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Management and Emotion Regulation”

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Preface

This doctoral dissertation “The Effects of Task and Relationship Conflict on Emotional Exhaustion and Work Engagement: Conflict Management and Emotion Regulation” is based upon two published and one submitted Journal articles. This dissertation work was conducted under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Christian Korunka.

This thesis focus on the influences of task conflict and relationship conflict on two vital work-related well-being, namely emotional exhaustion and work engagement. Furthermore, I investigate how conflict management and emotion regulation moderate the effects of the two types of conflict on the study outcomes.

Since the two published and one submitted research work in this thesis originated from collaboration with my colleague, Prof. Dr. Korunka, throughout this doctoral dissertation, I employed two different active voices in line with the suggestions of the American Psychological Associations’ publication manual (APA; American Psychological Association, 2010). The use of the first-person singular voice (“I”) is utilized whenever referring to the doctoral dissertation in its entirety. First-person-plural voice (“we”) is employed to highlight that the two authors contributed to each study.

To the beloved memory of my parents

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Overview of Publications

Esbati, Z., & Korunka, C. (2020). What moderates the relation between intragroup conflict, emotional exhaustion, and work management? *Scandinavian Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 5(1): 5, 1–15. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/sjwop.91>

Esbati, Z., & Korunka, C. (2021). Does Intragroup conflict Intensity Matter? The moderating Effect of Conflict Management on Emotional Exhaustion and Work Engagement. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12: 614001, 1-15. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.614001

Esbati, Z., & Korunka, C. (submitted). Intragroup conflict and well-being: A meta-analysis. Submitted to (2021 July). *International Journal of Conflict Management*.

Abstract

Conflict is inevitable when people of various backgrounds and different work styles and opinions are brought together in workgroups. Conflict in workgroups known as “intragroup conflict” have typically classified into two broad categories: task conflict and relationship conflict. Despite the proliferation of workgroups as a primary organization unite; the influence of conflict types on (a) well-being indicators at work, and (b) how they may be best managed are scarce.

This cumulative dissertation extends the existing literature by a set of three studies that provides insight into the influences of conflict types on emotional exhaustion and work engagement, and how these relations are moderated by conflict management and emotion regulation.

- 1) Study 1 addressed the question of how emotion regulation moderates the association between relationship conflict and emotional exhaustion and how conflict management moderates the association between task conflict and work engagement.
- 2) Using an experimental survey, Study 2 provided an answer to whether the intensity (low versus high) of the two types of conflict matters in order to boost work engagement and to attenuate emotional exhaustion and whether these associations are moderated by cooperative versus competitive conflict management. To control the effects of emotion regulation on the study variables, it was assessed as covariate.
- 3) Study 3 offered the first meta-analysis of task and relationship conflict on well-being indicators including work engagement, burnout, and psychological-physiological symptoms of well-being.

Overall, this dissertation sheds light on the distinct effects of task and relationship conflict on work engagement and emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, it demonstrated that conflict intensity matters. It also demonstrated that conflict is manageable. Implications for both scholarly knowledge and managerial practice are discussed.

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*“As conflict—difference—is here in this world, as we cannot avoid it,
we should, I think, use it to work for us.”*

Mary Follout, 1925

1. General Introduction

Human beings evolved in groups. Throughout our evolutionary history, group membership has been essential to survival. Groups protect us against hostile environments and enable us to respond adaptively to environmental challenges. Participation in groups remains a reality in many aspects of our lives, including working in organizations. Today’s organizations, however, differ profoundly in scale and complexity compared with those of the past.

The past three decades have witnessed the proliferation of increasingly complex organizational environments, creating the need for increased problem-solving, speed, and flexibility. To meet these needs, organizations have frequently adopted workgroups as a primary organizational unit.

It is widely accepted that “workgroups,” that is, two or more persons interacting interdependently towards a common goal, are the building blocks of organizations. Bringing people together in a workgroup may indeed be beneficial; nonetheless, the individual differences and interdependence of its members may frequently lead to substantial conflict that may hinder the workgroup’s progress towards its goals.

Conflict within workgroups, or *intragroup conflict*, is defined in its broadest sense as perceived incompatibility or differences among workgroup members (Jehn, 1995; Thomas, 1992). The two most researched types of incompatibilities are *task conflict* (defined as disagreements about task content) and *relationship conflict* (defined as interpersonal incompatibilities).

Since Jehn's seminal work (1995, 1997) on workgroup conflict, researchers have focused primarily on understanding how task and relationship conflict can differentially affect workgroup outcomes (Benitez, et al., 2018; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). Research findings consistently demonstrate that relationship conflict is dysfunctional (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Kuriakose, et al., 2019). However, the effects of task conflict are less clear. Some studies have found task conflict to be beneficial (Amason, 1996; Behfar et al., 2011) while others have indicated it is detrimental (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jehn et al., 2008). Still other studies have shown that task conflict can be beneficial, but only under certain circumstances, depending on task type and on the moderators of the task conflict-outcome relationship (e.g., De Wit et al., 2012; Jehn, 1995).

Most research on intragroup conflict has focused on workgroup effectiveness as measured by "hard" outcomes such as performance (e.g., De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; De Wit et al., 2012; O'Neill et al., 2013). "Soft" outcomes such as well-being remain largely unexplored. Whereas well-being at work can potentially contribute to the development of conditions likely to either undermine or enhance desired workgroup outcomes (e.g., Jungst & Blumberg, 2016), and there appears to be an interplay between the types of intragroup conflict and well-being (e.g., De Dreu et al., 2004). Furthermore, the significance of well-being at work for individuals lies in both the humanistic aspect and the economic burden resulting from reduced well-being such as sickness, absence, and decreased productivity (e.g., Buffet et al., 2014). For this reason, promoting well-being has become a key objective of European policy (Eurofound, 2017).

Intragroup conflict has powerful implications for well-being (Kuriakose et al., 2019; Meier et al., 2013). Research documents that workgroup conflict is often positively related to stress and threat, thus increasing the effects of negative emotional responses and affect (Jehn, 1997; Thomas, 1992), and is negatively related to well-being (e.g., Dijkstra, et al., 2011;

Tafvelin et al., 2019). Speaking to this point, Eurofound's (2021) report revealed that "work-related stress is one of the health risks most frequently identified by workers in Europe." While there seems to be a consensus that conflict in workgroups is emotionally laden (e.g., Jehn & Bendersky, 2003), the effects of distinct types of intragroup conflict on well-being has rarely been examined. Many questions remain unanswered, for instance, "What are the influences of task versus relationship conflict on the well-being of workgroup members?" "Does each type of intragroup conflict have the same or different effects?" A primary purpose of this dissertation was to address these questions.

Consistent with the *Job Demand-Resource Theory* (JD-R, Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001), I considered two vital indicators of work-related well-being in workgroups: (1) *work engagement*, defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004); and (2) *emotional exhaustion*, defined as a feeling of being overextended (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). I reasoned that studying what might increase positive aspects (work engagement) and reduce negative aspects (emotional exhaustion) of well-being would provide a robust representation of well-being in workgroups. Research shows that work engagement is positively, and emotional exhaustion negatively, associated with workgroup effectiveness (e.g., Schaufeli et al., 2008). Surprisingly, however, few studies have investigated the associations between (a) task and relationship conflict and (b) the two well-being indicators.

As implied by the opening quote of Mary Fallout (1925) in the introduction, conflict is inevitable and we need to reap the greatest possible benefit from it. To do so, conflict must somehow be managed (e.g., DeChurch & Marks, 2001; Dimas & Lourenco, 2015). The influences of conflict originate in how members respond to or manage it (e.g., DeChurch, et al., 2013; Tjosvold et al., 2006). Taking a cognitive perspective and weighing one's interest versus the other party's interest could be a way to manage conflict (Pondy, 1992). Part of

managing conflict requires addressing emotions (Griffith, et al., 2016; Medina et al., 2005), which are an inherent aspect of conflict that have been largely neglected. In this dissertation, therefore, I have focused on both cognitive and emotional aspects of managing intragroup conflict (Pondy, 1992): (a) *conflict management*, defined as the responses of workgroup members to conflict (Thomas, 1992); and (b) *emotion regulation*, defined as efforts to impact the experience and expression of activated emotions (Gross, 1998).

In this dissertation, I have focused on two active and conflict-engaging strategies of conflict management: a cooperative strategy (high concern both for self and the other person) and a competitive strategy (high concern for self and low concern for the other person). I also considered two strategies of emotion regulation occurring before an emotional response is activated: distraction (redirecting thoughts) and cognitive reappraisal (changing the mode of thinking about an emotional situation).

In summary, the first aim of this dissertation was to document and understand the influences of task and relationship conflict on (a) work engagement and (b) emotional exhaustion. The second aim was to explore whether (c) conflict management and (d) emotion regulation strategies moderated relations between intragroup conflict, work engagement, and emotional exhaustion.

1.2. *Conflict at work*

The “process model” of conflict (Pondy, 1967; Thomas, 1992) defines *conflict* as a dynamic process in which at least one individual perceives incompatibilities or differences with another individual or others over something that matters (Thomas, 1992). Conflict begins with a clash or interaction between individuals that takes place in the context of scarce resources, power, and interdependence (Pondy, 1967). This triggers an appraisal of the interaction in which the individuals interpret the interaction and its importance. An individual’s interpretation leads to labelling the interaction as an offence or to blaming (e.g., Felstiner et al., 1980). This

interpretation in turn results in feelings, cognitions, and actions in response to conflict (Pondy, 1967; Thomas, 1992).

Conflict is generally perceived as a hindrance to effective workgroup functioning (e.g., Blake & Mouton, 1984) regardless of the type of perceived incompatibility. In recent decades, conflict at work is viewed as a job demand and as one of the most potent job stressors negatively related to well-being (e.g., Spector & Bruk-Lee, 2008).

Conflict is studied at different levels of analysis. Conflict analyzed within a workgroup is referred to as “*intragroup conflict*”. At this level, a workgroup’s members are interdependently connected (Jehn, 1995). In this dissertation, I have focused on conflict within workgroups, or intragroup conflict.

In the following sections, I provide an overview of intragroup conflict, its types, and the influences of each type on work engagement and emotional exhaustion in order to ensure a general understanding of intragroup conflict. I also point out research gaps concerning the variables of interest.

1.3 Intragroup conflict

Although scholars have defined *intragroup conflict* in different ways, the definitions have common constituents. In a synthesis of different definitions of conflict (Putnam & Poole, 1987; Thomas, 1992_a, 1992_b) three themes were identified: interdependence, disagreement, and interference.

In this dissertation, I chose a broad definition of intragroup conflict: incompatible views among workgroup members. This definition is derived from the “*diversity model*” of intragroup conflict (Litterer, 1966). According to the model, diversity refers to visible or invisible differences (e.g., race, age, values, and expertise). Workgroup members perceive the differences and accordingly separate themselves from others (McCarter et al., 2018; Perry-

Smith & Shalley, 2003). Such separation, in turn, may highlight differences which could trigger conflict among workgroup members.

The literature reports four main types of conflict: task, relationship, process, and status conflict. The two most researched types are task and relationship conflict. *Task conflict* refers to disagreements among workgroup members over task content. *Relationship conflict* refers to interpersonal disagreements such as personality clashes, value differences, and tension (De Wit et al., 2012; Jehn, 1995). *Process conflict* is defined as disagreements over how to approach and accomplish specific tasks (Jehn, 1997; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). *Status conflict* is defined as arguments among workgroup members over their relative positions in the workgroup social hierarchy, such as the amount of respect they should receive (Bendersky & Hays, 2012).

In this dissertation, I have focused on task and relationship conflicts because these are the most robust types, and both are well-supported by research. Process conflict has a strong relation with relationship conflict, and it is difficult to distinguish its effects on workgroup outcomes from those of task conflict. Moreover, the definition of process conflict is not consistent (Jehn & Mannix, 2001). Status conflict is a very recent construct that has not been studied adequately in the field.

Whereas the distinction between relationship and task conflict is common in research on performance, it has largely been ignored in association with well-being (e.g., Spector & Bruk-Lee, 2008). Research generally supports the idea that conflict at work is related to individual well-being and health complaints (e.g., De Dreu et al., 2004; Meier et al., 2013). Researchers have found positive associations between relationship conflict and physiological symptoms, emotional exhaustion, and burnout (e.g., Benitez et al., 2018; Leon-Prese et al., 2016; Meier et al., 2014). Nonetheless, it is unclear whether relationship conflict and task

conflict (see Meier et al., 2013), have different effects on work engagement and emotional exhaustion. In this dissertation, I address this gap in the literature.

1.3.1. Relationship conflict

Relationship conflict is considered to be a social stressor and a job demand that causes stress responses such as tension and animosity (Jehn, 1995; Dijkstra et al., 2011; Spector & Bruk-Lee, 2008). Research shows that relationship conflict is often highly emotional (e.g., Chen & Ayoko, 2012; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003), hurts ongoing relationships, and can in turn negatively influence a broad range of workgroup outcomes: from hard outcomes such as performance to soft outcomes such as trust (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; De Wit et al., 2012; O'Neill et al., 2013).

Despite empirical findings suggesting that relationship conflict (a) is primarily an emotional entity (Jehn, 1995), (b) causes stress responses (De Dreu & Weingart, 2001) and (c) has behavioral, psychological and medical consequences (Quick et al., 1997), the literature related to its effect on emotional exhaustion is relatively limited, and research related to its influences on work engagement is particularly sparse. These two outcomes (i.e., work engagement and emotional exhaustion) have emotional and motivational components that may be affected by conflict (e.g., Costa, et al., 2014) and both influence workgroup effectiveness (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003; DeChurch & Marks, 2013). However, the literature has so far not extensively examined the effect of conflict types on work engagement and emotional exhaustion.

1.3.2. Task Conflict

Task conflict is the most researched type of intragroup conflict (De Wit et al., 2012). Interestingly, as indicated earlier, the debate on the benefits of task conflict has been continuing in the conflict literature. Task conflict is beneficial (e.g., Amason, 1996; Jehn, 1995), or, in

contrast, impairs workgroup outcomes¹ (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jungst & Blumberg, 2016). Other research found that task conflict is beneficial only under certain circumstances (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; De Wit et al., 2012).

Some research has found that task conflict is related to decreased well-being, as it increases stress (Kuriakose et al., 2019; Sonnentag et al., 2013), whereas other research found that task conflict is generally unrelated to well-being (Medina et al., 2005; Giebels & Janssen, 2005), which, in my view, could be disputed. Consistent with the *self-verification theory* (Swann et al., 2004), although task conflict causes less stress than relationship conflict, disputes over task issues may threaten a positive self-view that workgroup members strive to maintain (Meier et al., 2013). This may lead to a loss of resources and a drain on energy, and thus to burnout or withdrawal from the task at hand in order to avert additional losses of resources (Shirom, 2003).

In summary, few studies have explored the associations between task conflict, work engagement, and emotional exhaustion (e.g., Jungst & Blumberg, 2016; Tafvelin et al., 2019). As such, the influences of task conflict on work engagement and emotional exhaustion are unclear. My dissertation addresses this gap in the literature.

1.4. Intragroup conflict, work engagement and emotional exhaustion

In accordance with the *Job Demands-Resource theory* (JD-R, Demerouti et al., 2001), this dissertation focuses on work engagement and emotional exhaustion² as workgroup outcomes. Both are critical constructs for employee well-being (Halbesleben, 2010) and allow for a general assessment of workgroup well-being (see Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Work

-
1. The literature indicates that most studied workgroup outcomes are performance, innovation, and decision making.
 2. I chose solely emotional exhaustion, as it is (a) a core dimension of burnout, (b) it is conceptualized as the first stage of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001), and (c) job demands are more strongly related to exhaustion than to two other dimensions of burnout, namely cynicism and reduced professional efficacy (Peng et al., 2010).

engagement and emotional exhaustion include distinct processes: a motivational process and a health-impairing process, respectively. This duality provides a robust representation of well-being in workgroups. Work engagement conveys a positive mindset at work and brings meaning, pride, and enthusiasm. In contrast, emotional exhaustion conveys an unpleasant state that negatively affects individuals' health. It is indisputable that organizations benefit from having highly motivated and less stressed workgroup members. Surprisingly, researchers have given scant attention to work engagement and emotional exhaustion in relation to task and relationship conflict. In this dissertation, I address the following question to bridge the resultant gap in the literature: "What are the influences of task and relationship conflict on work engagement and emotional exhaustion?"

1.4.1. Work engagement

Work engagement is defined as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 295). It is determined by the resources people have that enable them to control demands and environments at work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). Work engagement is related to good health and positive work affect (Schaufeli, et al., 2008; Sonnentag, 2003).

Work engagement theory (Kahn, 1990) asserts that (a) the perception of work context impacts employees' psychological responses, and (b) individuals in environments in which members can freely question one another and express their opinions without fear of negative consequences are more likely to invest themselves in their work (Kahn, 1990). Thus, according to the theory, "Would workgroup members be able to engage at their work when they are faced with conflict in their workgroup?"

The existing literature has shown that (a) resources facilitate work engagement and (b) work engagement maximizes workgroup effectiveness and well-being. However, we know

little about the effects of workgroup demands, such as relationship or task conflict, on work engagement. Furthermore, even the limited research on this issue has resulted in inconsistent findings. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) showed that demands are not relevant to work engagement. In contrast, some studies have indicated that demands are relevant to work engagement (Costa et al., 2015; Schaufeli et al., 2008; Sonnentag et al., 2013). Thus, the effects of relationship and task conflict on work engagement remain unclear. There is no consistent, research-based answer to the question, “Can workgroup members dedicate themselves fully to their work, devoting their cognitive, emotional, and physical resources, when they are going through task or relationship conflict?” Research has not sufficiently addressed the effects of job demands such as relationship and task conflict on work engagement. This dissertation

1.4.2. Emotional exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion is defined as a feeling of being overextended (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). It is characterized by the depletion of physical, emotional, and cognitive resources (Crawford, et al., 2010; Demerouti et al., 2001).

Empirical research (e.g., Bear et al., 2014; Giebels & Janssen, 2005) confirms that relationship conflict leads to emotional exhaustion. Scholars posit that tension and stress associated with relationship conflict lead to the loss (or to the threat of loss) of resources, and in a vicious cycle the loss of resources intensifies stress and tension (e.g., De Dreu et al., 2004). It would appear that the research findings on the effects of relationship conflict on emotional exhaustion are consistent.

There is, however, little empirical research on the effects of task conflict on emotional exhaustion. It is established that (a) conflict is a hindrance to work effectiveness (e.g., Blake & Mouton, 1984), (b) all types of intragroup conflict are emotional (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003), and (c) workgroup members appraise task issues as either a hindrance, that is, a stressful demand that inhibits members’ growth and ability to adequately perform their tasks; or as a

challenge demand, that is, a stressful demand with the potential to promote members' growth and achievement (Crawford et al., 2010; LePine et al., 2005). Accordingly, a primary appraisal of task conflict as being a "stressful demand," along with accompanying emotions, could lead to a drain of energy. However, the literature has not fully explored the influence of task conflict on emotional exhaustion. Thus, I aimed to thoroughly examine the effects of task conflict on emotional exhaustion and to replicate previous studies on the impacts of relationship conflict on emotional exhaustion.

1.5 The Moderators of intragroup conflict

It is unrealistic to believe that any workgroup will be conflict free. Still, conflict can be managed. Scholars have thus focused on how to manage conflict. Related research indicates that a reduction in the detrimental impacts of workgroup conflict depends in part on how capable workgroup members are of moderating the conflict they encounter (e.g., Tjosvold, 1998). This dissertation investigated two key categories of moderators: conflict management and emotion regulation.

