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Work design and conflict in the workplace: The moderating effect of personality

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This Master's Thesis entitled:
Work design and conflict in the workplace: The moderating effect of personality

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this research is to study the effect of work design on the type of conflict that emerges in the workplace. The concept of work design is divided in two three dimensions, namely task, knowledge and social characteristics. These dimensions are linked to the two dimensions of workplace conflict, that is, task conflict and relationship conflict. This research is also intended to verify the moderating effect of personality traits on the association between work design and workplace conflict. This study is based on 473 employed participants who have experienced workplace conflict up to 6 months prior to the canvass period, which was from January 14th to the 18th 2012.

The results indicate that there is no particular association between work design and conflict in the workplace. With regards to the moderating effect of personality traits, results indicate that these variables do not moderating the association between the dimensions of work design and the type of workplace conflict.

Overall, results do not show a relation between work design and types of workplace conflict, or the moderating effect that personality traits can have on these relations.

***Key words:** work design, workplace conflict, task conflict, relationship conflict, personality traits, Five-Factor Model.*

RÉSUMÉ

La présente recherche a pour objectif d'étudier les effets que peuvent exercer la conception du travail sur le type de conflit qui émerge en milieu de travail. La notion de conception du travail se divise en trois dimensions, soit les caractéristiques reliées à la tâche, les caractéristiques reliées aux connaissances et les caractéristiques sociales. Ces dimensions sont mises en relation avec les deux types de conflit en milieu de travail, soit le conflit relié à la tâche et le conflit relié à la relation. Cette recherche vise également à vérifier l'effet modérateur des traits de personnalités sur les relations entre les dimensions de la conception du travail et celles du conflit en milieu de travail. Cette recherche est basée sur 473 participants qui occupent un emploi rémunéré et qui ont vécu une situation de conflit en milieu de travail allant jusqu'à 6 mois avant la période de sondage, allant du 14 au 18 janvier 2012.

Les résultats indiquent qu'il n'y a pas de relations particulières entre la conception du travail et le type de conflit en milieu de travail. En ce qui a trait aux effets des traits de personnalité, les résultats indiquent que ces variables n'ont aucuns effets modérateurs sur la relation entre la conception du travail et le type de conflit en milieu de travail.

Globalement, les résultats ne démontrent aucune relation entre la conception du travail et les types de conflit en milieu de travail, ou les effets modérateurs que les traits de personnalités peuvent avoir sur ces relations.

Mots clés: *conception du travail, conflit en milieu de travail, conflit relié à la tâche, conflit relié à la relation, trait de personnalité, Model des cinq facteurs.*

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INTRODUCTION

Employees and managers are faced with an abundance of pressures at work (Hockey, 2000 and Niedhammer & Siegriest, 1998 cited in McMahan, 2004). Hartwick and Barki (2002, p.4) have stated that “interpersonal conflict is a dynamic process that occurs between individuals and/or groups who are in interdependent relationship, and is more likely to occur when a variety of workplace related background situations (e.g., zero-sum reward structures, scarce resources) and personal conditions (e.g., previous history of conflicts, interpersonal diversity) exist (Fink, 1968; Pondy, 1967; Thomas, 1992; Wall & Callister, 1995)”. By considering both the factors of work and personality, a better understanding may be gained as to the sources of workplace conflict.

Conflict shouldn't be taken lightly as it can be very costly to organizations, particularly when considering that “unresolved conflict represents the largest reducible cost in many businesses, yet it remains largely unrecognized” (Dana, online, 1999, sec. 1). According to the Center for Conflict Resolution International (online, 2010), it can be the cause of many negative outcomes in the workplace. On a personal level, it can cause employees stress, frustration, anxiety, loss of sleep, and strained relationships. On an organizational level, it can be the cause of grievances and litigation, presenteeism, employee turnover, loss of productivity, increased client complaints, absenteeism, sabotage, injury/accidents, disability, and increased sick leave usage. It has been stated that “chronic unresolved conflict acts as a decisive factor in at least 50 percent of departures. Conflict accounts for up to 90 percent of involuntary departures, with the possible exception of staff reductions due to downsizing and restructuring” (Dana, 2001, online, sec. 5). In addition, statistics show that “over 65 percent of performance problems result from strained relationships between employees, not from deficits in individual employee's skill or motivation” (Dana, online, 2001, sec. 6) Furthermore, "studies reveal a direct correlation between prevalence of employee conflict and the amount of damage and theft of inventory and equipment. And, covert sabotage of work processes and of management's efforts usually occurs when employees are angry at their employer" (Dana, online, 2001, sec. 8).

By accepting that conflict is real and costly in organizational settings, employers can benefit by ensuring that employees improve their conflict resolution skills, ranging from better job focus and performance through higher job satisfaction and morale, to reduced stress and improved

workplace wellness. Though conflict can simply reflect differing points of view, when not addressed or badly managed it can be detrimental to organizational health (Jehn, 1997). Health Canada has also affirmed that "employees who report the following sources of stress are more likely than others to be absent for six or more days [...] interpersonal relations [conflict]; job control; and management practices" (Health Canada, 1998, sec. 4).

Employers should focus on workplace conflict because of its adverse effects, which can be felt on multiple levels. First level effects are normally direct and can be easily quantifiable. Such effects can include lost revenue and employee replacement costs. Second level effects can be more difficult to quantify, but can include increased management activities and time spent replacing departed employees, amongst others. Finally, third level effects are impacts that are quasi-impossible to truly quantify, but include miscommunication, passive-aggressive behaviour and poor image of the team/organization (Cram, Richard, & MacWilliams, 2010).

Taking into account the adverse impacts of conflict presented above, employers should ensure that they are better equipped to grasp some of the primary sources of conflict, including whether a person's work design, also known as the fundamentals of someone's work or nature of the work, can lead to certain types of conflict. This would help in knowing if certain types of work designs inherently create a stronger predisposition to the emergence of a type workplace conflict. In addition to this, employers should consider impacts individual personality can have on workplace conflict. Given that managers have been found to dedicate about 42 percent of their time on conflict related negotiations (Watson & Hoffman, 1996), there is value in a better understanding of the underlying influences that affect workplace conflict. This can help management to be better prepared to respond, deal with, and thus prevent conflict. Organizations should ideally be in a position to identify what elements of work can expose people to the risk of experiencing a particular type of conflict at work as well as the impacts personality traits can have. In order to better equip employees to address conflict and ensure proper conflict management, employers should be in a position to understand the sources of conflict, and thus ensure that conflict becomes constructive and not destructive.

Research Objectives

The purpose of this research is to establish the contribution of work design and personality traits on the type of workplace conflict that emerges in the workplace. In this view, the following research question is formulated:

What are the effects of work design and personality traits on the type of workplace conflict that emerges at work?

More specifically, the objectives of this research are to:

1. Establish if work design characteristics are related to the manifestation of a type conflict in the workplace;
2. Test the moderating effects of personality traits on the relationship between work design and workplace conflict.

Research Relevance in Industrial Relations

This research paper is pertinent to industrial relations as it helps to isolate the workplace factors that affect the manifestation of a particular type of workplace conflict. Workplace conflict is often a precursor to mental health problems, staff turnover, absenteeism, presenteeism, production issues and salary loss, amongst other organizational costs (Dana, 1999). In addition, the number of employees seeking help for work-related conflict has increased from 23 percent in 1999 to close to 30 percent in 2001 (Shepel, 2002). As a result, it is important to identify if the nature of a person's work and a person's personality are associated with the type of workplace conflict that emerges in a workplace. By identifying these factors, employers can better predict, prepare and address workplace conflict. Such measures could include specific and targeted training for particular occupational groups who are at higher risk of developing a particular type of workplace conflict. It could even motivate organizations to provide ad-hoc or preventive involvement of workplace mediators for targeted interventions aimed towards specific occupational groups. These measures could deter long term costs and ensure a proactive approach towards critical issues. Past research has identified different types of conflict that are nurtured by various types of environments. It can consequently be established that different work

designs can foster different types of stressors and generate stress factors that are unique to the specific work design. As a result, it is possible that different types of work will provoke the emergence of different types of conflict, and we can consider that a person's particular personality traits can moderate these relations.

Structure of the Master Thesis

This Master's thesis includes five chapters. In the first chapter, we will discuss the theoretical context of the research, more specifically touching on the literature review and conclusions of past research regarding conflict, work design and personality traits. Chapter two will detail the conceptual model along with the hypotheses. The methodology will be the central subject of chapter three, where details of the data collection procedure, participants, materials, ethical considerations and plan for results analysis will be presented. Chapter four cover will cover the research results, more specifically the statistical data results. A discussion will be presented in chapter five and finally, a conclusion will end this master thesis.

CHAPTER 1- THEORETICAL BACKGROUND (STATE OF RESEARCH)

Chapter one aims to bring forth research analysis on the subject of conflict, work design and personality traits. A review of pertinent research, including the relations between the concepts of conflict, work design and personality traits will be presented for each of these respective subjects.

1.1 Conflict in the Workplace

In literature, conflict can be defined in many ways. According to the Center for Conflict Resolution International (online, 2010, sec. 1), conflict is defined as “a difference of wants, needs, or expectations”. When considering that a workplace is at its core a combination of people’s variations in needs and expectations, accordingly conflict can and will occur (Center for Conflict Resolution International, online, 2010). According to Deutsch (1973) conflict represents incompatible activities where the actions of a person interfere with those of others. Jehn (1995) has presented conflict as the perceptions of engaged parties who maintain different points of view or who have interpersonal incompatibilities. Barki and Hartwick (2001) have defined conflict as a mix of disagreement, interference and negative emotion. De Dreu and Weingart (2003) indicated in their research that conflict is the process where there is a perceived or real difference that leads to tension between team members. Katz and Kahn (1978, p. 615) defined conflict as a “specific type of interaction, marked by obstruction, struggle, constraining or prejudicial act and by resistance or retaliation against these efforts”. Hatch (1997) has additionally defined organizational conflict as the contrary to cooperation. The author has recognized conflict as an open discussion between parties in an organisation, which reflects negative manifestations and disrupts cooperation and is done by destroying trust and closing communication channels (Hatch, 1997). Putman and Poole (1987) as well as Thomas (1992) have all summarized conflict to include three general themes. According to these authors three properties must be present for conflict to exist: a) interdependence, which is present when the attainment of someone’s goals/work depends, at least partially, on the actions of another other person, b) disagreement, which is present when a someone thinks that there is a discrepancy in values, needs, interests, opinions, goals, or objectives, and c) interference, which manifests itself when one or more persons interfere with, or oppose, the other person's attainment of their

interests, objectives, or goals. Though there seems to be little consensus on a general definition of conflict, as different authors have focused on different points of the conflict theme, Putnam and Poole (1987) have stated that definitions of conflict will generally involve the three elements presented above: interdependence, disagreement and interference. It is also important to highlight that conflict can transpire between either two individuals (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993), within small groups/work teams, or between larger groups, such as work units and work sections (Jehn, 1995).

1.1.1 Types of conflicts

As shown in Table 1 below, many scholars view conflict as having two related yet distinct dimensions. This evident division between *task* and *relationship* within conflict typologies is similar to other organizational theories which also differentiate between tasks and the interpersonal dimensions of organizational life. These organizational theories include leadership (Fiedler, 1978) and group function theories (Bales, 1958; Ancona & Caldwell, 1988).

Table 1. Typologies of Conflict Types ¹

Authors	Types de conflict
Amason and Sapienza (1997)	Two types of conflict: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cognitive conflict is a task-oriented disagreement arising from differences in perspective. ▪ Affective conflict is individual-oriented disagreement arising from personal disaffection.
Bono, Boles, Judge and Lauer (2002)	Two types of conflict: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Whether the conflict is about a task versus interpersonal relationships. ▪ Whether the conflict involves viewpoints, ideas, or opinions versus affect, feelings, or emotions.

¹ The authors in this table are presented in alphabetical order.

Table 1 (cont'd)

Brehmer, (1976)	<p>Two types of conflict:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cognitive conflict is defined as being task-oriented and develops from differences in judgment or perspective. ▪ Affective conflict is defined as emotional and develops from personalized incompatibilities or disputes.
Coser (1956)	<p>Two types of conflict:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Task conflict which is goal orientated, where people seek specific gains. ▪ Emotional conflict, which is a projected frustration with interpersonal interactions.
Guetzkow and Gyr (1954)	<p>Two types of conflict:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Substantive, or task conflict, which is “intellectual opposition among participants, deriving from the content of the agenda” (p. 380). ▪ Affective, relationship conflict as “tension by emotional clashes aroused during the interpersonal struggle involved in solving the group’s agenda problem (p.380)
Janssen, Van de Vliert and Veenstra (1999)	<p>Two types of conflict:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Task conflict in team decision making refers to disagreements about the work to be done, including issues such as the allocation of resources, application of procedures, and the development and implementation of policies. ▪ Person conflict in team decision making refers to the occurrence of identity oriented issues, where personal or group beliefs and values come into play.

Table 1 (cont'd)

<p>Jehn (1992, 1995, 1997), Jehn and Mannix, 2001)</p>	<p>Two types of conflict:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Emotional conflict, or affective conflict, comprises personal and affective elements which include friction, tension and dislike among members within the group. According to Jehn (1992) it is “an awareness by the parties involved that there are interpersonal incompatibilities” (p. 10) where “people tend to dislike others who do not agree with them and who do not share similar beliefs and values.” (p. 10). ▪ Task conflict, or cognitive conflict, involves the disparity that can subsist in viewpoints and opinions as related to the task. It is the “awareness by the parties involved that there are disagreements about the actual tasks being performed” (p.11) and “differences in viewpoints and opinions pertaining to the task” (p 11). In addition, according to Jehn (1995) group work can enhance the emergence of conflict. <p>Jehn (1997) also presents in her research an added typology called process conflict, or more specifically conflict which touches on <i>how</i> task accomplishment should progress within a work unit, who's responsible for what, and how things should be delegated, which includes divergence about assignments of duties or resources.</p>
<p>Pinkley (1990)</p>	<p>Two types of conflict:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Task disagreement ▪ Interpersonal disagreement <p>The author frames conflict based on three different dimensions: a) task versus relationship, b) emotional versus intellectual and c) compromise versus win.</p>
<p>Priem and Price (1991)</p>	<p>The author presents types of conflict based on cognitive, task-related and social emotional typologies, where the social-emotional angle is characterized by interpersonal disagreements not directly related to the task.</p>

Except for a few more recent exceptions (O'Reilly et al., 1998), the distinction between task and relationship conflict has been relatively stable and remains largely unchanged (Simons & Peterson, 2000). It is of relevance to add that the difference between task and relationship conflict is not always objective, as emotions and interpersonal conflict can often become intertwined with tasks themselves. The distinction, however, between task and relationship conflict is nonetheless made by individuals who experience a conflict situation, as supported by Pinkley (1990) as well as Simons and Peterson (2000), who all confirmed that individuals do in fact make such a distinction about their conflict situations.

