

## Additional case studies

### Team Reflexivity, New Product Development, and Conflict

#### Relevant to: Chapter 14: Power, Politics, Conflict, and Knowledge Processes

This paper tested a complex model involving multiple interactions and inter-relationships between a large number of variables. Primarily, it considers the relationship between team reflexivity and new product development (NPD) success, and also the moderating effect of conflict on this relationship. However, the model also examined the extent to which three separate factors were antecedents of team reflexivity, and also whether these factors had a direct impact on NPD success. The focus here is primarily on the impact that conflict has on the relationship between team reflexivity and NPD success.

Team reflexivity is defined as, '*the conscious reflection that team members do related to a team functioning ... in which team members perceive that they and their co-workers review, discuss, and modify their work to improve effectiveness*', (p. 22). NPD processes are concerned with the development of new, innovative products and services. The success of such processes is defined by the extent to which they result in products which result in marketable products and services which exceed people's sales expectations. Team reflexivity is argued to be positively related to NPD success, as NPD processes, to be effective, involve bringing together, processing and combining diverse sources of new knowledge and information, and team reflexivity represents a key mechanism via which this can occur. Fundamentally, team reflexivity processes allow people to bring together, share, and collectively evaluate the knowledge and information provided by individual team members.

However, conflict between team members has the potential to undermine team reflexivity processes. This is a challenge, as the nature of NPD processes, which involves different people bringing together different ideas related to the same issues and challenges, means that the potential for conflict is inherent and unavoidable. Thus conflict is likely when team members propose different ideas and solutions. One of the key focusses of this study is to examine the extent to which team conflict moderates the relationship between team reflexivity and NPD success.

In examining conflict, Wu et al. differentiate between relationship conflict, and task conflict. They suggest that relationship conflict may have a negative impact on the reflexivity-NPD relationship, as it can reduce the sense of team cohesiveness people experience. In contrast, task conflict, is argued to have a potentially positive impact on the relationship as it may act as a catalyst to dialogue and discussion.

In testing the model they develop they conducted a survey based study of NPD team members from over 250 NPD teams dispersed among 70 high technology firms from Taiwan.

Wu et al.'s analysis found that almost all the hypotheses they tested were supported. Thus team reflexivity was positively related to levels of NPD success. Furthermore, relationship conflict was seen to have a negative impact on this relationship, with it being weaker, when levels of relationship conflict increased. However, the positive impact of task conflict on the relationship between reflexivity and NPD success was not supported. Thus, in terms of practical recommendations related to the relationship between conflict, team reflexivity and NPD success, this study suggests that attention should be devoted to ensuring compatibility between NPD team members, in order to try and minimise levels of relationship conflict within teams.

Question:

While it may be possible to minimise relationship conflict, via the careful selection of team members, to what extent is conflict an unavoidable element of NPD processes?

Source:

Wu, W., Rivas, A., Liao, Y-K. (2017). 'Influential Factors for Team Reflexivity and New Product Development'. *Project Management Journal*, June/July: 20-40.