Conceptualizing Managerial Influence in Organizational Conflict—A Qualitative Examination

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Keywords

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to broaden the understanding of managerial conflict influence by suggesting a social complexity perspective on organizational conflict. From this perspective, influence is essentially a meaning-based phenomenon that represents an interpretive view of organizational communication. Although some research exists that holds similar notions of managerial conflict influence, most research embodies a transmission view of communication and influence. Based on a qualitative analysis of 30 semi-structured interviews, managerial conflict influence can be conceptualized according to two theoretical dimensions, directness and communicative influence, including five subdimensions: direct, indirect, distant, constraining, and enabling. A tentative typology of managerial conflict influence using the identified dimensions is proposed. Finally, theoretical and practical notions as well as limitations of the study are discussed.

Influence has been mentioned as one of the most important determinants of managerial effectiveness (e.g., Yukl, Falbe, & Youn, 1993) and has also attracted attention within organizational conflict and negotiation (e.g., Marwell & Schmitt, 1967; Miller, Boster, Roloff, & Seibold, 1977; Rubin & Brown, 1975). Managers have been argued to play an important part in influencing organizational conflicts (Goldman, Cropanzano, Stein, & Benson, 2008). Jameson (2001) found that managers were perceived as the most available third parties to handle disputes among workers. In fact, conflicts occupy a major share of managers' working hours (Mintzberg, 1973; Thomas & Schmidt, 1976; Watson & Hoffman, 1996). Watson and Hoffman (1996), for example, found that managers spend up to 42% of their time handling conflict-related negotiations. Current trends toward diversification of the workforce, flatter organizational structures, globalization,

rapid changes in external environments, and pressures to cut costs (Burke, 2006) envision increasing conflict-related tasks in managerial duties.

How do managers influence conflicts in organizations then? Most organizational conflict literature approaches managerial influence as direct intervention or involvement in organizational conflicts. Several scholars have examined strategies of managerial third-party intervention (e.g., Elangovan, 1995; Lewicki & Sheppard, 1985; Sheppard, 1983, 1984) or styles of managers in their own conflicts (Filley, 1975; Pruitt, 1983; Putnam & Wilson, 1982; Rahim, 1983; Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). In addition, a bevy of literature exists concerning persuasion and tactics, the specific moves and messages that are used to enact various strategies and styles (e.g., Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2005; Ledgerwood, Chaiken, Gruenfeld, & Judd, 2006; Marwell & Schmitt, 1967).

Some scholars have also drawn attention to indirect ways of influencing conflicts (e.g. Pfeffer, 1981; Putnam, 1994; Rubin & Brown, 1975). According to Kotter (1985), for example, managing conflict from a leadership position requires indirect influence to create "an environment where built-in conflicts can potentially lead to creative decisions through effective teamwork" (p. 44). Even though the indirect means of managerial influence have been acknowledged and employed in research, they represent a minor share of the organizational conflict literature concerning managerial behavior and influence.

Of special interest to this article are conflict style and third-party intervention frameworks. While these approaches do not represent the whole spectrum of theoretical approaches within organizational conflict management literature, they do, however, constitute a major share of the literature and have also been applied widely in the practice and training of managers (Goldman et al., 2008; Nicotera & Dorsey, 2006). These approaches can be viewed to treat influence limitedly and to represent a structural-functionalist view (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Influence is embedded in mechanistic views of communication (e.g., Lasswell, 1948) where the role of communication in organizations is to serve as "a vehicle for transmitting performance- or motivation-related information to different sections in the organizations for the purpose of establishing control and coordination" (Kersten, 1986, p. 135).

The purpose of this article is to broaden the understanding of managerial conflict influence by suggesting a social complexity perspective (SCP) of organizational conflict. This perspective is argued to draw attention especially to interpretive aspects of organizations (e.g., Geertz, 1973; Hatch & Yanow, 2003), organizational communication in particular (e.g., Putnam & Pacanowsky, 1983). The interpretive communication view is rooted in a social constructionist approach to organizing (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) according to which there is no "true" reality that can be known or understood, but instead, reality is interpreted, constructed, enacted, and maintained using discourse and language (Ford, 1999). This meaning-centered approach departs from the structural-functionalist view of influence as intervention to establish control and coordination. Instead, the interpretive view draws attention to one's contribution to the construction of reality and the process of sense-making through discourse and language (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004). In particular, this study attempts to answer the following question: How do managers influence conflict interaction in organizations? The answer is sought via

content analysis of 30 semi-structured interviews to identify the theoretical dimensions underlying managerial influence.

The article begins with a brief review of the predominant approaches to conflict management in organizations, that is, third-party intervention and conflict style frameworks. These approaches are then discussed concerning their portrayal of managerial conflict influence as transmission of communication. The article continues with a discussion of the social complexity perspective (SCP) and its approach to managerial influence in organizational conflict. SCP is argued to be in unison with the constructionist view of organizing and the interpretive view of communication. After the empirical section, a tentative typology of managerial conflict influence is introduced, and finally, the implications of the theoretical and practical aspects of influence are discussed.

Background

The Predominant Models

Two approaches can be viewed as predominant in the study and practice of managerial behavior in organizational conflict. Third-party intervention models have become increasingly popular over the last two decades (Goldman et al., 2008) along with the increasing popularity of alternative dispute resolution methods (Lipsky & Seeber, 2006). Conflict style models in turn have dominated managerial conflict behavior literature to date (Nicotera & Dorsey, 2006) since its adoption to conflict research from Blake and Mouton (1964).

Third-Party Intervention Frameworks
Third-party intervention frameworks typically examine the roles that managers assume when engaged in conflicts as third parties (Putnam, 1994). The early models of third-party intervention (Lewicki & Sheppard, 1985; Sheppard, 1983, 1984), based on frameworks in legal settings (Thibaut & Walker, 1975), categorized third-party roles on two dimensions, the extent to which the third party controls the conflict process and the outcome of the conflict, resulting in four roles: adjudicative, inquisitorial, mediational, and motivational (or providing impetus). Since, two additional roles were identified, which were not included in the models acquired from legal settings: the procedural marshal (Karambayya & Brett, 1989) and the restructurer (Kolb, 1986).

Managers have been argued to differ from professional third parties in many ways. Managers are not genuinely neutral (as are third parties) and can impose solutions in conflicts. They may also have vested interests in the outcome of the conflict or may ally themselves with a particular party (i.e., alignment or affiliation bias; see, e.g., Carnevale & Arad, 1996). Murnighan (1986) has labeled such third parties ''intravenors.'' According to Conlon, Carnevale, and Murnighan (1994), intravenors are more likely to use forceful and pressure tactics than neutral third parties. Managers also sometimes have relationships with the disputing parties and continue to have relationships with the parties after the conflict is handled. Kressel (2006) calls this kind of mediation ''emergent mediation.''