Conflict in itself often involves a substantive message that can result in an interpersonal exchange that ultimately relays information about a relationship itself (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967; Folger & Poole, 1984). Consequently, it is possible that task related conflicts may transform into relationship conflicts, such as presented in Jehn's (1997) research where task conflicts lead to relationship conflicts when they remained unresolved. This is additionally confirmed by Amason & Sapienza (1997) who concluded that teams that stimulate conflict can unknowingly trigger affective conflict. Since most conflict related attributions are personal rather than situational (Ginzel, 1994), task conflicts can often be perceived as personal attacks. According to Simons and Peterson (2000), scholars have offered possible explanations for why task conflict and relationship conflict are consistently correlated. The authors suggest that task conflict leads to relationship conflict through a process of mis-attribution. This occurs because members of a group consistently interpret the behavior of other members of the group. Such interpretations can include inferring intentions, evaluating whether the source of a behavior they see from someone is internal or external, and assessing the completeness and/or accuracy of the arguments made by others. When this attribution process brings a conflicting party to conclude that a particular behaviour is a personal attack (Jehn, 1997; Torrance, 1957) or is a hidden agenda (Amason, 1996; Amason & Sapienza, 1997; Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988), a task related conflict will then generate relationship conflict through biased information processing and self-fulfilling prophecy. This type of interpretation process can then create situations of distrust. When distrust exists in a relationship, an individual will then interpret ambiguous conflict behaviours to have ill intent and also display distrust in their own behaviour. Though interrelated, Bono et al. (2002) stated in their research that it is nonetheless important to

distinguish between task and relationship conflict because of the implications that each type has on attributions and subsequent behaviour.

Relationship conflict, or the perception of personal animosities and incompatibility, may be described as the outline of task conflict. Studies from Deutsch (1969), Evan (1965), Guetzkow and Gyr (1954), Gladstein, (1984), Janssen et al. (1999), Jehn (1995) as well as Wall and Nolan (1986) documented the negative effects of relationship conflict on group satisfaction and commitment, all while encouraging hypothesis-confirming negative attributions for other's behaviour (Janssen et al., 1999; Simons & Peterson, 2000). Relationship conflict can also negatively affect group decision quality in three interrelated ways. This is done by: 1) limiting the information processing ability of the group because group members spend their time and energy focusing on each other rather than on the group problems (Evan, 1965; Jehn & Mannix, 2001); 2) limiting group members' cognitive functioning by increasing their stress and anxiety levels (Jehn & Mannix, 2001; Staw, Sandelands & Dutton, 1981); and 3) encouraging hostile attributions towards other group members' behaviour, which can create a self-fulfilling prophecy of mutual hostility and conflict escalation (Baron, 1991; Janssen et al., 1999; Torrance, 1957; Walton, 1969). In sum, substantial literature has indicated that relationship conflict is detrimental to decision quality and to affective group commitment. Task related conflict is also not always positive for group relations and its performance (Jehn, 1995) as it reduces group satisfaction, particularly during periods with high levels of conflict (Amason, 1996; Amason & Sapienza, 1997). This type of conflict can, however, generally be positive for a group by generating opportunities for debate, fostering the emergence of various skills, cultivating different points of views, and by improving strategic decision making (Mitroff, 1982; Bantel & Jackson, 1989; Schweiger et al., 1986, 1989).

1.1.2 Organizational Sources of Conflicts

There can be various causes to workplace conflict, and they can be linked to or be found within an organization itself. Gordon (1987) cited five key factors that explain conflict escalation within organizations: (i) as departments grow, people lose touch and contact with other departments and even members of a department start to think differently from other areas; (ii) the enhancement of

financial measures as tools to motivate management and as a result the establishment of different profit centers inside an integrated organization; (iii) the increasing emphasis in functional specialization, the politics of promotion and a recruitment strategy that strengthens the isolation of departments instead of encouraging versatility ; (iv) the little room there is for employees to show criticism amongst each other; (v) client demands, which in turn can create pressures for departments to work more effectively thus creating conflicts among departments.

Another reason pointed out in literature for the occurrence of conflict is the asymmetric degree of interdependence that can affect the level of trust and commitment of groups (Kumar, Scheer, & Steenkamp, 1995). Asymmetric interdependence occurs when parties have different levels of dependence amongst each other. That is, in one same group some individuals can depend on people that, in turn, show independence in relation to them. In total interdependence, on the other hand, individuals are totally dependent on one another. Kumar, Scheer and Steenkamp (1995) state that relationships with total interdependence have less conflict than the ones with asymmetric interdependence. For Jung (2003), conflict is smaller in highly dependent relationships because, in general, the dependent party conforms itself. Furthermore, while examining the level of relationship conflict that individuals experience, Barki and Hartwick (2001) proposed that sources of conflict can include characteristics which are related to an individual (personality, demographics, education/experience, organizational status, organizational role/department and needs/interests/goals), a team (size, heterogeneity, leadership, team processes and history), a project (system characteristics/importance, resources, time pressure/constraints, success criteria and top management support) and an organization (organizational culture and organizational climate).

Turner and Weed (1983) in their research demonstrated that organizational conflicts often entail the elements of power, organizational demands and worth. They stated that these three elements are often matched through organizational arrangements in order to resolve the conflict. More specifically, according to the authors *power* involves the capacities and means that people have at their disposal to get work done. Power can often be linked to budgetary discretion, personal influence, information, time, space, staff size and dependence on others. Power can create conflicts if misused but if used efficiently, it can create an environment of cooperation.

Organizational demands are linked to expectations concerning work performance. Expectations in the workplace with regards to work performance can often be very high and consequently render them unrealistic. If performance expectations are not satisfied, people can feel negative emotions such as anger and discontent, and as a result conflict situations can arise. The third element, *worth*, is linked to a person's self-esteem. People naturally want to demonstrate their worth in an organization. Management usually has in place hierarchal role with regards to compensation, performance appraisals and bonus', and what an employee receives generally reflects, what is perceived as, their worth. Accordingly, an individual may feel loss of worth if some basic needs are not fulfilled. Generally, conflicts arise when power, organizational demands and feelings of personal worth are not correctly matched. Tosi, Rizzo and Carroll (1986) identified organizational causes of conflict by presenting workplace factors, often linked to work and its design, used to rectify or even avoid conflicts. These factors include establishing clear goals; minimizing vagueness; minimizing authority; bettering policies, procedures and rules; rearranging existing resources or obtaining new resources; shifting communications; personnel moves and altering the reward systems.

According to Kenneth (1992), there are four different types of variables or forces pressuring conflicting parties: a) behavioural predispositions, or preferred styles of the conflicting parties (hierarchies or habits) b) social pressures, also known as normative forces pressuring the conflict parties which can often come from representatives of the conflicting parties or "ambient social pressure" from bystanders; c) incentive structures, or the parties' stakes in the conflict and the degree of conflict of interest between the parties different concerns and d) rules and procedures, or constraints upon the interaction process, such as decisions, rules and negotiating procedures.

Based on the above literature review analysis, it can be summarized that authors have attributed many causes for the emergence of conflict in the workplace. To summarize, the causes touch on characteristics intrinsic to an organization and to an individual's particularities.

1.2 Work Design

This section will explore the different facets of work, more specifically the different paradigms of work design theory. It will also explore the various distinctions that different types of work can encompass. Finally, this section will also detail the different psychological and psychosocial impacts that these work design differences can have on employees.

1.2.1 Work Design Theory

Work design theory is found in numerous different disciplines, including operations management, ergonomics, industrial engineering, and organizational psychology (Morgeson & Campion, 2003). This field research focuses on the actual design of work as well as the content and structure of the work that individuals perform, a term which often extends to the broader term of “team”. Work design has important practical pertinence for organizations considering that at its core it attempts to ensure efficiency within work methods, while considering organizational processes, and seeks to ensure satisfaction with for its incumbents. Over the years, multiple theoretical frameworks have been created in work design theory, namely scientific management, job enrichment approaches, sociotechnical systems theory, social information processing perspective and interdisciplinary model of work design. These frameworks are briefly described in the following sections.

1.2.1.1 Scientific Management Approach

This approach is based on the principles of specialization and simplification. It is on the perspective that management should decide precisely how to divide and design work and its processes. As a result, management will put in place control mechanisms so that work is completed as per their specific demands (Morgeson & Campion, 2003). These notions have based themselves on efficiency oriented approaches, and are implemented by designing or creating jobs which optimize efficiency. As an example, this is often done by simplifying work and reducing unnecessary processes or distractions as well as not changing employees between tasks in encouraging them to increase efficiency.

1.2.1.2 Job Enrichment Approaches

There are two general notions inked to this the Job Enrichment Approach perspective and they include, a) the Motivator-Hygiene Theory and b) the Job Characteristics Theory. Firstly, the Motivator-Hygiene Theory looks at how work can motivate people by differentiating between elements of work that are classified as satisfying (motivators) and dissatisfying (hygiene factors) (Herzberg et al., 1959 in Morgeson & Campion, 2003). A motivator can include recognition, achievement and career advancement, which can all be seen as intrinsic elements. Hygiene factors are elements external to the actual work itself and can include workplace policies and salary.

Secondly, the Job Characteristics Theory (Morgeson & Campion, 2003) sets-forth the notion that there exist five work characteristics that in turn generate critical psychological states in its incumbents, which ultimately will result in a set of positive work outcomes. These characteristics include a) skill variety, or using a large amount of an employee's skills and abilities, b) task identity, or the extent to which an employee has to accomplish a complete series of tasks with a clear beginning and end, c) task significance, or the impact the work has on the lives of others, d) autonomy, or the level of freedom and independence someone has to do their work, and e) feedback, or the level of which the work is able signal to the employee the results of the work being done (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). *Skill variety*, *task identity*, and *task significance* are said to increase the meaning of work. *Autonomy* increases the experiences of responsibility for the work outcomes. And finally *feedback*, which provides knowledge concerning the results of the work. The psychological states generated from these work characteristics in question are said to influence four particular outcomes related to the workplace: internal work motivation, growth satisfaction, general satisfaction and work effectiveness.

1.2.1.3 Sociotechnical Systems Theory

This approach puts forward the idea that organizations and companies are comprised of people interacting with one another as well as a technical system that used to produce goods and services (Trist & Bamforth, 1951 cited in Morgeson & Campion, 2003). That relationship has a reciprocal and dynamic impact on the operation and suitability of technology and the behaviour

of those who operate it. There are, however, three conditions to be met to ensure the positive use of technology: 1) adequate differentiation of the autonomous tasks that are completed, 2) adequate boundary control, where employees can influence and control transactions in the task environment and 3) ability to control the immediate task environment so that their behaviour can be regulated in order to produce goods.

1.2.1.4 Social Information Processing Perspective

This perspective puts forth that people adapt their attitudes, behaviour and beliefs to their social context in conjunction with facets of their past and present behaviour (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978 cited in Morgeson & Campion, 2003). It is based on four essential ideas regarding a person's social environment: 1) one's social environments can provide cues as to what elements they will use to characterize their work environment, 2) the social environment can provide information about how a person will weigh the multiple dimensions related to a work environment (e.g., if the person gives more importance to autonomy versus variety of skill), 3) the social context can provide cues about how others have evaluated their work environments on the selected dimensions, and 4) the social context can provide a direct evaluation of the work setting in relation to positive or negative dimensions, thus allowing the person to construct a rationale in order to make sense of a shared affective reaction. This approach proposes that different types of work create different social contexts that require employees to adapt.

1.2.1.5 Interdisciplinary Models of Work design

Beginning with the proposal that most work design research has been done independently from one another, this perspective states that there are at least four essential approaches to work design, each one focusing on particular yet different outcomes: 1) mechanistic model (increasing simplification of work, specialization and repetition of work), 2) motivational model (enriching the work of employees by increasing the variety in work or provided autonomy with which the work is done), 3) perceptual model, (reducing the information processing requirements of work so that there is a decrease in mistakes, accidents and overload) and 4) biological model (alleviate the physical stress of work) (Morgeson & Campion, 2003).

Work design and its related theories essentially examine the content and structure of the work that individuals perform, even extending to the design of work around teams (Oldham, 1996 cited in Morgeson & Campion, 2003). Most integrated work design theories factor in contextual influences, characteristics of work, mediating mechanism and work outcomes. These approaches demonstrate that work shouldn't be examined as a one-dimensional activity, but that it is rather a multi-dimensional activity where the numerous elements *about* work and *around* work impact work design and what you do.

1.2.2 Characteristics of Work design

In this section, we will examine the characteristics of work design and the effects they have on people. Hackman and Oldham's (1980) job characteristics approach suggested that five particular work characteristics (skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback) produce critical psychological states in job incumbents. These psychological states influence the outcomes of internal work motivation, growth satisfaction, general satisfaction, and work effectiveness. More specifically, work design is important for a range of individual, group and organizational outcomes (Morgeson & Campion, 2003; Parker & Wall, 1998; Wall & Martin, 1987). The work characteristics of skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback have been found to have positive links with a number of affective outcomes, and although smaller, also on relationship and behavioural related outcomes (Fried & Ferris, 1987; Loher, Noe, Moeller & Fitzgerald). Morgeson and Humphrey (2006) addressed the gap that exists in work and work design research which were, according to the authors, incomplete. These incomplete work design approaches included the Job Diagnostic Survey (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) and the Multimethod Work Design Questionnaire (Campion, 1988; Campion & Thayer, 1985). They addressed this gap by creating the Work Design Questionnaire (WDQ) and consequently acknowledged not only jobs, but also the link between jobs and the broader environment. They identified and integrated previously described work characteristics and developed a measure to establish how *work* is characterised.

The WDQ (Morgeson & Campion, 2003) aims to signal contextual influences that impact

various outcomes. This includes social (e.g., Leader behaviour and positive and negative social cues) and structural (i.e., organizational structure and technology) influences; the characteristics of work, which includes job complexity (i.e., skill, autonomy, etc.); the social environment (i.e., friendship, social support, etc.), and; the physical demands (i.e., physical activity and work conditions). Along with mediating mechanisms such as critical psychological states, empowerment and knowledge levels, there are specific outcomes that are shaped from each specific characteristic of work such as psychological, behavioural, human resource and role definition outcomes. Morgeson and Humphrey (2006) confirmed that there exist differences between jobs and their work. They state that jobs in professional occupations will have higher levels of knowledge characteristics and autonomy than jobs in nonprofessional occupations (professionals have a higher level of task complexity, information processing capacity, problem solving skills, skill variety, work scheduling autonomy, decision-making autonomy, and work methods autonomy). In addition, jobs in nonprofessional groups will have higher levels of physical demands and less positive work conditions than jobs in professional groups. Also, this research confirmed that jobs with work design in the “human life” fields will have higher levels of tasks significance than jobs in other fields. Task characteristics (decision-making autonomy; work methods autonomy; task variety; significance; feedback from job) and knowledge characteristics (job complexity; information processing; problem solving; skill variety; specialization) are significantly related to work satisfaction. In developing a comprehensive measure of work and work design characteristics, Morgeson and Humphrey’s (2006) WDQ concluded that motivational work characteristics are related to a) task characteristics, as in how the work itself is accomplished as well as the range and nature of tasks (autonomy, task variety, task significance, task identity and feedback from job), b) knowledge characteristics, or the types of knowledge, skills and abilities required to do the job (job complexity, information processing, problem solving, skill variety and specialization), c) social characteristics (social support, interdependence, interaction outside of the organization and feedback from others), and d) contextual characteristics, or characteristics related to the environment (ergonomics, physical demands, work conditions and equipment use).

