The relationship between scheduling type and conflict level in caregiving organization teams.
Abstract

Today flexibility is an important part of organizational work. This study investigated the relationship between level of flexibility in scheduling and conflict level in caregiving teams, while controlling for team cohesion, team trust, age, team size and how long they have been in the team. The study was conducted in two small towns in the southeast of Sweden in elderly care and handicap care organizations. The ages of participants varied from 16 to 65 years. Out of 109 participants who filled out questionnaires 61 worked with an adapted (flexible) schedule and 48 with the ordinary schedule. Results showed no significant difference between the scheduling types and the conflict level, even after controlling for the named variables. Overall, it was found that team trust and team cohesion were more important for conflict level than scheduling type.

Keywords

certainty; schedule; trust; cohesion; care giving professions;
Introduction

Nowadays flexible work schedules have become a big part of the organizational work, since “the concept of flexibilization has become a magic wand in modern organizational strategies. Practically all organizations try to organize their production in more flexible ways.” (Martens, Nijhuis, Van Boxtel, & Knottnerus, 1999, p. 35). This has also spread to the service and caregiving professions. However, its effectiveness has not been sufficiently investigated to date.

This study investigates the relation between different types of scheduling and the team conflict level while controlling for team cohesion, team trust, time in team, team size and age. The two types of scheduling studied here are the fixed ordinary schedule (OS) and the adapted schedule (AS). The OS repeats itself every six or ten weeks and allows some changes to be made if the organization requires it. Here, the workers already know in the beginning of the year how and when they will work for the rest of the year. In the AS, each schedule covers a six weeks period but the workers of each unit/team can decide who works which shift. All shifts of that unit have to be covered, which means that the workers in the team have to decide together who works which shift. They have the opportunity to change their working schedule every working period if they like. The study was done in a service sector where the employees care for elderly and handicapped persons, a 24-hours care with shifts covering all hours.

Research on scheduling

Only a limited amount of research has been done on scheduling and most of the relevant studies date back 20-40 years ago. None of those studied self-organized flexible schedules in care giving professions. The majority focused on flexible schedules in office settings and industries or on compressed workweeks (Krausz & Freibach, 1983; Harrick, Vanek, & Michlitsch, 1986; McGuire & Liro, 1986).

Flexible work schedule means that there is a core time when everybody has to be present, the time before and after the core time is flexible as long as the workers work their appointed work hours each day, week, or month. For example, an employee can choose to come in early in the morning and therefore leave earlier, while others come later in the morning and then also leave later in the afternoon. For a more thorough description of flexible work schedules used in these studies see Allenspach (1972). AS is a form of flexible work schedule where the employees can imply changes every six weeks and fit it to their non-work life, but here it does not contain core hours, and the
team has to make sure together that all shifts are covered. Compressed work schedules are when employees work longer hours per day, and fewer days per week, like a 10 hour shift per day for 4 work days instead of an 8 hour workday for 5 days a week. Both, AS and OS, have features of the compressed work week as they are applied in care giving professions requiring 24 hour staffing, which leads to long and irregularly work shifts up to a length of 13 hours. In this study, all employees had a certain amount of hours they had to work in a six-week period.

In research on flexitime, it was found “that flexitime is a desirable company policy for employees because it does facilitate travel, reduce inter role conflict and increase a sense of being in control in the work setting” (Hicks & Klimoski, 1981, p. 340). One study showed that women on flexible schedule had less absenteeism especially when they where married and had children (Krausz & Freibach, 1983). This could be interesting for the current study since the caregiving professions in Sweden are predominantly staffed with female workers. A positive effect on change of work schedules to compressed and flexitime schedules was found by Harrick et al. (1986). In their study, the workers where significantly more satisfied with the work schedule and had fewer absenteeism, but they did not get more effective. Another study (McGuire & Liro, 1986) showed that flexible schedules lead to a higher satisfaction within the work environment and made it easier to bring both work activities and non-work activities into balance. The higher the flexibility (less core hours) of the schedule the more effect it has on the employees’ attitudes. Nevertheless, it can also cause problems when employees need each other to do their work but do not work at the same time (Baltes, Briggs, Huff, Wright, & Neuman, 1999). Satisfaction at work and with the schedule could lead to less conflict in the teams.