As noted earlier, conflict has cognitive and affective aspects. Conflict is generally emotionally charged (e.g., Pondy, 1967) and cognitively appraised (Smith & Lazarus, 1993). Drawing on the literature, I assumed that managing conflict necessitates dealing with both its emotional and cognitive aspects. Emotion regulation involves efforts to affect the experience, intensity, and expression of activated emotions in conflict situations (Gross, 1998). Conflict management consists largely of cognitive responses to conflict situations, which can vary from highly cooperative to highly competitive (Deutsch, 1973). Therefore, I assumed that conflict management and emotion regulation could enable workgroup members to deal with both emotional and cognitive aspects of conflict.

Furthermore, I considered conflict management and emotion regulation as personal resources, defined as aspects of the self that assist individuals to persist through challenges and

obstacles (Hobfoll, et al., 2003). The JD-R theory predicts that personal resources moderate the consequences of job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). In my view, conflict management and emotion regulation manifest themselves in individuals' skills and personal tendencies as well as in their unique approaches to managing conflict cognitively and emotionally. I support my view as follows:

(a) Lewin's (1936) equation states that behavior is a function of the person and the environment. Accordingly, the way a person approaches conflict (a behavior) is a function of the individual's preferred or default mode of conflict management and emotion regulation (person) and the type of conflict experienced in workgroups (environment).

(b) As an extension of the JD-R theory, Hobfoll (1989) defines resources in a broad context as "...object, personal characteristics ... that are valued by individuals..." (Hobfoll, 1989, p.516). Accordingly, emotion regulation and conflict management strategies could be also listed as personal characteristics. Let us have a brief look at each. Research suggests that there are individual differences in the regulation of emotions (e.g., Gross & John, 2003). Furthermore, individuals tend to have a default conflict management style (Thomas, 1976; Van de Vliert, 1997), although, depending on the situation, they may choose other styles (Ayub et al., 2017). Thus, it is safe to consider both conflict management and emotion regulation as personal resources. Accordingly, it is plausible that emotion regulation and conflict management boost work engagement and/or buffer against loss of energy.

There exists ample research literature investigating the role of conflict management. Nevertheless, there has been little examination of its role as a moderator in the link between types of conflict and work engagement and emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, it has been almost three decades since emotion regulation emerged in the organizational psychology field. As yet, scholars have paid little attention to the role of emotion in managing intragroup conflict although emotions have an important influence in conflict situations at work (Posthuma, 2012).

With this dissertation, I have addressed this gap by examining the moderating role of conflict management and emotion regulation. I contend that studying these two moderators can help to engender a better understanding of how to manage intragroup conflict and thus enhance work-related well-being in workgroups.

1.5.1. Conflict management styles

Conflict management is usually conceptualized at the individual level and defined as the individual's reactions in response to perceived conflict (Thomas, 1976). Accordingly, conflict management styles are the responses of workgroup members to conflict situations (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986).

Different conceptual models have been proposed to analyze the way individuals handle conflict. The most extended model is the *Dual Concern Model* (Blake and Mouton, 1964). The model holds that conflict management is a function of (a) high or low concern for self (own interest/ goal), and (b) high or low concern (relational interest/goal) for the other. Crossing these two axes results five ways of handling conflict: cooperative (also labelled “integrating”, “collaborating” high concern for both self and others), competitive (also labelled “dominating”, “forcing”, high concern for self and low concern for others), avoiding (low concern for self and low concern for others), obliging (low concern for self and high concern for others), and compromising (midpoint of both the others-oriented and self-oriented dimensions). As a result, some scholars defined conflict management as the degree of concerning one's or others' interest in response to conflict (Thomas, 1992).

In this dissertation, I focused on two conflict management styles: a cooperative and a competitive style. These two styles originally built upon “*social interdependence theory*” (Johnson & Johnson, 1989), that “...exists when the outcomes of individuals are affected by their own and other's actions” (Johnson & Johnson, 2009., p.366, 1989). Furthermore, both

conflict management styles are active and are characterized by a high concern for self, but they differ in their concern for the other.

It is established that a cooperative style is the most constructive way to reduce conflict and stress (Dijkstra et al., 2009; Medina & Benitez, 2011). Yet, most research has investigated conflict management and its association with work group effectiveness such as performance and innovation (e.g., DeChurch & Marks, 2013; O'Neill et al., 2013). There is limited research on the moderating role of conflict management between (1) relationship and task conflict and (2) work engagement and emotional exhaustion. I aimed to bridge the gap through examining the moderating role of conflict management in the relation between (a) task and relationship conflict and (b) work engagement and emotional exhaustion.

1.5.2. Emotion regulation

Emotion regulation (ER) strategies are behavioral and cognitive methods by which individuals influence the type, timing, intensity and expression of their emotions (Gross, 1998). Emotion regulation strategies are categorized into antecedent-focused and response-focused emotion regulation strategies. The first one occurs early in the process, before the emotion response tendencies have become fully activated and influence the triggering of emotional responses. Cognitive reappraisal (changing the mode of thinking about an emotional situation in a way that changes its emotional impact) and attentional deployment (distraction or redirecting thoughts) are two examples of this type of strategies. The latter one, by contrast, come relatively late in the emotion-generative process and influence emotional responses once they have already been elicited. This category targets one's expressed emotions, rather than inner feelings. An example of this category is suppression.

With this dissertation, I focused on antecedent-focus emotion regulation and two effective strategies including cognitive reappraisal and distraction. Because both involve taking action prior to or during an emotion experience. These two strategies are the most possible and

cognitively healthy emotion regulation strategies in the context of organizations (Griffith et al., 2014; Gross, 1998; Gross & John, 2003). A meta-analysis on ER (Hu, et al., 2014) has shown that cognitive reappraisal was correlated significantly and positively with positive indicators of mental health. Research also has shown that using distraction leads to greater well-being (Gaudreau & Blondin 2004). One plausible reason is that ER may provide individuals with the opportunity for detachment from the conflict situation thereby maintaining resources to manage conflict (e.g., Gross & John, 2003). That is individuals do not consume much of their existing cognitive and emotional resources. Using ER strategies may indeed recover and boost their resources to deal with conflict situations. Despite the vital influence of emotion regulation on well-being, its effects on work engagement and emotional exhaustion are sparse. Thus, I aimed to address this gap in the literature.

2. Own Research

The aim of this dissertation was to provide a better understanding of the distinct influences of relationship and task conflict on work engagement and emotional exhaustion, and to examine how conflict management and emotion regulation moderate the linkage between the two types of conflict, work engagement and emotional exhaustion. To fulfill this aim, my colleague and I have conducted three studies which peruse different research questions. In Study 1, we attempted to answer the question of how emotion regulation moderates the association between relationship conflict and emotional exhaustion and how conflict management moderates the association between task conflict and work engagement. In study 2, we utilized a scenario-based experimental study. We attempted to provide an answer whether the intensity (low versus high) of the two types of conflict matters in order to boost work engagement and attenuate emotional exhaustion and whether these associations are moderated by a cooperative versus competitive conflict management. We assessed emotion regulation as a covariate to control its effects on the study variables. In Study 3, we conducted a meta-

analysis to explore the trends of the impacts of task and relationship conflict on work-related well-being namely work engagement, burnout and psychological-physiological symptoms, which it seemed to us have been neglected.

Study 1 and Study 2 are based on on-line survey data of workgroup members. Study 3, a meta-analysis one, includes studies on intragroup conflict conducted in 1995-2020. We chose 1995 as a beginning point because the vast majority of studies on intragroup conflict has been done in mid- 90s and used a measure Jehn (1995) developed.

Study 1 and 2 were conducted in accordance with the recommendations of the APA (APA, 2010). The research protocols complied fully with the standards of the University of Vienna. These include strict guidelines to store potentially identifying information such as e-mail addresses separate from the individual data. Individuals interested in participating in the studies of this doctoral dissertation were informed about the general purposes and the protocol of the studies before their participation. At the beginning of each online questionnaire, participants were informed about the confidentiality of the respective study and their voluntary participation. They could exit the survey at any time.

In the following sections, I will present a summary containing the purposes, method, and main findings for each study. Full reports of the manuscripts can be found in chapter 3.

2.1. What moderates the relation between intragroup conflict, emotional exhaustion, and work engagement?

Esbati, Z., & Korunka, C. (2020). What moderates the relation between intragroup conflict, emotional exhaustion, and work engagement? *Scandinavian Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 5(1), 1–15. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/sjwop.91>

The first study of my dissertation was to explore the relationships between task and relationship conflict and employees' well-being, and to examine how emotion regulation and

conflict management might moderate this relationship. In the framework of JD-R theory, employees' well-being was measured via work engagement and emotional exhaustion. We considered two means of managing conflict in the workgroups: emotion regulation (via distraction and cognitive reappraisal) and conflict management, (via a cooperative and competitive styles). Driven from the *Triple-Match Principle* (TMP, de Jonge & Dormann, 2006) proposing that stressors, moderators, and the outcomes should be qualitatively similar to produce a buffering/moderator effect, we assumed there is a match between relationship conflict, emotion regulation, and emotional exhaustion. Because emotions play a critical role in each of them. We thus assessed emotion regulation as a matched moderator in the link between relationship conflict and emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, we assumed that conflict management is a matched moderator in the link between task conflict and work engagement. Because task conflict is initially a cognitive disagreement based upon facts, evidence, interpretations, or applications. However, it is emotion laden as well (Jehn, 1995). Conflict management is an approach to conflict incorporating cognitions and emotions associated with conflict and resolutions (e.g., Huang, 2010). Work engagement also includes cognitive and emotional components (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

A sample of 91 workgroups (N=595) participants from five Iranian organizations constituted our research sample.

To analyze our data, we examined the structure of each measure used in this study by performing Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA, AMOS 24). To assess the appropriateness of aggregating individual responses to the workgroup level, we computed within-group agreements and intra-class correlations coefficient (ICC) for all variables except for moderators. To explore the moderator hypotheses, we conducted moderation analysis using SPSS macro (PROCESS; Model 1) developed by Hayes (2012).

As hypothesized, relationship conflict was positively related to group emotional exhaustion. The results revealed that the distraction strategy, but not cognitive reappraisal is a moderator in the link relationship conflict and emotional exhaustion. Task conflict was negatively related to group work engagement, yet this association was non-significant in a robust testing. The results illustrated that a cooperative style is a moderator, but a competitive style is not.

2.2. Does intragroup conflict intensity matter? The moderating effects of conflict management on emotional exhaustion and work engagement?

Esbaty, Z., & Korunka, C. (2021). Does Intragroup Conflict Intensity Matter? The Moderating Effects of Conflict Management on Emotional exhaustion and Work Engagement. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12: 614001, 1-15. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.614001

In Study 2, to better understand the influences of relationship and task conflict on emotional exhaustion and work engagement, we addressed three circumstances. First, we decoupled relationship and task conflict, as Solansky et al. (2014) contend that decoupling relationship and task conflict is critical for understanding the effects of conflict types on individual and workgroup outcomes. Second, we addressed conflict intensity—the amount and frequency of conflict that could influence workgroup outcomes (Andrews & Tjosvold, 1983). Because the intensity of workgroup conflict is important in how group members interact regarding their perceived incompatibilities (Aydako, et al., 2008; DeChurch et al., 2013). Third, we addressed cooperative versus competitive conflict management styles as a moderating variable under which the influence of relationship and task conflict might change (Benitez et al., 2018; Dijkstra et al., 2005). We assessed the influence of emotion regulation via cognitive reappraisal and distraction as a covariate.

The first purpose of study 2 was to elucidate the distinct effects of high versus low relationship and task conflict on emotional exhaustion and work engagement. The second purpose was to explore the moderating roles of conflict management (controlling for the role of emotion regulation) in the association between high versus low levels of relationship and task conflict and emotional exhaustion and work engagement. To do so, we designed two separate 2×2 between-subject designs. This gave us eight conditions, for example high task conflict and a cooperative style condition, to measure.

We developed eight scenarios or conditions for the study. Through a pilot study ($N=30$), we finalized the scenarios. Furthermore, we conducted a manipulation check. The results of the manipulation checks indicate that our manipulations worked as intended. The study sample consisted of 120 volunteers from several companies and organizations in Vienna who agreed to take part in the study. The participants were randomly assigned to one of eight conditions (fifteen per condition).

As hypothesized, higher levels of both relationship and task conflict were positively related to emotional exhaustion and negatively to work engagement. A cooperative conflict management style moderated the effects of both relationship and task conflict on work engagement, but not emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, our results showed that distraction (not cognitive reappraisal) moderated the link between relationship conflict and emotional exhaustion. The moderating role of emotion regulation strategies (i.e., distraction and cognitive reappraisal) was insignificant for task conflict.

2.3. Intragroup Conflict and Well-being: A Meta-Analysis

Esbati, Z., & Korunka, C. (submitted). Intragroup conflict and well-being: A meta-analysis. *International Journal of Conflict Management*.

Study 3 aims to provide a novel meta-analysis of task and relationship conflict and investigate the influences of task and relationship conflict on well-being indicators including work engagement, burnout, and psychological-physiological symptoms of well-being. To do so, we collected studies conducted at individual or group levels and we performed a separate analysis for each. We reasoned that both task and relationship conflict may initially emerge among certain workgroup members (i.e., individual level) or spill over the workgroup, as such members recognize that conflict exists in their workgroup, regardless of the certain member's involvement (i.e., group level).

We conducted systematic searches for articles published between 1995- July 2020 using Web of Science, PsycInfo, Scopus, google scholar, and academy of management processing. We chose 1995 as a beginning point because most studies on intragroup conflict have been done in mid- 90s. We included studies if (a) they measured at least one type of intragroup conflict (relationship or task); (b) included a measure of well-being indicators defined in the present study; and (c) gave sufficient statistic information to compute effect size. All analyses were conducted in R 4.0.5 (R Core Team, 2021) using the R-package metafor 2.4-0 (Viechtbauer, 2010).

At the individual level, results of the random-effect models based on 22 correlation coefficients stemming from 15 studies revealed a statistically significant negative overall correlation between task conflict and well-being. As for the correlation between relationship conflict and well-being, results based on 63 correlation coefficients stemming from 33 studies showed a statistically significant negative overall correlation.

At the group level, results of the random-effects model based on seven correlation coefficients stemming from three studies models revealed a statistically significant negative overall correlation between task conflict and well-being. As for the correlation between

relationship conflict and well-being, results based on eight correlation coefficients stemming from five studies showed a statistically significant negative overall correlation.

3. General Discussion

The aim of this thesis was to provide a better understanding of the influences of relationship and task conflict on work engagement and emotional exhaustion and to investigate how these influences are moderated by emotion regulation and conflict management strategies. To do this, I developed three main research questions guided my research. For each study, I made a specific contribution.

Below, I will provide an overview of the studies and a discussion of their theoretical implications and contributions. Following that, I will report on limitations and strengths of the current research and offer suggestions for future research.

Perhaps one of the most important contributions of this thesis is to represent relationship and task conflict, work-related well-being, and the two approaches of managing conflict in a single theoretical framework. Before now there were few analyses of the distinct effects of conflict type on work-related well-being that addressed emotion regulation and conflict management as the moderators in the link between intragroup conflict, work engagement and emotional exhaustion.

In Study 1, my main research questions were whether (a) emotion regulation could moderate the influence of relationship conflict on emotional exhaustion and (b) conflict management could moderate the influence of task conflict on work engagement. The results revealed that the distraction strategy of emotion regulation, but not cognitive reappraisal was a moderator in the link between relationship conflict and emotional exhaustion. One plausible reason may be that cognitive reappraisal requires cognitive resources to re-evaluate the situation, which might not be available in the heat of relationship conflict. Whereas shifting attention away from relationship conflict is a readily available means of mitigating

susceptibility to negative emotion (e.g., Eisenberg & Fabes, 1992). In this line, Zillman's studies (1988) suggest that evoking negative emotions can be effectively mitigated by engaging in activities that are highly absorbing and entertaining. The results illustrated that in the link between task conflict and work engagement, a cooperative style was a moderator, but a competitive style was not. One plausible reason is that handling task disagreements cooperatively increases intrapersonal self-efficacy and harmony in the workgroup (see De Dreu, 2008). This, in turn, mitigates negative emotions and encourages group members to openly discuss issues. Perhaps when group members view task conflict as a win-lose struggle, negative emotions would escalate and if deadlocks prevailed, group members would block each other's efforts (e.g., Tjosvold, et al., 2003).

The main contribution of study 1 was to extend the literature on intragroup conflict through providing an empirical evidence that using distraction strategy of emotion regulation is an effective mean to attenuate the adverse effects of relationship conflict on emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, a cooperative style of conflict management is an effective tool to manage the influences of task conflict work engagement. This opens an avenue to consider the matched moderators in examining intragroup conflict.

In Study 2, our research questions were (a) whether the influences of relationship and task conflict on work engagement and emotional exhaustion differ across the intensity of conflict (low versus high) and whether (b) the way of managing conflict (a cooperative versus a competitive style) matter.

The results suggested that the intensity of both relationship and task conflict matter. As such high level of each type, as opposed to low level, were positively related to emotional exhaustion and negatively to work engagement. One plausible reason could be high relationship and task conflict increase tension and social and psychological discomfort (Seo et al., 2004). These feelings deplete energy / resources and interfere with the group members'

cognitive functioning needed to engage at work. Our results illustrated that a cooperative conflict management style was not effective for moderating the detrimental effects of high relationship conflict on emotional exhaustion. One possible reason is that relationship conflict creates an imbalance between the emotional demands of the situation and the resources available to meet such demands. A cooperative style may thus be less able to call on emotional resources to reduce relationship conflict. The results suggested that the effectiveness and appropriateness of a cooperative style (vs. competitive) in moderating the effects of relationship conflict could depend upon the intensity of RC and type of workgroup outcomes.

A key contribution of Study 2 is to clarify the mixed findings for task conflict (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). As we may claim that intensity (low vs. high) could account for the negative effects of task conflict, as it appeared in the literature (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; De Wit et al., 2012). By experimentally disentangling relationship and task conflict occurrence and manipulating the intensity of conflict expression (low vs. high), we employed a new approach to investigating conflict and directly examined our study hypotheses.

In Study 3, our research question was about what the literature on intragroup conflict from 1995-2020 tells us about the association between relationship and task conflict and work-related well-being (i.e., work engagement, burnout, and psychological-physiological symptoms). We examined studies conducted at either the individual or group levels. The results at each level revealed that both task and relationship conflict are negatively related to the well-being indicators examined. Our meta-analysis is consistent with Crawford et al.'s (2010) meta-analytic findings: demands appraised as hindrances were negatively associated with work engagement.

According to our meta-analysis, it is plausible to consider task and relationship conflict to be hindrance demands for the work-related well-being indicators examined in our study—particularly in the results of studies undertaken at the individual level. One plausible reason is

that opposition to one's personal or work-based opinions poses a threat to self. Such opposition may be appraised as disrespect, rejection, or affront, causing affective reactions. When an individual judges an event threatening or harmful, negative emotions such as frustration are elicited. As a result, the individual's emotional and attentional resources are consumed. The resource consumption caused by negative emotions leads workgroup members to feel overextended and burned out (Hobfoll, 1993), motivating them to protect their remaining resources through withdrawal. Workgroup members might then be less willing to invest effort and energy in dealing with task conflict or relationship conflict. When resources are consumed to deal with negative emotions and the psychological threat associated with task conflict or relationship conflict, the individual's level of engagement decreases (e.g., Jungst and Blumberg, 2016). Therefore, our results suggest that when it comes to work-related well-being indicators, both task and relationship conflict act as hindrance demands on positive (i.e., work engagement) and negative (i.e., burnout and psychological-physiological symptoms) aspects of work-related well-being.

The main contribution of this meta-analysis to intragroup conflict literature is to focus on work engagement and burnout as two indicators of well-being at work. The significance of this study lies in the fact that well-being at work can potentially develop conditions to undermine or enhance desired workgroup outcomes (e.g., Huynh et al., 2014; Jungst & Blumberg, 2016).