Morgeson and Humphrey (2006) demonstrated, as shown in Table 2, that work categories, between professional and nonprofessional categories, do in fact vary in their work

characteristics, confirming that different types of work have fundamentally different features. As presented in Table 2, task characteristics are mainly considered to be elements that are related with how the work itself is done, in addition to the range and nature of tasks associated to a particular job. One of the most researched characteristics studied is autonomy, which includes work scheduling, decision making and work methods autonomy. Knowledge characteristics on their end denote the types of work demands that are related to knowledge, skill and ability. This includes, according to the authors, necessary specialization. Problem solving signifies the level to which the work requires incumbents to have unique ideas or solutions. This characteristic reflects the more active cognitive processing required by the work. Job complexity reflects the level to which tasks related to the work are difficult and complex to perform. Work conditions touches on the actual environment within which a job is performed. The amount of information processing needed at work reflects the degree to which work requires attending to and processing data or other information. Physical demands denote the level of physical activity or effort required for the work to be done. Sand finally, skill variety indicates the extent to which work requires an individual to use a variety of different skills to complete the work (Hackman & Oldham, 1980 in Morgeson and Humphrey, 2006).

Table 2. Means of Jobs Across Occupational Categories

Work characteristic	Occupational category	
	Professional	Nonprofessional
Job complexity	3.94	3.12
Information processing	4.42	3.81
Problem solving	3.83	3.55
Skill variety	4.30	3.98
Specialization	4.00	3.93
Work scheduling autonomy	4.00	3.58

Table 2 (cont'd)

Decision-making autonomy	4.19	3.80
Work methods autonomy	4.03	3.76
Physical demands	2.06	3.60
Work conditions	3.86	2.62
	Human life-focused	Nonhuman life-focused
Significance	4.38	
	Sales	Non sales
Interaction outside organization	4.37	3.47

Note. All means across occupational categories are significantly different except specialization. This table is reproduced from Morgeson and Humphrey (2006).

Table 2 and the WDQ put forth that jobs within broad work categories differ on certain work characteristics; more specifically that certain occupations tend to have higher or lower levels of particular work characteristics.

1.2.3 The Psychological and Psychosocial Impacts of Work Design on Employees

In order to demonstrate that different types of work can have varying impacts on people, we can examine the state of research on individual outcomes of work. Firstly, it is important to state that Spector and O'Connell (1994) and Thomas (1992) categorized conflict as a workplace stressor. In addition, according to the Canadian Center for Occupational Health and Safety (2008), workplace stress can occur when there is inadequacy or conflict between job demands on the employee and the amount of control an employee has over meeting these demands, thus demonstrating that job characteristics do in fact have impacts on their incumbents. In general this type of stressor can be the combination of high job demands, where employees are not given the leeway to make decisions regarding their work or work environment. These types of jobs also do not provide incumbents with the opportunity to learn new skills or problem solve, and also provide a low amount of control. Over time, this type of situation can lead to stress, as demonstrated in research by Karasek (1979). Such factors include features unique to the job (i.e., workload, hours, autonomy, etc), role in the organization (i.e., role conflict, ambiguity or

responsibility), career development (i.e., job security and satisfaction), relationships at work (i.e., managers, colleagues or subordinates), and organizational structure/climate (i.e., communication, management style, participation in decision-making). The main sources of workplace stress, according to the 2000 General Social Survey (Stansfeld, 2005), are 34% too many demands/hours, 13% job insecurity, 15% poor interpersonal relationships, 13% risk of accident of injury and 10% new computer skills.

The research of Humphrey, Nahrgang, and Morgeson (2007) presented elements that can impact a variety of work outcomes. These elements include a) task variety, or the extent to which an incumbent performs different tasks in their job, b) job complexity, or the extent to which a job is multifaceted or difficult to do, and c) information processing, or the extent to which a job requires incumbents to focus/concentrate on or manage information. More specifically, all three characteristics demonstrated large relationships with job satisfaction, and both job complexity and task variety were strongly related to work overload. The results support the notion that different work elements/characteristics promote various psychological and emotional outcomes for incumbents. The authors' conclusions stated that "participants showed that 14 work characteristics explained, on average, 43% of the variance in the 19 worker attitudes and behaviors examined. For example, motivational characteristics explained 25% of the variance in subjective performance, 2% in turnover perceptions, 34% in job satisfaction, 24% in organizational commitment, and 26% in role perception outcomes. Beyond motivational characteristics, social characteristics explained incremental variances of 9% of the variance in subjective performance, 24% in turnover intentions, 17% in job satisfaction, 40% in organizational commitment, and 18% in role perception outcomes. Finally, beyond both motivational and social characteristics, work context characteristics explained incremental variances of 4% in job satisfaction and 16% in stress" (Humphrey, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007, p.1332).

According to De Jonge, Bosma, and Siegrist (2000b), jobs that require high effort and that provide low reward, or jobs with high demands and low control, generate more complaints, higher dissatisfaction, emotional exhaustion, psychosomatic and physical health problems. Siegrist's (1996) Effort-Reward Imbalance model sets forth that one's work efforts must

adequately represent the obtained rewards in order for there to be satisfaction and to deter a toxic work environment. De Jonge, Dollard, Dormann, Leblanc and Houtman (2000) have examined the concept of job demand and job control by specifically studying work in the fields of health-care, transportation, bank/insurance, retail trade and warehouses. Through this research they established that in specific work groups, such as those with high-strain versus active jobs, there are also several interaction effects on well-being and health. Dwyer and Ganster (1991) also concluded that though work with subjective workloads did not increase lateness and absenteeism, work with low perceived control did. By examining work groups comprised of clerical employees, university professors and sales associates, Narayan, Menon and Spector (1999) found that each group had a unique combination of stressors related to the job. Relationship conflict, work overload and time wasters were stressors across all occupations, however, lack of control and work overlord was specific to the clerical group. The academic and sales group denoted relationship conflict as a major stressor. Roxbrough (1996) presented a job stress model and identified the moderating effects of this stress as being the self-direction of the work, job demands and co-worker social support, which all ultimately influence overall well-being. In addition, work groups with low decision authority/high job demands and those with effort-reward imbalances are at higher risk of psychological disorder (Stansfeld, Fuhrer, Shipley and Marmot, 1999). The occupational strain indicators presented by Van der Doef, Maes and Diekstra (2000) suggest that work groups with high time pressures, low control and low-social support lead to lower well-being. McMahon (2004) presented in her research that work factors such as decision making authority, job insecurity, psychological demands and at job/outside job support are linked to psychological distress. Moderator variables related to conflict situations developed within working groups (teams) according to Cyr (2006) can be related to the characteristics of the task, in addition to the size of the work team itself.

It is also of importance in this discussion to consider past research that has proposed that different work designs can impact behavioural and psychological states differently. Research has shown that industries that present higher levels of psychological distress include those in the field of machinery, equipment and supplies wholesale distribution as well as those who work in support activities for agriculture and forestry; building material and supplies. Included to this list is work as stationary engineers, machinery mechanics; power station and systems operators;

other elementary services; construction support staff and labourers; motor vehicle mechanics have a higher probability of psychological distress (Coulombe, 2007). The author additionally stated that demands at work have a significant link to psychological distress. Desharnais-Pépin (2008) proposed that certain professions where work conditions are more difficult could lead to more extreme tensions for an individual. More specifically, blue collar, white collar, semi-professionals, supervisors and low-qualified employees are at higher risk for psychological distress compared to professional groups including executives, professionals and managers (Marchand et al., 2005), or more specifically professions with inferior qualifications versus professional groups of high hierarchical level. Desharnais-Pépin (2008) also set forth that tensions generated by the way work is organized at the company level would better explain the prevalence of psychological distress and workplace stress.

Karasek (1979) presented two principal elements of the psychosocial work environment, stating that different jobs will present variations between psychological job demands and decision latitude (decision authority and skill discretion). According to his 'Job Strain Model' the worst combination for a person's well-being is to have high demands and low decision latitude. Further research has added the important dimension of work social support to this model (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). Karasek et al. (1998) developed the Job Content Questionnaire (JCQ) which measures social and psychological characteristics of jobs with regards to decision latitude, psychological demands, social support, physical demands and job insecurity scales. These are used to measure high-demand/low-control/low-support models of job strain development. The demand/control model predicts stress-related risks and active passive behavioural correlations between jobs. The social support dimension of the JCQ ensures that when examining job stress and behaviour, social relations in the workplace are equally assessed. The dimension of psychological demands relates to how hard employees work, organisational constraints on task completion and conflicting demands. This model presented an occupational distribution of psychological demands and decision latitude. Active jobs with high demands and high control are high prestige occupations: public officials, physicians, engineers, nurses, and managers of all kinds. Those classified as passive jobs, with low demands and low control, include clerical employees such as billing clerks, and low-status service personnel such as janitors. High-strain

jobs, with high demands and low control, include machine related operations such as assemblers, cutting operatives, freight handlers, as well as other low-status service operatives such as waiters.

“Toxic jobs”, which are job that are noxious to either an employee’s physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual health, have been also studied by the Office of National Statistics Survey in the United Kingdom who examined psychiatric morbidity (Stansfeld, 2005). Their research shows that occupations with a high prevalence of mental health issues included: clerks (27%), sales (26%), general managers in government and large organisations (26%), managers in transport and strong (24%), professional and technical occupations (24%), welfare associate professional (21%) and catering (20%). Occupations with a low prevalence of common mental disorders include business-finance professionals (6%), natural scientist (6%), computer analysts-programmers (9%), electrical and electronic trades (7%) and metal formers- welders (7%).

1.3 Relations Between Work design and the Emergence of Conflicts Within Organizations

Above we examined the dimensions of work design and the consequent psychosocial impacts that the variations in work can have on incumbents. We also examined the different sources of conflict in the workplace. In this section, we will examine how conflict and work design are related, such as how one’s work and its variations can be linked to workplace conflict.

As examined in section 1.2, work has significant impacts on people and the emergence of workplace conflict. More specifically, work itself can often create environments of stress, which in turn can be a source of conflict. It is consequently important to retain that conflict is often linked to situations of stress and threats, which are psychological states that can be linked to the work we do (Thomas, 1992). Stress and threats are two elements that are considered to increase emotional responses and negative arousal amongst people. Research also demonstrates that demographic attributes such as job tenure, which is the duration of time that you have been with your employer, to have been positively correlated with relationship conflict (Pelled, 1996a), and this due to self-categorization mechanisms that are created. This reveals that personal demographic attributes and the specifics of your work design can impact conflict. With regards to task related conflict, this research additionally set-forth that job related demographic

attributes, including functional background and tenure, are positively correlated with task related conflict because of the divergence of job experience, knowledge, and task perceptions. While many elements in one's environment can cause conflict, such as incompatible goals, limited resources, and irreconcilable personalities (Jehn, 1995), the basis of many organizational conflicts can be explained by underlying values regarding work, such as being rule-orientated, innovative, or attentive to details (Bar-Tal, 1989; Eisenhardt & Schoonhoven, 1990; Watson, Kumar & Michaelsen, 1993). According to De Dreu and Van der Vliert (1997), Deutsch (1973) as well as Greenberg and Baron (1999), within work groups and organizations, conflict can be linked to power disparities, to competition over limited resources, to tendencies to differentiate rather than converge, to negative interdependence patterns between work units, to ambiguity of responsibility/jurisdiction. Disagreements over resources and responsibilities create a perception of unfairness amongst groups, which results in a decrease in performance and impacts satisfaction with being part of the group itself (Jehn, 1997). Inconsistent task responsibilities hinder efficient task completion and often cultivate feelings of role ambiguity and increasing dissatisfaction, which can in turn lead to staff turnover (Katz & Kahn, 1966). According to Donais (2006) some sources of conflict include interpersonal factors (ethno-racial issues, language, cultural, personality styles, etc.), organizational issues (hierarchy, management styles, resource allocation, seniority, pay equity, accountability, etc.), trends/change (change management, downsizing, etc.) and external factors (recession, changing markets, domestic/foreign competition, etc.).

According to Kirchoff and Adams (1982), there exist four particular conditions for a conflict to emerge. These conditions include high stress environments, ambiguous roles and responsibilities, situations where there are multiple managerial superiors and environments with that tend to have a prevalence of advanced technology. In his research, Filley (1975) additionally presented factors that can instigate conflict within organizations. Firstly, there are ambiguous jurisdictions, where two individuals can have interdependent responsibilities but whose work limitations and role definitions are not clearly stated. Second, there is the existence of goal incompatibility and conflict of interest. In this scenario, conflicting goals between individuals, or a lack of clarity and barriers to accomplishment, can create conflict situations within a workplace. Thirdly, communication barriers can also be at the root of misinterpretations. Fourth, inter-independence

where one party depends on another. Fifth, creating differentiations within the organization such as specializing tasks within different and specific work units. Sixth, the involvement of specialized parties, which occurs when people specialized in different tasks work together. Seventh is behaviour regulation, which are circumstances where organizations put in place functional norms and regulations for individuals in the workplace (e.g., health and safety). Finally, unresolved prior conflicts which remain pending.

With regards to groups, Jehn (1995), via her IntraGroup Conflict Scale, considers two elements of evaluation in the emergence of conflict: Group Value Fit (VFG) and Group Value Consensus (GVC), which is the degree to which group members agree on the importance of various work values to the group. Sources of affective and cognitive conflict, with the moderating effects of task type, conflict norms and task interdependent, can affect the outcomes of performance and satisfaction amongst teams. According to this model, member interdependence exists by examining the extent to which group members are reliant on each other to perform and complete their individual jobs, and where increased interaction and dependence among members causes conflict and consequently has an intensified effect on group outcomes. More specifically, GVC is negatively related to affective conflict amongst members.

Brehmer (1976) suggested that the type of task a group performs influences the relationship between conflict and effectiveness. Routine tasks have a low level of task variability, which is defined as the variety of methods and repetitiveness required for task processes (Hall, 1972). Routine tasks generally become familiar and are completed the same way each time with predictable results (Thompson, 1967). On the other hand, non-routine tasks that require problem-solving, have few set procedures, and have high degree of uncertainty (Mason & Mitroff, 1981; Van de Ven, Delbecq, & Koenig, 1976). Cognitive conflict, consequently, increases stimulation and curiosity (Tjosvold, 1991), which may lead to positive attitudes and thus less conflict. Based on the negative effects that lack of cognitive conflict can have, such as the introduction conformity and complacency in the workplace, and the overall benefits of cognitive conflict, such as the increased number of ideas and opinions, cognitive conflict should be positively related to effectiveness in non-routine tasks. Conflict related to content issues, however, will hinder groups performing routine tasks by interfering with efficient processing (Jehn, 1997).

When groups consistently perform the same activities in the same manner every day, conflict related to that task that may arise can be counterproductive, time consuming and frustrating. As a result, Jehn's (1997) research confirms that the source and the characteristics of what a person, or a group, performs/executes inherently impacts conflict.

De Dreu and Wingart (2003) indicate that conflict has a stronger negative relation with team performance in highly complex (ex. decision making and mixed projects) than in less complex (ex. production) tasks. It consequently seems that conflict interferes less with the execution of simple, well-learned tasks than in complex tasks, though both conflict types are not productive. Consequently it can be stated that job variations and job execution can in fact impact on the emergence of conflict. Taylor, Repetti, and Seeman (1997) present that unhealthy environments threaten safety, undermine the creation of social ties, rather than creating ties, and that unhealthy environments are considered as conflictual, abusive or violent. Healthy environments however provide an atmosphere of safety, opportunities for social integration and the ability to predict and or control aspects of the work environment, where the nature of one's work can dictate the type of environment in an organization.

Based on the above research it can be summarized that sources of conflict can be due to (i) psychological distance, where employees don't feel involved in the organization and feel that their needs are not met; (ii) power and status, such as situations where employees feel powerless and alienated; (iii) differences in value and ideology, which represents underlying difference in beliefs on objectives and goals of an organization and; (iv) scarce resources, which are at the source of disagreements regarding benefits, salary and work conditions.