Pinkley, Brittain, Neale, and Northcraft (1995) conducted a multidimensional scaling analysis to investigate the underlying dimensions of managerial intervention strategies instead of categorizing intervention strategies and roles in discrete classes. They identified five dimensions that are necessary to distinguish between different strategies: (a) "manager approaches conflict versus manager avoids conflict," (b) "manager decision control versus disputant decision control," (c) "commitment forced versus encouraged," (d) "attention to the stated versus underlying problem," and (e) "dispute handled publicly versus privately." Irving and Meyer (1997) in turn argued that third-party intervention strategies should be mapped into two dimensions, avoid versus approach conflict and participative versus autocratic.

Conflict Style Frameworks

The dominant approach to the study of managerial behavior in organizational conflict has by far been the dual concern model (Nicotera & Dorsey, 2006), which examines individual styles in managing conflict (Putnam, 2006). Styles represent people's behavioral orientations (or mindsets) toward conflict (Folger et al., 2005). The two independent dimensions are commonly known as assertiveness (concern for self) and cooperativeness (concern for other) and combine to specify five styles: competing, accommodating, avoiding, collaborating, and compromising (Thomas, 1992). Style approaches have generally focused on managers' own conflicts, particularly superior–subordinate conflicts (Nicotera & Dorsey, 2006), whereas managerial third-party approaches have been left to lesser attention.

Several scholars have also developed lists or typologies of conflict tactics (e.g., Wilmot & Wilmot, 1978). According to Folger et al. (2005), typologies of influence (e.g., Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980) and compliance-gaining behavior (e.g., Marwell & Schmitt, 1967) can also be used to map tactical choices in conflict. Tactics can be viewed to represent the vast literature on persuasion and social influence (e.g., Cialdini, Wissler, & Schweitzer, 2002) that have typically approached influence as the effect that an exposure to a persuasive message has on an audience (Ledgerwood et al., 2006).

Several scholars have also examined the role of contextual constraints on the choice of conflict styles (e.g., Friedman, Tidd, Currall, & Tsai, 2000; Ohbuchi & Suzuki, 2003). Marin and Sherblom (1994), for example, noted that contextual variables predicted the choice of conflict management strategy 73% of the time. Despite the advances in including context as an important variable in studies of conflict styles, most literature on managerial conflict styles ignores or takes a static view of context.

The Predominant Models' View of Managerial Conflict Influence

Certain common assumptions can be identified from the above review of the predominant models of conflict behavior in organizations. First and foremost, they can be viewed to represent a transmission view of communication, which has several implications for managerial influence. These models typically treat communication as a tool or skill "for accomplishing organizational goals through *transmitting messages*" (Putnam & Boys, 2006, p. 545; emphasis in the original). Managers exert influence by mediating the

message flow between disputants, making suggestions about possible settlements, behaving in ways that have an intended effect on other parties, or sending persuasive messages to gain preferred outcomes and reactions from the disputants. The nature of influence is illustrated in Lasswell's (1948) classical definition of communication: "Who says what in which channel to whom with what effect?" (quoted in O'Sullivan, Hartley, Saunders, Montgomery, & Fiske, 1994, p. 50). Although most research on organizational conflict has moved from sender-oriented views of communication toward two-way message flows, the assumption of communication as transmission underlies the predominant models of managerial conflict behavior.

The above review indicates that managerial influence is examined primarily within the boundaries of a particular conflict. The role of communication is viewed as incidental or intervening (Fairhurst, 2001); that is, managers communicate and thus influence organizational conflict dynamics only sporadically. This view also accentuates the perceived ability of managers to control conflict outcomes. Managerial influence is essentially imposition of meanings, intentions, and messages to the conflicting parties via an appropriate communication channel to get an intended effect.

From the SCP, which will be discussed next, the transmission view of communication, and thus the conceptualization of influence, is inadequate. That is, the conceptualization of influence is deeply rooted in the traditional systems perspective of organization, where the manager's influence potential stems exclusively from his or her role in the organization's authority structure (e.g., Katz & Kahn, 1966). From this perspective, managerial influence is predefined and role relevant; that is, managers can exert influence only on a specific range of people over whom the managers have authority. According to Katz and Kahn (1966), influence is mostly constraining and top down by nature: "The supervisor is to instruct, communicate requirements for change, correct any deviations from required performance; in short, he is to influence" (p. 216).

The Social Complexity Perspective

Complexity theory has its roots in natural sciences and draws from various scientific disciplines such as chemistry, biology, and mathematics (e.g., Kauffman, 1991; Prigogine, Nicolis, & Babloyantz, 1972; Thom, 1975). Scholars and practitioners have applied complexity theory increasingly to various social and organizational phenomena (Maguire, Allen and McKelvey, 2011), because it is believed to allow a more accurate reflection of actual organizational dynamics and practices than traditional models of organization (e.g., Byrne, 1998; Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2007; Mathews, White, & Long, 1999; Snowden & Boone, 2007). Vallacher, Read, and Nowak (2002), for example, note that while "[t]he dynamism and complexity of personal and social phenomena have been long recognized" by pioneers such as James (1890) and Mead (1934), those features represent "a serious challenge for traditional research methods" (p. 264). The complexity perspective has been argued to add value, for example, to the study of leadership by allowing the exploration of "issues of shared, distributed, collective, relational, dynamic, emergent and adaptive leadership processes" that the traditional models typically exclude from examination (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009, p. 631).

In particular, the complexity approach to organizations departs from the linear view of organizational functioning and change (e.g., Lewin, 1947). Instead of viewing change as occasional, predictable, and proportionate, complexity theory views organizations as being in a constant state of change "where the laws of cause and effect appear not to apply" (Burnes, 2005, p. 77). That is, a small change in organizational conditions may yield to disproportionate consequences for organizational functioning and vice versa. These nonlinear changes and other surprising dynamics, in turn, stem from a high degree of interdependence of complex systems (Hazy, Goldstein, & Lichtenstein, 2007). A complex system is not necessarily "complicated," which in customary usage refers to an "intricate and detailed interweaving" of system components (e.g., computer; Hazy et al., 2007, p. 4), but rather, "complex" refers to the type of interactions that occur in a system. A system is complex "[i]f relationships in a system cannot be fully explained by analyzing its individual components [as is the case in complicated systems] because they are not fixed but shifting and changing" (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009, p. 632). Human organizations can be viewed as complex because of their highly interactive, emergent, nonlinearly dynamic, and unpredictable nature (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009). Thus, rather than focusing on discrete components, events, or systems, complexity studies pay attention to the interactions, connections, and relational dynamics of system agents (Hazy et al., 2007).