Other studies showed negative effects of these flexible or shortened workweeks (Martens, Nijhuis, Van Boxtel, & Knottnerus, 1999). They found that employees who work compressed weeks, rotating shifts, and irregularly changing hours had significant more health complaints, higher sleeping problems, and also greater problems with their psychological performance, than workers with non-flexible work schedules. After controlling for some other work related variables including subjective workload, the flexible work schedules did have a smaller effect. It seems like “it is a matter of extra stress added to pre-existing work related stress.” (Martens, Nijhuis, Van Boxtel, & Knottnerus, 1999, p. 43). Those with irregular or compressed working hours had 40% more health complains. Thus flexibility is associated with higher health complains.
especially if it is paired with irregularity. Their study further point out the controllability of the flexibility, the less controllable the flexibility is the higher are the negative effects on health and well being (Martens, Nijhuis, Van Boxtel, & Knottnerus, 1999). Therefore, the negative effects found for flexible schedule could lead to higher conflict levels in teams.

In many municipals in Sweden the clearly flexible schedule labelled AS has been introduced in care giving professions without sound research behind it. There has been a lot of discussions and complains about the schedule. Tullberg (2003) found that AS led to a source of irritation and on going discussions in teams and also that it takes a lot of time to put the schedule together. In the care profession the AS has the effect that everyone works with everyone and therefore each shifts has to do a new roll division and adjust to each other, whereas before the subteams were quite stable (Tullberg, 2003). It is therefore important to look at how this type of scheduling affects employees. One of the things it influences is the team and makes it more and more autonomous. A team is defined as “a collection of individuals who are interdependent in their tasks, who share responsibility for outcomes, who see themselves and who are seen by others as an intact social entity embedded in one or more larger social systems, and who manage their relationship across organizational boundaries” (Cohen & Bailey, 1997, p. 241). Work teams are often stable over time, well defined and full-time, they are responsible to provide services or to produce goods (Cohen & Bailey, 1997). For this study, the teams with an AS are planning their schedule themselves and in teams with OS they are influenced by each other’s schedule. Teams are often seen as a positive work solution, but there are other opinions like Sinclair (1992), who is critical to the praise that teams are the solution to all organizational problems. She states that working in teams can lead to conflict and stress, might only be satisfying for some. This could be amplified by the different scheduling types.

Individuals need for structure

According to Moxnes (1991) some people feel satisfied in groups and others do not because of the anxiety that is created by structure, which has a different influence on different employees. He describes every day anxiety, how all humans; some more, some less; feel anxiety in social situations and also in changing situations. Structure is seen as a mechanism to minimize anxiety. Moxnes (1991) defines structure in groups as guiding principles on how human interaction should be. He describes how the group accepts certain goals and rules, which includes rules about communication and role distribution.
A structured environment is an environment in which contents patterns are continuously repeated (like fixed schedules), for example patterns on how to do the work, patterns for human interaction, and strain of thought in the organisation. Rules, regulations, customs, rituals, routines, work division, roles, goals, and expectations - all of these are ingredients in the social structure. When the structure in an organization weakens and falls below a certain level, anxiety rises (Moxnes, 1991). He makes a distinction between loosely structured groups and groups with higher structure and that people are reacting differently to these two groups depending on their own need for structure. In work groups that are under constant threat and where anxiety is high, the group develops a defence mechanism to avoid the anxiety. Structure and organisation becomes a way to handle anxiety. To get this structure to function in an optimal way it has to be matched with the human needs of the organization. Too little control may create anxiety, but too much control may also create discomfort for some people in the organization. A strong structure locks the workers into certain roles and behavioural patterns. Some like to be locket while others feel trapped (Moxnes, 1991). The schedule of a workplace is a kind of structure. The AS is less structured since it is more changeable in a short time and it is done by the employees themselves. The OS on the other hand is more structured since it is fixed and repeats itself, and it is harder to change in a short run.