1.4 The Role of Personality Traits With Regards to Workplace Conflicts

As demonstrated by Barki and Hartwick (2001), personality can't be ignored as a source, influence or even precursor of relationship conflict in the workplace. Most definitions of personality tend to refer to a mental system. It is seen as a collection of psychological factors that comprise motives, emotions, and thoughts. Though there exist varying definitions of personality, the common theme is that it involves a pattern or global operation of mental systems. Warren and Carmichael (1930, p.333) presented personality as "[...]the entire mental organization of a

human being at any stage of his development. It embraces every phase of human character: intellect, temperament, skill, morality, and every attitude that has been built up in the course of one's life." Mayer (2005) followed by stating that "An individual's pattern of psychological processes arising from motives, feelings, thoughts, and other major areas of psychological function. Personality is expressed through its influences on the body, in conscious mental life, and through the individual's social behavior."

Personality is often measured or presented as a trait (Hofstee, 1994). A trait within the field of psychology has been particularly used to highlight consistent patterns in a person's behaviour (Winter et al., 1998). More research in the field has brought particular attention to the elements of number, nature and organization of what is considered the basic traits (John, Robins and Pervin, 2008). Literature on the topic of personality presents two different yet related objectives. Firstly, it is the research of individual difference, also seen as the dimensions with which people differ from one another and second, the research of individual people as unique and integrated wholes (John, Robins, & Pervin, 2008).

Cattell (1949), as cited in John, Robins and Pervin (2008), adopted the concept of trait as the essential conceptual unit of personality by stating "the ideal of a science or personality description is to build its traits upon a foundation of objective test measurements" (p. 210). There have been many efforts throughout the years to organize personality under a single taxonomy, beginning with McDougall (1932) who distinguished 5 factors of personality and followed by Cattell et al. (1970) with a complex taxonomy of 16 primary and 8 secondary factors. Goldberg went on to propose that the five key dimensions of the rating system could provide a framework for many theoretical organizations of personality, including the views of Cattell (1957), Norman (1963), Eysenck (1970), Guilford (1975), Osgood et al (1975), and Wiggins (1980) (in John, Robins and Pervin, 2008). Today there has been a general consensus on the structure of personality, which is based on Norman's (1963) taxonomy of personality attributes known as the Five-Factor Model, formerly the "Big Five" (Digman, 1990).

1.4.1 Five-Factor Model

There is a level of agreement and widespread acceptance among personality researchers that the Five-Factor Model (FFM) is a comprehensive structure for the research of personality (Wiggins & Trapnell, 1997). It essentially provides researchers with a personality typology. A trait is defined as “consistent patterns of thoughts, feelings, or actions that distinguish people from one another. Traits are basic tendencies that remain stable across the life span, but characteristic behaviour can change considerably through adaptive processes. A trait is an internal characteristic that corresponds to an extreme position on a behavioural dimension” (Timothy, *Motivating Humans* 01.138, January 27 2000, sec. 2). The FFM personality traits can be summarized as such: a) agreeableness which represents a person who is good natured, cooperative, altruistic, tender-minded, modest and trusting; b) conscientiousness which is a person that is responsible, orderly, dependable, socially prescribed impulse control that facilitates task and goal-directed behaviour, which includes thinking before acting, delaying gratification, following norms and rules, and planning; c) extraversion which signifies somebody who is talkative, social, with energetic approach to the social and material world, and somebody who positive emotionality and assertive; d) neuroticism which characterizes a person who is anxious, prone to depression, tense and worries a lot; e) and openness to experience which represents a person who is imaginative, independent, and which it linked to the complexity of a person’s mental and experiential life, including divergent thinking (Timothy, *Motivating Humans* 01.138, January 27 2000). Digman (1990) also provided a historical taxonomy and detailed listing of these five personality traits and the general meanings of each trait, as seen in Table 3. This table presents that the descriptors of the five personality traits are generally consistent and stable between authors and in time.

Table 3.

Digman's (1990) Analysis of the five dimensions of personality from Diske (1949) to Lorr (1986)

Author	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Neuroticism	Openness
Fiske (1949)	Social adaptability	conformity	Will to achieve	Emotion control	Inquiring intellect
Euscnck (1970)	Extraversion	Psychoticism	Psychoticism	neuroticism	
Types & Christal (1961)	surgency	agreeableness	dependability	emotionality	culture
Norman (1963)	surgency	agreeableness	conscientiousness	Emotional	intelligence
Borgatta (1964)	assertiveness	likeability	Task interest	emotionality	intelligence
Cattell (1957)	exvia	cortertia	Superego strength	Anxiety	intelligence
Guilford (1975)	Social activity	Paranoid disposition	Thinking introversion	Emotional stability	
Digman (1986)	Extravrsion	Friendly Compliant	Will to achieve	Neuroticism	Intellect
Hogan (1986)	Sociability and ambition	likeability	Prudence	adjustment	intellectance
Costa & McRae (1985)	extraversion	agreeableness	conscientiousness	neuroticism	openness
Peabody & Goldberg (1989)	Power	Love	Work	Affect	Intellect
Buss & Plomin (1984)	activity	sociability	impulsivity	emotionality	
Tellegen (1985)	Positive emotionality		Constraint	Negative emotionality	
Lorr (1986)	Interpersonal involvement	Level of socialisation	Self-control	Emotional stability	independent

1.5 Personality and Conflict Responses

In any conflict situation, individuals respond to circumstances in different ways (Utley, Richardson, & Pilkington, 1989). While one person can become aggressive, another person can try and escape a situation, and research has shown that one's personality can impact the response

a person can have. Consequently, proving that different personalities can live conflict differently, most research conducted on personalities types and conflict attempt to link personality to conflict management styles, hence the relation between exposure to a conflict situation and consequent reaction to it. More specifically, research has often looked at reactions in conflict situations, such as the tendency to avoid (e.g., post-poning or hiding), accommodate (e.g., satisfy needs of the individuals or groups), compromise (e.g., ensure that all parties are satisfied, willing and flexible), compete (e.g., exercise of power) or collaborate (e.g., teamwork and cooperation) (Rahim, 1983; Schneer & Chanin, 1987; Van de Vliert & Euwema, 1994). Past research has also explored the affective response individuals may have with conflict (Berry & Willingham, 1997; Côté & Mokowitz, 1998; Suls, Martin & David, 1998). Antonioni (1998) examined the relationship between the Five Factor Model personality factors (i.e., extroversion, openness, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism) and five styles of handling relationship conflict (i.e., integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising). Key results demonstrated that extroversion, conscientiousness, openness, and agreeableness have a positive relationship with integrating style. Extroversion has a positive relationship with a dominating style, while agreeableness and neuroticism have negative relationships with dominating. Extroversion, openness, and conscientiousness have a negative relationship with avoidance, while agreeableness and neuroticism have a positive relationship with avoidance. In examining conflict management styles and their outcomes, Spector and O'Connell (1994) and Barki and Hartwick (2001) also confirmed that personality², as an individual characteristic, as well as team, project and organizational characteristics, are considered in themselves as sources of conflict.

Utley, Richardson and Pilkington (1989) addressed the extent to which personality factors are related to the responses in relationship conflict situations. Two issues were examined: (a) the relationship between personality and conflict styles and (b) the consistency of conflict response styles. Conflict responses were related to particular needs of each personality types, such achievement, nurturance, endurance, and social desirability related to an integrating conflict response, dominance and understanding related to dominating. In general, the results of this research point to the importance of both personality and situational (i.e., target) factors in

² The authors do not define personality in their article

understanding responses to relationship conflict.

As proven by Utley et al. (1989), results show that not all personality factors are related to all conflict responses. Because there was some inconsistency in personality/conflict relationships across targets, these results suggest that a personality or the *individual difference* approach, which is part of relationship conflict management research, may be too restricted. This consequently demonstrates that though personality does have an impact on conflict, external factors to personality, such as one’s role in the organization, support from management and work resources (Barki & Hartwick, 2001), can also be at play. Conflict can be a multi-dimensional concept where external factors beyond personality, such as work and work design, must be taken in to account. The FFM traits with relation to conflict are presented in Table 4. This table established the general characteristics that are related to each trait and how/why particular characteristics from personality traits can be linked to conflict.

Table 4. Five Factor Model - Traits and Their Behavioural/Emotional Outcomes

Personality Trait	Description
Agreeableness (vs. antagonism)	<p>Individuals who score high on this trait are often defines as <i>altruistic, trusting, cooperative, compliant</i> and <i>moved by others’ needs</i>. This trait has been linked with the desire to maintain positive social relationships (Cost & McCrae, 1992).</p> <p>Individuals who score low on this trait are <i>cynical, tend to experience and express hostility, prefer to compete with others</i> and are described as <i>ruthless and cruel</i>. This trait is very uneasy with interpersonal relationships (Graziano & Eisenberg, 1997; Trapnell & Wiggins, 1990).</p> <p>Low agreeableness tends to experience more frequent conflict and seek more conflict from partners. They also tend to be less fond of partners (Suls et al. 1998).</p>

Table 4 (cont'd)

<p>Conscientiousness (vs. undirectedness)</p>	<p>No significant research has linked this trait and conflict. It is nonetheless related to <i>dutifulness</i>, <i>orderliness</i> and <i>achievement orientation</i>. These are characteristics that are not expected to be related to conflict (Bono et al., 2002).</p>
<p>Extraversion (vs introversion)</p>	<p>This trait is linked to being <i>positive</i>, <i>social</i>, <i>energetic</i>, <i>joyful</i>, and <i>interested in other people</i>. It has also been linked to being <i>dominant</i>, <i>assertive</i>, <i>domineering</i> and <i>forceful</i> (Cost & McCrae, 1992; Watson & Clark, 1997).</p> <p>In a conflict situation it is the dominant and forceful descriptors that are of particular importance. This trait demonstrates in research to have a preference for <i>dominant</i> and <i>competitive</i> approaches with regards to conflict resolution strategies (Schneer & Chanin, 1987).</p> <p>This trait reflects the propensity to approach rather than avoid conflict (Blickle, 1997).</p> <p>This trait is positively linked to <i>anger</i> and <i>anger intensity</i> (Buss, 1991; Geist & Gilbert, 1996; McFatter, 1998).</p> <p>This trait will <i>express feelings</i> in response to conflict (Berry & Willingham, 1997; Gesit & Gilbert, 1996).</p> <p>This trait does not seem to experience more conflict (Asendorpf & Wilpers, 1998).</p>

Table 4 (cont'd)

<p>Neuroticism (vs emotional stability)</p>	<p>This trait is described to experience <i>negative affect</i> and emotions like <i>fear, sadness, anger</i> and <i>guilt</i>. This trait is positively linked to the frequency and affect intensity of conflict (Bolger & Zuckerman, 1995; McFatter, 1998; Suls et al., 1998).</p> <p>This trait can experience more anger and hostility but does not tend to express this anger (Cost & McCrae, 1992; Watson & Clark, 1984).</p>
<p>Openness to experience (vs not open to experience)</p>	<p>This trait is described as <i>creative, inquisitive, introspective</i>, and <i>attentive to inner feelings</i> (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Hofstee, deRaad & Goldberg, 1992).</p> <p>This trait most highly predicts approaches of <i>argumentativeness</i>. Those who score high on this personality trait have tendency to seek intellectual arguments that are focused <i>positions</i>. (Blickle, 1995, 1997).</p> <p>There is not much research linking this trait to conflict however research shows that open individual do not shy fro conflict, where there is a correlations with the tendency to approach and not avoid arguments.</p>

1.5.1 Personality Traits and Conflict: the Behavioural Outcomes

Personality traits can impact conflict in many ways, and can often impact the creation and the outcomes of conflict situations. McAdams (1995) has set forth that the individual differences of a person's personality can be examined on three different levels. Firstly, there is what a person has (e.g., *traits*, Level 1), secondly what a person does (e.g., *contextually influenced strategies, goals and concerns*, Level 2) and thirdly how a person makes meaning of their experiences (e.g., *life narratives*, Level 3). The author concludes that when the link between personality and conflict is being examined it can consequently be expected that traits (Level 1) will be in relation

to conflict specific motives and behaviours (Level 2). Personality can also be expected to influence on conflict and behaviour, as well as the subsequent interpretations of the conflict situations themselves. Graziano et al. (1996, 1997) put forth that the personality trait of *agreeableness* is linked to a person's motive to maintain harmonious social relationships, which can therefore influence conflict-related behaviours, as well as interpretations of conflict events and partners. Bono et al. (2002) confirm that conflict requires more than one individual, and consequently both individuals, also known as *actor* and *partner*, and their personalities will necessarily influence the experience of conflict.

Bono et al. (2002) additionally examined the role of personality in task and relationship conflict. They conclude that individuals have stable tendencies in how they attribute their conflict experiences, and this is true temporally, across partners and situations. More specifically, they concluded that agreeableness and openness are related to relationship conflict. In their analysis, partner levels of extraversion and conscientiousness resulted with individuals' propensity to report relationship conflict. The influence of personality on attributions of relationship conflict appeared to be more consistent than the effects of personality on attributions of task conflict. However, a difference between partners with relation to extraversion raises the frequency of conflict and the reporting of task-related conflict. Those who scored high on agreeableness tended report fewer conflicts whereas those who scored high on openness and neuroticism reported more conflict. Individuals high on neuroticism and openness to experience, as well as individuals low on conscientiousness, were more likely to report their conflicts as being based on issues or tasks.

Though the literary review presented in this study puts forth many pertinent articles and publications related to work design, personality traits and conflict, there is still little relevant research done that combines all these variables. This is confirmed by Bono et al. (2002) who stated that there has been little attention on the factors that influence an individual's attributions about conflict type, or the factors that influence the degree to which conflict is attributed to task or relationship issues. The authors additionally expressed that personality isn't the only attribute to consider in conflict situations, again supporting that though it is a pertinent aspect in conflict, conflict remains a multi-dimensional concept. This confirms that the exploratory research

undertaken in this research project is needed to better understand conflict and conflict attributions.

1.6 The role of socio-demographics in conflict

As we can see in the literary review many authors concluded certain socio-demographic factors such as tenure can have an impact on the emergence of conflict. More specifically, as mentioned in section 1.2 of this research project, Pelled (1996a) indicated that work tenure can be positively correlated with relationship conflict. This author additionally demonstrated that work related demographic attributes, including functional background and tenure, are positively correlated with task-related conflict because of the divergence of work experience, knowledge, and task perceptions.