The complexity perspective of organizations seems particularly compatible with conflict research. First, the complexity perspective views conflicts as "inherently dynamic: They escalate and deescalate, change form, spread into new groups, and can be passed from generation to generation" (Coleman, 2006, p. 327). According to Andrade, Plowman, and Duchon (2008), conflicts represent naturally occurring "fluctuations" in the ongoing interactions of system agents. Interactions are characterized by nonlinear cause-effect relationships "where surprise is likely and pattern fluctuations continuous" (p. 29). Coleman (2006) was among the first to propose a dynamical systems approach to analyze and intervene in social conflicts, intractable conflicts in particular. Similarly, Vallacher, Coleman, Nowak, and Bui-Wrzosinska (2010) suggest the dynamical systems perspective as a useful framework to rethink the nature of intractable conflicts and the ways to transform such conflicts. Complexity approaches to organizational conflicts have also appeared recently (Andrade et al., 2008; Aula & Siira, 2007, 2010; Sword, 2008; see also the special issue of *Emergence: Complexity & Organization, Vol. 10*, No. 4, 2008). Dynamic views of organizational conflict are not, however, new. For example, Smith (1989) demonstrated how conflicts have a tendency to move around in organizations. Conflict scholars in communication and anthropology in turn have been noted to "take as a given that a negotiation script is shared and dynamic" (Bazerman, Curhan, Moore, & Valley, 2000, p. 290).

Second, complexity scholars view conflict as endemic and potentially constructive for organizational functioning. That is, rich connections and tension between system agents are viewed as essential for an organization to survive, develop, and succeed (e.g., Lichtenstein et al., 2007; Plowman & Duchon, 2007; Schreiber & Carley, 2007; Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). Andrade et al. (2008), for example, argued that conflict is inherent in complex adaptive systems, such as human organizations, and can be a source of energy, adaptation, and growth. Thus, the complexity view challenges the conventional view of

conflict "as a problematic condition always requiring reduction or elimination and whose conditions or outcomes can be predicted" (p. 23). While various conflict scholars have similar notions of organizational conflict (e.g., De Dreu & van de Vliert, 1997; Deutsch, 1973; Marcus, 2006; Pondy, 1992; Putnam, 1994; Robbins, 1974; Ruben, 1978; Tjosvold, 1991), the predominant models of managerial conflict behavior stand in contrast with the view of conflict as natural and even positive to organizations.

The Social Complexity View of Managerial Conflict Influence

From the SCP, managerial conflict influence draws not solely from the traditional managerial command and control thinking but is also tightly connected to the notions of leadership. Leadership in complex human systems does not, however, refer to top-down control, as viewed by conventional influence literature (e.g., Kipnis et al., 1980). Rather, leadership takes place "during interactions among agents when those interactions lead to changes in the way agents expect to relate to one another in the future" (Hazy, et al., p. 7). The complexity approach does, however, acknowledge the importance of individual agents in the leadership process (Goldstein, 2007). Whereas leadership is seen as "an emergent, interactive dynamic that is productive of adaptive outcomes," leaders are "individuals who act in ways that influence this dynamic and the outcomes" (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007, p. 299). Leadership is continuous, because "With every contact between people or groups in organizations, with every exchange of information there is the opportunity for influence, and therefore leadership" (Plowman & Duchon, 2007, p. 127). This perspective draws attention away from the sporadic and formal occasions of managerial influence toward the informal and continuous influence that managers exert in their daily routines.

According to Goldstein (2007), managers exert influence on complex systems by encouraging, constraining, and shaping interaction to bring about novel patterns, structures, dynamics, and properties. In fact, middle managers are often in a position to engage in such enabling behaviors because of the managers' access to resources and their direct involvement in the boundary conditions for the system's production level (Goldstein, 2007). From the SCP, one cannot not have an impact on organizational life. According to Stacey (2003), people exert influence continually in organizations, because people constrain and enable each other in interaction with each other. Yet one cannot exert influence directly to get planned outcomes; instead, one ought to aim at creating suitable conditions (Aula & Siira, 2007).

From the SCP, managerial influence can be viewed essentially as a communicative phenomenon. That is, several scholars have noted the importance of communication to understand human organizations as complex systems (e.g., Aula & Siira, 2007, 2010; Contractor & Grant, 1996; Corman, Kuhn, McPhee, & Dooley, 2002; Goldspink & Kay, 2003; Leeuwis & Aarts, 2011; Stacey, 2003). Luhman and Boje (2001), for example, embraced the communicative perspective of complexity science by viewing complex systems as organizational discourses. According to them, organizational actors exist "as multiple discourses, or networks of identities, in space and time" (p. 164). Thus, the complexity perspective has drawn attention particularly to language and discursive aspects of organizational communication (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004).

From this perspective, communication does not function within and is not determined by the formal organizational structure, but rather, organizational members create and sustain the structure and the social arrangements (such as rules, policies, levels, and departments) through the members' behavior and interactions with each other (Putnam, 1986). Communication happens in a particular organizational context "where people together create, maintain, handle, and shape meanings" (Aula, 1999; p. 22). Organization is particularly dependent upon conversation, "because discourse is the very foundation upon which organizational life is built" (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004, p. 5). This perspective does not, however, represent "an extreme social constructionist" perspective that marginalizes all nondiscursive aspects of organizations that constrain social action. Instead, it acknowledges that some agents have advantages over others in exercising discursive power and hegemony (Robichaud, Giroux, & Taylor, 2004). This represents "the becoming orientation" to organizations as discursive constructions according to which "Agency is…conceived as both passive and active" (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004, p. 14).

Managerial conflict influence, in turn, can be viewed as any impact one has on conflict interaction and the meaning-making process. However, this is not in the transmission sense, which aims at predetermined outcomes and "prohibits treating meaning as contested or problematic" (Fairhurst, 2001, p. 387), but via ongoing social interaction, where meanings are co-constructed, talk is contested, and competing perspectives cherished. In fact, there is intrinsic value in privileging the emergence of various "microstories over the one grand narrative or macrostory" (Boje, Luhman, & Baack, 1999; p. 341). Managers are viewed as responsible for their power as organizational agents. The concept of power is not conceived in its conventional sense as established through position or structure, but rather, managers often have access to and control of information, resources, and incentive systems (Kersten, 1986), which affect to a great extent which meanings are created and which are not. Thus, influence is exercised particularly via conversations (e.g. Baker, 2009). In conflicts, people construct conflict in interaction via language and talk "so as to bring into existence a new conversational reality in which new opportunities for action are created and effective action takes place" (Ford, 1999, p. 492). As opposed to the traditional system perspective of organization (e.g., Katz & Kahn, 1966), influence is not predefined and role relevant but contextual and pervasive.