**Team cohesion**

On a group level cohesion is an important part of teams, but there is a lack of research on team cohesion and its relationship with scheduling; most of the research is focused on team or individual performance (Chiocchio & Essiembre, 2009; Chang, Hughes, & Mark, 2006). Since cohesion is found to be linked to conflict (Tekleab, Quigley, & Tesluk, 2009), it is important to have it as a covariate in this study.

Group cohesion consists of two parts; one is the individual aspect of group cohesion and the other is the group aspect. The individual’s attraction to the group concerns how much the individual wants to be accepted by the group and stay in the group. The group aspect of group cohesion is the unity, similarity and closeness in the group. Group cohesion is often seen as a strong group spirit or moral, it is also called “overall group processes” (Carless & De Paola, 2000; Borek, 2011). Negative effects of cohesion are groupthink, which consists of several parts like direct leadership, sanctions against dissent, poor information search, and high cohesiveness. It was found that the majority of the group makes the decisions despite the fact that one or more members in the team
do not agree (Wise, 2014; Tindale, Smith, Dykema-Engblade, & Kluwe, 2012). In other studies it was shown that cohesion has a positive effect on performance (Cohen & Bailey, 1997; Chiocchio & Essiembre, 2009; van Vianen & De Dreu, 2001) and also on job satisfaction (Chang, Hughes, & Mark, 2006).

The cohesion concept is assumed to be connected with scheduling. Since in the OS the team is divided into subgroups that usually work together, this allows for familiarity between the team members. The AS on the other hand leads to that members of the team that usually did not work together now do just that. So they have to get to know each other, find their roles and may need new routines; all of which could lead to more conflict.

Team trust

Earlier research has shown that trust, cohesion, and satisfaction are central predictors for team effectiveness. In addition, trust has a relationship to conflict (Rispens, Greer, & Jehn, 2007; DeOrtentiis, Summers, Ammeter, Douglas, & Ferris, 2013), therefore this study takes trust in to account.

The most common view of team trust is that in order to trust, the team the members must feel that the team will not harm them or their interests, but also that the team is capable and knowledgeable enough to perform the task or achieve the goal. This means that the individuals are willing to be in situation where they are vulnerable to others and where their goal achievement is dependent on others (DeOrtentiis, Summers, Ammeter, Douglas, & Ferris, 2013). Another part is how much one is willing to attribute positive intentions to others and to believe in the actions and words of other people (Miner-Rubino & Reed, 2010). Cook and Wall (1980) divide trust in two dimensions. One is the belief in the intentions of others and the confidence in the ability of the other. The second dimension is between co-worker and management. Trust becomes more important when there is no structure or just a weak structure (DeOrtentiis, Summers, Ammeter, Douglas, & Ferris, 2013), like in the AS.

Previous research on trust has also shown that there is a relationship between cohesion and trust. If the team does not build team trust, then it has an impact on the teams’ ability to build team cohesion. Trust has also been shown to influence performance; it has a higher effect on performance if the team also has cohesion and satisfaction (DeOrtentiis, Summers, Ammeter, Douglas, & Ferris, 2013).

It is assumed that in the AS there has to be more trust, because it is less structured and team members have to decide the schedule together, where they have to trust each
other and that nobody has bad intentions. Also when they are working with team members they are not used to work with, they have to trust that these members will do their work. This could lead to higher conflict when they do not trust each other or one feels that the rest do not trust her or him.

**Team Conflict**

Conflict is the main variable in this study, which aims to investigate if there is a relationship between scheduling type and conflict. Previous research on conflict was not focused on scheduling, but it has been shown that cohesion, trust and conflict are interrelated. For example Tekleab, Quigley and Tesluk (2009) assume that conflict is a natural stadium that can lead to team cohesion.

