It is well known that BPC leads to job losses and I am well aware that middle managers are in the middle. Thus if they are removed, the organisation can still function well. That is why, I did not want to co-operate in bringing about any change.

Once the conflicts became evident, ways of resolving them were sought. An example of a conflict was when the production department's process change was being considered. As the managers were aware that one of the consequences of BPC was a reduction in the work force, they were wary of any form of change impacting their department. For this reason, when plans were being formed for that department, the managers of that department voiced their opinions to a great extent and opposed many of the changes. However on reflection, it was also found that this particular unit was one of the largest and was going to incur reductions. Due to the strong opposition to many of the plans, many jobs were saved and compromises sought. More work-related conflict was evident rather than the personal one. As a human resources director stated:

We did not pay attention to the conflicts that involved, "Oh, I do not want to work with X as we do not get along". This was not the purpose of the project and so we did not pay attention to that. It would also have been very difficult to solve. Instead if someone said, this design method is better than this and will be beneficial, we listened to that and if we could find sense in that, we followed that. Another thing you have to consider is that the team was comprised of experienced individuals and we did not need have to deal to a large extent to personality issues.

As suggested by the literature review, task-related conflict was viewed to be beneficial for the project. However, it was quite difficult to raise this particular topic. When asked about conflict, the respondent did brush it aside, however, after repeating the question twice, the researchers obtained an answer. It was also found that there were more personal conflicts within the project, but the teams recognised that the project was more important and that is why they were placed aside.

Friday afternoons were set for resolving the issues and was a means of conflict management. Friday was also considered suitable as it was the end of the week and the team members could recover from any confrontations or unfair decisions over the weekend. However, it was also brought to the attention of the researcher that unfairness is a subjective term and therefore the whole team avoided that term. Instead they referred to it as a disadvantage and attempted to solve that problem as soon as it arose rather than to let the individual feel depressed or build anger within themselves. In terms of team development, this is the norming stage. At this point, the team examined all the problems and potential solutions in a face-to-face situation. Therefore, if there was a problem such as how many people should be assigned to the change and who should be undertaking the initial experience of it, it was dealt with on this day. Then the team would seek the list of all likely candidates and examine their experiences and relations with colleagues. There was an instance when one candidate was viewed to be the best for the position (in the opinion of his/her manager); however, the rest of the team declined that and sought someone else. "I wanted Michael to undertake the preparations as I felt that in the past he could handle responsibility, had a degree qualification. Despite this, he seemed to be missing out on other large projects such as this one and I felt that this would be a good experience for him." In the end, all

the candidates work experiences were examined and eventually the manager's suggestion was approved. This stage of resolution is known as the norming stage of Tuckman's model and viewed as beneficial as this stage allows the resolution of any evident problems. If this stage were not existent, then it would be difficult to undertake any work as the problems would still be apparent and would prevent any work to be undertaken. Once the problems are recognised and resolved, the team can work and that is the performing stage of Tuckman's model.

Although this description is in simple terms and demonstrates that conflict was resolved in effortless ways that was not always the case and was brought to the attention of the researcher. "The project was quite difficult in terms of development, however, we were committed to it and wanted to make sure that nothing would deter us. I feel commitment is particularly vital when such a task is undertaken." Also noted was that work-related conflict was easier to resolve. If there would have been personality conflict, then that would have been difficult to resolve since if at a critical stage it was discovered that individuals could not work, then it would be difficult to bring in replacements. Literature has found that face-face communication also serves a dual purpose (Graham and LeBaron, 1994). This was also confirmed in the findings. Face-to-face communication was found to be beneficial since people could talk at one place and in front of one another and this reasoning was also supported by literature. Due to face-to-face communication, decisions could be made instantaneously and as a result, prevented delay. However, the pre-establishing of time and locations assisted in this matter. As explained earlier, there was a suite of rooms where the teams met and this was how the pre-establishing of times and locations occurred. If that was not the case, then there might have been problems as other commitments appearing and subsequently, the problem lingering. Team development was found to be dependent on conflict and its resolution to a large extent and the provided explanations are meant to emphasise that. What was also emphasised was that the conflict resolution and communication was a team effort and not an individual's efforts and consequently, a team was viewed very important for the BPC.