Complexity approaches to organizational conflict have drawn attention particularly to the underlying assumptions and mental maps (or models) that people hold concerning conflicts. Aula and Siira (2007) noted that conventional conflict management literature, the dual concern model (i.e., conflict styles) in particular, is based on assumptions of linearity, reductionism, and determinism. These assumptions, in turn, are crucial, because "they are the roads and landscapes of mental maps managers are using, when they make decisions and act as leaders" (p. 370). According to Sword (2008), conflict analyses are based on conflict mental maps, referring to "cognitive processes for making sense and meaning of situations and beliefs" (p. 11). Thus, cognitive processes seem to play an important role in understanding and affecting managerial influence in organizational conflict. It should be noted, however, that cognitive processes in this context refer to sense-making rather than psychological origins of the words (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001) (Table 1).

Table 1

A Comparison of Managerial Influence Characteristics of the Predominant Conflict Models and Social Complexity Perspective

Characteristics of influence	Predominant conflict models	Social complexity

Source	Hierarchical authority
	    Sheppard (1983)
	    Katz and Kahn (1966)
		Mental models
		    Sword (2008)
		    Aula and Siira (2007)

Purpose	Attaining intended outcomes
	    Sheppard (1983)
	    Thomas and Kilmann (1974)
	    Rahim (1983)
	    Lasswell (1948)
		Changes in agents' relational expectations
		    Hazy et al. (2007)

Nature	Constraining
	    Sheppard (1983)
	    Katz and Kahn (1966)
		Constraining/enabling
		    Goldstein (2007)
		    Stacey (2003)

Temporality	Intervening
	    Lasswell (1948)
		Ongoing
		    Stacey (2003)
		    Plowman and Duchon (2007)

Target	Conflict parties and their tasks
	    Sheppard (1983)
	    Kolb (1986)
		Interaction/meaning-making process/conditions
		    Goldstein (2007)
		    Aula and Siira (2007)
		    Hazy et al. (2007)

Range	Predefined
	    Katz and Kahn (1966)
		Undefined
		    Aula and Siira (2007)
		    Stacey (2003)

Data and Method

Interviews

The empirical part of the article is based on 30 semi-structured interviews with people holding managerial positions in Finnish organizations. The interviewees were found through two central organizations for graduates and students, the Finnish Association of Graduate Engineers (TEK), and the Finnish Association of Business School Graduates (SEFE). The interviewees were selected based on their organizational position (management or higher middle management), nationality (Finnish), and location (organization located in Finland; for SEFE, Southern Finland). E-mails were sent to a total of 1,350 members of the participating organizations (600 TEK members, 750 SEFE members); the 30 who were the quickest to reply who fit the requirements were selected for the study. Twelve were women and 18 men. Interviews were conducted from March 2008 to May 2008. Altogether, 22 organizations were represented in the study.

The interviewees were allowed to describe their views on organizational conflict management as freely as possible, allowing them to interpret the questions and pursue those themes that the respondents regarded as central. At the beginning of the interviews, the participants were offered the following general definition of conflict; however, during

the interviews, the participants were allowed to discuss any themes that the interviewees felt were related to the subject.

> Conflicts can be caused by ''any friction that produces a mismatch in expectations of the proper course of action for an employee or group of employees'' (Lipsky, Seeber, & Fincher, 2003; p. 8) and center on three factors: (a) incompatibilities, (b) an expressed struggle, and (c) interdependence among two or more parties (Putnam, 2006).

All interviews followed the same semi-structured outline, which contained a set of questions repeated at each interview. The themes in the outline focused on the following:
(1) The typical conflict situations that occur at the interviewees' workplace (for instance, ''What are typical conflict situations at your workplace? How are they handled?'')
(2) Organizational procedures to manage conflicts (for instance, ''What kinds of opportunities are there to voice difficult issues? What kinds of opportunities are there to solve conflicts?'')
(3) Manager's role in conflict management (for instance, ''What is a manager's role in conflict management? What kind of qualities should a manager have to manage conflicts?'')
(4) Conflict culture (for instance, ''How do people regard difficult issues? How are difficult issues expected to be managed at your workplace?'')
(5) Consequences of conflict (for instance, ''What kinds of consequences have you noticed that have stemmed from conflicts?'')

The interviews, which lasted from 45 min to 2 hr, were recorded with the approval of the interviewees and transcribed verbatim. The interview transcripts totaled 378 pages (single-spaced, Times New Roman, size 12).

Analysis

The analysis process followed an inductive research design, in which the research focus was constantly reiterated and adjusted to enable theoretical generalizations (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The data were analyzed using Atlas.ti software (ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH, Germany).

As advised by the interpretive view of organizational communication, managerial conflict influence was viewed rather widely in this study. The interview data (i.e., managers' talk about conflict and conflict management) were treated as evidence of the ways in which managers affect, create, foster, and maintain meanings and the meaning-making processes concerning organizational conflict and its management.

In the first stage of the analysis, all passages that reflected organizational or managerial approaches to managing conflicts were isolated. This included passages concerning interviewees' talk on organizational structures and procedures (e.g., meetings, performance appraisals, coffee table discussions, grievance procedures), organizational circumstances (e.g., organizational climate, culture), descriptions of managerial attitudes, and descriptions of managerial behavior. Altogether 1,163 such passages were identified.

In the second stage of the analysis, the remaining data were analyzed and reduced by identifying passages that could be interpreted to have an influence on organizational

conflict dynamics. In particular, attention was paid to the ways in which managers can or could influence the meaning-making processes in organizational conflict. In addition to direct accounts of managerial behavior, passages concerning organizational structures and procedures, which can be viewed as functioning as a ''metamessage'' (Putnam, 1986) that affects and is affected by organizational members' behavior, were included. The pool of data was reduced to 512 passages.

In the final stage, the isolated passages were grouped according to the nature of the impact on conflict interaction. In this stage, the passages were first found to differ concerning their directness, which refers to the degree to which one interferes in conflict interaction or its circumstances (in terms of physical and/or communicative behavior). The passages were grouped into three categories: direct, indirect, and distant influence. In addition to directness, the passages were found to differ according to their communicative influence; that is, the constraining or enabling effect on meaning making in conflict interaction. The passages were coded either as constraining or enabling.