Intragroup conflict is often defined “as the process emerging from perceived incompatibilities or differences among group members.” (de Wit, Greer, & Jehn, 2012, p. 360). First, two types of conflict were defined; task conflict and relationship conflict, later on a third kind was added; the process conflict. Process conflict deals with the logistics of a task on who does what and who has the responsibility for what. “Relationship conflict exists when there are interpersonal incompatibilities among group members, which typically includes tension, animosity, and annoyance among members within a group. Task conflict exist when there are disagreements among group members about the content of the tasks being performed, including differences in viewpoints, ideas, and opinions.” (Jehn, 1995, p. 258). Since the team members in the AS are more dependent of each other to get the schedule they want, small disagreements can become bigger in the scheduling situation. When there already are small task or relationship conflicts they may surface when the team makes the schedule, especially if some already feel unfairly treated, putting together the schedule can be an additional source of conflict.

In the beginning of conflict research it was thought that conflict has only negative effects on the productivity, but later on it was found that some task conflict could lead to better group decisions, more critical thinking, and facilitate innovativeness (Jehn, 1995; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003; Hon & Chan, 2013; Liu, Härtel, & Sun, 2014, Cohen & Bailey, 1997). Cohen and Bailey (1997) found that for routine tasks conflict was lowering the team performance, but for non-routine tasks it did not have a negative effect, and in some cases it was even advantageous. The positive effects of conflict had a limit, if there was too much conflict the team members could not fulfil their group goal since they got overwhelmed with information (Cohen & Bailey, 1997; Jehn &
“Conflict is central to team effectiveness because conflict is a natural part of the process that makes team decision-making so effective in the first place.” (Liu, Härtel, & Sun, 2014, p. 644). Conflict in a scheduling situation could lead to more creative solutions that makes all team members satisfied, however, if there is too much conflict it could make them ineffective and prevent them from getting the scheduling done.

De Wit, Greer and Jehn (2012) found that process conflict and relational conflict are more damaging for distal and proximal group outcomes than task conflict. Rispens, Greer and Jehn (2007) found that both relationship and task conflict affects trust of the individual in the group negatively. Trust was found to be positively related with perceived performance. The mediation effect of trust on perceived performance was that it completely mediated the effect of relationship conflict, but just partially mediated the effect of task conflict. Groups that are “are highly connected such that a shared view about the work group and who knows what exists, task conflict brings about a smaller decline in trust than when groups are less cognitively connected.” (Rispens, Greer, & Jehn, 2007, s. 338). Teams that are highly connected and trust each other are assumed to experience less conflict which should also be the case in the AS.

There can be an asymmetry of how team members perceive the power distribution and the conflict in teams. “Depending on the personal beliefs, thoughts and values derived from their former experiences, the expectations of team members may differ in terms of how they imagine that conflict will manifest.” (Janss, Rispens, Segers, & Jehn, 2012, p. 843). People from different countries perceive conflict in different ways (Rispens, Greer, & Jehn, 2007). If one party is not even aware of the problem than it is hard to discuss it in an effective way. Moreover, if the other party perceives the conflict more, then that person puts down more time to solve it, instead of focusing on performance relevant tasks. It was found that an asymmetry in relational conflict leads to a negative group performance while asymmetry in task conflict leads to less satisfaction in the team and to less self reported individual performance (Jehn, Rispens, & Thatcher, 2010). When the teams are making their schedules in the AS, there may be some who are experiencing that there is a conflict or that they are disadvantaged, but others might not see it that way, which could lead to the negative effects described earlier and to more conflict.

Individuals who are disadvantaged in the group are more likely to strive for more power while people with higher power in a group are more likely to strive after
acceptance from others. “From a broader perspective, these impaired emotional resources can be subsumed under the human need for power and status and the human need for social acceptance and belongingness, two needs that constitute the core of interpersonal experience.” (Dovidio, Saguy, & Shnabel, 2009, p. 440). This could influence peoples reactions in the AS when they are doing their schedule.

Since the research described earlier showed that conflict, trust, and cohesion are important predictors in performance, these factors are used to investigate the relationship between scheduling types and conflict. The assumption is that teams who have AS have to be more relying on each other to get the schedule done, which may also lead to more friction between the members of the team and could therefore lead to more conflict in these teams. The research question is: Do teams in care organisations (elderly- and handicap care) with an ordinary schedule have lower conflict levels than teams with adapted schedules? Also, do they have lower conflict level than teams with AS, when controlling for team trust, team cohesion, age, time in team and team size?