3.1. Strength, Limitations, and Future Research

The major strength of my doctoral dissertation is fourfold. First, it combined cross-sectional and experimental research designs to answer the proposed research questions. This allowed us to assess both correlation and causal relations amongst variables of the study. Second, we conducted a first meta-analysis of intragroup conflict and well-being indicators at workgroups. In the framework of the JD-R theory, our meta-analysis yields significance insight

into the influences of task and relationship conflict on well-being indicators which have been relatively neglected. Third, we integrated two tools as personal resources into the JD-R theory, namely conflict management and emotion regulation. In particular, we shed light on distraction as a tool for managing relationship conflict. Therefore, we suggested that the way workgroup members response cognitively and emotionally to conflict could be viewed as an effective way to deal with conflict. Because our research, along with others (e.g., Benitez et al., 2018; Shoukat et al., 2017), illustrates handling conflict via conflict management and emotion regulation strategies yield to desired outcomes. Fourth, our study provided support for the *Triple-Match Principle* (TMP, de Jonge & Dormann, 2006) proposing that stressors, moderators, and the outcomes should be qualitatively similar to produce a buffering/moderator effect. As such a cooperative style was an effective tool for moderating the effects of task conflict on work engagement, but not emotional exhaustion. Or distraction was an effective tool for relationship conflict and emotional exhaustion. An additional strength is the samples were composed of employees in real workgroups (rather than students) who had at least one year of working in the same workgroup. Moreover, although we developed general rather than cross-cultural predictions in Study 1, it provides some research evidence whether the findings on intragroup conflict are generalizable across different cultural contexts. The overarching theoretical contribution of this doctoral dissertation is that it integrated four separate literature involving intragroup conflict, conflict management, emotion regulation and well-being indicators arguably, are incomplete without considering all together.

As all research, my studies in this thesis have certain limitations that could be used as directions for future research. I have discussed the limitations of each study in the respective manuscripts. One overarching limitation is that the two first studies relied on self-report data, which raises concerns about social desirability or (Ganster & Schaubroeck, 1991; Podsakoff,

et al., 2003; Podsakoff, et al., 2012). However, some researchers believe that the magnitude of any such effects is often overstated (Spector, 1994).

The second limitation is that we assessed two conflict management strategies, while group members might adopt more than two conflict management strategies depending on the situation (Van de Vliert, 1997). Future studies may measure all conflict management strategies in the linkage between conflict types and well-being indicators at workgroups. The third limitation is that we did not manipulate emotion regulation. Given the role of distraction in handling conflict (Griffith et al., 2014), future studies may manipulate distraction to explore its moderating role in the context of intragroup conflict. The fourth limitation is related to Study 3. The number of studies for the group level was relatively small and the interpretations of our findings to the group level should be made cautiously. Our meta-analysis includes correlational studies. This does not afford causal inferences overlooking the possibility of reverse or mutual causality. The last but not the least, the studies included in our meta-analysis were published in English language journals and the number of studies on intragroup conflict and well-being indicators examined in this review was small.

3.2. Conclusion and Outlook

The aim of present thesis was to investigate (a) the distinct effect of task and relationship conflict on emotional exhaustion and work engagement and (b) how conflict management and emotion regulation moderate the association between the two types of conflict and the study outcomes.

According to the findings of the current thesis it is safe to conclude that whereas conflict is inevitable, it is manageable. The findings offer hope for a less negative view of intragroup conflict if: workgroup members acquired skills how to utilize matched and effective tools for dealing with cognitive and emotion aspects of the types of conflict. Furthermore, the intensity of conflict matters. All blames of relationship and task conflict back to the level of conflict.

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5. Reprint of Publications

To increase readability, tables and figures were placed within the running text.

5.1. What moderates the relation between intragroup conflict, emotional exhaustion, and work engagement?

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**What Moderates the Relation Between Intragroup Conflict, Emotional Exhaustion, and
Work Engagement?**

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What Moderates the Relation Between Intragroup Conflict, Emotional Exhaustion, and Work Engagement?

Abstract

The present study investigated whether emotion regulation moderates the association between relationship conflict and group emotional exhaustion and whether conflict management moderates the association between task conflict and group work engagement in organizational workgroups. We conducted hierarchical regression and moderation analyses on questionnaire responses from the members of 91 workgroups (N=595). The analyses revealed that emotion regulation via distraction moderated the influences of relationship conflict on group emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, a cooperative style of conflict management moderated the influences of task conflict on group work engagement. The findings suggest that distraction and a cooperative style are effective for moderating group emotional exhaustion and group work engagement respectively. Future research should use a more interpretive perspective to gain deeper insight on the ways of managing conflict at the workgroup level. This study suggests which strategies would be most useful for reducing group emotional exhaustion and for increasing group work engagement.

Keywords: relationship conflict, task conflict, group work engagement, group emotional exhaustion, emotion regulation, conflict management

Introduction

To survive and thrive in an increasingly complex work environment, organizations often rely on workgroups. Workgroups are intended to provide an adaptive response to today's work environment. Many workgroups, however, become hotbeds of conflict (Jehn and Mannix, 2001). Group members bring different values, norms, expertise, and attitudes to job-related and interpersonal issues. These differences can ignite *intragroup conflict* defined as real or

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perceived incompatibilities among group members (Jehn, 1995). Two broad types of intragroup conflict have been identified: relationship conflict and task conflict (Jehn, 1995). These conflict types are distinct, both in their nature and in their effects on workgroup outcomes (e.g., Jehn and Mannix, 2001). Even so, both types of intragroup conflict, especially relationship conflict, have detrimental effects on workgroup outcomes (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003; De Wit, Greer, and Jehn, 2012). Intragroup conflict is associated with a variety of psychological, behavioral, and physical symptoms (Bruk-Lee, Nixon and Spector, 2013; Meier et al., 2014) that threaten employees' well-being (Dijkstra et al., 2005; Sonnentag, Unger, and Nägel, 2013). Yet, research investigating the distinct effects of relationship conflict and task conflict on the different aspects of well-being and moderators of this relationship is sparse.

The purpose of the present study was to explore the relationships between intragroup conflict at the group level and employee well-being, and to examine how emotion regulation and conflict management might moderate this relationship. Employee well-being was measured via work engagement and emotional exhaustion, both of which were considered as collective (group-level) phenomena.

We consider *work engagement* and *emotional exhaustion* as two distinct indicators of well-being at work (see Schaufeli et al., 2002). We assumed that studying what might increase positive aspects (work engagement) and reduce negative aspects (emotional exhaustion) of well-being would provide a robust representation of well-being in workgroups.

Most previous research on work engagement and emotional exhaustion has examined these constructs at the individual level, treating group outcomes as statistical aggregations. In contrast, we examined and measured the constructs at the workgroup level, asking participants to assess work engagement and emotional exhaustion of their workgroup rather than of themselves. From a theoretical perspective, the psychological well-being manifested by one person can influence well-being of other people (Westman, 2001). This implies that work

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engagement and emotional exhaustion of one or more workgroup member can affect the work engagement and emotional exhaustion of the whole workgroup (see Bakker, Emmerik, and Euwema, 2006; Costa, Passos, and Bakker, 2014). An individual level of constructs such as work engagement and emotional exhaustion, might often be insufficient to address the interactive nature of workgroups. We thus attempted to examine what might be done to facilitate group work engagement and to prevent group emotional exhaustion.

Bakker et al. (2006) define group emotional exhaustion as a shared feeling of depleted energy among the members of a workgroup. Consistent with our assumption, Costa et al. (2014: 6) defined group work engagement ‘... as a shared, positive, fulfilling, motivational emergent state of work-related well-being’. Group work engagement is shaped by the nature of members’ interactions during workgroup activities.

Research suggests that the influence of conflict on workgroup outcomes is contingent upon workgroup members’ reaction to conflict and how they are managed (e.g., De Dreu and Weingart, 2003, De Wit et al., 2012). We considered two means of managing conflict in the workgroups. The first was *emotion regulation* referring to people’s efforts to impact their activated emotions during emotionally events (Gross, 1998) – a mostly emotion-focused strategy. The second one was *conflict management*, referring to strategies implemented by group members to reduce conflict (DeChurch and Marks, 2001) – a mostly cognitive-focused strategy. Accordingly, we measured the moderating influence of emotion regulation and conflict management as personal skills (individual level) on two indicators of employees’ well-being in workgroups.

This effort extends the literature on intragroup conflict and provides insight into the use of emotion regulation and conflict management to mitigate the negative effect of intragroup conflict.

Relationship Conflict and Group Emotional Exhaustion

Relationship conflict, also known as affective conflict or social-emotional conflict occurs when differences in personalities, values, and norms create interpersonal emotional tension, anger, and animosity in a group (Jehn, 1995). Relationship conflict tends ‘...to be more interpersonal and emotional’ (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003: 747) and is accompanied by stress, tension, and frustration (Jehn, 1995). Relationship conflict is associated with negative affective responses and a greater risk to one’s well-being (Sonnentag et al., 2013).

There is consensus on the adverse effects of relationship conflict on group outcomes (e.g., De Wit et al., 2012; Shaukat, Yousaf, and Sanders, 2017). The main supportive reason is that the mere experience of discord and divergence of interests, norms, and values elicits negative emotions and threatens oneself (Jehn et al., 2008). This is consistent with self-verification theory (Swann et al., 2004), which posits that whenever an individual’s self-views and social views are not confirmed by colleagues, it is perceived as a threat to oneself. Lack of confirmation jeopardizes the self-verification process (Jehn et al., 2008) and increases group member anxiety and hostility (e.g., Dijkstra et al., 2005).

From a work stress perspective, relationship conflict is a threatening work stressor (Spector and Bruk-Lee, 2008) as it generates tension and aggravation, with psychological costs increasing strain and emotional exhaustion (Dijkstra et al., 2009). When relationship conflict persists or intensifies, it results in a decline in physical and psychic functioning, which could lead to burnout (De Dreu and Beersma, 2005). Relationship conflict is related to symptoms of increased strain (Bruk-Lee et al., 2013; De Dreu, Dierendonck, and Dijkstra, 2004; De Dreu, 2008), increased psychological stress, and decreased well-being (Dijkstra et al., 2011; Meier et al., 2014; Sonnentag et al., 2013). Relationship conflict is also associated with emotional exhaustion, a core element of burnout (De Dreu and Beersma, 2005; Dijkstra et al., 2009).

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Emotional exhaustion is defined as depletion of one's physical and emotional resources (Maslach and Jackson, 1981) leading to emotionally charged interactions in workgroups. These emotional interactions evoke strong emotions (e.g., Dijkstra et al., 2009) and can then lead to emotional exhaustion. Shaukat et al. (2017) reported a significant, positive correlation between relationship conflict and emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, research illustrates that there is a tendency to automatically copy and synchronize one's emotional states with those of another member (e.g., Hatfield et al., 1994). This suggests that one workgroup member's emotional exhaustion could spread to the whole group (Bakker et al., 2006). Recent studies have found that frequency of exposure to such emotional interactions at workplace predicts group emotional exhaustion (Benitez, Francisco, and Lourdes, 2018). We thus argue that emotionally charged interactions and conflict-induced negative emotions elicited by relationship conflict generate additional emotional demands. When such demands exceed group members' resources, group members feel chronic fatigue, exhaustion, and depleted of energy (e.g., Dijkstra et al., 2009), leading to emotional exhaustion. When these feelings are shared amongst group members, this could escalate negative emotions (Jehn and Mannix, 2001) and spread emotional exhaustion in workgroup. Thus, we proposed hypothesis H1:

H1: Workgroup relationship conflict will be positively related to group emotional exhaustion.

Task Conflict and Group Work Engagement

Task conflict, also known as cognitive conflict, centers on disagreements about task views; the content of the task being performed, the distribution of resources, procedures, or guidelines and the interpretation of facts (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003).

Findings about the association between task conflict and workgroup outcomes are less conclusive than those of relationship conflict and group outcomes. Some studies report that task conflict is beneficial for workgroup performance (e.g., Jehn and Mannix, 2001) and for

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making better decisions (e.g., Behfar et al., 2011). Other studies indicate that task conflict impairs work group performance, and group member satisfaction (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003). Jungst and Blumberg (2016) demonstrated that task conflict is negatively associated with work engagement.

Recent studies have examined the circumstances influencing positive or negative outcomes. For example, De Wit et al. (2012) have shown that task conflict is beneficial when task conflict and relationship conflict are weakly correlated or when the conflict arises among top management groups rather than groups at lower levels of the organizational hierarchy. Nevertheless, some studies suggest that employees who engage in task conflict tend to experience negative emotions and to be less satisfied with their group, colleagues, and work (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003).

A normal reaction to any type of conflict is frustration and dissatisfaction irrespective of outcomes (Ross, 1989). According to Jehn (1997), such negative emotions can be present with any type of conflict, including task conflict. Still, research shows that positive emotions positively influence the intensity of work motivation, or the amount of effort contributed, (e.g., Staw, Sutton, and Pelled, 1994). For example, Staw et al.'s findings (1994) indicate that positive emotions are associated with work achievement. Seo, Barret, and Bartunek (2004) theorized that unpleasant affective experiences produce negative motivational states. Jungst and Blumberg (2016) suggested that task conflict probably demotivates individuals, due to increased cognitive load as a cost in the process of task conflict. Their findings suggest that when employees experience or perceive task conflict, they are less engaged with their work.

Schaufeli et al. (2002) defined work engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind, characterized by vigor (high energy), dedication (inspiration and pride in one's work), and absorption (full concentration on one's work). As task conflict intensifies, arousal and tension increases (e.g., Carnevale and Probst, 1998). This places additional burdens on group

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members and increases their cognitive load, often draining most of the group members' cognitive resources. As a result of increased cognitive load, group members' cognitive resources become diverted towards the task conflict. Increased cognitive load also reduces the ability to process information and this often leading to freezing the process (Carnevale and Probst, 1998).

According to *threat rigidity theory* (Staw et al., 1981), conflict can produce rigid thinking, which restricts judgment and reduces ability to consider alternative perspectives (Carnevale and Probst, 1998). Drawing on threat rigidity theory, task conflict may pose a threat to self and increases arousal, anxiety, and frustration (Carnevale and Probst, 1998). These feelings could be shared amongst group members. Consequently, when group members feel threatened and fail to process information from others, they may be less likely to question their initial views and be more likely to hold onto their initial opinion rigidly. Restriction in information processing may reduce attention to their fellow workgroup members' views while increasing reliance on their initial views and prior expectation. As a result, workgroup members might freeze up, withdraw, or confine their perceptual field of input – all characteristics of work disengagement. To adapt, group members often behave by withdrawing from task involvement and withholding effort (Jehn, 1995). When disengaging from workgroup activities is shared amongst the workgroup members, it leads to disengaging from work. Thus, we deduced a second hypothesis:

H2: Workgroup task conflict will be negatively related to group work engagement.

The Moderating Effect of Emotion Regulation on Group Emotional Exhaustion

Research suggests that conflict, especially relationship conflict, is emotionally laden (Jehn and Bendersky, 2001) and is closely linked to conflict management (Nair, 2008). Handling emotions also moderates the effects of relationship conflict on group outcomes (Griffith,

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Connelly, and Theil, 2014) and it also has important consequences for well-being (Gross and John, 2003).

According to the model by Gross (1998), emotion regulation (ER) is an efficient means of managing negative emotions. ER is defined as ‘...the processes [strategies] by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions’ (Gross, 1998: 275). Gross (1998) discusses one means of emotion regulation, called antecedent-focused strategies, which can occur before the emotional responses have been completely developed. Antecedent-focused strategies promotes psychological well-being (John and Gross, 2004).

Cognitive reappraisal and distraction (attentional depletion) are two types of antecedent-focused strategies. Both involve taking action prior to or during an emotional response. These two strategies, in particular distraction, are the most likely and cognitively healthy emotion regulation strategies in the context of organizations (Griffith et al., 2014; Gross and John, 2003), yet no study has directly measured or compared the effects of these strategies on emotional exhaustion in the face of workgroup conflict.

Cognitive reappraisal involves changing the meaning attributed to a disagreement and thus the emotional reaction associated with it (Gross, 2008). Cognitive reappraisal is an effective strategy for moderating the experiential and behavioral consequences of emotion (Gross, 2008). It occurs before the emotion response tendencies have been fully generated. That is, cognitive reappraisal can efficiently alter the entire subsequent emotion trajectory. The usage of cognitive reappraisal allows one to exhibit interpersonal behavior that is appropriately focused on social interaction and is perceived by the others as emotionally engaging and responsive (John and Gross, 2004). Research shows cognitive reappraisal improves interpersonal functioning and well-being (John and Gross, 2004).

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Distraction involves a mental turning away from the emotion-generating event. When using an emotional strategy of distraction, group members redirect their thoughts to distract themselves from an emotional response towards a less emotional one. Examples include thinking of something pleasant and invoking thoughts that are inconsistent with the undesirable emotional state. By shifting their attention elsewhere, group members use distraction to regulate their emotions. Bushman (2002) has shown that distraction reduces anger and other negative emotions. Griffith et al. (2014) showed that emotion regulation, in particular distraction rather than cognitive reappraisal, has an important role in moderating the negative consequences associated with relationships conflict.

Considering emotion regulation as a personal resource, we expect that workgroup members who are able to regulate their emotions would manage the negative effects of emotions caused by relationship conflict and thus avoid becoming emotionally exhausted. This expectation was derived from the *Triple-Match Principle* (TMP, de Jonge and Dormann, 2006) proposing that stressors, moderators, and the outcomes should be qualitatively similar to produce a buffering/moderator effect. We assumed there is a match between relationship conflict, emotion regulation, and emotional exhaustion, because emotions play a critical role in each of them. We thus propose that emotion responses to relationship conflict can be managed by using emotion regulation strategy. This led to the following hypotheses:

H3a: The association between relationship conflict and group emotional exhaustion will be moderated by emotion regulation – such that the positive association between relationship conflict and group emotional exhaustion is weaker when group members' use of distraction is higher.

H3b: The association between relationship conflict and group emotional exhaustion will be moderated by emotion regulation – such that the positive association between relationship

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conflict and group emotional exhaustion is weaker when group members' use of cognitive reappraisal is higher.

The Moderating Effect of Conflict Management on Group Work Engagement

The effect of task conflict is not just a function of disagreement, but also of how group members manage disagreements (e.g., Friedman et al., 2000). Conflict management could be an important moderator of the association between task conflict and work engagement. It refers to the strategies implement by group members to reduce or solve conflict (DeChurch and Marks, 2001; Jehn and Mannix, 2001).

Much research on conflict management is built upon Pruitt and Rubin's (1986) dual concern theory. It posits that reaction to disagreement derives from two motivational underpinnings: concern for the self and concern for the other party. We focused on two strategies for conflict management in workgroups: cooperative and competitive. Based on dual concern theory these two strategies are in accordance with the two main motivational underpinnings. Individuals may communicate cooperative or competitive intentions to other parties in the conflict (Tjosvold, 1998). Furthermore, cooperative and competitive conflict management strategies are both active, conflict-engaging strategies and have a high concern for self (e.g., Dijkstra et al., 2009).

A cooperative style of conflict management is high on concern for both self and others. It is characterized by exchanging information on priorities and preferences, problem solving, and making trade-offs between important and unimportant issues. Cooperation is considered to be the most effective conflict management strategy for reducing both conflict and stress (Friedman et al., 2000).

In contrast, a competitive conflict management style is high on concern for self and low on concern for others. It is characterized by threats, bluffs, punishments, and intimidation (e.g., De Dreu and Beersma, 2005). Compared to the cooperative style, the competitive style

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frequently leads to conflict escalation and negative outcomes (e.g., Alper, Tjosvold, and Law, 2000). Research indicates a competitive style increases conflict and contributes negatively to group functioning and group effectiveness (De Dreu and Van Vianen, 2001).