The descriptions offered in this paper refer to the planning and feasibility stages of the BPC project. At that point, the usage of IT was minimal. However, from the conducted interviews and observations, it was found that the identification and resolution of conflict at this early stage assisted in the development of a better IT-enabled BPC. This was due to the teams having prior experience and knowledge of conflict and its resolution. This in turn, assisted in providing a more effective team because it did not have to waste too much time in solving problems that were connected to the development of the team. This was confirmed in a paramount view expressed by Manager X who reflected:

We could focus on the project and the problems in implementing the system rather than on the people because we had ironed out most of the people related conflict earlier. During implementation, the team was concentrated on the implementation process and did not have to encounter conflict because during the earlier stages, we had resolved the conflicting situations. So, now the teams could concentrate on the technical issues than anything else.

From the above explanation it also becomes clear that for systems development and implementation, a team that has no conflict is crucial. However, if there is a team that has to deal with conflict, then the existence of prior knowledge about conflict and its resolution is pertinent, otherwise, the project directions could divert to solving conflict

and subsequently, this could lead to a delay in the project, which could then also lead to failure as deadlines could be postponed and eventually not obtained. We also saw that work-related conflict is easier to resolve, but if there is a way of managing the conflict. This paper offered a solution in the form of face-to-face communication. It was also shown that there have to be certain days established to deal with the conflict. In this case, Friday was chosen since it allowed to the team members to recuperate over the weekend.

7. Conclusions

In order to obtain BPC the role of reengineering teams is viewed as pertinent. However, for a team to function smoothly, team development is necessary. This is also considered to be critical for the implementation of IS and BPC. A non-conflicting team can focus on the task at hand: systems development; rather than conflict and thereby obtain a much better implemented system as all the processes would be carefully understood and followed.

The research questions driving this research attempted to discover the impacts, if any, of communication and conflict on team development. It was illustrated that communication and conflict have an important role in team development when BPC occurs. Specifically when minimal information about the impending changes is known, there are bound to be misapprehensions as fear and feelings of resistance to the subsequent changes occur, thereby causing conflicts to occur. A form of conflict that was identified to occur in instances when BPC is undertaken is that of personal conflict. Such a form of conflict arises as individuals feel that job losses are going to take place and such a feeling of resisting change is more than likely to emerge among the middle managers. An additional observation made in this research was that during the final stages of the project, little consideration was paid to conflict as the team placed all its efforts on completing the project and ignored all the other issues.

An important finding of this research was that when considering systems implementation for which the role of reengineering teams was also considered important, consideration of conflict and its resolution are pertinent. By considering these issues, the teams can then perform the task at hand rather than focusing on conflicts. If attention is given to conflicts then the likely outcomes are that of delays and foregoing of the project deadlines.

It was found that conflicts are not productive for the organisation and therefore conflict resolution is sought. In order to resolve the conflicts existent within the teams, the role of face-to-face communication was considered to be pertinent. As the roles of electronic forms of communication are becoming prevalent within the daily life, so was the role of e-mail viewed to be essential. However, at the time of this research, this form of communication was utilised to a limited extent and at the time, was not utilised to solve conflicts. It also has to be understood that at the time that these organisations undertook BPC, e-mail was not so prevalent and therefore its role as a conflict resolution application was not well known or understood.

Contributions and further research recommendations

Given that this research was an exploratory one for the BPC area, a contribution was made as an understanding of team development, conflict and the role of communication in conflict management was identified. This paper also made an

additional contribution by offering a theoretical review of the areas of team development, communication and conflict. This is something that the IS and BPC areas lack and by providing these findings, further research into these topics can also occur. An added contribution is that by understanding these issues, the increasing rates of failure both within the IS and BPC may be somewhat reduced. The final contribution is that specific types of conflict, communication and team development have been formed and should lead to more investigation into the area. Currently an interest in the human aspects such as trust are emerging in the IS area. By identifying and emphasising other human aspects such as conflict, further research can then emerge.

A limitation that existed in this research was that the required information was available from larger organisations rather than the small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs). A future research strategy could be the inclusion of the results obtained from SMEs and forming a comparison such that the results can be more generalised rather than specific only to large organisations. By doing so, a balanced view of whether the findings in this paper will also be applicable to different contexts can emerge. An additional finding of this research is that it was found that the BPC involved minimal use of IT. Future research could attempt to determine whether the findings of this paper would be applicable in a situation where IT is prevalent. Further research directions could also include the research methodology. Being an exploratory and novel research, the data approach utilised in this paper was of a qualitative nature. Future research could focus on obtaining an empirical viewpoint. Therefore, by forming hypothesis and models the statistical evidence could then prove whether the variables, communication and conflict essentially do have an impact on team development.

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