Results

The results section consists of two parts. In the first part, the theoretical dimensions of directness and communicative influence are discussed, including sample quotes of the respective dimensions. The second part advances a typology of managerial conflict influence based on the identified dimensions. Each type is then discussed concerning its characteristics of influence.

Influence Dimensions

Directness
As noted above, directness can be viewed as the degree to which one interferes in conflict interaction or its circumstances (in terms of physical and/or communicative behavior). According to the data, directness can be viewed as consisting of direct, indirect, and distant influence.

Direct Influence   Direct influence refers to overt interference in conflict interaction by addressing conflict participants separately or together. The dominant models of managerial conflict behavior have typically viewed influence solely as direct influence.

> Immediately when one perceives a problematic situation, one takes this problem person or problem situation into a discussion about what the problem is.
>
> > Man, 38

> And the interference means then that one discusses with the person, who has behaved inappropriately or somehow childishly.
>
> > Woman, 50

The above passages reflect a need to act or ''do something'' in conflicts. These actions refer predominantly to discussing or orchestrating a discussion with the principal conflict

party or parties. Physical presence and proximity are pertinent to managerial intervention. In addition, managers seem to consider conflicts predominantly as negative aspects of organizational life; conflicts are characterized as ''problems'' or ''childish behavior'' that need to be addressed directly and from the top down. Managers need to be in close control of the situation and take responsibility for reaching a resolution. The conflicting parties, in turn, are implied to be incompetent in handling the issue themselves.

Indirect Influence   Social complexity researchers (e.g., Jennings & Dooley, 2007), and a few conflict scholars as well (e.g., Aula & Siira, 2007; Putnam, 1994), have drawn attention to indirect influence, which has been left to a lesser attention particularly within the two predominant frameworks of managerial conflict behavior that were identified earlier. Putnam (1994) suggested that managers should participate indirectly in disputes ''to balance opposing tendencies and to facilitate diversity of positions'' (p. 31). Indirect influence is exerted via interference in the circumstances, boundary conditions, or structures of conflict interaction, not addressing the conflict parties or interaction directly. Similarly, according to Thaler and Sunstein (2008), small changes in the context can have a great effect on people's behavior. Managers can be viewed as ''choice architects'' that are responsible ''for organizing the context in which people make decisions'' (p. 3). According to Goldstein (2007), managers can work with various ''containers'' to constrain and shape order such as ''psychological (e.g., sense of safety), social (e.g., rules of interaction), cultural (e.g., rituals and stories), technological (e.g., computer networks), even physical (e.g., the actual physical attributes of the workplace)'' (p. 89). These ''containers'' are seen also in the exemplary quotes.

> As a manager, one needs to create an atmosphere in which it is not purposeful to crucify someone for his or her blunder, to make everybody make excuses for one's fouls, but to get to the issue at stake as well.
>
>   Man, 62

> One of the duties of a manager is to manifest in advance the rules, workings, and culture of the workplace, what is acceptable and what is not acceptable at our workplace.
>
>   Man, 54

As the above quotes indicate, indirect influence can be exerted, for example, via interfering in the atmosphere or climate of the conflict circumstances and managerial manifestation of workplace rules. Here, the managerial influence is indirect and sometimes hidden in nature. Although managers are viewed as playing an important role in affecting conflict dynamics, the parties involved in the conflict are considered capable of handling conflict issues within the prevailing circumstances. From this perspective, indirect influence can be viewed as reflecting conflict-positive ideology (De Dreu & van de Vliert, 1997) that recognizes the necessity of being able to air dissenting opinions and perspectives.

Distant Influence   Distant influence refers to the impact on conflict interaction by one's mere presence; that is, one restrains oneself from direct or indirect acts altogether. According to Putnam's (1994) political view of conflict, managers can be seen ''as

'present' and critical to the development of organizational disputes, even when they are physically 'absent' from the interaction'' (p. 29). In terms of social complexity, managers contribute to the creation and maintenance of "attractors" that bring about nonrandom behavior (Schneider & Somers, 2006) and that emerge from the interaction of individual components within a complex system (Luhman & Boje, 2001). In social systems such as human organizations, "an attractor can be described as a restricted range of mental states and actions that is commonly experienced by a person or a group" (Vallacher et al., 2010, p. 265). Thus, an attractor "attracts" an organization's behavior so that it resists whatever disturbances or influences it might experience. From the interpretive communication perspective, managers can be viewed to influence conflicts especially via "micro-level hegemony" attractors (Boje et al., 1999), which refers to "the power of individuals to tell stories and make them stick, and the power of stories to inscribe or constrain individual action" (Luhman & Boje, 2001, p. 164).

> It may well be that when I say that, "Okay, let's consider this next Wednesday or a week hence," that it is enough for the person that the issue has been registered and that the issue will be monitored for a week. He or she knows that the issue has been acknowledged and is under consideration.
>
> Man, 54

> According to my experience, a manager does not practically have other options but desensitization; that is, one kind of teaches people to tolerate diversity better.
>
> Woman, 38

The first quote indicates a combination of direct and distant influences in which one initially involves oneself in the conflict process by directly acknowledging the situation, thus indicating one's interest in the subject, and then restraining oneself from direct and indirect actions altogether. Even though the manager does not interfere in conflict interaction after the initial stage, the conflict does not "float in the air" either after the interaction between the manager and the employee. In the second quote, the manager represents a nontraditional stance toward conflict, in that he or she fosters a "story" according to which organizational conflict is inevitable and one needs to learn to tolerate it.

Directness can easily be mingled with the construct of activeness. Van de Vliert and Euwema (1994) defined activeness as "the extent to which conflict behaviors make a responsive and direct rather than inert and indirect impression" (p. 676), implying activeness and directness are profoundly intertwined. From the SCP, however, directness serves better than activeness as the primary construct in explaining managerial conflict influence, because influence is exerted regardless of the level of activeness on behalf of a manager. Whereas activeness includes an element of intentionality, directness does not. In other words, even conflict-avoidant managers exert influence.

Communicative Influence

Aula (1996, 1999, 2000) proposed an organizational communication model based on the key principles of complexity and chaos principles according to which communica-

tion can be characterized by two simultaneous counter-forces: integrative and dissipative. On the one hand, communication may help integrate an organization's forms and structures by reducing contingencies and thus increasing an organization's ability to manage complexity. On the other hand, communications may modify or weaken existing forms and structures, breaking old and creating new ones.