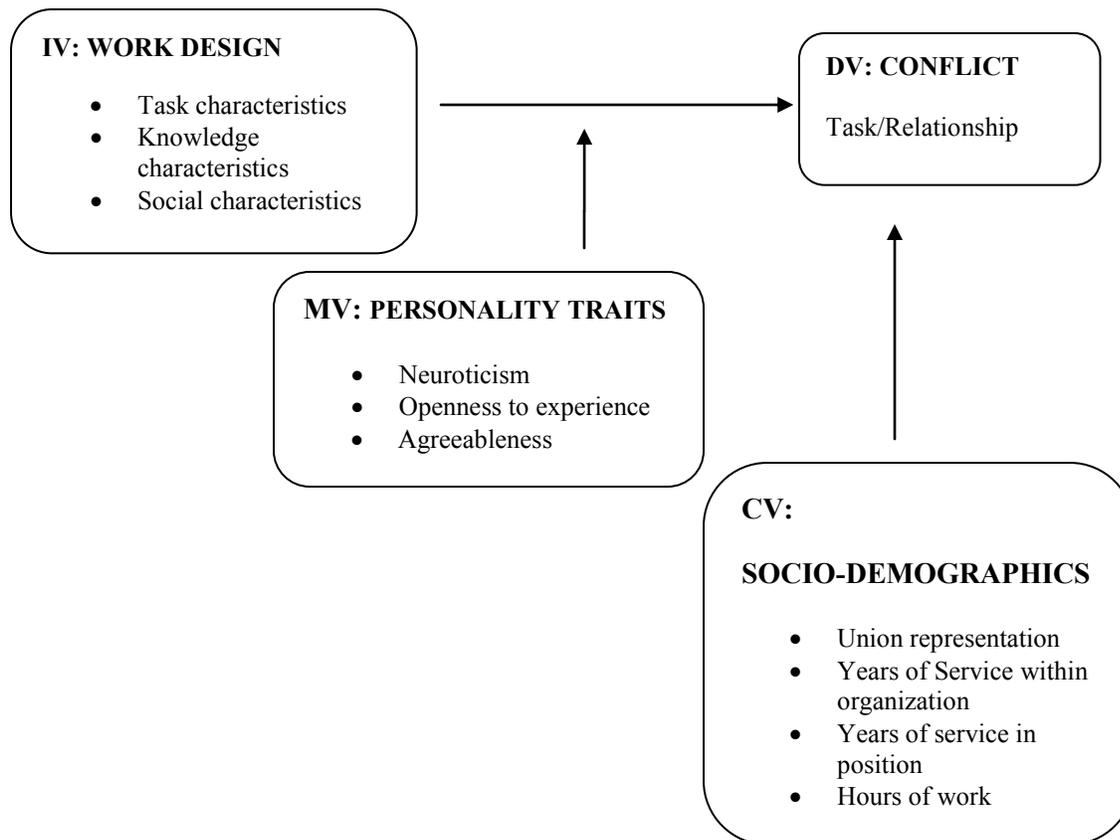
CHAPTER 2- CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

In this chapter, the conceptual model, which is based on the literature review reported in Chapter 1, will be presented. In addition, the research hypotheses related to the conceptual model will also be covered.

2.1 Conceptual Model

The principal objective of this research is to determine the role that work design and personality traits have on the type of conflict that occurs within the workplace. Based on past research and the literature review presented in Chapter 1, it is established that *conflict* is the dependent variable in this research's conceptual model. The independent variable is determined as being that of *work design*, or more specifically the nature of a person's work (work design) and the specifics of what someone actually does on a daily basis at work. Literature review has additionally been able to establish that an individual's personality can also play a role in conflict situations and therefore, *personality* is added to the conceptual model as the moderating factor. More specifically, this study includes three of the five personality traits from the Five Factor Model that have been shown to be relevant in conflict situations. As presented in the literature review, the personality traits of conscientiousness and extraversion are not strongly linked to conflict situations, and there were not retained for the purpose of this study (Bono et al., 2002; Asendorpf & Wilpers, 1998). Finally, control variables that are socio-demographic in nature are added to the model. The conceptual model is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Theoretical Model



***IV= independent variable, DV= dependent variable, CV= control variable, MV= moderator variable**

2.2 Research Hypotheses

The research hypotheses trail the conceptual model presented in Figure 1. In order to gain a better understanding of the complex relationships between work design characteristics, personality traits, and conflicts in the workplace, six hypotheses are presented.

In this research, it is expected that social characteristics of work design may decrease the level of relationship conflict. Indeed, Taylor, Repetti, and Seeman (1997) indicate that unhealthy environments undermine the creation of social ties. Person conflict, or relationship conflict, in

team decision making refers to the incidence of identity-oriented issues, whereby personal or group beliefs and values come into play. Such personalized disagreement "typically includes tension, animosity, and annoyance among team members" (Jehn, 1995, p. 258) is not directly related to the task being performed and could therefore be linked to relationship conflict. Furthermore, as proposed by Morgeson and Campion (2003), healthy workplace feedback is additionally an important element of a person's work design as it allows a person to gain knowledge on the results of the work being done. The psychological states generated from adequate work feedback includes, internal work motivation, growth satisfaction, general satisfaction and work effectiveness, which when absent can distort the work environment and lead to resentment. Another reason pointed out in literature for the occurrence of relationship conflict is the asymmetric degree of interdependence that affects the level of trust and commitment of the groups (Jehn, 1995; Kumar, Scheer, & Steenkamp, 1995). Asymmetric interdependence, which is a WDQ item (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006) identified under social characteristics, occurs when parties have different levels of dependence amongst each other, in other words when one party depends on another unilaterally in order to complete their work. When asymmetric interdependence occurs relationship conflict can be an outcome, as supported by Deutsh (1973) which indicates that conflict represents incompatible activities where the actions of a person interfere with those of others. As stated above, in unbalanced asymmetric interdependence situations, and in situations with little social support or little feedback being provided by management or others, it can be expected that social ties are undermined and that trust and commitment as destabilized and relationship conflict can occur. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 1: The level of social characteristics of work design is negatively related to the level of relationship conflict.

It is additionally expected that knowledge characteristics of work design may more strongly increase the level of task conflict. De Dreu and Wingart's (2003) research indicated that project complexity can lead to conflict situations and consequently have negative impacts on organizations. Amason (1996) and Mintzberg, Raisinghani, and Theoret (1976) indicate that the branched and ambiguous nature of complex issues can lead to task and relationship conflict since

"different positions see different environments" (Mitroff, 1982, p. 375). Such differing positions leave place to highly personal, thus mutually incompatible, images of organizational issues (Morgan, 1986; Tjosvold, 1991). Since work that requires a great deal of skill and specialization can foster multifaceted environments with more task complexity (De Dreu & Wingart, 2003) there exist more opportunities to disagree on tasks and processes themselves, such as how the tasks are carried out. De Dreu and Wingart (2003) have additionally stated that complex tasks without standard solutions require additional effort and consideration in team settings team. They denoted that "task conflict increases group members' tendency to scrutinize task issues and to engage in deep and deliberate processing of task-relevant information" (De Dreu & Wingart, 2003, p. 742). Consequently, occupations high in knowledge characteristics will be more often linked to task conflict due to the highly complex work that can be involved. Accordingly the second hypothesis of this research can be established:

Hypothesis 2: The level of knowledge characteristics of work design is positively related to the level of task conflict.

It is also anticipated that that task characteristics of work design may more strongly increase the level of task conflict. Humphrey and Morgeson (2006) classify task characteristics of work using the concepts of autonomy, task variety, task significance, and task identity. Workplace conflict can arise in situations where there is ambiguity of responsibility/jurisdiction and responsibilities (De Dreu & Van der Vliert, 1997; Deutsh, 1973; Greenberg & Baron, 1999). According to Katz and Kahn (1966), inconsistent task responsibilities can hinder efficient task completion, which can in turn cultivate feelings of role ambiguity and increasing dissatisfaction (Katz & Kahn, 1966). Task conflict in team decision situations relate to disagreements about the work to be done including issues such as the allocation of resources, application of procedures, and the development and implementation of policies (Jassen, Van De Vliert de & Veenstra, 1999). Therefore in situations where work does not have clear task identify and significance, and where there is little autonomy in their tasks, task related conflict can consequently arise. As a result, the following hypothesis is formulated.

Hypothesis 3: The level of task characteristics of work design is positively related to the level of task conflict.

Considering that personality traits have been established as being an important factor of conflict situations (as discussed in the literature review in section 1.4), it is anticipated that the relationship between the social characteristics of work design and relationship conflict in the workplace will be moderated by the level of agreeableness of a personality trait. As presented by Taylor, Repetti, and Seeman (1997), unhealthy environments with little social support undermine the creation of social ties. As presented by Hogan, Johnson and Briggs (1997), people with high levels of the trait of agreeableness, however, tend to be cooperative. Authors additionally state that they tend to conform and be compliant (Cost & McCrae, 1992). Individuals who have a high level of agreeableness are less likely to live a conflict situation because they are normally altruistic, trusting, cooperative, compliant and moved by others' needs. More specifically, in social settings agreeableness has been associated with the motivation to maintain positive social relationships (Costa & McCrae, 1992). On the contrary, those who score low on this trait are more susceptible of having a conflict situation as they are normally cynical, tend to experience and express hostility, find it hard to trust others, prefer to compete with others and are described as ruthless and cruel prefer to compete with others. These individuals tend to experience conflict more frequently and elicit more conflict from partners, and like/enjoy partners less (Suls et al., 1998). This trait is very concerned with interpersonal relationships (Graziano & Eisenberg, 1997; Trapnell & Wiggins, 1990). Based on the research cited above, it is proposed that the level of agreeableness can moderate the relationship between social characteristics of work design and a relationship conflict situation. Consequently, the following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 4: The relationship between social characteristics and relationship conflict is moderated by the level of agreeableness, such that this relationship is stronger when the level of agreeableness is low.

Similarly, it is expected that the relationship between the social characteristics of work design and relationship conflict that emerges in the workplace will be moderated by the level of neuroticism of a personality trait. Individuals who score a high level of neuroticism are often known to have strong emotionality, to be anxious and to have a strong affect (Digman, 1990). In addition, Costa and McCrae (1992) as well as Watson and Clark (1984) state that individuals

having a high level of neuroticism can experience more anger and hostility, all while being easily discouraged. This emotional sensitivity and emotional exposure can lead to more volatile work relationships and interrelations at work as they have a more difficult time coping with stress, in part by the fact that they are easily affected by their surrounding environment. People high in this trait will tend to use contentious tactics and blame, and consequently require special treatment (Deutsch, Coleman, & Marcus, 2006). As a result, people with high levels of neuroticism are likely to experience more negative emotions (Nasurdin, Ramayah & Kumaresan, 2005). In putting forth the supposition that the level of neuroticism can moderate the relation between social characteristics of work and relationship conflict, then the following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 5: The relationship between social characteristics and relationship conflict is moderated by the level neuroticism, such that this relationship is stronger when the level of neuroticism is high.

Finally, it is anticipated that the relation between task characteristics of work design and the task related conflict that arises in the workplace will be moderated by the level of openness to experience of a personality trait. Research demonstrates that the level of openness to experience is the highest predictor of argumentativeness, individuals who score high levels of this personality trait have a propensity to pursue intellectual arguments focused on position and not people (Blickle, 1995, 1997). These individuals also tend to be liberal and open to re-examining their own values, and so relationship conflict should be rare (Cost & McRae, 1992). In addition, the research from Bono et al. (2002) about the role of personality in task and relationship conflict found this trait to be a predictor of task conflict. It is therefore expected that individuals who score a high level of openness to experience will have a stronger relationship between task characteristics and task conflict. Adversely, individuals who score low on openness to experience will be less likely to live a stronger conflict situation in a task related setting.

Hypothesis 6: The relationship between task characteristics and task conflict is moderated by the level of openness to experience, such that this relationship is stronger when the level of openness to experience is high.

CHAPTER 3- METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, we will cover the methodological aspects of the research. More specifically, we will cover the procedures undertaken for the research, the data collection procedure, participant characteristics material used, ethical considerations, and the plan for results analysis.

3.1 Research Procedure

To test the hypotheses set forth, this research was undertaken in a web-based context. The structure of proof was founded on a questionnaire-based investigation with participants from North America. Participants were recruited from the on-line source called Mechanical Turk (MTurk) which is an online crowdsourcing Internet marketplace launched in 2005 under the management of Amazon Web Services³. MTurk is a crowdsourcing internet marketplace that permits individuals [or “requesters”] to ask people to perform tasks electronically. MTurk links requesters, such as an employer, a researcher or an individual seeking workers who offer payment for the completion of human intelligence tasks (HITs), and workers willing to complete such tasks. As presented in an article by Barger, Behrend, Sharek, and Sinar (2011), though MTurk and other crowdsourcing sites are new and were not necessarily intended for academic research in the beginning, crowdsourcing and online canvassing has become a popular and scientifically supported method of recruiting participants for research purpose.

This research is based on a cross-sectional design and all the variables were collected at one single period in time. There will be a static snapshot of workplace conflict situations and personality trait identification, and this will permit savings in relation to time and money all while remaining efficient. Consequently, this scientific method is descriptive in nature since there is no identification of causality.

3.2 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted using MTurk and SurveyMonkey. MTurk was chosen to recruit research participants as it provides substantial flexibility to locate a large number of eligible

³ <https://requester.mturk.com/>

participates while ensuring the use of fewer physical resources, simplified logistics, and the elimination of data entry errors (Barger and al. 2011). Though MTurk is relatively new in academic research, Barger et al. (2011, p. 14) stated that “*Based on the available research and our own experience, we feel that the sample representativeness of MTurk workers makes them well-suited to employee-focused research, particularly in comparison to many other alternatives.*” Using MTurk consequently rendered the data collection simple, fast and relatively economical. The method used was consequently based on indirect observation since the research is addressing itself to participants in order to gather the required information.

For this research, once a participant (or “service provider”) was identified by MTurk, based on our participant criteria, they became eligible to complete this survey. If they were willing to participate, they were then forwarded to an online version of this questionnaire at Survey Monkey website⁴. There they were able to provide their consent to participate, complete the questionnaire electronically and submit once completed. Participants received a 50 cent compensation for their completed questionnaire. Compensation was managed directly by MTurk, so there is no contact between participants and researchers. Compensation was provided directly to MTurk who then compensated participants accordingly.

3.3 Participants

The target population for this research was employed individuals eighteen years or older who lived through, or who have gone through within the last 6 months during the canvassing period of January 14th to 18th 2012, an organizational conflict within their workplace. Participants were from across North America, and the canvassing period was from January 14th to the 18th, 2012. Participants had to reference a conflict situation in the workplace going back up to 6 months prior to their participation. Based on the work of Green (1991), to conduct regression analysis it is important to ensure that the proper amount of participants are included. The author therefore suggests that $N > 50 + 8k$ be used when testing R^2 (N being the number of cases and k being the

⁴ www.surveymonkey.com

number of predictors),. Consequently, a sampling of over 194 people was be expected in the context of this research.

Participation for this research was voluntary and only participants willing to fill out a questionnaire did so. A total of 503 participants completed questionnaire, with only 473 retained due to incomplete questionnaires. Participants where included individuals 18 years or older living in North America and who have been employed during, or up to 6 months prior to, the canvassing period. Only one participant per IP address was permitted and the data collected demonstrates a that the IP addresses were spread across North America.

3.4 Material

Participants were asked to complete the questionnaire themselves as they are in the best position to express and communicate information with regards to their workplace conflict, work design, and personality traits. The questionnaire's content was created from the combination of numerous existing scales.

3.4.1 Work design

For the purpose of this study, work design characteristics were assessed by using, Morgeson and Humphrey's (2006) Work Design Questionnaire (WDQ) which is comprised of a three-component structure of work. The first category includes the motivational characteristics, which have been the most investigated in literature and are thought to reflect the overall complexity of work. The basic principle work motivation is that jobs will be enriched (i.e., made more motivating and satisfying) if high levels of these characteristics are present. This motivational category was additionally subdivided into work characteristics, which reflect the task and knowledge characteristics of work. The second category includes social characteristics, which reflects the reality that work is performed within a broader social environment. Finally the third category includes the contextual characteristics, which reflects the context within which work is performed, including the physical and environmental contexts. It is to be noted that for the purpose of this research, as per the conceptual model and literature review, this last component was not retained.