Drawing on the dual concern theory (Pruitt and Rubin, 1986) group members who handle conflict cooperatively are more likely to engage in constructive communication. They encourage full exchange of task-related opinions with their fellow group members, leading to an improved understanding of the key perspectives and issues and an improved understanding of the standpoint of other members (Tjosvold, 1998). We argue that engaging with task conflict constructively via a cooperative style leads to unfreezing of the processing of task-related information and an opened mindset that produces less rigid cognitive structures (Carnevale and Probst, 1989). As a result, a cooperative style mitigates the adverse effects of task conflict on work engagement.

In contrast, when group members adopt a competitive style of conflict resolution, the result is usually fractious debate, escalating threats and deadlock. Group members who wish to outdo one another rarely compromise and instead block each other's efforts (e.g., Tjosvold et al., 2003). Managing conflict competitively tends to be associated with withholding information, win-lose interactions, and closed-mindedness (e.g., Chen, Liu, and Tjosvold, 2005). Engaging with task disagreements competitively leads to freezing of the process of task-related information and a closed mindset that produces rigid cognitive structures (Carnevale and Probst, 1989). Holding onto self-centred work views and prioritizing personal gain of all advantages impairs constructive interactions and intensifies disagreements and stress (Friedman et al., 2000), leading workgroup members to withhold their task effort (Jehn, 1995).

Based upon the TMP, we argue there should be a match between task conflict, conflict management, and work engagement. Task conflict is initially a cognitive disagreement based on facts, evidence, interpretations, or applications. However, it is emotion laden as well (Jehn,

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1995). Conflict management is an approach to conflict incorporating cognitions and emotions associated with conflict and resolutions (e.g., Huang, 2010). Work engagement also includes cognitive and emotional components (Schaufeli et al., 2002). These two components indicate a qualitative match among task conflict, conflict management, and work engagement as defined by the TMP. As Figure 1 illustrates, we expect conflict management moderates the adverse effects of task conflict on work engagement, leading us to the following hypotheses.

H4a: The association between task conflict and group work engagement will be moderated by conflict management – such that the negative association between task conflict and group work engagement is weaker when group members' use of a cooperative strategy is higher.

H4b: The association between task conflict and group work engagement will be moderated by conflict management – such that the negative association between task conflict and group work engagement is greater when group members' use of a competitive strategy is higher.

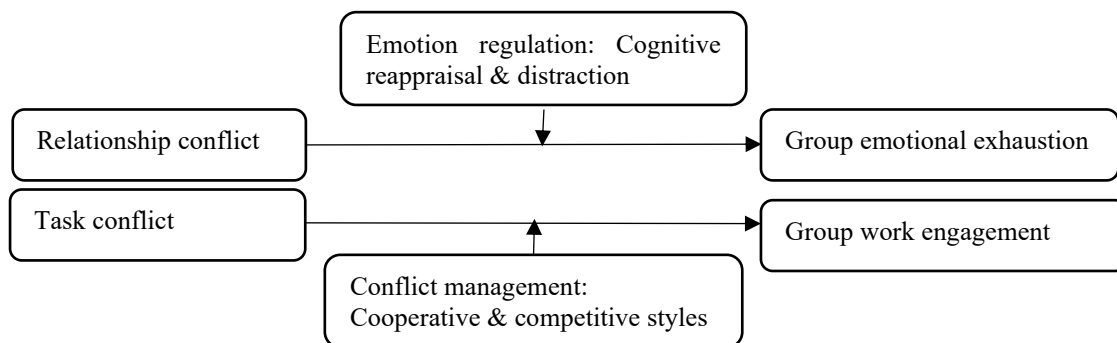


Figure1: A graphical summary of the study design.

Method

Participants

We collected data from 106 workgroups drawn from five Iranian organizations. Fifteen of these workgroups had a research questionnaire return rate below 80 percent. These workgroups were excluded from the data analysis. The remaining 91 workgroups (N=595 participants: 272 women and 323 men; average age = 38 year; SD = 4.87 years) constituted our research sample.

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The participants were drawn from one industrial organization (34%), two professional research centers (29%) and two health care centers (37%). Seventy-nine percent of the participants had a bachelor's degree or higher. The average length of time workgroup members had been working together was 4.1 years ($SD = 1.97$, ranging between 1 year and 11 years). The average group size was six members ($SD = 1.8$).

Procedure

Because the questionnaire items of all but one measure were in English, they were backtranslated. The conflict management items were taken from a previously constructed Farsi scale.

Prior to data collection, several steps were taken to address ethical concerns and to ensure participants' commitment to the study. First, we sent managers an email describing the research as a study of intragroup conflict. Consenting managers nominated workgroups in which the members had been intact for at least one year. A research assistant distributed the questionnaires to members of these groups. The managers also wrote a memo to their employees requesting their cooperation. Next, the research assistant visited each selected group, explained the purpose of the study and distributed the questionnaires to the group members. The written instructions accompanying the questionnaires again included a brief explanation of the study's purpose.

Employees were given assurance of confidentiality and were allowed to respond to the survey anonymously during work hours. It was emphasized that the responses would be anonymous, and that data would be aggregated for analyses.

Measures

In this study, we measured the independent (relationship and task conflict) and dependent variables (group emotional exhaustion and group work engagement) at the group level. Theoretically, the construct of intragroup conflict resides at the group level. In line with

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research (e.g., Bakker et al., 2006; Costa et al., 2014; Benitez et al., 2018), and with crossover theory (Westman, 2001) proposing when a stressor or psychological strain experienced by one person affects the level of stress of other persons, we measured emotional exhaustion and work engagement at the group level. The moderators (individual perception of emotion regulation and conflict management styles), as personal skills and resources were measured at the individual level. We assumed that the level of these skills and resources varied among group members.

All independent, moderating, and dependent variables represented by items on the questionnaire were measured on seven-point rating scales e.g., from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) and from 1 (none) to 7 (a great deal). The following scales were included in the questionnaire.

Intragroup conflict. Jehn's three-item scale (1995) of relationship conflict and three-item scale of task conflict were used. The participants were asked to rate how much conflict they perceive in their workgroup. The sample items: 'How much relationship tension is there in your work group?' and 'How much conflict of ideas is there in your work group?' measure relationship conflict and task conflict respectively.

Group work engagement. To assess group work engagement, the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (17 items, UWES; Schaufeli et al., 2002) was included. However, we modified this scale based on the referent-shift consensus to refer to group members' perceptions of their colleagues' work engagement rather than to themselves (Chan, 1998). As such, the items were transformed from an individual referent to group-level referent that reflected the perceptions of the individual of their colleagues' work engagement. A sample item was: 'in our workgroup, my colleagues find the work that they do full of meaning and purpose'.

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Group emotional exhaustion. We employed the emotional exhaustion subscale of Maslach's Burnout Inventory-General Survey (8 items MBI-GS; Schaufeli et al., 1996). As with items in UWES, emotional exhaustion items were reworded, replacing individual references (I, me, my, mine) to group-level references that asked for judgments on all workgroup members. A sample item was: 'My fellow group members are burned out from our workgroup'.

Conflict management style. The questionnaire items used for this assessment were taken from those employed by Ghahremani et al. (2015) in their evaluation of group conflict in Iranian management teams. Ghahremani et al. measured the cooperative (7 items, $\alpha = 0.82$) and competitive (5 items, $\alpha = 0.81$) dimensions of conflict management based on Rahim's (1983) organizational conflict inventory form C (ROCI-II). One such item was: 'I try to explore ideas to come up with a decision collectively' and 'I utilize my authority to make decisions in my favor'.

Emotion regulation. We included five cognitive-reappraisal items from Spaapen et al.'s (2014) Revised Emotion Regulation Questionnaire. One of them, for example, was: 'I control my emotions by changing the way I think about the situation I am in'.

We also developed three items to assess attention depletion or distraction ($\alpha = 0.81$). Items included: 'When I am feeling negative emotions, I make sure to distract my mind by thinking about something exciting or challenging', 'When I am faced with a stressful situation, I get my mind off the situation by concentrating on something pleasant', 'When I am feeling negative emotions, I keep myself busy with something else (such as giving a phone call to a friend or surfing on the net)'.

Control variables. Because the workgroup was the unit of analysis in our study, we considered workgroup size and tenure as control variables. These variables have been shown to increase the likelihood of incompatibilities and differences in personal and work views (e.g.,

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Jehn, Northcraft, and Neale, 1999; Lichtenstein et al., 1997), which, in turn, affect outcomes such as work engagement, workgroup creativity, and decision quality (Hu et al., 2016; Parayitam and Dooley, 2004; Selmer, Jonasson, and Laurant, 2013).

Results

Statistical analysis

We examined the structure of each measure used in this study by performing Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA, AMOS 24). Chronbach's alphas were calculated for all scales. Given that our study is about the perception of each group member of their workgroup, theoretically our unit of analysis is workgroup. To assess the appropriateness of aggregating individual responses to the workgroup level, we computed within-group agreements and intra-class correlations coefficient (ICC) for all variables except for moderators. To explore the moderator hypotheses, we conducted moderation analysis using SPSS macro (PROCESS; Model 1) developed by Hayes (2012). Finally, significant interactions were plotted, and simple slopes tests were conducted at both low (-1 SD) and high levels ($+1$ SD) of the moderator variables.

Preliminary analysis

We tested the hypothesized two-factor structure of the intragroup conflict measure, with the first factor representing relationship conflict and the second reflecting task conflict in the total research sample ($N = 595$). The first CFA with two factors representing relationship conflict and task conflict accounted good for the data [χ^2 (8, $N = 595$) = 27.22, $p < 0.001$. (GFI = 0.96, CFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.06)]. For cognitive reappraisal and distraction types of emotion regulation, we tested the hypothesized two-factor structure of emotion regulation with the first factor representing cognitive reappraisal and the second reflecting distraction. The first CFA did not account well for the data, χ^2 (19, $N = 595$) = 53.8, $p < 0.001$, GFI = 0.97, CFI = 0.97, TLI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.06. However, removing one item (out of eight

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items) based on standardized residual covariance (> 2.58) resulted in a model that provided a much better fit of the data, $\chi^2(13, N = 595) = 24.87, p < 0.02$, with fit indices largely exceeding 0.97 (CFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.98, GFI = 0.99), and an RMSEA of 0.03. Therefore, the model with seven items was preferred as the model that best fits the data.

For conflict management, we tested the hypothesized two-factor structure of the conflict management measure, with the first and the second factor representing the cooperative and competitive style, respectively. The first CFA with two factors, representing the cooperative and competitive styles accounted good for the data: $\chi^2(53, N = 595) = 91.29, p < 0.001$, with good fit indices (CFI = 0.98, TLI = 0.97, GFI = 0.98), and an RMSEA of 0.03.

We also tested the hypothesized a single structure of the emotional exhaustion measure. The first CFA did not account well for the data, $\chi^2(20, N = 595) = 514.3, p < 0.001$. (GFI = 0.80. CFI = 0.84, TLI = 0.77, RMSEA = 0.20). However, removing four items based on standardized residual covariance (> 2.58) resulted in a model that provided a much better fit of the data: $\chi^2(2, N = 595) = 7.77, p < 0.02$, with following fit indices CFI = 1.00, TLI = 0.99, GFI = 0.99, and an RMSEA of 0.06. Furthermore, the contents of these four items showed that they addressed individual action or feelings not shared with the groupmates. For example, 'Workgroup members feel fatigue when they get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job' or 'Workgroup members feel frustrated on their job'. In light of the CFA results and inspection of these four items, the model with for remaining items was judged as the model that best fits the data.

For work engagement, we tested the hypothesized three-factor structure of the work engagement measure, representing dedication, vigor, and absorption, respectively. The first CFA with three factors did not fit. After inspecting the modification indexes and allowing the errors of some items to correlate, the model did not fit. Thus, an exploratory principal component analysis with varimax rotation on group work engagement was performed to verify

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whether the three factors could be retained, and the items loaded on their intended factor. The analysis revealed the three-factor model, explained 62.07 percent of the variance. The factor solution was interpretable. The cut-off point for considering an item for a scale was set at a component loading higher than 0.70.

Data aggregation

As the unit of analysis in this study was the workgroup rather than the individual, we computed r_{wg} values (James, Demaree, and Wolf, 1993) to determine the amount of agreement among the judgments made by the members of each workgroup for all variables, except for moderators measured at the individual level (Table 1). The r_{wg} values were all above the conventionally acceptable value of 0.70 (James et al., 1993). Furthermore, considerable variance between groups is required to justify aggregation at group level. To do so, intra-class correlation (ICC; Bliese, 2000) was estimated by ICC (1). As indicated by James (1982), if the resulting ICC (1) is between the conventional cutoffs of 0.05 and 0.25, the aggregation of individual scores at workgroup level can be safely justified. As Table 1 displays all scales, except that for emotional exhaustion, exceeded them slightly.

Table 1. r_{wg} and ICC indices for justifying aggregation.

Variables	r_{wg}	ICC (1)
Relationship conflict	0.74	0.13
Task conflict	0.80	0.14
Emotional exhaustion	0.92	0.64
Work engagement	0.90	0.26

Descriptive analysis

Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviations) and correlation matrix.

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Table 2. Mean (M), Standard deviation (SD) and inter-correlations of the study variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.Relationship conflict	4.18	0.68	0.82							
2.Emotional exhaustion	4.63	0.70	0.37***	0.89						
3.Cognitive reappraisal	5.21	0.84	-0.16	-0.04	0.73					
4.Distracton	5.30	0.62	0.13	-0.41***	0.15	0.81				
5.Task conflict	4.16	0.75	0.33***	-0.02	-0.20	0.32**	0.90			
6.Work engagement	4.18	0.63	-0.02	0.20	0.13	0.09	-0.33**	0.95		
7.Cooperative style	5.50	0.34	0.01	-0.17	0.07	0.15	0.25*	-0.36***	0.73	
8.Competitive style	4.13	0.70	0.17	-0.36***	0.23*	0.52***	0.29**	-0.07	0.33***	0.8

Note: N = 91 workgroups (595 participants), coefficient alpha reliability estimates are listed in bold on the diagonal.

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001, two tailed.

Testing the hypotheses

Main effect

Consistent with H1, Table 3 illustrates the positive and significant effect between relationship conflict and group emotional exhaustion ($b = 0.54$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, this finding supported our Hypothesis 1.

Table 3. Results of a moderator analysis for group emotional exhaustion

Variables	B	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
<i>Control variables</i>					
Task conflict	0.02	0.21	0.84	-0.15	0.18
Workgroup tenure	-0.04	-1.24	0.22	-0.10	0.02
Workgroup size	0.08	2.58	0.01*	0.02	0.14
<i>Main effect</i>					
Relationship conflict (RC)	0.54	5.77	0.004**	0.35	0.73
Distracton	-0.46	-4.84	0.002**	-0.65	-0.27
RC× distracton	-0.57	-3.72	0.004**	-0.88	-0.27

Note: b= unstandardized regression coefficient. LLCI & ULCI= lower and upper level of confidence interval.

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001, two tailed.

H2 predicates a negative and significant correlation between task conflict and group work engagement. As Table 4 illustrates there is a negative effect between task conflict and work engagement, yet this effect is not significant. Thus, the second hypothesis did not gain support.

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Although, a simple linear regression analysis supported the negative and significant correlation between task conflict and group work engagement ($F = (1, 89) = 10.68$, $p = 0.002$, $\beta = -0.33$, $p < 0.01$) with an R^2 of 0.11.

Table 4. Results of a moderator analysis for group work engagement

variables	b	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
<i>Control variables</i>					
Relationship conflict	0.03	0.24	0.81	-0.22	0.28
Workgroup tenure	0.01	0.17	0.86	-0.06	0.07
Workgroup size	0.03	0.92	0.36	-0.04	0.11
<i>Main effect</i>					
Task conflict (TC)	-0.19	-1.56	0.12	-0.44	0.05
Cooperative style	-0.48	-2.24	0.03*	-0.91	-0.05
TC $\times$ cooperative style	0.47	2.26	0.03*	0.06	0.89

Note: b = unstandardized regression coefficient. LLCI & ULCI = lower and upper level of confidence interval.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$, two tailed.

Moderating effect

H3a predicts that distraction strategy of emotion regulation would moderate the association between relationship conflict and group emotional exhaustion. We conducted a moderation analysis for the distraction as follows.

Controlling for task conflict, workgroup tenure, and size, the interaction of distraction and relationship conflict was significantly negative (Table 3, $b = -0.57$, $P < 0.001$). Thus, hypothesis 3a suggesting the usage of distraction moderates the association between relationship conflict and emotional exhaustion, was supported.

A simple slope analysis was performed to test the significance of the relationship in low and high distraction strategy usage. The results revealed that at low levels of distraction usage (1 SD below the mean distraction, that is, below 0.62), the association between relationship conflict and group emotional exhaustion is positive and significant ($b = 0.90$, $p < 0.001$, CI 95% [0.63; 1.17]). This is also true at average level ($b = 0.54$, $p < 0.001$, CI 95% [0.35; 0.73]), but not at high level of distraction strategy usage (1 SD above the mean distraction, that is over 0.62) ($b = 0.19$, $p > 0.05$, CI 95% [-0.08; 0.45]).

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The graphical presentation of the interaction was derived using standard regression coefficient of the regression lines for workgroup high and low (± 1 SD of the mean) on the moderator variable of distraction (Figure 2). The figure suggests that *utilizing high distraction in a situation with high relationship conflict* is not beneficial. Perhaps this is because the tension and resentment caused by such conflict restrict emotional resource. In a highly emotional situation, the restriction could create a gap between the group members' emotional arousal (e.g., high animosity) and their wishes and efforts to redirect their attention from the relationship conflict to a neutral or pleasant issue. This gap might vitiate using a high distraction strategy in a high relationship conflict situation.

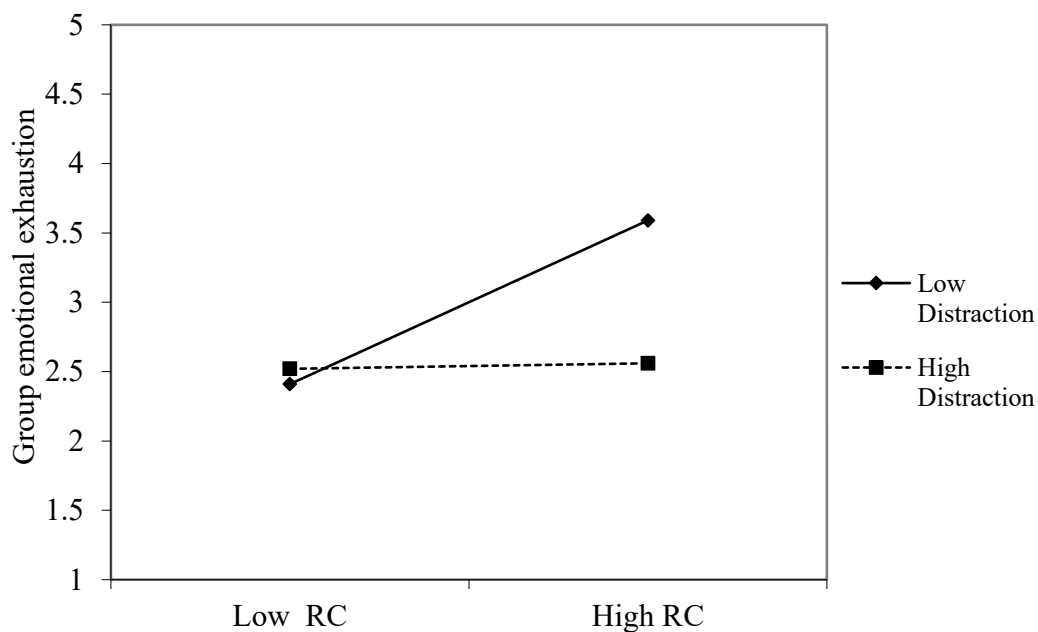


Figure 2: Interaction effect of relationship conflict (RC) and distraction in prediction of group emotional exhaustion

H3b predicts that cognitive reappraisal strategy of emotion regulation would moderate the association between relationship conflict and group emotional exhaustion. Controlling for task conflict, workgroup tenure, and size, the interaction of cognitive reappraisal and relationship

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conflict was not significant ($b = 0.17$, $P > 0.05$; CI 95%: $[-0.18; -0.51]$). Thus, hypothesis H3b was not supported.