In the conflict context, the integrative quality can be viewed as constraining the inclusion of multiple views and diverse opinions, whereas the dissipative dimension fosters the opposite (Aula & Siira, 2007). How events unfold is not interpreted and narrated by a single voice (that of an individual manager, for example), but by various stakeholders of organizational conflict.

Constraining Influence   Constraining refers to managerial influence that prohibits the inclusion of diverse views in conflict interaction.

> The conception that we are here to work and getting paid and that we should be present has totally blurred. That is one contradiction, the blurring of the rules of working life. Now we have clarified the rules with a few written warnings.
>
> Woman, 58

> The approach that all issues ought to be considered, that everybody ought to discuss with everybody, one ought to listen to everybody, that is totally impossible. It is always best to find an adequate reference group with whom to have a quick discussion and to make the decision after that. Then one can say that I have discussed the issue, period.
>
> Man, 42

As illustrated by the exemplary quotes, constraining influence can be exerted, for example, by enforcing rules, making unilateral decisions, and weighing the issues in isolation. What is noteworthy is the exclusion of various views and suffocation of open discussion. Various assumptions can be detected underlying the constraining influence. First, the quotes reflect a negative attitude concerning organizational conflict. That is, conflicts are considered unasked for deviations from the normal course of organizational action and thus need to be resolved by higher authorities. Solutions are developed in isolation from the principal parties and dictated by superiors. The quotes also reflect a rigid mindset of one's own perspective and approach to affecting conflict interaction. Further, conflicts are measured and categorized according to their usefulness and importance to the organization and are acted upon according to this objective judgment by an outside party.

Enabling Influence   Enabling refers to influence that allows the inclusion of diverse views in conflict interaction.

> Managers often dictate issues or tell issues off pat. That discussion can be conducted in another way. One can put a question to the lads that we have this problem here: how should we solve it or how should we operate here?
>
> Man, 53

It is always useful to discuss issues. It, in fact, cultivates one's view when one discusses with different people a little.

Man, 43

As illustrated by the exemplary quotes, enabling influence can be exerted, for example, by open and mutual problem solving, restraining from unilateral decisions, challenging one's own hypothesis, and experimenting. An enabling approach to influence seems to reflect a neutral or even positive attitude toward conflicts, which in turn does not require a quick resolution, as opposed to the constraining approach. In addition, the exemplary quotes illustrate managers' flexible attitudes concerning their approach to handling conflicts. Managers seem open to questioning their own as well as the organization's dominating assumptions and structures. Managers see themselves as facilitators of conflict interaction and portray a higher toleration of uncertainty than illustrated by the constraining examples.

Communicative influence (constraining/enabling) may seem to overlap several concepts employed in conflict research that describe behavior, typically two dimensionally, such as intensification–mitigation (Sternberg & Dobson, 1987), integration–distribution (Walton & McKersie, 1965), and agreeableness–disagreeableness (Bales, 1950; in van de Vliert & Euwema, 1994). These concepts differ, however, fundamentally from the constraining-enabling dimension utilized in this study. Whereas the intensification–mitigation and integration–distribution dimensions concentrate specifically on the outcomes of conflict interaction (the consequences of conflict behavior and strategic outcome objectives), the communicative quality does not attempt to predict or prescribe the ultimate outcomes of conflict interaction, but rather, the level of constraint affecting the meaning-making process. Agreeableness, in turn, seems to resonate with the communicative quality, as agreeableness also aims to describe the impression on conflict interaction. Agreeableness, however, focuses on the impact that can be reflected with ''such adjective scales as *good-bad*, *valuable-worthless*, *kind-cruel*, and *pleasant-unpleasant*'' (van de Vliert & Euwema, 1994, p. 676; emphasis in the original), thus reflecting a value-based judgment rather than a more neutral communicative influence as intended by the communicative quality dimension.

Managerial Conflict Influence Types

The identified dimensions can be combined to form a two-by-three typology of managerial conflict influence (see Table 2). The typology suggests that six types of managerial

Table 2
A Typology of Managerial Conflict Influence

Communicative influence/directness	Constraining	Enabling
Direct	Masterminding	Prodding
Indirect	Containing	Cultivating
Distant	Overseeing	Acknowledging

influence are in play in an organizational conflict: masterminding, prodding, containing, cultivating, overseeing, and acknowledging.

The proposed types should be viewed as ideal types of conflict influence that do not appear in their purest forms. Within the levels of directness (direct, indirect, distant), the two countertypes (masterminding-prodding, containing-cultivating, overseeing-acknowledging) are argued to be simultaneously present when managers influence conflict interaction. Direct influence, for example, is argued to include constraining and enabling elements and thus varies between masterminding and prodding. The levels of directness should not be considered exclusive either; that is, one can, for example, exert influence simultaneously on direct and indirect levels. Each type is discussed below according to its characteristics of influence.

Masterminding (Direct and Constraining Influence)

Masterminding can be viewed to reflect the same characteristics to influence as portrayed by the predominant models of managerial conflict behavior. That is, masterminding represents an outcome-oriented and intentional approach to influencing conflicts. One employs influence as stemming from one's hierarchical authority, constraining the inclusion of diverse views, and exerting influence unilaterally from the top down on the conflict parties or their tasks.

Underlying the masterminding influence type is the ideology of order and predictability; conflicts are considered deviations from the ideal organizational functioning and thus need to be resolved directly by an outside authority. People, in turn, are considered incapable of engaging in constructive interaction by themselves.

Containing (Indirect and Constraining Influence)

Constraining reflects the same constraining and authority-oriented ideology as masterminding. The goal is to reach predetermined outcomes within certain limits; however, influence is exerted continuously by not aiming at a direct encounter but rather operating via conditions or "containers" allowing more leeway for interaction. The indirect approach also allows for a more proactive approach to guiding conflict interaction.

Containing assumes that people have more potential in handling the conflict issues themselves. The manager is not as directive and overt in exerting influence, and within predetermined conditions, conflicts may have also positive consequences.

Overseeing (Distant and Constraining Influence)

Overseeing can also be viewed as representing a somewhat constraining approach to influence in its attempt to restrict conflict interaction from a distance. In overseeing, one refrains from direct exertion of influence and operates instead via "attractors" that affect conflict interaction. For example, as noted by Putnam (1994), managers exert influence merely by having authority and power over the disputing parties. Influence does not, however, stem solely from one's formal authority over the disputants, but rather, the influence potential stems from one's "narrative power" (or "micro-level hegemony") to constrain behavior (Luhman & Boje, 2001).