As seen in Table 5, the final items of Morgeson and Humphrey's (2006) Work Design Questionnaire were unmodified and were entirely extracted for the purposes of this research's questionnaire. Participants were be asked to self-identify the details of their current work design based on the questions. They will be asked to answer to the following questions from Table 5 with the help of a 5-point Likert scale (1- Strongly disagree, 2- Disagree, 3- Neither agree nor disagree, 4- Agree and 5- Strongly agree).

Table 5. Measure of Work Design (continued until page 49)

Dimension	Component	Items
Task characteristics	Autonomy: Work Scheduling Autonomy	The job allows me to make my own decisions about how to schedule my work
		The job allows me to decide on the order in which things are done on the job
		The job allows me to plan how I do my work.
	Decision-Making Autonomy	The job gives me a chance to use my personal initiative or judgement in carrying out the work.
		The job allows me to make a log of decisions on my own.
		The jobs provides me with significant autonomy in making decisions
	Work Methods Autonomy	The job allows me to make decisions about what methods I use to complete my work
		The job gives me considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do the work
		The job allows me to decide on my own on how to go about doing my work

Table 5 (cont'd)

	Task Variety	<p>The job involves a great deal of task variety</p> <p>The job involves doing a number of different things</p> <p>The job requires the performance of a wide range of tasks</p>
	Task Significance	<p>The results of my work are likely to significantly affect the lives of other people</p> <p>The job itself is very significant and important in the broader scheme of things</p> <p>The jobs has a large impact on people outside the organization</p> <p>The work performed on the job has a significant impact on people outside the organization</p>
	Task Identity	<p>The job involves completing a piece of work that has an obvious beginning and end</p> <p>The job is arranged so that I can do an entire piece of work from beginning to end</p> <p>The job provides me the chance to completely finish the pieces of work I begin</p> <p>The job allows me to complete work I start</p>
	Feedback from the Job	<p>The work activities themselves provide direct and clear information about the effectiveness (e.g. quality and quantity) of my job performance</p> <p>The job itself provides feedback on my performance</p> <p>The job itself provides me with information about my performance</p>

Table 5 (cont'd)

<p>Knowledge characteristics</p>	<p>Job Complexity</p>	<p>The job requires that I only do one task or activity at a time (reverse scored)</p> <p>The tasks on the job are simple and uncomplicated (reverse scored)</p> <p>The job comprises relatively uncomplicated tasks (reverse scored)</p> <p>The job involves performing relatively simple tasks (reverse scored)</p>
	<p>Information Processing</p>	<p>The job requires me to monitor a great deal of information</p> <p>The job requires that I engage in a large amount of thinking</p> <p>The job requires me to keep track of more than one thing at a time</p> <p>The job requires me to analyze a lot of information</p>
	<p>Problem Solving</p>	<p>The job involves solving problems that have no obvious correct answer</p> <p>The job requires me to be creative</p> <p>The job often involves dealing with problems that I have not met before</p> <p>The job requires unique ideas or solutions to problems</p>
	<p>Skill Variety</p>	<p>The job requires a variety of skills</p> <p>The job requires me to utilize a variety of different skills in order to complete the work</p> <p>The jobs requires me to use a number of complex or high-level skills</p> <p>The job requires the use of a number of skills</p>

Table 5 (cont'd)

	<p>Specialization</p>	<p>The job is highly specialized in terms of purpose, tasks, or activities</p> <p>The tools procedures, materials, and so forth used on this job are highly specialized in terms or purpose</p> <p>The job requires very specialized knowledge and skills</p> <p>The job requires a depth of knowledge and expertise</p>
<p>Social characteristics</p>	<p>Social Support</p>	<p>I have the opportunity to develop close friendships in my job</p> <p>I have the chance in my job to get to know other people</p> <p>I have the opportunity to meet with others in my work</p> <p>My supervisor is concerned about the welfare of the people that work for him/her</p> <p>People I work with take a personal interest in me</p> <p>People I work with are friendly</p>
	<p>Interdependence:</p> <p>Initiated Interdependence</p> <p>Received Interdependence</p>	<p>The job requires me to accomplish my job before others complete their job</p> <p>Other jobs depends directly on my job</p> <p>Unless my jobs gets done, other jobs cannot be completed</p> <p>The job activities are greatly affected by the work of other people</p> <p>The job depends on the work of many different people for its completion</p> <p>My job cannot be done unless others do their work</p>

Table 5 (cont'd)

	<p>Interaction Outside Organization</p>	<p>The job requires spending a great deal of time with people outside my organization</p> <p>The jobs involves interaction with people who are not members of my organization</p> <p>On the job, I frequently communicate with people who do not work for the same organization as I do</p> <p>The job involves a great deal of interaction with people outside my organization</p>
	<p>Feedback from Others</p>	<p>I receive a great deal of information from my manager and coworkers about my job performance</p> <p>Other people in the organization, such as managers and coworkers, provide information about the effectiveness (e.g. quality and quantity) of my job performance</p> <p>I receive feedback on my performance from other people in my organization (such as my manager or coworkers)</p>

3.4.2 Conflict

The questionnaire identifies two types of conflict encountered in organizational settings: task and relationship. Based on a 5 point Likert scale of agreement (1- Strongly disagree, 2- Disagree, 3- Neither agree or disagree, 4- Agree and 5- Strongly agree) participants were asked to identify the nature of the conflict there are mediating.

3.4.2.1 Relationship Conflict

To measure relationship conflict, Cox's (1998) Organizational Conflict Scale was utilized. Cox's scale focuses on the active hostility found in relationship conflict situations. Five particular items from the original scale are used as they are found to best represent the underlying construct of relationship conflict. Participants were asked to self-identify the status or existence of

relationship conflict based on a 5 point Likert scale. The relationship conflict based questions, as presented in Table 6, were adapted to this questionnaire in order to better relate to a particular conflict in time, versus an ongoing conflict.

3.4.2.2 Task Conflict

Jehn's (1995) four item scale was used to assess task conflict situations. The scale asks that the participant indicate to what extent the conflict they are experiencing is generated by work or a task. Participants were asked to self-identify the status or existence of task conflict based on the 5 point Likert scale. The task conflict related questions, which are presented in Table 6, were adapted to this questionnaire in order to better relate to one conflict in time, versus an ongoing workplace conflict.

Table 6. Measure of Conflict

Dimensions	Items
Relationship	The atmosphere was charged with hostility There was backbiting One party undermines another There were feelings of hostility among parties “Plotting” was taking place “behind the scenes”
Task	Do you disagree about opinions regarding the work being done Is this conflict about the work you do Is this conflict about ideas To what extent is this a difference of opinion

***Questions adapted from Cox (1998) and Jehn (1995)*

3.4.3 Personality traits

The personality facet of this research questionnaire is a Mini-IPIP personality scale that was a recently developed short measure of the Five-Factor model personality traits, derived from items in the International Personality Item Pool (Donnelan et al., 2006) research. This 20 item, 5 sub-

scale, questionnaire assists in identifying a participant’s personality traits based on the Big Five’s taxonomy: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism and agreeableness. As mentioned in section 2.1, the conceptual model has only retained three out of the five personality traits of the Five-Factor Model, and this due to the stronger relationship shown in literature between conflict and openness, conscientiousness and agreeableness. Participants were asked to self-identify their personality traits based on a 5 point Likert scale of agreement (1- Strongly disagree, 2- Disagree, 3- Neither agree or disagree, 4- Agree and 5- Strongly agree). It is important to consider that auto-declaration questions can have their limits.

Table 7. Measure of Personality Traits

Dimension	Items
Openness	<p>I see myself as someone who has a vivid imagination</p> <p>I see myself as someone who is not interested in abstract ideas (reverse item)</p> <p>I see myself as someone who has difficulty understanding abstract ideas (reverse item)</p> <p>I see myself as someone who does not have a good imagination (reverse item)</p>
Conscientiousness	<p>I see myself as someone who gets chores done right away</p> <p>I see myself as someone who often forgets to put things back in their proper place (reverse item)</p> <p>I see myself as someone who likes order</p> <p>I see myself as someone who makes a mess of things (reverse item)</p>

Table 7 (cont'd)

Agreeableness:	<p>I see myself as someone who sympathizes with others' feelings</p> <p>I see myself as someone who is not interested in other people's problems (reverse item)</p> <p>I see myself as someone who feels others' emotions</p> <p>I see myself as someone who is not really interested in others (reverse item)</p>
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3.4.4 Socio-demographic Information

The control variables that were utilized in this research were based on socio-demographic information related to people and their workplace. Participants were asked self-identify themselves vis-à-vis socio-demographic items, as seen in Table 8.

Table 8. Control Variables

Socio-demographic characteristics	Choice of responses
At the time of the conflict, was your position unionized?	Yes No
At the time of the conflict, what were your weekly hours of work?	<i>Participant indicates</i>
At the time of the conflict, how many years of service did you have within the organization?	<i>Participant indicates</i>
Please indicate your age	<i>Participant indicates</i>

3.5 Ethical Considerations

With regards to the data collection itself, participants were asked to take part in this research on a voluntary basis. Considering that there was no obligation to participate, there were little or no ethical considerations to evaluate. In addition, considering that this is a research related to workplace contexts, only adults (18 plus) were canvassed.

Furthermore, before an individual began a questionnaire, participants were notified of: the objectives, methods, anticipated benefits and potential hazards of the research. They were additionally informed of their right to abstain from participation in the research and their right to terminate their participation at any time. Finally, they were advised of the confidential nature of the questionnaire replies. This information was presented via an electronic consent form that participants were required to agree to prior to starting the on-line questionnaire.

An ethics approval request was submitted to Université de Montréal for evaluation and was approved February 4th, 2012 with no modifications required. An extension to the ethics approval was request and approved in June 2012

3.6 Plan for Results Analysis

In this section, we will present the preliminary analyses and the statistical analyses that were conducted in order to test the research hypotheses. This research worked with quantitative data and the hypotheses are relational and interactional in nature, as they are principally aimed at identifying the relation and/or interaction between work design, personality traits, and conflict.

Data collected via the questionnaires was entered in to the statistical analysis program SPSS, on a “per participant” basis where the data was then analyzed.

3.6.1 Preliminary Analysis

Multiple preliminary analyses were conducted in the context of this study, including reliability analysis, descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. These analyses permitted us to establish if the data collected corresponds to conceptual model set forth in this research and establish if they can be used to test the hypotheses.

3.6.1.1 Reliability analysis

The first type of analysis conducted was a reliability analysis. The Cronbach Alpha is used to determine the internal consistency of the questionnaire that was used in this study. Because the measurement tool developed for this study contains multiple questions that measure a same concept, but with varying formulations, it is logical that a respondents answers to these questions be homogeneous. The homogeneousness of answers is therefore tested by Cronbach's Alpha. The result is presented as a number between 0 and 1 and the closer this result is to 1, then the more the tool has a good internal consistency and is reliable. (Drucker-Godard, Ehlinger and Grenier, 2003).

3.6.1.2 Descriptive Statistics

An analysis of the descriptive statistics was also conducted in this research. This type of analysis provides a description of the data collected (Howell, 1998). Respondents' socio-demographic characteristics were presented, such as age and years of service, and the mean and standard deviation for each variable was determined. The mean is the most common method to measure a central trend whereas the standard deviation shows how much variation or "dispersion" exists in respondents' answers in comparison to the average, or mean (Kranzler, 2003). This allows us to verify if the data follows a normal distribution. It should be noted that the normal distribution of data is a factor that is additionally used for correlation and regression analysis.

3.6.1.3 Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis completes the preliminary analysis section. This analysis consists of a bivariate analysis which establishes, quantifies and determines the direction of the relation between two variables (Kranzler, 2003). This analysis consists of taking a variable from the operating model and put it in relation, one by one, with all the other variables. The results of each correlation analysis will be presented as a number between -1.00 and 1.00. The more the coefficient reaches 1.00, then the more the link between the two variables is positively high. More specifically, when one characteristic increases (or reduces), the other will increase (or

diminish) proportionally (Kranzler, 2003). Inversely, more the coefficient approaches -1.00, more the relation between the two variables is strong, but negatively. The variables therefore evolve in opposite directions. This means that more that a characteristics increase (or diminishes), more the other will diminish (or increase). A result of 0 signifies that there exists no relation between the two variables. It is however important to note, however, that the data analysis does not establish a causal link between the variables being measures (Howell, 1998). The correlation analysis does not establish that the “cause” comes before the “effect”.

3.6.2 Hypothesis Testing

The hypotheses were verified by utilizing a multiple regression analysis and a hierarchal regression analysis. Multiple regression analysis verified the relation hypotheses (Hypothesis 1, 2 and 3) whereas hierarchal regression analysis verified the moderating effect of personality traits (Hypothesis 4, 5, and 6).

3.6.2.1 Verification of Relational Hypotheses

In order to test Hypothesis 1 through 3, hierarchical regression analysis was conducted as per procedures proposed by Cohen, Cohen, West and Aiken (2003). Whereas correlation analysis indicates the intensity of a relation between two variables, a multiple regression determines the nature (Kranzler, 2003). It is a technique that measures the variation of a dependent variable while simultaneously interjecting many other independent variables. This method therefore determines that relative contribution of each independent variable in the prediction of a dependent variable.

This type of analysis is conducted in 2 steps. In the first step, all control variables are introduced in the regression model. In the second step, the independent variable is added to the regression model. The hypotheses will be confirmed if the independent variables present a significant regression coefficient.

3.6.2.2 Verification of the Moderating Effect of Personality Traits

In order to test moderating hypotheses (Hypothesis 4, 5, and 6), a three-step hierarchical regression analysis approach was utilized. The first step consisted in adding the control variables in the regression model. The second step consisted in introducing the independent and moderator variables (which were previously centered). Finally the last step consisted in adding an interaction term resulting from the multiplication of the independent and moderator variables. An interaction effect is highlighted when the regression coefficient of the interaction term is significant. Prior to conducting this analysis, the independent and moderating variables were centered on their mean as to facilitate the interpretation of results, and to avoid multicollinearity. The moderating effect is confirmed when the coefficient of regression associated to the interaction term is significant ($p < .05$).

CHAPTER 4- RESULTS

The fourth chapter of this master thesis will outline the study results. First, a section on the preliminary analysis will be presented. The following section will be comprised of the research hypothesis testing results, which encompasses the relation and moderating effect hypotheses. Finally, supplementary analysis results related to interaction effects between variables will be examined.

4.1 Preliminary Analysis

The preliminary analysis section aims to describe data collected at the observation stage of this study (Howell, 1998). The internal consistency of each variable (i.e., reliability analysis), the descriptive statistics and the correlation analysis will be presented in this section.

4.1.1. Reliability Analysis

In order to assess the internal consistency of the scales used when gathering the data, reliability analysis was conducted. This analysis shows that the scales that were used to measure the variables in this study are all acceptable in their internal consistency (see Table 9). More specifically, the internal consistency shows work design scales, namely those measuring social, knowledge and task characteristics of work, are adequate with Cronbach alphas of .60 and above. In addition, the scales that measured the Big Five personality traits (i.e., openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) have adequate Cronbach alphas values ($.69 < \alpha < .82$). Finally, the values of Cronbach alpha for task and relationship conflict scales are .57 and .81 respectively. Though the Cronbach alpha of task conflict (.57) and social characteristics of work design (.60) are lower than expected, the measures were retained as they are both existing and pre-validated tools previously used by Cox (1998) and Morgeson and Humphrey (2006).

