Chapter 2

Overview of the Present Dissertation

The effects of team composition and conflict on team outcomes have been largely contradictory (for reviews, see Jackson, Joshi, & Erhardt, 2003; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003; Mannix & Neale, 2005; Van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007; Williams & O’Reilly, 1998). I suggest that this may be due to a lack of attention to two key factors. First of all, I address the issue in this dissertation that within teams, individual members may have very different cognitions and behaviors. I look at the implications of this for research on team composition and conflict, including identifying reasons why individual cognitions and behaviors relating to team composition and conflict may differ, and examining the effects of individual differences in cognitions and performance on individual and team processes and performance. A second main focus, and contribution, of this dissertation is incorporating the role of power differences in theory and research on team composition and conflict. I will describe below how each of the studies in this dissertation serves these two primary goals and how this will help our understanding of the effects of team composition and conflict.

Chapter 3: Individual Conflict Engagement

In the first empirical chapter of this dissertation, I investigate how individual differences in conflict situations may affect individual outcomes. I build upon research which has suggested that individual perceptions of conflict may vary between individuals of the same team (e.g., Jehn & Chatman, 2000; Jehn et al., 2006) by looking at how individual conflict behaviors may also vary. I develop theory to suggest that not all individuals engage in every conflict. I then examine in depth the consequences for individuals who do choose to engage in conflict. I propose that the effects of the choice to engage in conflict or not are contingent upon the type of conflict
in which the individual engages, the conflict tactics the individual uses, and the individual’s verbal style. I incorporate the literatures on power and influence by developing a new framework of conflict tactics that specifically looks at how individuals utilize power and influence in conflict situations to achieve desired outcomes. I draw upon the influence tactic framework developed by Kipnis and Schmidt (1985, 1988) and apply it to conflict behaviors. I suggest that certain influence tactics may be more effective than others in certain conflict situations, such as in conflicts about the task versus conflicts about relationships. I examine these hypotheses utilizing an archival sample of 3000+ emails from activist organizations collected over a period of three years.

**Chapter 4: Effects of Team Composition on Conflict Engagement**

In the previous chapter, I introduced the concept of conflict engagement and examined its effects on individual outcomes. In the current chapter, I examine the antecedents of team and individual conflict engagement. I look at how an individual’s power and status in a team may affect the degree to which the individual engages others in conflict and the degree to which the team as a whole comes to have conflicts. I draw on research on the proportional representation of minorities (e.g., Ely, 1994; Kanter, 1977), which has suggested that numerical representation may serve as a proxy for power in the team and organizational settings. I integrate this thinking with past research and theory on demographic faultlines, which has suggested that numerical imbalances in faultline situations, such as in a team with five male engineers and one female consultant, may have an important impact on team processes and outcomes (Lau & Murnighan, 1998). In doing so, I develop a new distinction in faultline research - the concept of faultline placement – whether the faultline divides two subgroups (faultline coalitional split) or separates a single member from a larger subgroup (faultline solo split). I examine how the power dynamics associated with faultline placement affect team and individual conflict engagement and performance, and I also look at how demographic status moderates these effects. I examine these ideas across three studies, including both laboratory and field data.
Chapter 5: Perceptions and Realities Surrounding Team Composition

In this chapter, I examine the role of cognition in team composition and diversity research. While the commonly used theories in this field, such as social identity theory or self-categorization theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1985; for reviews, see Ellemers et al., 2003; Ellemers et al., 2002; Haslam, 2001), are specified to be contingent on the perception of diversity, most research on team composition has overlooked the role of perception. Therefore, in a multi-method field study, using surveys with both quantitative and qualitative questions, interviews, and observation, I investigate the most commonly perceived forms of faultlines, or subgroup divides, within teams, and then look at the consequences of these perceptions for team conflict and performance. I utilize both qualitative and quantitative data to investigate whether the perception of team composition may be what ‘drives’ the primary effects of diversity on team process and outcomes. In addition to looking at the degree to which members perceive themselves to be divided into subgroups, I suggest that the basis on which members perceive these faultlines to exist may also be of impact. In doing so, I provide one of the first investigations of the bases on which work team members perceive faultlines to exist. I employ the concept mapping technique of Jackson and Trochim (2002) to identify the most common bases that people perceive faultlines to exist on within their workgroup (e.g., job function, status, or nationality). One of the advantages of this technique is that it allowed me to utilize open-ended questions to test the degree to which organizational team members cite traditionally studied demographic characteristics (e.g., race, gender) or other forms of team differences (e.g., status or power differences) as factors they perceive as most salient in shaping their team composition. I then examine how the base on which members perceive a faultline to exist can further exacerbate or ameliorate the effects of faultline strength on intersubgroup conflict and team dynamics. In addition to identifying the type and strength of faultline perceptions, I also look at the role of (a)symmetry in members’ perceptions of faultlines and propose that disagreement between members on the existence of faultlines within the team can exacerbate the effects of perceived faultline strength on intersubgroup conflict. I examine these hypotheses in a field study of 46 pre-existing organizational teams.
Chapter 6: Power as a Determinant of Team Composition

After finding support in the previous chapters for my initial proposition at the start of this dissertation that differences in social power may play an important role in defining team composition, I examine in-depth in Chapter 6 the dynamics associated with power hierarchies in teams. I investigate how team power composition affects team conflict and performance across two field studies. In the first study, I examine the differences between high and low power teams in conflict and performance in the organization. In a second, quasi-experimental field study, I then systematically compare existing high-power to low-power organizational teams on a decision-making task. Additionally, in this study, in line with the central proposition of this dissertation that individual differences in perception of composition matter, I also incorporate theory which suggests that the effects of team power may be dependent on differences between individual members’ perceptions of the power hierarchy within the team. Specifically, I examine whether the negative effects of high power are attenuated when members’ perceptions of the power balance within the high power team are congruent with each other – i.e. when individuals share the same cognitions regarding the relative power of the members within their team.

Chapter 7: Summary and General Discussion

Chapter 7 entails a summary and overview of the empirical chapters in this dissertation. The chapter also outlines a theory for the future study of perceptual and behavioral differences in teams over time.

To conclude, the central goal of this dissertation is to demonstrate how by taking into account a) individual differences in perceptions and behaviors and b) power differences, we may gain a more complete understanding of the relationships between team composition, conflict, and performance. I develop theory in each of these chapters to explain how individual differences and power differences may impact team composition, conflict, and performance, and investigate these relationships using a variety of methods. I hope with this dissertation to therefore provide a new framework to understand the relationships between team composition, conflict, and performance. As an important ending note, all chapters in this dissertation may be read...
independently of each other, as the empirical chapters in this dissertation have been prepared as separate journal articles.