Similar to containing, overseeing takes a more optimistic approach to an individual's potential in handling difficult issues without strict direction from above. In fact, conflict interaction may result in unexpected outcomes despite a manager's supervision. Overseeing (i.e., restraint from direct and indirect actions) requires a somewhat high toleration for uncertainty.

Prodding (Direct and Enabling Influence)

Prodding represents a manager's role as a catalyst in evoking diverse views by direct influence. The manager does not, however, exert influence intentionally (i.e., to achieve certain outcomes) but instead focuses on achieving maximum input (i.e., various views) from all conflict parties. The purpose of influence is not outcome-oriented as much as aimed at changing the parties' relational expectations for future encounters.

Prodding reflects a conflict-positive ideology in which conflicts are seen as a natural and potentially constructive part of organizational functioning. For managers, direct influence is probably the most tangible way to exert influence on daily basis; that is, managers have internal and external expectations to intervene in conflicts. Prodding approaches intervention with a low level of control, suggesting confidence in people, yet casts a manager as "an active player" in the process.

Cultivating (Indirect and Enabling Influence)

Cultivating refers to one's role in creating suitable conditions, which enable the inclusion of multiple perspectives and views in conflict interaction. Influence is continuous in nature and is aimed at interaction and circumstances instead of the conflict parties or their tasks. The purpose of cultivating is to alter the relational expectations by facilitating changes in the subjective realities of the conflict interactants.

People are considered capable of engaging in constructive and potentially productive conflict behavior within fertile conditions. Exerting indirect and enabling influence requires a somewhat high toleration of ambiguity and consideration of conflict as a natural part of organizational life.

Acknowledging (Distant and Enabling Influence)

Acknowledging refers to a low control approach to exerting influence in which one refrains from direct or indirect exertion of influence altogether and lets the parties work the conflict out by themselves. Acknowledging is proactive and enabling in nature. The purpose is to create and maintain order in which diverse views are manifested and discussed, allowing for fundamental changes in conflict parties as well as in the larger conflict dynamics.

People are considered highly capable of handling conflicts and creating new meanings for the larger whole. Conflicts are considered natural and as having the inherent potential to benefit the organization. Acknowledging typically requires mindfulness of the larger dynamics of the conflict interaction; that is, acknowledging departs from the normative responses to conflicts, which often include direct or indirect suffocation of the problematic issues.

Theoretical Implications

The proposed managerial conflict influence typology departs from the two predominant frameworks (i.e., third-party intervention and conflict styles) in important ways. In particular, the proposed typology focuses on the actual effect on conflict interaction as opposed to the desired effect on outcomes, thus making a direct comparison of the proposed typology and the predominant frameworks less straightforward. A few remarks can, however, be made.

The proposed model is similar to the dual concern model (i.e., conflict styles), in that it makes comparable notions concerning approaching conflict. That is, according to the dual concern model, managers either (a) avoid conflicts or (b) approach them typically using four styles: accommodation, compromise, collaboration, or competition. Thus, the focus of the model is on direct engagement, while avoidance is left untheorized. From the SCP, avoidance (i.e., not engaging directly in conflict interaction) requires more attention. In fact, the proposed typology suggests that managers influence conflicts indirectly (containing-cultivating) and distantly (overseeing-acknowledging). The issue of avoidance is discussed below in more detail.

From the SCP, four distinct categories for direct engagement might not be necessary. That is, the proposed typology suggests that direct engagement consists of merely two simultaneously functioning components, enabling and constraining, that determine the dynamics of conflict interaction together with indirect and distant influences. Although the two frameworks differ in their focus (effect on interaction vs. outcomes), making a direct comparison more complicated, one could, however, hypothesize that a collaborative style might predominantly induce enabling influence, whereas competition might result in predominantly constraining influence. The relationship between specific styles and influence dimensions requires, however, further examination. A close examination of actual conflict interaction scripts, for example, might shed light on this question.

Third-party intervention models, the role approach in particular, differ from both the proposed influence typology and the dual concern model, in that they focus only on managers' direct interventions. Yet some resemblance between third-party intervention role models and the proposed influence typology can be seen. The process dimension seems particularly interesting, in that it refers to managers' control over the interaction process. From the SCP, it would be interesting to examine how managers use process control to either enable or constrain the inclusion of various views in conflict interaction. In addition, roles representing high outcome control, such as the inquisitorial role, can be hypothesized to induce predominantly constraining influence, while low outcome control roles such as mediation are likely to more enabling. An analysis of actual third-party intervention could elucidate on what kind of influence the enactment of certain roles actually produces.

The typology proposed here has more in common with the dynamic approaches to third-party intervention such as those of Pinkley et al. (1995), Irving and Meyer (1997), and Putnam (1994). Putnam (1994; as well as Kolb, 1986) suggested restructuring as an indirect way for managers to influence conflicts as third parties. Restructuring is aimed at addressing the underlying issue(s) of conflict and is based on the notion

that generating organizational change might be one desirable outcome of managerial intervention. Consistent with Putnam's notions, Pinkley et al. (1995) proposed the dimension of paying attention to the stated versus underlying problem, which seems to relate specifically to the enabling-constraining dimension, in that paying attention to the underlying problem(s) is likely to call for enabling influence. In addition, the dimension of public versus private handling of conflict by Pinkley et al. is interesting, because "the desire to use a public forum may also be linked to the desire to generate structural change" (Jameson, 1999, p. 279). These notions resonate with both dimensions of the influence typology. Questions such as, "How does the selection of the arena (public vs. private or formal vs. informal) relate to the dynamics of conflict interaction, and how can they be characterized in terms of conflict influence?" seem to be interesting starting points for examination.

As mentioned above, the proposed influence typology contributes and draws attention particularly to the dimension of avoidance, which refers to all other ways to influence conflict interaction but direct engagement and is included in the dual concern model and the dynamic models of Pinkley et al. (1995) and Irving and Meyer (1997). These models imply that when managers avoid direct engagement (i.e., open discussion of differences) in conflict interaction, they restrain themselves from exerting influence altogether. From the complexity perspective, such restraint and detachment from conflict dynamics is not possible. The proposed influence typology offers one way to approach avoidance, in that it identifies four types in which managers might exert influence when "avoiding" conflicts (i.e., containing, cultivating, overseeing, acknowledging). A few questions arise when avoidance is viewed from the SCP, an interpretive communication perspective in particular. That is, if managers truly aim to detach themselves from conflict, what are the meanings they attach to that decision? What are the mental maps upon which managers act? Although some literature that takes a more elaborate view on avoidance as a conflict management strategy exists (e.g., Tjosvold & Sun, 2002), there is a need for more detailed theorizing about the concept. In particular, it would be useful to examine the ways in which managers exert influence when not engaging in conflicts directly.