Table 9. Cronbach Alpha Results

Variable	Internal Consistency (Cronbach Alpha)
Relationship conflict	.81
Task conflict	.57
Knowledge Characteristics	.85
Task Characteristics	.76
Social Characteristics	.60
Openness	.79
Conscientiousness	.75
Extraversion	.80
Agreeableness	.82
Neuroticism	.69

4.1.2 Descriptive statistics

In this section, the mean and standard deviation of each variable in this research will be examined. Firstly, the descriptive statistics related to the independent (i.e., work design characteristics) and dependent variables (i.e., conflict type) as well as the moderating variables (i.e., personality traits) will be presented. Then, the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, more specifically gender, years of service within the organization, unionization, weekly hours of work and years of service within position will be examined.

Work design characteristics were kept grouped under higher order dimensions of the work design (Morgeson and Humphrey, 2006). More specifically, task characteristics (grouping of work scheduling autonomy, decision making autonomy, work methods autonomy, task variety, task significance, task identity and feedback from the job), knowledge characteristics (grouping job complexity, information processing, problem solving, skill variety and specialization) and

social characteristics (grouping of social support, initiated interdependence, received interdependence, interaction outside the organization and feedback from others) have remained grouped in order to facilitate data analysis. The means of these dimensions are 3.44 for task characteristics, 3.50 for knowledge characteristics, and 3.32 for social characteristics. The standard deviation for the each grouping is .61 for task characteristics, .74 for knowledge characteristics, and .59 for social characteristics. Considering that a 5-point Likert scale was used, these values represent moderate levels of mean and variance from respondents.

As for the types of conflict, more specifically task and relationship conflict, on a 5-point Likert scale the means are 3.31 for task conflict and 3.14 relationship conflict. The standard deviations are .79 and .90 respectively. Consequently the standard deviation is fairly moderate, meaning that there is a moderate level of variance amongst respondents and the mean is relatively moderate as well.

The mean for the moderating variables, being the Big Five personality traits of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism are 3.72, 3.52, 2.99, 3.73 and 2.75 respectively on a 5-point Likert scale. The mean scores for neuroticism and extraversion are lower than those of other personality traits. The standard deviations of the Big Five personality traits are .86 for openness, .84 for conscientiousness, .91 for extraversion, .80 for agreeableness and .80 for neuroticism. This demonstrates that the answer variability from respondents is moderate.

As for the socio-demographic results from respondents, the average years of service within the organization is 4.14 years, with a standard deviation of 4.77. The average number of years of service within the position is 3.26 years with a standard deviation of 3.59. The average weekly hours of work is 34.42 hours a week, with a standard deviation of 14.66. The percentage of respondents who were unionized was 14% unionization.

4.1.3 Correlation Analysis

To complete the preliminary analysis, a correlation analysis was conducted in order to establish, quantify and determine the direction, whether positive or negative, of the relations between two variables at a time. To complete this, it is necessary to take each variable in relation to each

other. Though many correlation results were analysed, as seen in Table 10, it should be noted that most correlations were not significant ($p > .05$). However, a few notable correlation results will nonetheless be presented. As seen in the correlation matrix from Annex 1, the results from the correlation analysis demonstrate that there are significant correlations between work design characteristics themselves. More specifically, there is a correlation between task characteristics and knowledge characteristics ($r = .55, p < 0.01$), between social characteristics and task characteristics ($r = .52, p < 0.01$), and between social characteristics and knowledge characteristics ($r = .41, p < 0.01$). Moreover, there are significant correlations between personality traits and work design characteristics, namely the relationship between agreeableness and knowledge characteristics ($r = .16, p < 0.01$)

Finally, significant correlations between work design characteristics and conflict types were also obtained for the following variables: task characteristics and task conflict ($r = .14, p < 0.01$) as well as social characteristics and task conflict ($r = .10, p < 0.05$). There are no significant correlations between conflict types and personality traits. Finally, there are significant correlations between the conflict type identified by participants and the question “Do you define your conflict situation as being relationship or task related” (relationship conflict was coded “0” and task conflict was coded “1”). The correlation between the close ended question and relationship conflict levels identified by respondents is $-.22$ ($p < 0.01$), whereas the correlation between the close ended question and the task conflict levels identified by respondents is $.26$ ($p < 0.01$).

Table 10. Correlation Matrix

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1- Task Conflict	1.0							
2- Relationship Conflict	.13**	1.0						
3- Knowledge Characteristics	.09	.09	1.0					
4- Social Characteristics	.10*	.08	.41**	1.0				
5- Task Characteristics	.14**	-.03	.55**	.52**	1.0			
6- Openness	.03	-.01	.11*	.03	.089	1.0		
7-Agreeableness	.05	-.06	.16**	.10*	.11*	.34**	1.0	
8- Neuroticism	-.06	.04	-.05	-.04	-.06	-.06	-.06	1.0

**** Correlation is significant at $p < 0.01$ level**

***Correlation is significant at $p < 0.05$ level**

4.2 Hypothesis testing

In order to test the relational hypotheses, a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted. The same procedure was used to test Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3. More specifically a two-step multiple regression was applied. The control variables were first inserted into the regression model. The control variables, more specifically the socio-demographic characteristics of years of service within the organisation, years of service within the position, average weekly hours of works and unionization, were introduced in the regression analysis because of their possible influence on workplace conflict. As a second step, one of the independent variables was added, which for Hypotheses 1 to 3 was a work design related variable.

According to Hypothesis 1, the level of social characteristics of work design is negatively related to the level of relationship conflict. Results show that social characteristics are not significantly related to the level of relationship conflict ($\beta = .06, p > .05$; see Table 11). Therefore, results do not support Hypothesis 1.

Table 11. Summary of Regression Analysis Regarding the Relationship between Social Characteristics and Relationship Conflict

Model	B	Standard Error	Beta	R Square Change
<i>Dependent variable: Relationship conflict</i>				
Step 1				.03
Unionization	-.30	.12	-.11	
Weekly Hours of Work	.01	.00	.10	
Years of service within organization	-.01	.01	-.03	
Years of service within position	.02	.02	.08	
Gender	-.101	.09	-.06	
Step 2				.00
Social Characteristics	.10	.07	.06	

N= 473. Note: No regression coefficient is statistically significant.

According to Hypothesis 2, the level of knowledge characteristics of work design is positively related to the level of task conflict. Results show that knowledge characteristics are not significantly related to and task conflict ($\beta = .06, p > .05$; see Table 12). Therefore, results do not support Hypothesis 2.

Table 12. Summary of Regression Analysis Regarding the Relationship between Knowledge Characteristics and Task Conflict

Model	B	Standard Error	Beta	R Square Change
<i>Dependent variable: Task conflict</i>				
Step 1				.01
Unionization	-.10	.11	-.05	
Weekly Hours of Work	.00	.00	.04	
Years of service within organization	-.01	.01	-.05	
Years of service within position	.01	.01	.02	
Gender	.11	.07	.07	
Step 2				.01
Knowledge Characteristics		.05	.10	

N= 473. Note: No regression coefficient is statistically significant.

According to Hypothesis 3, the level of task characteristics of work design is positively related to the level of in task conflict. Results show that task characteristics are not significantly related to task conflict ($\beta = .15, p > .05$; see Table 13). Therefore, results do not support Hypothesis 3.

Table 13. Summary of Regression Analysis Regarding the Relationship between Task Characteristics and Task Conflict

Model	B	Standard Error	Beta	R Square Change
<i>Dependent variable: Task conflict</i>				
Step 1				.01
Unionization	-.10	.11	-.05	
Weekly Hours of Work	.00	.00	.04	
Years of service within organization	-.01	.01	-.05	
Years of service within position	.06	.01	.02	
Gender	.11	.07	.07	
Step 2				.02
Task Characteristics	.19	.06	.15	

N= 473. Note: No regression coefficient is statistically significant.

To test Hypotheses 4, 5, and 6, a three-step multiple regression approach was applied. The control variables were first inserted in to the regression model. The control variables, more specifically the socio-demographic characteristics, were introduced in to the regression analysis because of their possible influence on workplace conflict. As a second step, one of the independent variables related to work design and a moderating variable were inserted. Finally, an interaction term formed from the multiplication of the scores of the independent variable and moderating variable was included in the regression model.

Hypothesis 4 proposes that the relation between social characteristics of work design and relationship conflict which emerges in the workplace will be moderated by the level of agreeableness of a personality trait. Results indicate that the level of agreeableness does not

moderate the relationship between social characteristics and relationship conflict ($\beta = -.12, p > .05$; see Table 14). Consequently, Hypothesis 4 was not supported by the results.

Table 14. Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis Regarding the Relationship between Social Characteristics, Agreeableness and Relationship Conflict

Model	B	Standard Error	Beta	R Square Change
<i>Dependent variable: Relationship conflict</i>				
Step 1				.03
Unionization	-.30	.12	-.11	
Weekly Hours of Work	.01	.00	.10	
Years of service within organization	-.01	.01	-.03	
Years of service within position	.02	.02	.08	
Gender	-.10	.09	-.06	
Step 2				.01
Agreeableness	-.10	.07	.07	
Social characteristics	.11	.05	-.08	
Step 3				.02
Social characteristics x Agreeableness	-.23	.09	-.12	

N= 473. Note: No regression coefficient is statistically significant.

Hypothesis 5 proposes that the relation between social characteristics and relationship conflict is moderated by the level neuroticism. Results indicate that the level of neuroticism does not moderate that relationship between social characteristics and relationship conflict ($\beta = -.05, p > .05$; see Table 15). Consequently, Hypothesis 5 was not supported by the results.

Table 15. Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis Regarding the Relationship between Social Characteristics, Neuroticism and Relationship Conflict

Model	B	Standard Error	Beta	R Square Change
<i>Dependent variable: Relationship conflict</i>				
Step 1				.03
Unionization	-.3	.12	-.12	
Weekly Hours of Work	.01	.00	.1	
Years of service within organization	-.01	.01	-.03	
Years of service within position	.02	.06	.08	
Gender	-.10	.09	-.06	
Step 2				.01
Neuroticism	.05	.05	.04	
Social characteristics	.01	.07	.06	
Step 3				.00
Social characteristics x Neuroticism	-.01	.08	-.05	

N= 473. Note: No regression coefficient is statistically significant.

Hypothesis 6 proposes that the relation between task characteristics and task conflict in the workplace will be moderate by the level of openness to experience of a personality trait. Results indicate that the level of openness to experience does not moderate that relationship between task characteristics and task conflict ($\beta = -.08, p > .05$; see Table 16). Consequently Hypothesis 6 was not supported by the results.

Table 16. Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis Regarding the Relationship between Task characteristics, Openness and Task Conflict

Model	B	Standard Error	Beta	R Square Change
<i>Dependent variable: Task conflict</i>				
Step 1				.01
Unionization	-.10	.11	-.05	
Weekly Hours of Work	.00	.00	.04	
Years of service within organization	-.01	.01	-.05	
Years of service within position	.01	.01	.02	
Gender	.14	.07	.07	
Step 2				.02
Openness	.03	.04	.03	
Task characteristics	.18	.06	.14	
Step 3				.01
Task characteristics x Openness	-.11	.06	-.08	

N= 473. Note: No regression coefficient is statistically significant.

CHAPTER 5- DISCUSSION

The objective of this chapter is to interpret the results of this study relative to conflict, work design, and personality literature. This chapter will be divided into five parts. Firstly, the objective of this research will be reviewed. Secondly, study results in relation to the research hypotheses and the results of all supplementary analysis will be discussed. Thirdly, the limits of this research will be presented in addition to its contributions both theoretical and practical. Finally, suggestions concerning possible future research will be discussed.

5.1 Overview of the research objective

The general objective of this master's thesis was to deepen existing knowledge of workplace conflict. It aimed at finding precise factors that can contribute to the emergence of a specific type of conflict in the workplace versus another. The lack of knowledge on the relation of work design characteristics and types of workplace conflict is what motivated this study. It additionally aimed at examining the moderating effect that personality traits can have on the relationships between work design characteristics and type of conflict.

The hypotheses of this study consisted in verifying the link between work design characteristics as conceptualised by Morgeson and Humphrey (2006) and the emergence of task or relationship conflict in the workplace (Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3), and the moderating of effect of three personality traits, namely agreeableness, neuroticism, and openness to experience (Hypotheses 4, 5 and 6).

5.2 Discussion of research results

A discussion of the results obtained following data analysis will be presented in this section. The objective is to interpret the results and link these results with existing literature in order to bring a better understanding to these of the conceptual model.

5.2.1 The Relation Between Social Characteristics and Relationship Conflict

The first hypothesis which was emitted proposed that the social characteristics in one's work, including the level of social support, interdependence interaction from outside the organization and feedback from others, are negatively related to situations of relationship conflict. The results did not support this hypothesis. No significant relation was found between social characteristics and relationship conflict.

If we return to research from Simons and Peterson (2000), the authors demonstrate that intragroup trust plays a critical role in the interpretation process within a conflict situation and the workplace. Intragroup trust has been strongly linked to benevolence, honesty and competence (Mayer et al., 1995). Consequently, benevolence and honesty can have a cause and effect on group trust and thus have an important influence on group members' interpretations of conflict behaviour. Under the dimension of social characteristics and the questionnaire used in this study, an in depth examination of the presence, or absence, of trust as a social characteristic in the workplace was not included. Consequently including such a variable could explain the lack of significant findings. More specifically Simons and Peterson (2000, p.104) state: *"If task conflict triggers relationship conflict primarily through misattribution of task conflict behaviour, then the contact in which the interpersonal relationship is held should play a moderating role. If group members trust each other, they will be more likely to accept stated disagreements at face value and less likely to misinterpret task conflict behaviors by inferring hidden agendas or personal attacks as the driving force behind the behavior."* It would have therefore been advantageous to ensure a better evaluation of the level interpersonal trust amongst the conflicting parties within the questionnaire to better evaluate the relation between social characteristics of work and donrelationship conflict. A better evaluation in to the presence or lack of interpersonal trust amongst conflicting parties could have therefore better orientated the hypothesis results.

5.2.2 The Relation Between Knowledge Characteristics and Relationship Conflict

The second hypothesis stated that knowledge characteristics of one's work (level of job complexity, information processing, problem solving, skill variety and specialization), is

positively related to task conflict situations. The results do not confirm this hypothesis. We found no significant relation between knowledge characteristics and task conflict.

Fineman (1993) and Gabriel (1998a) state that finding such rational answers to conflict situations in the workplace does not address the true emotional and relation elements of such situations, including self-esteem, status and power. Contrary to these authors' findings, this hypothesis aimed to link very concrete workplace variables (knowledge characteristics) and a concrete type of conflict (task conflict) but did not consider the emotional and contextual background that can be therefore present in workplace conflict.

5.2.3 The Relation Between Task Characteristics and Task Conflict

The third hypothesis suggested that the task characteristics of one's work (level of autonomy, task variety, task significance and task identity) is positively related to task conflict. The results do not confirm this hypothesis. No significant relation was found between task characteristics and task conflict or task characteristics and relationship conflict.

As addressed in the previous section 5.2.2, Fineman (1993) and Gabriel (1998a) have presented in their research that there irrational angle to conflict and a strong emotional component. It would be therefore of importance to reiterate that this hypothesis was possibly concentrated on the concrete elements of work design and conflict and did not sufficiently evaluate the emotional and relational elements related to the job and the conflict situation.