Method

Participants

The participants included 109 employees in care giving professions between the ages of 16 and 65 years (M=48.84, SD= 11.45). Sixty-one worked with the AS and 48 with the OS. There were 100 woman and 6 male participants. The respondents have worked in their teams between just a couple of month and up to 29 years (M= 7.98, SD= 7.27). The team size was between 1 to 17 persons (M= 8.45, SD= 2.85). The external dropout was 141 possible participants; the internal was for the conflict scale six participants who did not answer all questions. For the trust scale two participants did not answer all questions and regarding the cohesion scale six participants did not complete all questions. One participant did not answer the question regarding age and one participant did not answer the question about team size. For how long they have been in the team five participants had not answered the question and for gender three participants had not answered the question.

Measuring instrument

The questionnaire used in this study was constructed out of three previously tested questionnaires and several questions of demographic nature and was written in Swedish.
The demographic part consisted of five questions, starting with if they are working in elderly care or in handicap care, followed by their age, how long they have worked in their team and team size. The three questionnaire parts on cohesion, trust, and conflict already existed in English and have been translated by the author into Swedish, and then retranslated by the supervisor. The questionnaire begins with the demographic questions, followed by questions on team cohesion, then team trust, and ends with conflict questions.

For the cohesion part the Revised Scale of Cohesion (Carless & De Paola, 2000) was used. It consists of ten questions including a 9-point Likert scale for every question. The scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree). Questions in this part included statements like: “Our team is united in trying to reach its goals for performance” and “I’m unhappy with my team’s level of commitment to the task (R)” (Carless & De Paola, 2000, p. 81). They reported an alpha coefficient for the questions between .63 and .81. The cohesion scale has a possible answer scale from 10 to 90 points. The respondents in this study gave answers, which ranged from a total score of 32 to 90 points. The cohesion scale in this study has a Cronbach’s Alpha of .72.

For the trust part in the questionnaire the Interpersonal Trust at Work measurement by Cook and Wall (1980) was used. Since this study was focussed on the trust in the team and its members, only the parts on faith in peers and confident in peers where used and not the parts on trust in management. This resulted in 6 questions with a 7-point Likert scale raging form 1 (I strongly disagree) to 7 (I strongly agree). Questions were for example: “If I got into difficulties at work I know my workmates would try and help me out” and “I have full confidence in the skills of my workmates” (Cook, Hepworth, Wall, & Warr, 1993, p. 261). Cook and Wall (1980) reported an alpha coefficient for the subscale of faith in peers of .71 and for the subscale of confidence in peers an alpha of .74. The lowest possible value for the trust scale is 6 and the highest is 42. The answers ranged from 11 to 42. The trust scale in the current study has a Cronbach’s Alpha of .90.

For the conflict part in the questionnaire Jehn´s (1995) Intragroup conflict scale was used. It has eight questions with a 5-point Likert scale; which ranged from 1 (none) to 5 (a lot). With questions like “How much frictions is there among members in your work unit?” and “How much are personality conflicts evident in your work unit?” (Jehn, 1995, p. 268) were used in this section. She reported an alpha coefficient of task conflict .87 and relationship conflict .92. For the conflict scale the possible answers are
from 8 to 64. The respondent’s answers ranged from 8 to 30. The Cronbach’s Alpha for the conflict scale in this study is .87.