This study also concurs with the scholars who acknowledge the significance of context on organizational conflict dynamics and managerial behavior (e.g., Friedman et al., 2000; Marin & Sherblom, 1994; Ohbuchi & Suzuki, 2003). The SCP draws attention especially to the conversational context. According to Ford (1999), people are socialized in conversational backgrounds (e.g., cultures, traditions, and institutions) upon which they make interpretations, act, and make decisions. Thus, a change in the conversational background has a direct effect on how people act. Of special interest to social complexity are the conversations that either enable or constrain the surfacing of diverse opinions and views. This interest is congruent with critical discourse studies that aim "to reveal the role of language as it relates to ideology, power and socio-cultural change" (Grant, Hardy, Oswick, & Putnam, 2004, p. 11).

Finally, both complexity and discourse scholars have started to pay attention to cognitive aspects of behavior and influence. Schwandt and Szabla (2007) reviewed the evolution of the leadership and social systems discourse and noted, "The next phase of

development may be in the direction of a more human cognitive orientation to influence" (p. 59). In fact, cognition has been posed as the "missing link" between discourse and action (van Dijk, 1993, p. 251). Although some cognitive approaches to organizational discourse already exist (Gioia, Donnellon, & Sims, 1989), there is a need "for more studies in organizational discourse that examine the psychosocial origins of organizational texts, narratives and meanings, which lie beneath the subtext of social interaction" (Grant et al., 2004, p. 24). Although this study does not attempt to address the psychological origins of influence, it does overlap the cognitive area of organizational studies, namely sense-making (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001). This study suggests that at least assumptions concerning normalcy and functionality of conflict as well as people's capacity to handle conflicts may be relevant from a managerial conflict influence perspective.

Practical Implications

The practical implications of this study stem primarily from the basic premise of organizations as complex and dynamic systems. In particular, this approach highlights the intrinsic value of polyphony and diversity (Boje et al., 1999); that is, there is no need to resolve conflicts; instead, they should be managed to balance opposing tendencies and preserve diversity (Pondy, 1992).

First, managers should pay special attention to the conflict parties' opportunity to voice their perspectives instead of aiming at quick resolution of the issue, no matter how clear the case may seem. In fact, from a SCP, an objective, accurate analysis of the issue is not possible, nor is a resolution of conflict a proof of successful conflict management. Instead, what is more important is that new conceptions are manifested whether they actually are true, real, or accurate in some objective sense (Ford et al., 2002). When this happens, "one is given the opportunity to challenge, engage, explore, and create, thereby discovering underlying assumptions and opening new opportunities for action" (Ford et al., 2002, p. 113). Research on minority dissent, for example, has found that giving voice to views that challenge the status quo or "the spirit of the times" may yield to improved long-term effectiveness as well as overall increases in performance at the organizational, group, and individual levels (De Dreu & De Vries, 1997, p. 97).

Second, when engaging in conflicts as participants or third parties, managers ought to withdraw from pushing their views. Managers often have a tendency to enter conflicts that they know nothing about and make executive interpretations based on shallow data. Indeed, managers may be ignorant of their power as narrative agents and view themselves, misguidedly, as neutral observers. Although managers cannot control conflicts or their outcomes, they do possess a special role in the discursive dynamics of organization. Managers are often in an exceptional position to contribute to and even dominate the meanings for others. Thus, they should be very cautious when they make interpretive statements concerning conflict, such as blame, reasons, and effects. According to Ford (1999), "There is no idle speaking in conversationally constructed realities since everything that is said affirms or modifies reality in some way" (p. 493). Disputants, in turn, are somewhat aware of their audiences and adapt and create their story

with each audience (Boje et al., 1999). Thus, any time managers make interpretations and express those interpretations, they create second-order reality conversations and increase the chance for a self-fulfilling prophecy (Ford, 1999).

Finally, drawing from Ford's (1999) notions on managing resistance in organizational change, conflicts can be viewed as issues of language maintenance. Managers can thus influence the conflict interaction by helping people see what it is that they actually talk about and why they say what they say when engaged in conflict interaction. In particular, managers should withdraw from making conclusions about the individual characteristics of the disputants, which is often the case, and rather pay attention to conversational patterns. Thus, if managers want to have changes, they need to make the disputants speak differently. Managers should pay special attention to making explicit the difference between first- and second-order realities to help avoid confusing the events with interpretations and explanations of the events (Ford, 1999).

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to broaden the understanding of managerial conflict influence by approaching it from social complexity and interpretive communication perspectives. The interview data reveal that managers influence conflicts not only directly but also indirectly and distantly. Most organizational conflict research frames influence as direct influence, as noted above. However, this study concurs with those scholars who view managerial conflict influence more broadly (e.g., Putnam, 1994; Kotter, 1985). Whereas the predominant models assume that the power of managers stems from the higher position in the organizational hierarchy, the interpretive perspective focuses on the unique position of managers in contributing to the construction of organizational realities via discourse and stories.

Thus, social complexity does acknowledge the importance of individual agents, such as managers, in contributing to organizational conflict dynamics; however, the role of managers should be viewed as catalytic rather than implementing. That is, managers influence conflict dynamics continuously by acting in ways that foster, alter, or modify the conversational context according to which people interpret organizational phenomena and make decisions. This approach to influence represents the current urge for meaning, discourse, and narrative as approaches to the study and practice in organizational conflict processes (Wilson, Paulson, & Putnam, 2001). This area of study seems particularly fruitful and compatible with complexity approaches as well. That is, it takes the dynamic nature of organizations for granted and has applicability over various relevant organizational phenomena such as globalization, technology, identity, power, and culture (Grant et al., 2004).

One of the limitations of the study is the use of interview data to examine influence. That is, the data do not provide evidence of concrete micro-level communicative means and acts of exerting influence in conflict situations but, rather, are retrospective accounts of conflicts and conflict-related events. Thus, the typology is and should be viewed as tentative.

Despite the limitations, however, the method seems viable in enabling a tentative conceptualization of managerial conflict influence. That is, the interviews provided a rich and plentiful pool of data that functioned well in uncovering the complex ways in which managers potentially exert influence in organizational conflict interactions. Specifically, they underscored the significance of managers' ongoing, daily actions and conversations, whether intentional or unintentional, in influencing organizational conflict dynamics.

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