H4a postulates that a cooperative style would moderate the association between task conflict and group work engagement. Controlling for relationship conflict, workgroup tenure, and size indicated that the interaction of a cooperative style and task conflict on group work engagement was significant (Table 4, $b = 0.47$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, hypothesis H4a was confirmed.

A simple slope analysis was performed to test the significance of the relationship in low and high levels of a cooperative style usage. The results revealed that at low level (1 SD below the mean a cooperative style, that is, below 0.34), the association between task conflict and group work engagement was negative and significant ($b = -0.35$, $t = -2.91$, $p < 0.001$, CI 95% $[-0.59; -0.11]$). For average ($b = -0.19$, $p > 0.05$, CI 95% $[-0.44; -0.05]$) and high levels of using a cooperative style ($b = 0.03$, $p > 0.05$, CI 95% $[-0.35; 0.29]$), the association was also negative yet not significant.

The graphical presentation of the interaction was derived using standard regression coefficient of the regression lines for workgroup high and low (± 1 SD of the mean) on the moderator variable of a cooperative style (Figure 3). The figure shows *that* utilizing a high level of cooperation in a high task conflict situation is not beneficial. At high level of task conflict, the workgroup members' cognitive and emotional loads and tension increase, thereby drawing resources away from the processing of information associated with critical debates of differing perspectives. This may block an open and constructive discussion and create reluctance and withdrawal, while a cooperative style requires tackling conflict actively and openly.

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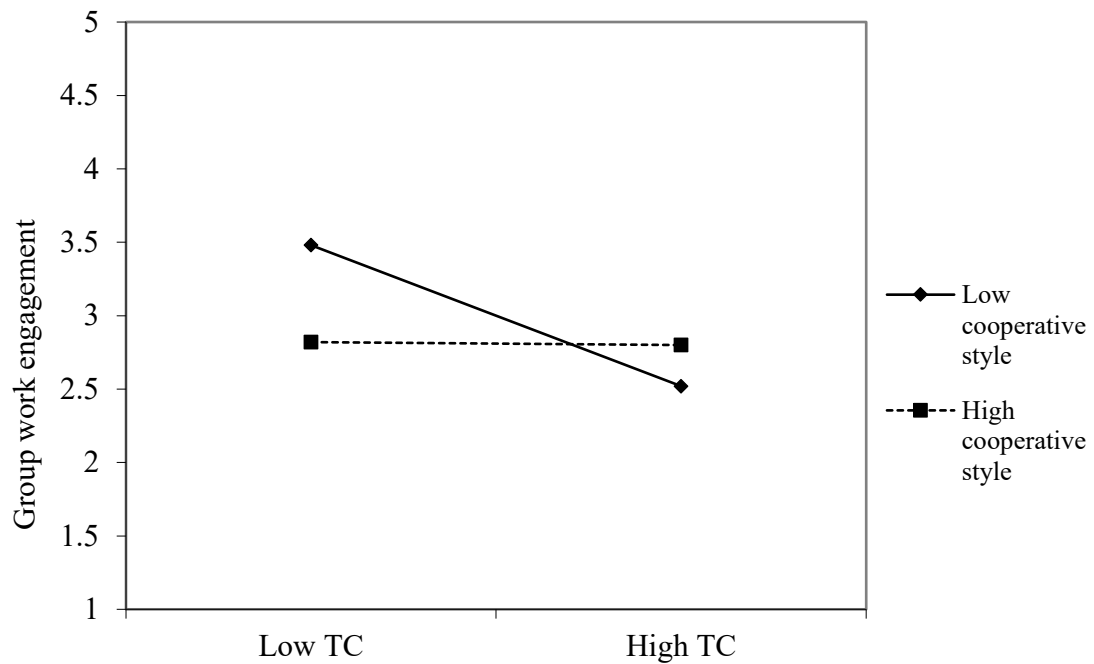


Figure 3: Interaction effect of task conflict (TC) and cooperative style of conflict management distraction in prediction of group work engagement

H4b postulates that a competitive style would moderate the association between task conflict and group work engagement. Controlling for relationship conflict, workgroup tenure, and size revealed that the interaction of competitive style and task conflict on group work engagement was not significant ($b = -0.09$, $p > 0.05$, [95%CI: -0.55; 0.36]). Thus, H4b did not gain support.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine the effects of the distraction and cognitive reappraisal strategies of emotion regulation on the association between relationship conflict and group emotional exhaustion. In addition, we attempted to examine how cooperative versus competitive styles of conflict management moderate the association between task conflict and group work engagement. Prior to testing the moderator hypotheses, we investigated whether

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relationship conflict is positively related to group emotional exhaustion and whether task conflict is negatively related to group work engagement.

In our study, relationship conflict was positively related to group emotional exhaustion, which supported our expected association (H1). The result is congruent with previous findings that showed a positive association between relationship conflict and emotional exhaustion at the individual (De Dreu et al., 2004; De Dreu and Beersma, 2005; Dijkstra et al., 2009) and group levels (Benitez et al., 2018). It suggests that relationship conflict, which is emotional in its core (Greer and Jehn, 2007) depletes group members' emotional resources as a whole. One plausible reason is that group members perceive relationship conflict as a threat triggered by colleagues, a threat that drains them of energy. When this negative experience is shared within the workgroup members, it increases the level of group emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, the results revealed that workgroup size is related to relationship conflict, because when workgroups are larger, social/personality clashes, which can engender hostility and tension, are more likely.

Our results also extend previous research by examining the moderating influence of emotion regulation strategies during the occurrence of relationship conflict in workgroups. The results revealed that the distraction strategy is a plausible moderator, supporting H3a. This finding is consistent with previous studies (e.g., Bushman, 2002). For example, Zillman's studies (1988) suggest that evoking negative emotions can be effectively mitigated by engaging in activities that are highly absorbing and entertaining. Griffith et al. (2014) showed that using distraction could mitigate the adverse effects of relationship conflict. Shifting attention away from relationship conflict is a readily available means of mitigating susceptibility to negative emotion (e.g., Eisenberg and Fabes, 1992). It easily prevents the mind from wandering back to the source of negative emotion. Thus, using distraction may serve as a venting when experiencing relationship conflict as Griffith et al. (2014) noted. It allows negative emotions to

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subside. Distraction may also provide group members with the opportunity for rest and detachment from the negative emotions. As a result, it is likely that the depleted resources are replenished which, in turn, buffer the effects of conflict on emotional exhaustion.

Contrary to our expectation, a cognitive reappraisal strategy did not gain support as a moderator in the association between relationship conflict and emotional exhaustion, not supporting H3b. One plausible reason may be that cognitive reappraisal requires cognitive resources to re-evaluate the situation, which might not be available in the heat of relationship conflict. Furthermore, cognitive reappraisal requires application before or after experiencing an emotion (Sheppes and Meiran, 2007), while distraction could be applied at any point during the experience of an emotion. Due to its simplicity and rapid effect, distraction strategy received support as a moderator.

In our study, task conflict was negatively related to group work engagement, yet this association was non-significant in a robust testing. Therefore, H2 did not gain support. A plausible reason for this might be related to controlling for relationship conflict, as there is a correlation between relationship and task conflicts. In fact, research has shown the average correlation between these two constructs is approximately + 0.54 (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003; De Wit et al., 2012).

Our study extends the intragroup conflict literature by examining the moderating influence of cooperative and competitive styles of conflict management on the association between task conflict and group work engagement. The results show that a cooperative style is a moderator, but a competitive style is not. Consistent with previous studies (e.g., DeChurch and Marx, 2001; Lovelace, Shapiro, and Weingart, 2001), this finding indicates the benefit of a cooperative conflict management style over the competitive style in managing task conflict.

One plausible reason is that handling task disagreements cooperatively increases intrapersonal self-efficacy and satisfaction as well as harmony in the workgroup (see De Dreu,

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2008). This, in turn, mitigates negative emotions and encourages group members to openly discuss issues. Workgroup members can then become more confident that their opponents are pursuing mutually beneficial solutions. This could conserve their cognitive and emotional resources to buffer the negative effects of task conflict on their work engagement. In contrast, a competitive style of conflict management does not buffer the adverse effects of task conflict. Perhaps when group members view task conflict as a win-lose struggle, negative emotions would escalate and if deadlocks prevail, group members would block each other's efforts (e.g., Tjosvold et al., 2003). Holding rigidly to initial work task views blocks open discussion. This could intensify disagreements and stress (Friedman et al., 2000) leading members to withhold their effort from work due to incompatibilities (Jehn, 1995).

Although we developed general rather than cross-cultural predictions, a few comments about cultural patterns are in order as data were collected in Iran. Iranian culture emphasizes values of preserving harmony and saving face in order to maintain long-term relationships. Group members usually have an implicit, indirect, and abstract style of communication (Hofstede, 1983). This style has two common consequences. First, it can restrict open discussion among group members; too much open discussion can violate social norms, leading group members to maintain their initial views. The second consequence of the Iranian communication style is related to distraction as a strategy to manage the negative effects of relationship conflict. Distraction allows group members to maintain their relationships in their group by taking attention away from conflicts. Thus, it could serve as an escape to circumvent the emotional situation faced.

In summary, by focusing on group emotional exhaustion and group work engagement and the distinct effects of relationship and task conflicts in non-western workgroups, the results confirm the significantly negative impact of the relationship conflict on emotional exhaustion. The results suggest that the effects of task conflict might be adverse for group work

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engagement, as it showed a negative impact, even so the effect was not significant. Furthermore, the results reveal how distraction and a cooperative conflict management style reduce the adverse effects of relationship and task conflicts. The results provided evidence that Western's findings can be generalized and are relevant to a collectivist culture.

Theoretical and practical implications

The first finding of theoretical importance is related to examining the distinct effects of intragroup conflict (relationship and task conflicts) on two independent dimensions of well-being (group emotional exhaustion and group work engagement). Few studies have addressed the possible relations between the two major types of intragroup conflict and workgroup well-being. Moliner et al. (2008) stated that a complete understanding of well-being at work requires both reducing the negative aspects of well-being and increasing the positive aspects of well-being. Our results suggest that researchers should focus more on factors that can buffer the negative consequences of workgroup conflict. The moderating effects of distraction and cooperative approach for dealing with workgroup conflict indicate that the effects of conflict depend on how it is managed.

Our findings also map well with previous findings at the individual level reporting the adverse effects of relationship. Consistent with related research, our findings suggest that future research should address the means of managing conflict at the workgroup level. There might be a broad range of manageable and trainable variables for alleviating the effects of conflict on workgroup outcomes.

The results also have important practical implications. As relationship and task conflicts are inherent to workgroups, group members cannot escape their effects. A major implication is that workgroup creators should prepare group members to manage the dynamics of relationship and task conflicts by providing training that supports the regulation of emotions and a win-win approach to conflict management. These skills can be learned (e.g., Tjosvold et al., 2003),

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although they might be a part of the group members' personalities and behavioral repertoires. For example, Druskat and Wolff (2001) stated that workgroup training can improve emotional awareness and emotion regulation among workgroup members. Lovelace et al. (2001) also showed that collaborative communications help alleviate conflict before it becomes personalized.

With practice, both emotion regulation and cooperative conflict management could become habitual. We suggest that workgroup leaders train group members to develop more effective emotion regulation skills and teach group members intragroup communication techniques and how to adopt a cooperative approach that helps them frame task and relationship disagreements as challenges to the whole group rather than to particular individuals.

Limitation and future research

Our study was based on self-reports, and it is likely that responses were influenced by social desirability or common method variance (Ganster and Schaubroeck, 1991). However, some researchers believe that the magnitude of any such effects is often overstated (Spector, 1994). For example, Evans (1985) states that common method bias is less of a problem when testing interaction effects as we did in our current study. Furthermore, the choice of standardized and validated measurements used in this study (i.e., CFAs) could reduce the possibility of this problem (Spector, 1987).

Another limitation is the cross-sectional nature of our data. Cross-sectional studies do not allow the establishment of causal relationships between the variables analyzed. Developing longitudinal designs could address this issue. As the data were collected from multiple organizations, specific organizational characteristics may have influenced the measured variables. However, the size and heterogeneity of our sample (N = 91 workgroups that involved 595 participants) is a better alternative to the unique characteristic of data captured from a single organization. Indeed, the generalization of results is improved in that they are based on

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data from different organizations. One advantage of the heterogeneous respondents is that it helps reduce the effects of individual biasing factors. Nevertheless, researchers are careful about causality and develop longitudinal designs to address this issue.

The study finding may need to be interpreted cautiously. One reason is related to the CFAs results of group emotional exhaustion and group work engagement. In line with Costa et al (2014) one possible explanation could be related to using group-referent measures when studying group-level constructs. One might assume that aggregating individual-referent items accurately does not represent a collective construct. Although it is plausible, because workgroups have specific dynamics and that promoting well-being in individuals within workgroups may demand a different action. Thus, we suggest that future study needs to investigate whether aggregating individual-referent items accurately represents a collective construct.

The results of this present study suggest that conflict within workgroups is manageable. Thus, future research could address the variables that buffer the negative effects of conflict. Additionally, group members who base their daily interactions on the context of their own workgroup could develop a perception of conflict in the workgroup. The context of the workgroup has a major impact on group members (George and Jones, 1997). Therefore, to provide a better understanding of intragroup conflict researchers should take into account the contexts under which the negative effects of conflict can be diminished, if managed correctly. Of note, due to the nature of the survey study, there is further needed for development of experimental designs to assess which emotion regulation, i.e., distraction or cognitive reappraisal is more effective, as well as to evaluate their usage frequency.

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Authors' contributions: ZE and CK contributed to the conception and design of the study. ZE organized the collection and preparation of data. ZE and CK performed the statistical

analyses. ZE wrote the first draft of the manuscript. ZE and CK read and edited the manuscript during the preparation of the manuscript.

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5.2. Does intragroup conflict intensity matter? The moderating effect of conflict management on emotional exhaustion and work engagement

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**Does intragroup conflict intensity matter? The moderating effect of conflict management
on emotional exhaustion and work engagement**

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ABSTRACT

To elucidate the distinct effects of relationship conflict and task conflict, we investigated the intensity (low versus high) of the two types of conflict on emotional exhaustion and work engagement. Furthermore, we examined how cooperative versus competitive conflict-handling styles moderate the relation between the two types of conflict and emotional exhaustion and work engagement. We also examined the role of emotion regulation (cognitive reappraisal and distraction) as a covariate to control its effects on the study variables. Utilizing two separate 2×2 between-subject experimental designs, we recruited 120 employees from several companies in Austria. The results suggest that higher levels of both RC and TC are positively related to emotional exhaustion and negatively to work engagement. A cooperative conflict management style moderated the effects of both relationship and task conflict on work engagement. The results suggest decoupling relationship and task conflict and examining the interplay between the intensity of intragroup conflict types and conflict management styles, provides insights into the connection between the levels of conflict, conflict management, emotional exhaustion, and work engagement. Additionally, it supports the usage of distraction as a viable regulation strategy for managing the effects of high levels of relationship conflict on emotional exhaustion.

Keywords: intensity, relationship conflict, task conflict, work engagement, emotional exhaustion.

INTRODUCTION

The use of workgroups- two or more people interacting interdependently towards a common goal- in organizations has steadily increased over the past few decades (Kozlowski and Bell, 2003). Yet, while bringing people together in a workgroup can be beneficial, individual differences and interdependencies of workgroup members (the extent to which workgroup members cooperate and work interactively to get done tasks, Stewart and Barrick, 2000) can also increase the chances of *intragroup conflict* (e.g., De Wit et al., 2012; Korsgaard et al., 2008).

Intragroup conflict is defined as perceived incompatibilities or differences among workgroup members (Jehn, 1995). This mainly originates from disagreements over tasks' viewpoints such as how the tasks being performed called *task conflict* (TC) or from interpersonal incompatibilities in personality, habits or style called *relationship conflict* (RC).

Research implies that RC is dysfunctional (Benitez et al., 2018; Esbati and Korunka, 2020) and that TC is beneficial for desirable workgroup outcomes (Jehn, 1995; Tjosvold, 2008). RC is associated with affective responses (Jehn, 1995). TC is beneficial as it increases workgroup members' tendency to scrutinize task opinions, allows critical evaluations of each other work viewpoints resulting in a better understanding of task at hand (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003; Jehn and Bendersky, 2003). Yet, two meta-analyses of the intragroup conflict literature (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003; De Wit et al., 2012) found no support for an overall positive association between TC and workgroup outcomes, such as performance and job satisfaction. Perhaps because RC and TC have rarely been investigated separately, little is known about the distinct effect of TC and RC on workgroup outcomes (See Korsgaard et al., 2008). The equivocal results of conflict prompted us to separate and explore these effects.

Research suggests that intragroup conflict is largely an emotional entity (Jehn, 1995), causing stress responses (De Dreu and Weingart, 2001) with behavioural, psychological and

medical consequences (Quick et al., 1997). Yet, studies of the effects of RC and TC on well-being indicators at work are limited (Kuriakose et al., 2019; Meier et al., 2013), while well-being can potentially develop conditions to undermine or enhance workgroup outcomes (e.g., Huynh et al., 2014; Jungst and Blumberg, 2016). Consistent with the *Job Demand-Resource Model* (JD-R, Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001), we chose two vital indicators of well-being (a) emotional exhaustion (feelings of being overextended, Maslach and Jackson, 1981) and work engagement (a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind, Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). Research suggests that poorer workgroup outcomes are partly the result of at least two psychological factors: (a) reductions in work engagement (e.g., Brown and Leigh, 1996), and (b) increases in emotional exhaustion (e.g., Benitez et al., 2018). Both can reduce the motivation of workgroup members to attain workgroup goals. Can such reduction be minimized or avoided in the context of RC and TC?

Research suggests that the influences of RC and TC are contingent upon how members respond to or manage them (e.g., De Dreu and Weingart, 2003, De Wit et al., 2012). *Conflict management* (strategies implemented by group members to reduce conflict, DeChurch and Marks, 2001) has shown its effectiveness in handling conflict (e.g., Dijkstra et al., 2011). Yet there is limited study on moderating effects of conflict management on the relation of TC, RC, emotional exhaustion and work engagement.

To better understand the influences of RC and TC, we addressed three circumstances. First, we decoupled RC and TC, as Solansky et al. (2014) contend that decoupling RC and TC is critical for understanding the effects of conflict type on individual and workgroup outcomes. We considered at least two plausible reasons for decoupling RC and TC: the possibility of the co-occurrence of RC and TC (De Wit et al., 2012), and the strong association between them (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003). Second, we addressed conflict intensity—the amount and frequency of conflict that could influence workgroup outcomes (Andrews and Tjosvold, 1983).

Third, we addressed cooperative versus competitive conflict management styles as a moderating variable under which the influence of RC and TC might change (Benitez et al., 2018; Dijkstra et al., 2005). These two conflict management strategies are both active conflict-engaging strategies (Dijkstra et al., 2009). The conflict–outcome relationship might vary across people who employ different means of regulating their emotional reactions to conflict (e.g., Curşeu et al., 2012; Griffith et al., 2014). We thus controlled the influence of emotion regulation via cognitive reappraisal and distraction as a covariate.