**Procedure**

In the beginning different municipals were contacted by telephone in order to find one where they use the OS. A town in the south of Sweden was found where they use the OS, where the questionnaire was distributed in their elderly care units. In terms of the AS, a smaller town also located in south Sweden was found, where the questionnaire was distributed in both elderly care and in handicap care. The translated and finished questionnaire with the accompanying letter was provided in an envelope. The accompanying letter explained the study without revealing its purpose. It provided the participants with the information that they are treated anonymously, that it is optional to participate, and that it would be much appreciated if they did so. The contact information of the author was integrated to give them the possibility to get in contact if any questions arise while filling out the questionnaire. In the elderly care the head of the units distributed the questionnaires and in the handicap care organisation the author distributed them herself via the internal mail of the organisation. The questionnaires where distributed in the beginning of March and by the end of April all answered questionnaires were collected. Within this timeframe both the author and the head of the units reminded the participants of the questionnaire and ask them to answer it.

Overall 250 questionnaires were distributed to the participants, 120 in the OS and 130 in AS. In total, 109 questionnaires were returned to the researcher (43.6%). Sixty-one of them are with the AS and 48 with the OS. Since the researcher handed out the questionnaires in two different towns where they used only one of the schedules, it was the researcher who added the schedule information. Each returned questionnaire was numbered and marked with the scheduling typed.

**Statistical methods**

The answers were entered in SPSS version 22, in which all statistical calculations were performed. The numbers for trust, cohesion, and conflict scale were calculated for each participant and these were used throughout the statistical calculations. The missing values for each variable were calculated. Firstly, some descriptive statistic were done for all the variables and also split into the two scheduling types. There it was found that some variables where not normal distributed. These were: how long they have worked
in their team, age, trust and conflict. Also the Chronbach’s Alpha for each scale was calculated.

A t-test with scheduling as the independent variable and with the cohesion scale as the dependent variables was performed, and Mann-Whitney test with scheduling as the independent variable and with the trust and conflict scale as the dependent variables was calculated, since these two were not normal distributed. For the same reason a Spearman’s rho was calculated for all the variables, to see if they are related to each other.

An ANCOVA with scheduling type as independent variable and ranked conflict as dependent variable with cohesion, ranked trust, ranked time in team, team size, and ranked age was calculated, and the variables that were skewed got ranked to make the ANCOVA more robust. This was done even though the Mann-Whitney did not show a significant difference between the scheduling types in conflict level, to identify subtle differences that could have been missed in the Mann-Whitney test. The covariates and scheduling type are independent from each other. An ANCOVA is used to remove the bias of variables, that besides the independent variable are assumed to influence the dependent variable (Field, 2012).

Results

As shown in table 1 there are just small differences between the different scheduling types and conflict, trust, and cohesion. Furthermore, the Mann-Whitney test and t-test showed that these small differences are not significant. This means that the research question whether the OS has lower conflict scores can be answered with that it has not and that between these two scheduling types no significant difference in the conflict level exist.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for conflict, trust and cohesion by A-schedule and O-schedule type with mean and standard deviation. P-value by Mann-Whitney test for conflict and trust and by t-test for cohesion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A Schedule</th>
<th>O Schedule</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>p value</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>15.47</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>16.35</td>
<td>4.88</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>37.49</td>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>37.52</td>
<td>5.25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cohesion</td>
<td>61.68</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>60.04</td>
<td>12.37</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
In table 2 correlations are shown. Especially between the three scales there were high and significant correlations.

Table 2 shows correlations by Spearman's Rho, for team size, schedule, conflict, trust, age, cohesion and time in team.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Schedule</td>
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<td>2. Conflict</td>
<td>.067</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Cohesion</td>
<td>-.045</td>
<td>-.389**</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Trust</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-.569**</td>
<td>.497**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Age</td>
<td>-.086</td>
<td>-.362**</td>
<td>.090</td>
<td>.215*</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Time in team</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.168</td>
<td>.250*</td>
<td>.114</td>
<td>.232*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Team size</td>
<td>.296**</td>
<td>.244*</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>-.216*</td>
<td>-.184</td>
<td>-.232</td>
<td>-.022</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
* correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The ANCOVA, with the scheduling methods as independent variables and the ranked conflict scale as the dependent variable and with five co-variables, showed that even after controlling for the five covariates there is no significant difference between A schedule and O schedule with F (1,86) =.001, p=.97, partial \( \eta^2 = .00 \).