As a general consideration for Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 it is important to highlight that as per Simons and Peterson (2000), task conflict and relationship conflict are consistently correlated. Though research has demonstrated that when making attributions about conflict individuals' assessment of the characteristics of their work (Judge, Bono & Locke, 2000) there are other assessments that come in to play, such as work attitudes and even their evaluation of other people's behaviours (Bernandin, Cooke & Villanova, 2000). Consequently, it is possible that other variables of importance when analysing the emergence of conflict type in the workplace were overlooked for these hypotheses. Finally, according to Fortado (2001), searching for

precise causal models that will provide exact explanations or predictions in conflict situations proves difficult when taking in to account the chaotic nature of such human situations.

The questionnaire utilized for this research was originally created for distribution within workplace conflict mediation centers in the federal public service of Canada. The original methodology was to canvass participants who were utilizing the services of professional workplace mediators to help them in their conflict situations. Due to multiple constraints, this data collection procedure was not possible and therefore MechanicalTurk was utilized to find participants via the Internet and through crowdsourcing. The questionnaire was therefore possibly better adapted to a mediation context where workplace conflict situations are better structured and better defined, with the help of a professional in the field of mediation. The use of the original questionnaire could further explain results considering that the intent was to canvass the federal public service of Canada. Through the use of Mechanical Turk, participants from private and public sectors of work were invited to respond to the questionnaire, and therefore more private sector data was collected than originally anticipated. Furthermore, the questionnaire and hypotheses were structured for conflict situations taking place within the federal public service environment. Statistics from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (online, 2008) demonstrate that there is more conflict in the public sector than there is in the private sector, in addition to more time being spent dealing with conflict than in the private sector. This is in part due to the open approach to conflict that exists within the public sector, where open discussions and optimal management of conflict is encouraged at all levels. This open approach to conflict can be felt even in the termination related statistics from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (online, 2008). These statistics show that public sector management is less likely to terminate employees based on a conflict situation (29%), and this in comparison to the private sector (44%). These numbers suggest that conflict can be discussed openly in the public service and that there exist lesser consequences to doing so than in the private sector. The complaint system for addressing conflict is in itself very structured in the public service, with the open availability of multiple avenues of recourse. The Canadian federal public services has formal systems in place for grievances, harassment and discrimination complaints. In addition to strong internal conflict mechanisms, there is a strong union presence in

the workplace, a very accessible Employee Assistance Program⁵, a federal whistle blowing program⁶ and a mandatory Informal Conflict Resolution Center⁷ in each department. It could therefore be expected that conflict in the private sector is likely to be less significant, or that it is more difficult to establish trends in results when data collection is spread amongst multiple industries. Participants' workplace demographics and workplace environments could have therefore impacted the study results and consequently made patterns and interrelations difficult to establish.

5.2.4 The Moderating Effect of Personality Traits

Hypotheses 4, 5, and 6 proposed that the relation between work design characteristics and the type of conflict that emerges in the workplace will be moderated by the level of agreeableness, neuroticism or openness to experience of a personality trait. More specifically, it was expected that agreeableness would moderate the relationship between social characteristics of work and relationship conflict. It was also expected that neuroticism would moderate the relationship between social characteristics of work and relationship conflict. Finally, a moderation effect was expected between the level of openness to experience and the relation of task characteristics and task conflict. None of the results confirm any of the three hypotheses. The personality trait of agreeableness had no significant moderation effect on the relation between social characteristics and conflict type; the personality trait of neuroticism has no significant moderation effect on the relation between social characteristics and conflict type; and the personality trait of openness to experience has no significant moderation effect on the relation between task characteristics and conflict type.

These results can be explained by research from Utley et al. (1989), who demonstrated that there can be some inconsistency in personality and conflict relationships across targets. This suggests that though personality traits have an impact on conflict, external factors to personality, such as one's role in the organization, support from management and work resources, are also of relevance (Barki & Hartwick, 2001). It is therefore possible that additional external variables

⁵ <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/occup-travail/empl/eap-pae-eng.php>

⁶ http://www.psyc-ispc.gc.ca/disclosure_divulgarion/publicservants_fonctionnaires-eng.aspx

⁷ <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/gui/conflplus-eng.asp>

other than those presented in the research model could have been of importance to establish the necessary relation between variables and moderating effects.

The results can also be possibly explained by the “actor effect and partner effect” as proposed by Bono et al. (2002). This notion sets forth that a conflict situation involves a minimum of two parties, where an actor effect is the degree to which an *“individual’s reports of conflict are affected by their own standing on the personality variable of interest”* (Bono et al., 2002, p. 317) and a partner effect is *“the extent to which the personality of one partner in a conflict affects the conflict experience of the other”* (Bono et al., 2002, p. 318). Considering that this study did not canvass or analyze the work design and the personality traits of both conflicting parties within a conflict situation, it is possible that missing data and information about the conflict situations rendered results incomplete. According to the “actor effect and partner effect”, conflicting parties react and adjust according to the reactions and the personality of the other conflicting party. Access to the details of both conflicting parties’ personality traits would have therefore permitted us to better understand the moderating effects of personality traits.

As affirmed by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, the most commonly cited cause of conflict are related to warring egos and personality clashes (online, 2008). Therefore, since the personality traits of both conflict parties were not simultaneously evaluated, it is therefore possible that the full breadth of personality clashes was not evaluated.

Research from Bono et al. (2002) affirmed that individuals’ own personality trait levels of agreeable and neuroticism were not related to attribution of conflict type, however they did find that openness to experience are more likely to attribute their conflict to task issues. It is therefore possible that the personality trait of openness to experience, however, is not specifically linked to task characteristics of a work design.

5.3 Limitations

Every study presents certain limitations, and this study is no exception. The first limit is related to the timeframe of data collection, or more specifically the cross-sectional nature of this study. Due to constraints related resources, as well as deadlines, participants were not evaluated throughout their conflict situation. Instead, a sole image in time of participants’ conflict

situations was canvassed and its evolution could not be analyzed. Because the questionnaire required participants to address one conflict situation in time and to provide specifics on their conflict situation from one specific timeframe, it is possible that this rendered the conflict analysis less complete and created limits in the outcomes and the process. More specifically, as presented by Jehn (1997) where task conflict may merge itself in to relationship conflict situation, without having a better view of the evolution of the conflict situation being evaluated with the questionnaire, we are unable to examine that possible transformation or the conflict situation as it was at its source.

The second limit is related to the definition of conflict that was given to participants. Due to the method taken for data collection, via the service of MechanicalTurk, participants were provided general guidelines of how to define a conflict situation and therefore how to classify the level of their conflict situation, whether task or relationship related, within a Likert scale. With no further guidelines in the questionnaire or detailed discussions with the participants regarding their conflict situation, it is possible that participants misclassified their conflict type and subsequent conflict intensity level. An interview-based study could have permitted the identification of subtle nuances of each conflict situation being analyzed. A further discussion, for example, with each participant could have permitted us to capture the complexity that conflict situations can encompass. As proposed by Jehn (1997), Amason and Sapienza (1997), Ginzler (1994) and Simons and Peterson (2000), the lines between task and relationship conflict can often be blurred and task conflict can often transform itself in to relationship conflict. That being said, without in person interviews with the participants, subtleties of the conflict situation could have been lost and thus misclassified in the questionnaire by participants.

The third limit confronted in this research is the Cronbach alpha result of the task conflict portion of the questionnaire tool, which specifically addressed the task conflict angle. Though the Cronbach alpha result was lower for these specific items, we nonetheless proceeded to use the tool for research questionnaire as it originated from a validated and existing research tool (Cox, 1998). In addition, upon further review, no specific item from this tool posed an individual problem and the correlation between the four items for task conflict, though weak, were in fact positive. In addition, withdrawing these items did not bring up significantly the alpha results.

Consequently, though conserved, there can be concerns regarding the validity of the tool and thus limits that were generated by these specific items.

5.4 Implications

5.4.1 Theoretical implications

Examining this research from the angle of scientific advancement, this research permits us to better understand the types of conflict in the workplace, the relation they have with work design factors and the moderating effects of personality traits. Though the results were not significant in relation to the specific hypotheses emitted in this research, we can nonetheless identify some valuable findings. More specifically, considering that results demonstrate no significant relation between variables and do not show any particular moderating effects, we can propose that both conflict types can emerge equally within the workplace, regardless of the specifics of work design or personality traits.

Authors such as Humphrey, Nahrgang and Morgeson (2007), Roxbrough (1996), De Jonge, Bosma, and Siegrist (2000b), De Jonge, Dollard, Dormann, Leblanc and Houtman (2000), as per literature review from section 1.2.3, concluded that certain types of work could generate particular tensions and conflict in the workplace. The sensitivities that certain types of work can create in the workplace environment can thus render certain work types more susceptible to task versus relationship conflict. However, considering no particular relation was found between work design factors and they type of conflict that emerges in the workplace, we can conclude that all types of work designs are exposed to the same level of fragility to both types of conflict. Therefore, in relation to the specific results of this research, employers do not need to have particular concern of particular types of work design in order to prevent one of either conflict types.

Literature review also demonstrated that different personality types deal with conflict in different ways (Antonioni, 1998; Utley, Richardson, & Pilkington, 1989). As a result this research intended to demonstrate to employers and organizations that personality traits can moderate types of conflict. Employers could have consequently ensured an added consideration of personality traits of employees when creating working groups, special teams and work shift

crews in order to diminish the probabilities of a certain type of conflict situation from emerging. However, because particular personality traits examined in the results section, we can establish that agreeableness, neuroticism and openness to experience will not moderate a particular conflict type more than another.

To conclude, as described in chapter 1 of this research, literature review demonstrated that no academic papers or academic research has been published linking all the variables proposed by the conceptual model of this research. Consequently, though no particular hypothesis was confirmed, it remains that it has contributed to the advancement of current knowledge by examining some potential antecedents of workplace conflict.

5.4.2 Practical implications

As a common management best practise, as promoted by the Canadian federal public service (2011, Eight Steps to Effective Conflict Management (CM)), employers should be aware of conflict in the workplace and assist in diffusing workplace problems, which can have multiple environmental and financial impacts on the workplace. The intention of this research was to assist employers and organizations to better understand the factors and that can contribute to the emergence of task or relationship conflict. This would have been done by providing them with work design factors that can strongly influence the emergence either type of conflict. With personality traits analyzed as moderating factors within these relations, employers would additionally have a better understanding of the types of employee personalities which can aggravate the emergence either type of conflict, or vice versa. Because the results did not demonstrate any relation between the variables, we can conclude that all types or work designs and personalities can contribute equally to the emergence of task and relationship conflict in the workplace.

5.5 Directions for Future studies

It would be important for future studies to examine the relation between work design, personality traits and the emergence of particular types of conflict on the workplace, and devote particular attention to the limits that have emerged from this research. In addition to the particular limitations of this research, however, it is pertinent to present avenues for future studies.

Firstly, it would be pertinent to analyze the relation between work design and conflict types all while factoring in situations without a conflict. Adding this independent variable can provide researchers with a more specific snapshot of the emergence of conflict and take this research a step further by examining the link between actual emergence of conflict, or non-emergence of conflict, and the work design or personality trait factors that can be present in these situations.

As presented in section 1.1 of this research, authors such as Barki and Hartwick (2001), De Dreu and Weingart (2003) as well as to Deutsch (1973), to name a few, conflict situations can be very complex and very delicate. As examined in the literature review, the source of a conflict situation, whether it be related to the task or the related relationship, can become confusing and thus blurred. Consequently, if time and resources permit, in person interviews with participants could provide an added value in the data collection versus a questionnaire based method. More specifically, in person interviews would permit the researcher to determine, as a neutral third party, the nuances of a conflict situation and can be in a better position to classify the conflict type that is being examined.

Thirdly, there would be added value in examining a workplace conflict situation while comparing all parties involved in a specific conflict situation, as opposed to one specific party as done in this specific research. Since a conflict situation is defined as having a minimum of two, usually opposing, parties, being able to simultaneously examine the parties involved in a same conflict situation would have contributed to the results of this study. However, due to various logistic, financial and time related constraints, we were unable to question and examine the opposing parties in a same conflict situation. This would have permitted us to better analyze the characteristics of the conflict situation, the varying or even similar work design characteristics of the conflicting parties and examine the personality traits of the conflicting parties involved.

Finally, again with time and resources permitting, a longitudinal study on conflict situations can also be of interest for future research. Such a longitudinal study could include examining a conflict situation prior, during and after the conflict events. A more in depth analysis of the conflict situation during and after the conflict events could provide some enlightening information. This would again permit researchers to better pinpoint conflict situations and the types of conflict that emerge in the workplace and help capture that steps and transition that these conflict situation go through.

CONCLUSION

This research attempted to contribute to the field of industrial relations by enriching the knowledge and understanding on the subject on workplace conflict. Conflicts can't always be avoided and organizations should consider that a modest level of conflict can be useful for innovation, such as the emergence of great ideas and new work methods. Nonetheless, managers should manage conflict with efficiency instead of ignoring or suppressing it. In order to better do that, when conflict situations emerge in the workplace they need to ask themselves, in relation to the conflict situation, *What, Why* and *Who* (Asopa & Beye, 1997) so that they are better equipped to manage emerging problems. In terms of practical applications, results of the research were to enable organizations to better establish the root of workplace problems and to consequently be in a position to better resolve conflict. In establishing the role work design in the generation of conflict, all why factoring employees' individual personality traits, managers can better reflect on the *Why* element in conflict. As examined in the Chapter 2, past research has shown that there exist different types of conflict, some which are fostered in particular environments and amplified by one's personality traits. Furthermore, past research that has examined work design demonstrates that there exist differences amongst jobs and that these difference can create various specific occupational stressors for incumbents. Different jobs create different work environment realities which are unique to the particular work designs. Conflict in an organization can arise over goals, project priorities, interdependence in work, administrative procedures, technical opinions, performance trade-offs, use of limited resources, costs, schedules, personalities, goal incompatibility/barriers to goal accomplishment, strong barriers to communication and past history (Ivancevich, Szilagyi and Wallace, 1977). Consequently, it can be proposed that work design can impact the type of conflict that is generated in a workplace.

In the context of this study, work design characteristics were analysed using three dimensions as independent variables in the conceptual model. These dimensions included task characteristics, knowledge characteristics and social characteristics, and each contain their own respective components as identified in Table 5. The dependant variables included the two types of conflict that have been shown by literature review to emerge in the workplace, more specifically task and relationship conflict. The moderating variable of personality attempted to examine how personality traits from the Big Five (Donnelan et al., 2006) can influence the relations between

work design and type of conflict. Finally, socio-demographic variables were included and controlled: gender, unionization, years of service within the organisation, years of service within the job and weekly hours of work.

From this conceptual model, 6 research hypotheses were established. The first three hypothesis addressed the relation between work design characteristics and the type of workplace conflict. The following three hypotheses addressed the moderating effect of personality traits on the relation between work design characteristics and type of workplace conflict.

In order to test these hypotheses a questionnaire was created using existing research tools from four sources: Jehn (1997), Morgeson and Humphrey (2006), Cox (1998) and Donnelan et al. (2006). In order to canvass participants,, electronic data collection was undertaken. It is to be noted that no secondary data was used. This research comprises a total of 473 participants.

Unfortunately, data analysis demonstrated that we were unable to make such conclusions from this research. That lack of relation between the various variables did not demonstrate particular links between work design characteristics and the type of conflict that emerges in the workplace, or even the moderating effects of personality traits on these relations. As stated by the Center for Conflict Resolution International (2010, online), conflict is a complex and nebulous matter. The confusion between the type of conflict that individuals like in the workplace can contribute to this complexity (Jehn, 1997; Torrance, 1957; Amason, 1996; Amason & Sapienza, 1997; Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988).

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