In sum, we addressed three gaps in the literature. While previous research on RC and TC largely has focused on “hard” outcomes such as performance and innovation, we focused on “soft” outcomes, namely emotional exhaustion and work engagement. Despite prior research largely examined the effects of RC and TC simultaneously, we decoupled RC and TC and manipulated their intensity (high vs. low) to elucidate equivocal results of TC. Although, prior research has shown the effectiveness of cooperative style of conflict management on handling conflict, its effectiveness has not explored in different intensity level of RC and TC and in relationship with emotional exhaustion and work engagement.

The Present Study

The first purpose of the present study was thus to elucidate the distinct effects of high versus low RC and TC on emotional exhaustion and work engagement and to shed more light on the elusive effects of TC. The second purpose was to explore the moderating roles of conflict management (controlling for the role of emotion regulation) in the association between high versus low levels of RC and TC and emotional exhaustion and work engagement. We employed an experimental study to fulfill these purposes, hoping to replicate, cross-validate, and extend previous statistical findings.

We will layout in details an overview of the theoretical framework of the study leading to the formulation of the study hypotheses in the following section.

THEORY AND HAYPOTHESE DEVELOPMENT

Conflict and Emotional Exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion is a state of feeling overextended and depleted of one's emotional resources (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). Research indicates a positive correlation between conflict at work and emotional exhaustion (Benitez et al., 2018; Spector and Bruk-Lee, 2008). From a work stress perspective, RC is a threatening work stressor (Spector and Bruk-Lee, 2008), as it generates tension with the psychological costs of increasing strain and stress (Bruk-Lee et al., 2013; Dijkstra et al., 2011). Emotionally charged interactions among workgroup members generate extra emotional demands. When such demands exceed group members' resources, it leads to emotional exhaustion (Dijkstra et al., 2009). Compared to RC, TC causes less stress and strain, yet disagreements over work-related issues may threaten group members' striving for a positive self-view and may induce stress (Meier et al., 2013). Research also indicates that, as TC intensifies, arousal and tension increase (e.g., Carnevale and Probst, 1998), which may lead to a drain on energy. This might be a reason for proposing that TC "should be of moderate intensity" (De Dreu, 2008, p. 9).

Given the above, a key question is whether the effects of RC and TC on emotional exhaustion would vary across the intensity (high vs. low) of conflict. We argue that high RC and TC can lead to emotional exhaustion. As Janssen et al. (1999, p. 122) stated nicely, a high level of RC produces "intolerance and antagonistic attributions concerning each other's intentions and behaviors." This may escalate emotional loads that might exceed group members' cognitive and physiological resources. Accordingly, workgroup members would feel chronic fatigue and drained of energy. Consistent with this reasoning, there is a positive correlation between RC and emotional exhaustion (Benitez et al., 2018; Esbati and Korunka, 2020). Conversely, when RC is low, group members are less likely to question the motives

underlying personal disagreements. The implication is that emotional and cognitive resources are available for managing conflict.

Furthermore, we argue that, as fundamental task disagreements intensify, group members' cognitive and emotional loads increase (e.g., Carnevale and Probst, 1998). This depletes most of the group members' limited resources. Emotionally taxing experiences can lead to emotional exhaustion and feelings of depletion (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). According to threat rigidity theory (Staw et al., 1981), when workgroup members constantly and strongly challenge each other's work perspectives, they may feel threatened—the feeling of losing their respect and acceptance on work viewpoints (Dickerson et al., 2004; Jehn et al., 2008). This, in turn, invokes a set of psychological and physiological responses (Dickerson, 2008). Conversely, when TC is low, disagreements are tolerable, and emotional and cognitive resources are available for managing work view discrepancies (Shaw et al., 2011). We thus propose that:

H1: Emotional exhaustion will be increased with high levels of RC as opposed to low levels.

H2: Emotional exhaustion will be increased with high levels of TC as opposed to low levels.

Conflict and Work Engagement

Work engagement is defined “as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind, characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). Engaged workgroup members dedicate their “full self” to work and are highly motivated to work. They also experience positive emotions. Positive emotions positively influence the intensity of work motivation or the amount of effort contributed (e.g., Staw et al., 1994), and unpleasant affective experiences produce negative motivational states (Seo et al., 2004). As negative emotions can be present with any types of conflict (Jehn, 1997), it would be beneficial to explore whether

the effects of RC and TC on work engagement would vary across the intensity (high vs. low) of conflict.

There is a dearth of research on the direct effect of conflict on work engagement. Yet, extant studies have reported that RC demotivates employees (Chen et al., 2011) and are negatively related to work engagement (Selmer et al., 2013). Jungst and Blumberg (2016) also suggest that employees are less engaged in their work when they experience or perceive TC.

In the present study, we argue that the distinct influences of RC and TC on work engagement would be contingent on the conflict intensity (high vs. low). When RC is highly prevalent in the workgroup, personal disagreements become more salient and reveal underlying tension (Jehn and Mannix, 2001). Consequently, the feeling of threat, i.e., social and psychological discomfort, increases within the workgroup (Seo et al., 2004). These feelings create disincentives for engaging at work. This propensity is consistent with threat rigidity theory (Staw et al., 1981) and social self-preservation (Dickerson et al., 2004), which propose that social threat activates a stress response that produces defensiveness, closed-mindedness, and either an intensification or avoidance reaction (Carnevale and Probst, 1998; O'Neill and McLarnon, 2018), which could lead to disengaging at work. Along these lines, Buric and Macuka (2017) documented in a two-wave cross-lagged analysis that teachers who experienced more anger, fatigue, and hopelessness in the first measurement point were also less engaged at the second assessment. Thus, we propose that a high level of RC leads to workgroup members feeling less devoted to their workgroup and less likely immerse themselves in the work.

Building on information processing theory (Galbraith, 1973), we argue that, with heightened TC, cognitive and emotional loads will also increase, thereby drawing resources away from the processing of divergent perspectives (Carnevale and Probst, 1998). De Wit and colleagues (2012) stated that too much TC distracts cognitive resources that may not be directly

invested in the task. This narrows the attentional field and creates reluctance and withdrawal (Carnevale and Probst, 1989), leading to disengaging at work. Hence, we hypothesize that:

H3: Work engagement will be decreased with high levels of RC as opposed to low levels.

H4: Work engagement will be decreased with high levels of TC as opposed to low levels.

The Moderating Role of Conflict Management Style

The literature on conflict suggests that the influence of conflict on the workgroup dynamic is not independent from the way conflict is handled by workgroup members (Dijkstra et al., 2011). According to dual concern theory (Puttin and Robin, 1986), reactions to disagreement arise from two motivational underpinnings: concern for the self and concern for the other party. The combination of these two dimensions yields five strategies, of which this study focuses on two: cooperative (high concern for both self and others) and competitive (high concern for self and low concern for others). We chose these two strategies because group members communicate cooperative or competitive intention to the other party in the conflict (Tjosovld,1989). Furthermore, these two conflict management strategies are both active conflict-engaging strategies (Dijkstra et al., 2009).

A cooperative conflict management style is characterized by exchanging information on priorities and preferences, problem-solving, and making trade-offs between important and unimportant issues, reducing both conflict and stress (Friedman et al., 2000). Group members who handle conflict cooperatively are more likely to engage in constructive communication, leading to improved understanding of personal disagreements and improved understanding of other members' viewpoints (Dijkstra et al., 2011).

In contrast, a competitive conflict management style is characterized by threats, bluffs, and intimidation (e.g., De Dreu and Beersma, 2005). A competitive style frequently leads to fractious debate and conflict escalation. This contributes negatively to group functioning and group effectiveness (Behfar et al., 2008).

The Effects on Emotional Exhaustion

Given the above, we argue that a cooperative conflict management style makes the workgroup less conflict-laden. Group members can manage the feeling of threat and improve their self-worth and lessen the frustration evoked by personal discrepancies (Gross and Guerrero, 2000; Friedman et al., 2000; Tekleab et al., 2009). This can be done through defining conflicting interests and values as a mutual issue to be solved and searching for shared interests or exploring new options that addresses the interests of the conflicting parties. Research shows that a cooperative strategy is the most effective conflict management for RC, particularly at a high level of conflict (Andrews and Tjosvold, 1983), and mitigates the adverse effects of RC on emotional exhaustion (Medina and Benitez, 2011).

Furthermore, through the cooperative style, group members can discuss their work view differences openly, at least actively, ask for further clarification, and consider their own and their opponent's concerns to resolve their discrepancies (see Tekleab et al., 2009). They may hold a "we are in it together" attitude, seek a solution to ensure workgroup goals are met, and treat conflict as a mutual problem to be solved. This attitude prevents conflict escalation or negative cycle of tension among workgroup members (Greer et al., 2008), allows mutual respect (Dijkstra et al., 2011), maintains feeling of self-worth and self-efficacy, and reduces the tension and frustration caused by TC (Takleab et al., 2009). The reduction could mitigate the intensity of TC and its depletion of energy allowing workgroup members focus their resources on the task at hand."

Conversely, a competitive style consumes group members' resources and results in resource loss. As disputants utilize pressure and critical remarks and may wish to outdo one another, This brings irritation to the surface and erodes emotional recourses. Thus, we hypothesize that:

H5: A cooperative, rather than a competitive, conflict management style will moderate the relationship between RC levels and emotional exhaustion.

H6: A cooperative, rather than a competitive, conflict management style will moderate the relationship between TC levels and emotional exhaustion.

The Effects on Work Engagement

The positive impacts of a cooperative style could also apply to work engagement. Costa and colleagues (2014, 2015) proposed that hindering or lowering RC levels will facilitate the building of teamwork engagement, as workgroup members will be “more able to provide constructive criticism and become less self-centered and more concerned with the team’s collective goal accomplishment and with the task(s) at hand” (Costa et al., 2015, p. 13). A cooperative style could encourage effective communication to verbalize disagreements in a helpful and less obstructive manner and facilitates recognition of the legitimacy of each other’s personal and work-related differences in perspectives. Research indicates that open-minded discussion contributes to lessen the adverse effects of TC on workgroup outcomes (Jiang et al., 2013; Tekleab et al., 2009). De Jong (2013) showed that group members with high levels of openness had constructive TC. This minimizes the emotional and cognitive resource load required for work engagement. However, holding on to self-centered work views and prioritizing personal gain over all other advantages impair constructive interactions and intensify disagreements (Friedman et al., 2000), leading workgroup members to withhold their task effort (Jehn, 1995). Thus, we hypothesize that:

H7: A cooperative rather than competitive conflict management style will moderate the link between RC levels and work engagement.

H8: A cooperative rather than competitive conflict management style will moderate the link between TC levels and work engagement.

Emotion Regulation

Emotion regulation is defined as “the processes [strategies] by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions” (Gross, 1998, p. 275). One emotion regulation strategy is called antecedent-focused, which can occur before the emotional responses have been completely developed (Gross, 1998). Cognitive reappraisal and distraction (attentional depletion) are two types of antecedent-focused strategy. Both involve taking action prior to or during an emotion experience. These two strategies are the most possible and cognitively healthy emotion regulation strategies in the context of organizations (Griffith et al., 2014; Gross and John, 2003).

Cognitive reappraisal involves the cognitive reconstruction of a potentially emotion-eliciting event such that it reduces its emotional impact (Lazarus and Alfred, 1964). Cognitive reappraisal is a flexible means of downregulating even tense negative emotions (e.g., Gross, 2001). It improves interpersonal functioning and well-being (John and Gross, 2004; Spaapen et al., 2014) through increasing positive emotions and decreasing negative emotions experienced and expressed (Matta et al., 2014).

Distraction involves a mental turning away from the emotion-generating event. Griffith et al. (2014) showed that distraction, rather than cognitive reappraisal, moderates the negative consequences associated with RC. In a series of experiments, Sheppes and Meiran (2007) found that distraction was immediately effective in reducing negative experiences, even when initiated late. By contrast, when reappraisal was initiated late, it was less successful in reducing the negative experience.

Emotion regulation strategies have different consequences in different contexts of emotion intensity (e.g., Sheppes et al., 2011). Sheppes et al (2011) illustrated that, in the context of low-intensity emotional situations, participants were inclined to employ reappraisal rather

than distraction; in the context of high-intensity emotional situations, distraction was a preferred strategy.

We argue that when RC (or TC) is high, distraction (a) blocks emotional input early before it accumulates, and (b) cognitive and emotional resources are not restricted for further self-control (Gross, 2002). Conversely, when RC (and TC) is low, cognitive demand is low (Sheppes et al., 2014). This implies that group members have the opportunity to take a different perspective of the situation. Reframing disagreements would attenuate the negative effect of RC (and TC) on emotional exhaustion.

In sum, we addressed emotion regulation as a covariate in our study. Using cognitive reappraisal strategy provides an opportunity for group members to examine and comprehend different perspectives. This makes them open to each other's ideas, values, and interests. This in turn encourages using a cooperative strategy to resolve conflict. Utilizing distraction can also promote cooperation as it reduces disrespectful and unpleasant interactions and may provide group members with the opportunity for detachment from negative emotions; thereby they could recover and re-gain their emotional and cognitive resources (see Jiang et al., 2013).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants

We estimated the sample size of this study by calculating the power size by using G*Power software set at $1 - \beta = 0.95$ and $\alpha = 0.05$. The effect size was kept at the range of value 0.40. The power extracted was 0.95. The results estimated a sample size of 84 participants. To boost the statistical power of study, we increased the number of participants to 120 that is fifteen participants were assigned to each condition.

Contrary to existent experimental studies in conflict arena that used university students as participants, we recruited employees from companies in Vienna. They voluntarily participated in this study.

The composition of participants in the study was as follows: age range, 23–63 years (mean [M] = 39.50 years, standard deviation [SD] = 10.53); 55.8 percent of the sample was female. Eighty-five (70.9%) of the sample held master degrees and higher. On average, the participants reported 14.41 years (SD = 9.34) of work experience. The work experience ranged from 2 to 38 years.

Procedure

We developed eight scenarios for the study. We recruited 120 volunteers from several companies in Austria. They were in Service (e.g., consulting company), Technology (e.g., computer, hardware and software products) and international organizations (Federal agencies). Due to difficulty of the data collecting from companies, we reached to the prospective participants through the authors' personal networks. After initial contact with them and getting their informed consent, they received an invitation letter for participating in the study.

This study was completed online. To apply randomization, we assigned, each participant randomly to one of eight conditions. To apply randomization, we assigned, each participant randomly to one of eight conditions: (1) high RC and a cooperative or (2) competitive conflict management style; (3) low RC and a cooperative or (4) competitive conflict management style; (5) high TC and a cooperative or (6) competitive conflict management style; (7) low TC and a cooperative or (8) competitive conflict management style. The questionnaire was sent to the email addresses of the participants who consented to take part in the study. The participants were assured of anonymity. They were asked first to read the script and imagine themselves as a member of the workgroup described, and then answer the study questions.

Design

Two separate 2×2 between-subject designs were used to investigate the influence of conflict type (low vs. high TC, low vs. high RC) and conflict management style (cooperative vs. competitive) on work engagement and emotional exhaustion (**Figure 1**). We created two

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scenario-based experimental designs. In the first, RC intensity (low vs. high) was manipulated while the level of TC was held constant. In the second, TC intensity (low vs. high) was manipulated, while the level of RC was held constant. To test the role of emotion regulation (cognitive reappraisal and distraction) for the effects on work engagement and emotional exhaustion, this variable was included as a covariate.

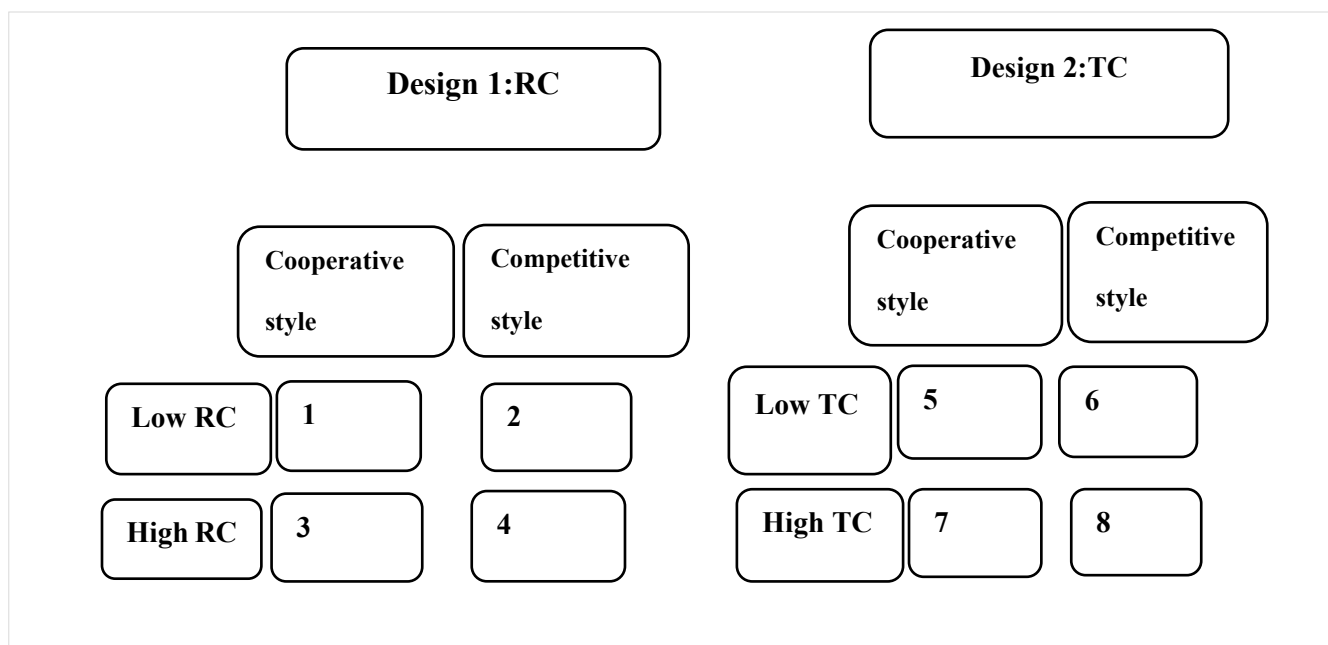


Figure 1 | The design of the study. RC= Relationship conflict; TC=Task conflict; 1-8: each condition of the study.

Manipulation

High- or low-level TC and RC, and a cooperative and competitive style of conflict management manipulations were developed for this study (Appendix A). These scripts were designed to reflect eight conditions: (a) high or low RC and a cooperative or competitive conflict management style; (b) high or low TC and a cooperative or competitive conflict management style.

First, we recruited 30 volunteers from some companies in Vienna to answer the manipulation check phase. First, participants answered questions on the covariate emotion

regulation. Then, they were asked to read a scenario and imagine themselves in the situation described. The first paragraph of the scenario informed the participants about the condition of the workgroup (e.g., Suppose you and four other people are all members of the same company workgroup. You are all working full-time and are all at the same rank in the company). The second paragraph described the conflict situation (e.g., Each of you propose very different solutions. Each member's ideas are usually challenged in heated discussions). The third paragraph addressed how the group members managed the conflict (e.g., Most often the disagreements are resolved by combining your diverse ideas into a group's consensus). Then, the participants answered the dependent variables questions.

The scenarios included several keywords to indicate that the intensity of conflict and the conflict management style. The descriptions of high or low intragroup conflict and conflict management styles were consistent with the definition of intragroup conflict (Jehn, 1995) and conflict management outlined by Rahim (2002).

Dependent Variables

Work engagement. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES; Schaufeli et al., 2002) was included for assessing work engagement. The items of the questionnaire were measured on seven-point rating scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). A sample item was "working in this workgroup, is full of meaning and purpose." Cronbach's alpha was 0.80.

Emotional exhaustion. We employed the emotional exhaustion subscale of the Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey (MBI-GS; Schaufeli et al., 1996). The items of the questionnaire were measured on seven-point rating scale, from 1 (none) to 7 (a great deal). A sample item was "I am burned out from this workgroup." Cronbach's alpha was 0.85.