We can also see that three of the covariates significantly predicts the conflict level. These are cohesion with F (1,86) = 8.28, p=.005, trust with F(1,86) = 9.93, p=002, and age with F (1,86) = 13.60, p=.000. This means that the higher trust or cohesion or age are the lower is the conflict level in the team, as shown in table 2. The other two covariates are not significantly predicting the conflict level; team size with F (1,86) =.107, p=.74 and time in team with F (1,86) =.04, p=.85.

Discussion

The results show that there is no significant difference between the AS and OS in conflict level. Even when controlling for cohesion, trust, age, time in team and team size; the scheduling type explains near to nothing of the variation in conflict and the team cohesion and team trust seems to be more important than the scheduling type to conflict. Cohesion, trust and conflict are inter-related and therefore they are influencing each other. If cohesion and trust is high in teams, small irritations may arise, but often they are solved easily with discussion, which means that they do not escalate to a conflict. Also if a conflict arises and there is trust and cohesion in the team it is easier to
solve it, without splitting the team. On the other hand if the cohesion and trust is low, as for example in newly formed teams, task conflict could lead either to a rise in trust and cohesion in the team or to the splitting of the team. As we can see in the results the trust scale had high values in both scheduling types, which could explain the low scores in conflict.

It was assumed that conflict would be higher in the AS since there the team has to work together and discuss in order to write the schedule, which everyone in the team then is supposed to follow. Surprisingly, it seems that the teams with an AS managed to work together in a way that does not lead to higher conflict. The AS may also give them the freedom to do the schedule in a way that it fits their non-work life and therefore the conflicts in the team may not be higher than with the ordinary schedule. This is in line with McGuire and Liro’s (1986) findings on how flexible schedules help the workers to find a better work and life balance. As a general trend, many women work in caregiving professions. Accordingly, in this study only six out of 106 participants where male. Krausz and Freibach (1983) found that women with a flexible schedule found it easier to bring their work and non-work life in balance. So the flexible schedule could suit women with family best, because it allows them to better adjust their work with their children’s needs.

Another possible explanation why there is no significant difference between the scheduling types in conflict could be that all individuals are reacting differently to the freedom the AS gives and the structure the OS gives (Moxnes, 1991). Individuals with a higher need for structure may react negatively to AS, its flexibility and its uncertainty, because they want to have a more structured and predictable schedule; other may feel more trapped with the OS. Both situations where the individuals do not feel comfortable with the schedule type can lead to more conflict within the work group, in a way the scheduling type can both, bring forth conflict and hinder it, depending on many other things like team cohesion, trust, and individual aspects. In the AS they may create stronger rules on how to do the schedule and they may create customs which keep the conflict on low levels, thereby creating cohesion and trust in the team. In the OS with the steady schedule, the structure is higher and the team does not have to work together to put the schedule together, they just have to follow it. This means that one reason for the result of this study could be the individual differences of the participants, because in each scheduling types there are some who feel good in it and others who do not. Some
need the structure that the OS gives to feel good and other feel trapped by it and the other way around in the AS (Moxnes, 1991).

Structure gives a feeling of control and manageability (Feldt, 1997). So some may see that doing their own schedule gives them a higher manageability of their life, while for others it might mean extra work stress and that they have to learn a complex scheduling model to be able to put the schedule together. The AS leads to a higher perceived workload which has been shown to lead to more work-related stress, but the controllability in this scheduling type may also help against the negative effects (Martens, Nijhuis, Van Boxtel, & Knottnerus, 1999). The AS gives the employee more control in a way that they can adjust it better to their living situation, but also less since it is done in a six weeks period. As a result they do not know in spring when they will work in fall, they have to discuss it with the rest of the team, and there is a chance they may not get the shifts they wanted.

If there is low structure in the organization or team there is a higher need for trust in the team (DeOrtentiis, Summers, Ammeter, Douglas, & Ferris, 2013). In the AS the team members have to trust the others in the team when they are doing their schedule and accept that it is a give and take. If there are members of the team that have put in the same shift they have to discuss who takes it and who has to move their shift to another day. There can be a chance for conflict but also a chance to solve it in a way that all team members are satisfied, whereby cohesion and trust are built. With high trust the group wants to keep together and provides benefits for the individual’s well-being (Cook & Wall, 1980). This environment of trust, cohesion, and low conflict leads to more satisfied employees and less absenteeism. Some individuals may seek power in the scheduling situations (Dovidio, Saguy, & Shnabel, 2009), which could be by trying to always get the shifts that are most popular. As a result, others might be left with shifts that do not fit their non-work life and underlying conflict in the group can increase. In groups decisions made by the majority are generally followed, so if the majority of the team decides that the schedule should be a certain way they may proceed with it even though someone is against it (Tindale, Smith, Dykema-Engblade, & Kluwe, 2012).

In the AS the employees are over the schedule when they are putting the schedule together and when it is done they are under it and have to follow it, which gives them control when they are putting the schedule together (Latour, 2012). In the OS the employees are just under the schedule since they are just supposed to follow it and somebody else without their control already did the schedule.
A further reason for the result that there is no significant difference in conflict between the AS and OS could be that everybody experiences conflict differently, some may feel that there is a conflict while others are unaware of it (Janss, Rispens, Segers, & Jehn, 2012). For further research it would be interesting to study the effect of schedules on conflict in each team for themselves. Also, culture can have an effect on the result. Since Sweden is seen as conflict avoiding, some of the participants may have answered in a way that is in line with that, and they did not want to admit that they have conflict in their work group (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Therefore, it would be interesting to do the same study but including observations to see if there is a difference between quantitative and qualitative method, and which kind fits this question best, following Tullberg (2003), who used observations and found that the adapted scheduling takes time and leads to irritation and discussions in the teams.

The results of this study further revealed that there is no significant relationship between scheduling type and cohesion or trust, so that it is more important for practitioners to strengthens cohesion and trust and seek a low or the right kind of conflict in their work groups. This study showed that cohesion, trust, and conflict have strong and significant relationships. It is important to foster cohesion and trust in the workgroup, and work out how to spot and counteract negative conflict. This could be done by clear roll definitions, to help avoid process conflict. When it comes to relationship conflict it is also important to solves the conflict fast, to avoid too much negative effects. Conflict that has gone too far can split a team and destroyed the trust and cohesion that once exited. On the other hand cohesion and trust can also inhibit conflict.

There were only 109 out of 250 questionnaires filled out, which is a response rate below 50%, and thus makes the results questionable since it is not sure that the dropouts would not have changed the result and potentially increased the conflict scores. This high amount of dropouts could reflect an overall tiredness in Sweden to answer questionnaires (TT, 2010), or that the employees found the questions to sensible, or that they simply did not want to take the time to answer, because they did not see any value in it. In the questionnaire it was easy to spot which part is about conflict, which about trust, and which about cohesion, which could have lead to some questions being avoided. One participant did miss the whole last page of the questionnaire, but filled out the rest of the questionnaire.
Further limitations of this study are that there could be differences between the two scheduling types but they were not found because of other differences between the organizations in the two towns. This could be that in the OS there was already a higher amount of conflict regardless of the schedule. Also only in the AS (because it was a smaller town with less employees in the elderly care) the handicapped care organization was included, which also could have influenced the results. To eliminate as much other explanations as possible it would have been interesting to do a longitudinal study in just one organization, where they just changing their schedule from OS to AS. With measurements before the change, in the middle of the change, and after the change has been implemented for a while, all with the same participants for each measurement time. That was not possible to do for the current study, because of the time limitations.

This work represents an exploratory study, which did not show the expected result. Since there was no earlier research on the scheduling types in relation to conflict, the results cannot be compared to previous findings. Therefore, it would be interesting in further research to investigate if there is higher stress in the AS, how a team has to be to get out most of the positive effects of flexible scheduling, and how to avoid the negative effects. One method could be participative observations in different teams, to see the effects of scheduling directly.

In conclusion, the schedule is not an important part on the conflict level in teams, but other factors like trust and cohesion that are crucially important.
References