Covariate

Emotion regulation was assessed as a covariate. Prior research suggests that emotion regulation potentially influences work engagement and emotional exhaustion (e.g., Costa et al., 2015; Esbati and Korunka, 2020; Griffith et al., 2014). To control for this potential effect, we assessed the participants' emotion regulation, including cognitive reappraisal (Revised Emotion Regulation Questionnaire, Spaapen et al., 2014) and distraction (Esbati and Korunka, 2020). Cronbach's alpha for cognitive reappraisal and distraction were 0.81 and 0.85, respectively.

Manipulation Checks

To check manipulation, the participants were asked four questions. Two questions assessed how the participant perceived the conflict in the workgroup. As an example, "how much task conflict do you think there is in the workgroup described above?" Two items measured how the participant perceived the conflict management. As an example, "how much of a cooperative-style conflict management do you think there is in the workgroup described above?" The questions were measured on seven-point rating scales, i.e., from 1 (none) to 7 (a great deal).

The results of the manipulation checks indicate that our manipulations worked as intended. The participants in each condition perceived expected manipulation. Participants in the TC condition rated the TC script as having TC, but not RC ($M = 4.87$, $SD = 1.64$ vs. $M = 0.12$, $SD = 0.34$, $t = [1.29] = 11.31$, $p = 0.001$). Participants in the RC condition rated the RC script as having RC, but not TC ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 2.12$ vs. $M = 1.20$, $SD = 1.21$, $t = [1.29] = 5.58$, $p = 0.001$). Participants in the cooperative conflict management style condition perceived a cooperative style in the script rather than a competitive one ($M = 6.42$, $SD = 0.67$, $t(1, 29) = 35.59$, $p = 0.001$). The same was true for perceiving a competitive style condition in the script rather than a cooperative one in the competitive conflict management style condition ($M =$

6.37, SD = 0.49, $t(1, 29) = 34.60$, $p = 0.001$). The responses to the manipulation check items showed that participants in both designs, and all conditions, differed as expected for all manipulations.

Data Analysis

Using SPSS 24, we computed descriptive statistics, an analysis of variance (ANOVA), and a two-way ANOVA to explore the relation of the variables of interest under high versus low RC and TC (hypotheses 1-4). To test the proposed hypotheses, the influence of RC (and TC) levels (low vs. high) and conflict management styles (cooperative vs. competitive) on work engagement and emotional exhaustion were assessed using multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), whereas emotion regulation was retained as a covariate (hypotheses 5-8). As an additional analysis, we tested the moderating role of emotion regulation in the link between RC (and TC) on emotional exhaustion and work engagement, we conducted moderation analysis using the SPSS PROCESS macro; Model 1, developed by Hayes (2012).

Design 1: Relationship conflict

RESULTS

This was a 2 (high vs. low RC) $\times$ 2 (cooperative vs. competitive style) between subject design. Means, SD, and correlations were calculated to provide a general understanding of the relationship between the variables of interest (**Tables 1 and 2**). The means and SD according to the conditions for RC, work engagement, and emotional exhaustion are presented in **Table 3**.

Table 1 | Descriptive statistics, and correlations coefficients for the study variables

Variables	M	SD	N	1	2	3
1. Emotional exhaustion	4.19	0.62	60	-		
2. Work engagement	3.94	0.67	60	-0.74**	-	
3. Emotion regulation	4.93	0.27	60	-0.27**	0.27*	-

** $p = 0.01$, * $p = 0.05$, two-tailed.

Table 2 | Descriptive statistics for relationship conflict and conflict management styles (N=60)

<i>Variables</i>		<i>Relationship conflict</i>		<i>Conflict management</i>	
		<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Cooperative</i>	<i>Competitive</i>
1. Emotional exhaustion	<i>M</i>	3.71	4.67	3.96	4.41
	<i>SD</i>	0.41	0.39	0.63	0.53
2. Work engagement	<i>M</i>	4.47	3.42	4.11	3.78
	<i>SD</i>	0.46	0.38	0.34	0.54

Table 3 | Descriptive statistics according to the conditions for work engagement and emotional exhaustion (N= 60)

<i>Levels of relationship conflict</i>	<i>Conflict management</i>	<i>Emotional exhaustion</i>		<i>Work engagement</i>	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
High	Cooperative	4.47	0.34	3.43	0.37
	Competitive	4.85	0.34	3.40	0.40
Low	Cooperative	3.45	0.39	4.80	0.22
	Competitive	3.97	0.23	4.14	0.40

Table 2 illustrates that participants perceived emotional exhaustion significantly higher at a high RC condition versus low [$F = (1, 58) = 84.14, p < 0.01$]. Compared to the low RC condition, high-RC participants reported less work engagement [$F = (1, 58) = 94.54, p < 0.01$]. The findings indicate that high-RC participants perceived more emotional exhaustion and less work engagement compared to their low-RC counterparts. Linear regression indicated that the level of RC is associated with emotional exhaustion ($\beta = 0.77, t = 9.17, p = 0.001$) and work engagement ($\beta = -0.79, t = -9.72, p = 0.001$). As such, a high (but not low) level of RC is associated with emotional exhaustion, and a low (but not high) level of RC associated with work engagement. Thus, the findings support H1 and H3. **Table 3** indicates that in the conditions of high level of RC, and using a cooperative style, the mean of emotional exhaustion ($M=4.47, SD=0.34$) is greater than low level of RC ($M=3.45, SD=0.39$).

The influence of RC level (low vs. high) and cooperative vs. competitive style on work engagement and emotional exhaustion were assessed using MANCOVA and ANCOVA.

To perform a MANCOVA, emotion regulation was retained as a covariate. Using Wilks' lambda, the results showed a significant interaction of RC level and conflict management style

on work engagement [$F = (1, 55) = 11.72, p < 0.01$]. The finding indicates that a cooperative conflict management style moderates the link between RC and work engagement, supporting H7 (**Figure 2**). The figure shows that using a high level of cooperation in a high RC situation is not beneficial. Perhaps this is because the tension and resentment caused by such conflict restrict emotional resource. In a highly emotional situation, the restriction could create a gap between the group members' emotional arousal (e.g., high animosity) and investing their efforts in the work. The results indicate that the interaction term of RC level and conflict management style on emotional exhaustion was nonsignificant (ns) [$F = (1, 55) = 0.85, p > 0.05$]. Therefore, H5, stating the moderating role of a cooperative style on the relation between RC level and emotional exhaustion, was not supported. A closer look at **Table 4** shows that the main effects of RC level on emotional exhaustion ($p < 0.01$) and work engagement ($p < 0.01$) were significant. Moreover, the analysis yielded a nonsignificant main effect of emotion regulation, as a covariate, for both emotional exhaustion ($p = ns$) and work engagement ($p = ns$).

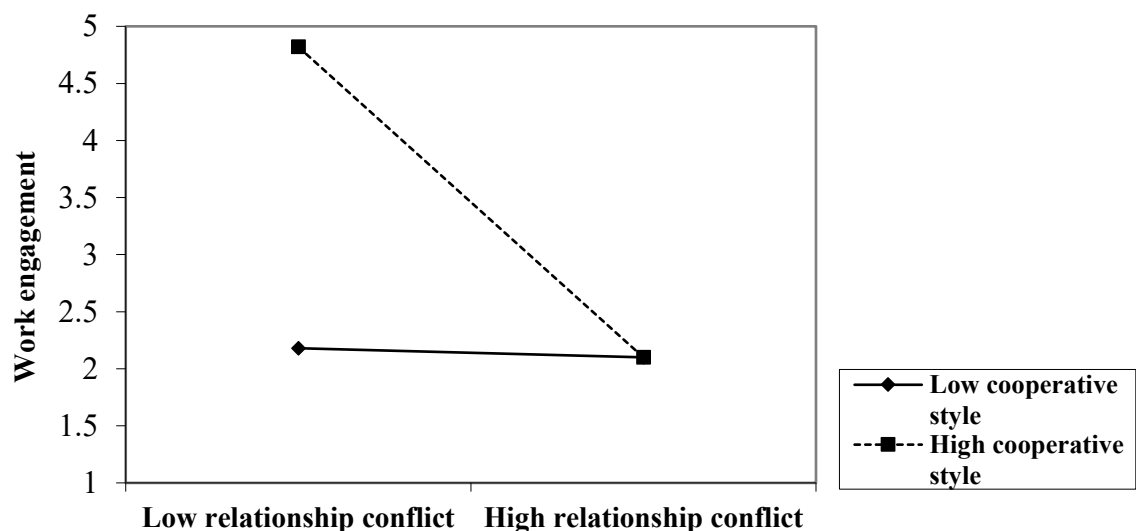


Figure 2 | The moderating effect of conflict management style on the relationship between Relationship conflict (RC) and work engagement

Follow-up univariate analyses for RC level and conflict management style on emotional exhaustion and work engagement were performed separately. The results were identical to that of the MANCOVA; as such, the interactive term for work engagement was significant ($p < 0.01$) and that for emotional exhaustion was nonsignificant ($p < 0.05$, ns).

Table 4 | Results of MANCOVA: RC intensity level on work engagement and emotional exhaustion

<i>Source</i>	<i>Dependent variable</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Eta</i>
Intercept	WE	1	12.60	0.001	0.19
	EEX	1	28.42	0.000	0.34
Emotion regulation	WE	1	0.38	0.54	0.007
	EEX	1	0.37	0.55	0.007
RC level	WE	1	112.23	0.001	0.65
	EEX	1	103.71	0.001	0.65
Conflict management style	WE	1	12.41	0.001	0.18
	EEX	1	25.60	0.001	0.318
RC level × conflict management style	WE	1	11.72	0.001	0.18
	EEX	1	0.85	0.362	0.02
Error	WE	55			
	EEX	55			
Total	WE	60			
	EEX	60			

N = 60, **p = 0.01, *p = 0.05, two-tailed; WE: Work Engagement, EEX: Emotional Exhaustion.

As an additional analysis, we conducted a moderation analysis to test whether emotion regulation moderates the relation between RC and emotional exhaustion and work engagement. The results show that distraction, but not cognitive reappraisal, moderates the association between high RC and emotional exhaustion ($B = -0.46$, $t = -0.2.69$, $p < 0.01$, 95% confidence interval [CI]: -0.81; -0.12). Furthermore, distraction and cognitive reappraisal did not moderate the link between RC and work engagement.

DISCUSSION

Consistent with previous research (Benitez et al., 2018; Dijkstra et al., 2009), design 1 indicates a positive relationship between RC and emotional exhaustion and a negative relationship with work engagement (Buric and Macuka, 2017). The results also show differing effects of RC level on emotional exhaustion and work engagement. At a high level of RC (vs.

a low level), more emotional exhaustion and less work engagement were reported. An explanation might be that heightened RC reveals more animosity (Jehn, 1995), and elevated conflict is more likely to evoke devastating reactions (Ayoko et al., 2008). Applying the attentional resource model (Ellis and Ashbrook, 1988), when RC is prevalent in workgroups, group members allocate psychological and emotional resources to address personal issues, reducing attentional resources for engaging at work tasks. This reduces the resources available for work engagement (Chen et al., 2011).

The results demonstrate that a cooperative conflict management style moderates the relationship between RC and work engagement, but not emotional exhaustion. This finding can be attributed to the fact that using a cooperative style, which is positive and unlikely to be emotionality charged, may facilitate engaging at work. As Medina and Benitez (2011) have shown, a cooperative style emphasizes shared interests, which may lessen the intensity of high RC. Thus, consistent with past research, a cooperative style is an appropriate and effective tool for handling the adverse effects of RC (Gross and Guerrero, 2000) on work engagement.

Contrary to our expectations, a cooperative conflict management style was not effective for moderating the detrimental effects of high RC on emotional exhaustion. One possible reason is that RC creates an imbalance between the emotional demands of the situation and the resources available to meet such demands. A cooperative style may thus be less able to call on emotional resources to reduce RC. This finding falls in line with studies in a different context. For example, Benitez et al. (2018) showed that using a passive (avoidant) conflict management style could mitigate the effects of RC on emotional exhaustion. Such findings suggest that the effectiveness and appropriateness of a cooperative style (vs. competitive) in moderating the effects of RC could depend upon the intensity of RC and type of workgroup outcomes.

Concerning our additional analysis, our results show that distraction moderates the link between RC and emotional exhaustion, which is consistent with past research (Esbati and

Korunka, 2020; Griffith et al, 2014). As previously discussed, one reason is that distraction requires relatively simple processes, and blocks emotional involvement before it accumulates. This reduces susceptibility to negative emotions and provides the opportunity for recovering and gaining required resources. The finding suggests that distraction could be an appropriate and effective means of moderating the negative effects of RC on emotional exhaustion.

Design 2: Task Conflict

RESULTS

As in design1, design 2 varied a high versus low conflict and cooperative versus competitive strategy in a 2×2 between-subject design. Means, SD, and correlations were calculated to provide a general understanding of the relationship between the variables of interest (**Tables 5 and 6**). The means and SD according to the conditions for TC, work engagement, and emotional exhaustion are presented in **Table 7**.

Table 5 Descriptive statistics, and correlations coefficients for the study variables

<i>Variables</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>
1. Emotional exhaustion	3.67	1.01	60	-		
2. Work engagement	4.10	0.61	60	-.52**	-	
3. Emotion regulation	4.58	0.83	60	-0.38**	0.33*	-

**p = 0.01, *p = 0.05, two-tailed.

Table 6 Descriptive statistics for task conflict and conflict management style (N=60)

<i>Variables</i>		<i>Task conflict</i>		<i>Conflict management</i>	
		<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Cooperative</i>	<i>Competitive</i>
1. Emotional exhaustion	<i>M</i>	3.67	4.59	3.92	4.28
	<i>SD</i>	0.86	0.92	1.04	0.97
2. Work engagement	<i>M</i>	4.04	3.31	4.00	0.41
	<i>SD</i>	0.42	0.53	3.35	0.61

Table 6 | Descriptive statistics according to the conditions for work engagement and emotional exhaustion (N= 60)

<i>Levels of task conflict</i>	<i>Conflict management</i>	<i>Emotional exhaustion</i>		<i>Work engagement</i>	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
High	Cooperative	3.67	4.59	3.92	4.28
	Competitive	0.86	0.92	1.04	0.97
Low	Cooperative	4.04	3.31	4.00	0.41
	Competitive	0.42	0.53	3.35	0.61

As **Table 6** illustrates, high-TC participants perceived significantly higher emotional exhaustion than low-TC participants did [$F = (1, 58) = 17.77, p = 0.001$]. Compared to their high-TC counterparts, low-TC participants also reported higher work engagement [$F = (1, 58) = 34.44, p = 0.001$]. The findings thus demonstrate that the high-TC participants perceived more emotional exhaustion and less work engagement than the low-TC participants did. Linear regression indicated that the TC level is associated with emotional exhaustion ($\beta = 0.48, t = 4.22, p = 0.001$) and work engagement ($\beta = -0.61, t = -5.87, p = 0.001$). These findings support H2 and H4. **Table 7** indicates that in the conditions of low level of TC and using a cooperative style, the mean of work engagement ($M=4.24, SD=0.34$) is greater than high level of TC ($M=3.74, SD=0.31$).

As in design 1, we conducted MANCOVA and ANCOVA to assess the influence of TC level (low vs. high) and cooperative vs. competitive style on emotional exhaustion and work engagement. The results illustrate a significant interaction of TC level and conflict management style on work engagement [**Table 8**, $F = (1, 55) = 8.04, p = 0.006$]. Our results confirm the moderating role of a cooperative style on work engagement, supporting H8. The graphical presentation of the interaction was derived using standard regression coefficient of the regression lines for workgroup high and low ($\pm 1SD$ of the mean) on the moderator variable of a cooperative style (**Figure 3**). At high level of TC, the workgroup members' cognitive and emotional loads and tension increase, thereby drawing resources away from the processing of

information associated with critical debates of differing perspectives. This may block an open and constructive discussion and create reluctance and withdrawal, while a cooperative style requires tackling conflict actively and openly. However, the results demonstrate that the interaction term of TC level and conflict management style on emotional exhaustion was nonsignificant [$F = (1, 55) = 0.94, p > 0.05$]. Thus, H6, proposing that a cooperative style moderates the relationship between TC level and emotional exhaustion, was not confirmed. The related findings show that the main effects of TC level on emotional exhaustion [$F = (1, 55) = 11.59, p < 0.01$] and work engagement [$F = (1, 55) = 54.29, p < 0.01$] were significant. Emotion regulation, as a covariate, showed a significant main effect on emotional exhaustion [$F = (1, 55) = 4.84, p < 0.05$] and work engagement [$F = (1, 55) = 4.47, p < 0.05$].

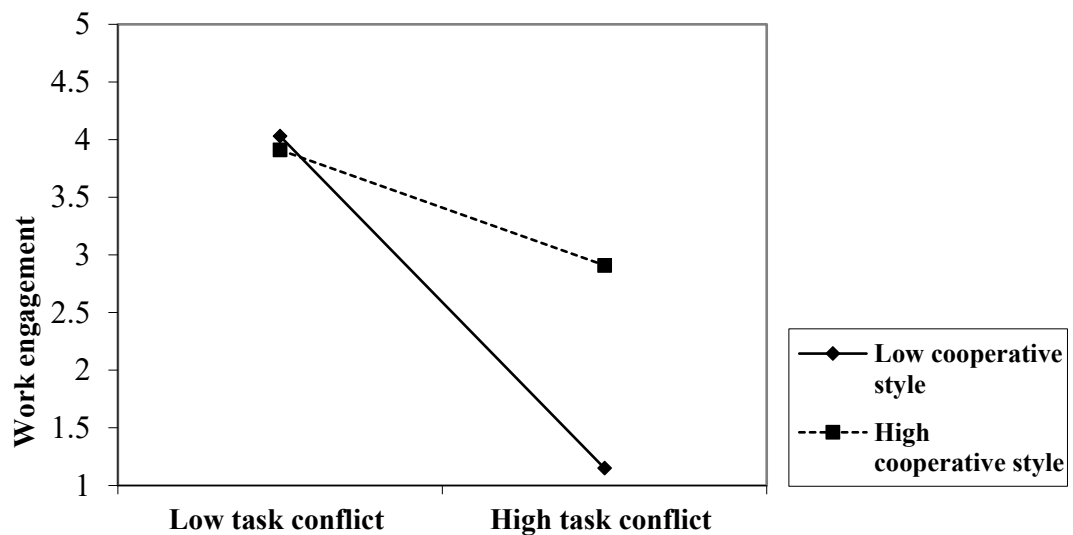


Figure 3 | The moderating effect of conflict management style on the relationship between Task conflict (TC) and work engagement

Follow-up univariate analyses for TC level and conflict management style on emotional exhaustion and work engagement were performed separately. The results were identical to that of the MANCOVA; thus, the interactive term for work engagement was significant ($F = 1, 56 = 7, 25, p < 0.01, \eta = 0.12$, observed power = 0.75) and that for emotional exhaustion was nonsignificant ($p > 0.05$, ns).

Table 8 | Results of MANCOVA: TC intensity level on work engagement and emotional exhaustion

<i>Source</i>	<i>Dependent variable</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Eta</i>
Intercept	WE	1	149.18	0.001	0.73
	EEX	1	69.49	0.001	0.56
Emotion regulation	WE	1	4.47	0.03	0.08
	EEX	1	4.84	0.03	0.08
TC level	WE	1	54.29	0.001	0.50
	EEX	1	11.59	0.001	0.17
Conflict management style	WE	1	57.79	0.001	0.51
	EEX	1	2.87	0.01	0.05
TC level × conflict management style	WE	1	8.04	0.006	0.13
	EEX	1	0.94	0.34	0.02
Error	WE	55			
	EEX	55			
Total	WE	60			
	EEX	60			

N = 60, **p = 0.01, *p = 0.05, two-tailed; TC: Task conflict, WE: Work Engagement, EEX: Emotional Exhaustion.

Concerning our additional analysis, the results showed that distraction and cognitive reappraisal did not moderate the association between TC level and emotional exhaustion and work engagement.

DISCUSSION

Consistent with prior research (De Dreu, 2008; De Dreu and Weingart, 2003), design 2 indicates that working under high-TC conditions increases emotional exhaustion. Congruent with the few related studies examining the association between TC and work engagement (e.g., Jungst and Blumberg, 2016; Selmer et al., 2013), our study also shows that TC reduces work engagement.

Our findings illustrate that high TC (vs. low) impairs group members' emotional and physical potential and inhibits them from engaging at work. The findings suggest that increased task disagreements disrupt information processing and divert a group member's attention from fellow workgroup members' views. Rigidly holding onto an initial view prevents group members from engaging at work. Consequently, heightened TC leads to cognitive rigidity,

defensiveness, and withdrawal (Carnevale and Probst, 1989). This in turn escalates conflict, leading to reduction of the group members' energy and reduces group effort (O'Neill et al., 2018).

In our investigation, conflict management style moderated the relationship between TC level and work engagement, but not emotional exhaustion. One plausible reason for this is that handling task disagreements cooperatively enhances self-efficacy and satisfaction as well as harmony in the workgroup (De Dreu, 2008). This, in turn, encourages group members to discuss task issues openly. They can then become more confident that their workgroup opponents are pursuing mutually beneficial solutions. This would conserve cognitive and emotional resources to buffer the negative effects of TC on work engagement and unfreeze the information sharing process.

The results illustrate that a competitive conflict management style does not buffer the effects of TC on emotional exhaustion and work engagement. Perhaps negative emotions escalate when group members view TC as a win-lose struggle. Hence, deadlocks prevail, and group members block each other's efforts (e.g., Tjosvold et al., 2003).

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this research was to examine the distinct effects of RC and TC intensity (low vs. high) on emotional exhaustion and work engagement. To do so, we decoupled RC and TC and examined them in two separate experimental, scenario-based designs. The other purpose of our research was to explore the moderating effects of cooperative and competitive conflict management styles in the link between RC (and TC) and emotional exhaustion and work engagement. To rule out the effects of emotion regulation (via distraction and cognitive reappraisal), we assessed it as a covariate.

The results support the premise that higher levels of both RC and TC are positively related to emotional exhaustion and negatively related to work engagement. This finding is

consistent with the study of Ayoko et al. (2008), who demonstrated that conflict intensity is significantly associated with destructive reactions to conflict. Past research has also documented the adverse influences of RC on emotional exhaustion (Benitez et al., 2018; Esbati and Korunka, 2020) and work engagement (Chen et al., 2011; Buric and Macuka, 2017). The main reason for this may be that RC context generates emotional exhaustion, burnout (Schaufeli and Salanova, 2014), and work disengagement (Jungst and Blumberg, 2016) due to increased tension and social and psychological discomfort (Seo et al., 2004). These feelings deplete energy and interfere with the group members' cognitive functioning needed to engage at work.

The results of this study reveal that a cooperative conflict management style is an appropriate and effective means of mitigating the detrimental effects of heightened RC and TC on work engagement, but not emotional exhaustion. This could imply that, in the context of heightened conflict, the benefit of using a cooperative style may be limited to attenuate the adverse effects of conflict on work engagement. Perhaps, there is no match between the emotional exhaustion and a cooperative style. The key component in emotional exhaustion is emotions, while conflict management has mainly cognitive components. This aligns with the Triple-Match Principle (TMP, de Jonge and Dormann, 2006) proposing that stressors, moderators, and the outcomes should be qualitatively similar to produce a buffering/moderator effect. Supporting this implication, Bear et al. (2014) revealed that an avoidant conflict management style mitigated the relationship between negative emotions engendered by RC and emotional exhaustion. Similarly, Benitez et al. (2018) found that avoiding and integrating conflict management styles buffered the link between RC and collective emotional exhaustion.

Consistent with past research (Esbati and Korunka, 2020; Griffith et al., 2014), our additional analysis reveals that distraction moderates the link between RC and emotional exhaustion. This suggests that there may be a match between RC, the distraction strategy, and

emotional exhaustion: emotions play a critical role in each of them. This match could produce a moderator effect.

The results could clarify the mixed findings for TC (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003; De Wit et al., 2012). Intensity (low vs. high) may account for the negative effects of TC in some studies (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003). This claim is consistent with some studies that have stated “intensity” of conflict leads to adverse effects on outcomes such as innovation and creativity (De Dreu, 2006). Participants at low levels of TC were less likely to make personal judgments about other group members’ opinions, and it was less likely for these workgroups to react emotionally to cognitive debate. Our results further imply that high RC generates detrimental effects on workgroup outcomes.

Our research makes a number of contributions to the intragroup conflict literature. The vast majority of studies on the effects of intragroup conflict are correlational, with all the limitations of inferring causation from correlational research (e.g., Calder et al., 1981). We conducted scenario-based experiments that allowed us to examine the true causal relations between variables while controlling confounding variables. We recruited participants who were employed and who had work experiences in a real workgroup setting. In contrast to prior research on conflict that focused mainly on distal outcomes, in particular, performance, our research provides evidence about how and when TC and RC may be associated with emotional exhaustion and work engagement. By experimentally disentangling TC and RC occurrence and manipulating the intensity of conflict expression (low vs. high), we employed a new approach to investigating conflict and directly examined the assumption that more TC and RC lead to more emotional exhaustion and less work engagement compared to low RC and TC. This may add new insights in the literature concerning the effects of intra-group conflict.

Limitations and Future Research

The limitations in the present study should be acknowledged. The first limitation revolves around the group sample. We used a convenience sample, which imposes limits on generalizability. Additionally, our sample was highly educated, which may imply comparatively low reactivity to conflicts. Our findings should be replicated using samples more representative of the employed population. Furthermore, the participants were mostly from multinational companies, lived and worked in Austria. Factors such as culture (i.e., collectivist vs. individualist) and workgroup norms could color the way intragroup conflict is viewed and managed (e.g., Chen et al., 2016). For instance, workgroup members might already deem what conflict management styles are (in) appropriate. Yet, it was beyond of the scope of our study. Future work in this area needs to address this issue. Yet, this limitation was controlled through assigning participants randomly to one of eight conditions. The second limitation revolves around the conflict management styles. Given our study design, we assessed two conflict management styles, while group members might adopt more than two conflict management styles depending on the situation (Van de Vliert, 1997). According to the contingency approach, there is no best way to respond to conflict. Thus, the effectiveness of conflict management style in response to conflict may vary with different contexts of conflict intensity. Future study may consider more than two styles of conflict management. The third limitation revolves around emotion regulation, was assessed as a covariate. Given the role of distraction in handling conflict (Griffith et al., 2014), future studies may manipulate distraction to explore its moderating role in the context of intragroup conflict.

Although our research is not exempt from limitations, it provides useful inputs for clarifying the findings on intragroup conflict. Furthermore, our study offers some insight into effective tools for managing conflict and enhancing well-being in a workgroup.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Our results have several theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical standpoint, our results demonstrate that decoupling RC and TC and assessing their intensity are vital for clarifying their effects on workgroup outcomes. Our results support the argument that TC (De Dreu, 2006) and RC could produce curvilinear effects.

Our findings have important implications for managers. Managers need to assess the intensity of conflict in their workgroups to ensure that their efforts to motivate their workgroup members are not nullified by dysfunctional group dynamics. Managers who encounter workgroups with high levels of intragroup conflict should mitigate its effects on employees' well-being by training them in conflict management and even emotion regulation strategies. The results also suggest that different types of conflict need to be managed differently. Therefore, any training program for managing intragroup conflict needs to be comprehensive and offer the required skills for conflict management and emotion regulation strategies.

CONCLUSION

Despite the obvious limitations, the study enriches the conflict literature by examining the interplay between intragroup conflict and conflict management. The key contributions of this study to the literature include decoupling the theoretical and methodological conflict types (task and relationship), examining conflict features (intensity), and handling conflict and its effects on emotion exhaustion and work engagement. Decoupling the types of conflict aided the isolation of specific effects of conflict on our study outcomes. The manipulation of conflict intensity and the way it is managed also offered better understanding of the connection between the variables of interest.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTIONS

ZE and CK contributed to the conception and design of the study. ZE organized the collection, preparation of data, and performed the statistical analyses. ZE wrote the first draft of the manuscript. ZE and CK read and edited the manuscript during the preparation of the manuscript.

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Appendix A | Selected statements used in the scenarios.

Relationship conflict

Low These differences sometimes easily lead to exchanges that are slightly heated and emotional.

High The exchanges frequently turn into quarrels and became personal, nasty, and disrespectful.

Task conflict

Low Each member's ideas are slightly challenged in heated discussions but are almost always respectful.

High Each member's ideas are always challenged in heated discussions but are almost always respectful.

5.3. Intragroup conflict and Well-being: A meta-analysis

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Intragroup conflict and Well-being: A meta-analysis

Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to provide a novel meta-analysis of task conflict and relationship conflict, and to investigate the associations between these two types of conflict and indicators of work-related well-being, including work engagement, burnout, and psychological-physiological symptoms of well-being.

Design/methodology/approach: Two separate analyses were performed on primary studies conducted at the individual or group levels. Furthermore, at each level, a separate analysis was performed for each type of conflict. At the individual level, we included 22 and 33 studies for task and relationship conflict respectively. At the group level, we included three and five studies for task and relationship conflict respectively. All analyses were conducted in R 4.0.5 (R Core Team, 2021) using the R package metafor 2.4-0.

Findings: The results indicate that at both individual and group levels, there are negative relationships between the two types of conflict and the well-being indicators examined.

Research limitations: The number of studies on the two types of conflict and well-being is small, in particular at the group level. Thus, interpretation of our findings at the group level should be undertaken cautiously.

Originality/value: This study is the first meta-analysis of the influences of task and relationship conflict on work-related well-being indicators, including work engagement, burnout, and psychological-physiological symptoms of well-being at work. The study reveals that the influences of conflict types on work-related well-being are to some extent overlooked in the literature.

Keywords: Task conflict, relationship conflict, well-being, work engagement, burnout, psychological-physiological symptoms.

Introduction

Organizations today are increasingly adopting workgroup-based structures. The value of workgroups lies in drawing upon diverse perspectives and the expertise of group members to solve complex problems. Yet workgroups can also be the source of an additional problem, namely *intragroup conflict*, defined as incompatibilities and disagreements among workgroup members (Jehn, 1995, 1997). The two most-researched types of intragroup conflict are *task conflict* (TC, defined as incompatibilities related to opinions about the task at hand) and *relationship conflict* (RC, defined as interpersonal incompatibilities and tensions). Research has consistently suggested that RC is detrimental to workgroup outcomes (De Dreu, 2008; Dijkstra et al., 2009, 2011). Findings on the effects of TC on workgroup outcomes, however, have been inconsistent. TC effects can be functional (Amason, 1996; Jehn and Mannix, 2001; Solansky et al., 2014), dysfunctional (e.g., De Dreu and Weingart, 2003; Medina et al., 2005), or even beneficial under certain circumstances, such as in work on nonroutine tasks (e.g., Jehn, 1997).

As the research on TC and RC has evolved, researchers have made enormous efforts to identify the distinct effects of these two types of conflict on workgroup effectiveness. Five recent meta-analyses (DeChurch et al., 2013; De Dreu and Weingart, 2003; De Wit et al., 2012; Hülshager et al., 2009; O'Neill et al., 2013) on the conflict types have summarized these research efforts.

While these past meta-analyses shed light on the consequences of different types of intragroup conflict, they focused largely on performance and workgroup innovation (DeChurch et al., 2013; Hülshager et al., 2009; O'Neill et al., 2013). Yet since the seminal work of Jehn (1995) on intragroup conflict, the influences of TC and RC on people's work-related well-being (defined by variables such as work engagement, emotional exhaustion, and job stress; Rothmann and Barkhuizen, 2008) have not been summarized. However, these conflict types

have powerful implications for well-being (e.g., De Dreu, 2008; Kuriakose et al., 2019; Meier et al., 2013). Conflict in workgroups is often positively related to stress and threat (Carnevale and Probst, 1998; Meier et al., 2013) and negatively related to well-being (e.g., De Dreu et al., 2004; Friedman et al., 2000; Kuriakose et al., 2019). We thus addressed this gap in the literature by conducting a novel meta-analysis to examine the relations between TC, RC, and several well-being indicators.

Consistent with the *job demands-resources model* (JD-R; Bakker and Demerouti, 2007), we chose two indicators of well-being at work: *work engagement* and *burnout*. Both are critical constructs for employees' well-being and allow a general assessment of well-being at work (see Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). Work engagement refers to “a positive, fulfilling, affective-motivational state of work-related well-being” (Bakker et al., 2008, p. 187). In contrast, burnout is defined as a syndrome involving weariness with work (Maslach and Leiter, 2008).

Drawing on the JD-R model, we considered conflict types as *job demands* (a term referring to aspects of the job that require effort and energy; Demerouti et al., 2001). Research has shown that all job demands are positively related to strain (LePine et al., 2005). Conflict is also known to be a work stressor (Keenan and Newton, 1985), and dealing with it requires effort and energy. Failure to handle conflict activates an energy depletion process, resulting in job strain (Bakker et al., 2003), or affects motivational processes and hinders the ability of employees to invest themselves in their work (Costa et al., 2015; Esbati and Korunka, 2021).

Furthermore, to capture wider well-being indicators, we also included *psychological-physiological symptoms* of well-being (such as job stress and somatic symptoms) in our study. Conflict may elicit negative emotions (Jehn, 1997), trigger stress, and influence well-being at work (Dijkstra et al., 2011; Tafvelin et al., 2019). Inclusion of these factors was also in line with the Sixth European Work Condition Survey's (EWCS) findings that job demands per se

are linked to an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disease, and depression (EWCS, 2017). As an example, emotional demands at work have been a predictor of mental health issues, fatigue, and burnout (EWCS, 2017).

Given the fact that individuals nested within workgroups interact with one another, and individuals and workgroups also interact (Klein et al., 1994), we looked at studies conducted at either individual or group level. This is consistent with two research perspectives on intragroup conflict: (a) the view that conflict is primarily an intra-individual process, which may emerge among certain workgroup members (Jehn, 1995; Kuriakose et al., 2019), and (b) the notion that conflict may affect workgroups as a whole, such that members recognize that conflict exists in their workgroup, or even such that it escalates from some members to the whole group (e.g., Benitez et al., 2018; Esbati and Korunka, 2020).

To sum up, this study aims to provide a new meta-analysis of TC and RC and to investigate their influences on well-being indicators, including work engagement, burnout, and psychological-physiological symptoms of well-being. The significance of this study lies in the fact that well-being at work can potentially develop conditions that undermine or enhance desired workgroup outcomes (e.g., Huynh et al., 2014; Jungst and Blumberg, 2016). Through two separate analyses, we examined the relations between conflict types and well-being at both individual and group levels.

Relationship conflict

Past research has consistently suggested that relationship conflict has detrimental and adverse effects on workgroup outcomes, including well-being (De Dreu, 2008; Dijkstra et al., 2009, 2011; Kuriakose et al., 2019). RC may influence employees' well-being in a number of ways: the mere experience of discord elicits negative emotions, such as anxiety and frustration (e.g., Dijkstra et al., 2005; Jehn, 1995). RC can be viewed as a threat to individuals and can jeopardize their positive social status and acceptability (Dickerson, 2008; De Wit et al., 2012).

This is consistent with *self-verification theory* (Swann et al., 2004), which posits that whenever an individual's self-views and social-views are not confirmed by colleagues, this is perceived as a threat to the individual.

Research has indicated that RC is related to symptoms of increased strain (Bruk-Lee et al., 2013; De Dreu et al., 2004; De Dreu, 2008), increased psychological stress, decreased well-being (Dijkstra et al., 2011; Guerra et al., 2005; Medina et al., 2005; Meier et al., 2013; Sonnentag et al., 2013), increased emotional exhaustion, and burnout (Benitez et al., 2017; De Dreu and Beersma, 2005; Dijkstra et al., 2009; Giebels and Janssen, 2005). In a more recent study, Esbati and Korunka (2020, 2021) showed that relationship conflict also has negative effects on emotional exhaustion.

Other health-related outcomes—such as depression—and life dissatisfaction have also been linked to relationship conflict experiences (Spector and Bruk-Lee, 2007; Tafvelin et al., 2020). Spector and Jex (1998) found a positive correlation between RC and depression ($r = 0.38$) and somatic symptoms ($r = 0.26$). Frone (2000) also showed positive correlations between RC, depression, and somatic symptoms.

In sum, research has suggested that the feelings of threat, wounded self-worth, and increasing frustration evoked by personal discrepancies deplete energetic resources. This loss of resources is manifested in negative outcomes that are physical (e.g., fatigue), emotional (somatic symptoms), cognitive (problems loading information), and behavioral (withdrawal from work) (Dijkstra et al., 2011; Jungst and Blumberg, 2016; De Wit et al., 2012).

Task Conflict

Task conflict has often been found to be beneficial to workgroups (Jehn, 1997). This is because different ideas about work are expressed and the workgroup's critical evaluation of information is improved; notions are clarified and task understanding increases (Amason, 1996; De Wit et al., 2012). However, TC can still cause anxiety, tension, and antagonism (e.g.,

Jehn and Bendersky, 2003). Consistent with self-verification theory (Swann et al., 2004), disagreement on task issues may also threaten group members' positive self- or social-views, inducing stress (Meier et al., 2013).

Some research has found that TC is related to decreased well-being and increased stress (Kuriakose et al., 2019; Sonnentag et al., 2013). Guerra et al. (2005), in a study of public-sector and private-sector employees, found that TC was linked to reduced well-being, but only for employees in the private sector. Esbati and Korunka (2021) also showed that high versus low levels of TC had negative effects on work engagement and emotional exhaustion. However, some research has indicated that TC is unrelated to emotional exhaustion (Giebels and Janssen, 2005), well-being (Medina et al., 2005), or burnout (Leon-Perez et al., 2016).

To summarize, compared to RC, TC causes less stress and strain, but disagreements over work issues may threaten group members' pursuit of acceptance and thus may still induce stress (Meier et al., 2013). This may lead to the loss of resources and a drain on energy, resulting in burnout or withdrawal from the task at hand in order to avert additional resource loss (Shirom, 2003).

Intragroup conflict and its outcomes: well-being indicators at work

Guided by the framework of the JD-R model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007), we chose two main indicators of well-being: work engagement and burnout. To broaden our approach, we also took psychological-physiological indicators of well-being, such as job stress, into consideration.

Work engagement is defined as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind, characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). Vigor refers to the state of exerting energy and sustaining effort even in the face of challenges and resistance. Dedication refers to the state of feeling inspiration and a sense of the significance of, and pride in, one's work. Absorption involves being immersed and happily engrossed in

work (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Engaged workgroup members dedicate their “full selves” to work and are highly motivated to carry out their tasks. They also experience positive emotions.

Burnout is “a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job and is defined by the three dimensions of emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy” (Maslach et al., 2001, p. 397). Emotional exhaustion refers to “feelings of being overextended and depleted of one’s emotional and physical resources” (Maslach et al., 2001, p. 399), while cynicism pertains to negative perceptions of the environment or job, including feelings of detachment. Lastly, inefficacy represents belief in one’s professional incompetence and lack of achievement or productivity (Maslach et al., 2001).

Psychological and physiological indicators of well-being include a range of stress responses or “fight-or-flight” bodily reactions to real or perceived threats, such as somatic complaints and anxiety.

Theoretical background of the study

The main theoretical framework of our study is the job demands-resources model, which is a widely used approach to predicting burnout and work engagement as the indicators of well-being at work. This theory posits that employees’ well-being is a function of their work conditions, which are generally divided into *job demands* and *job resources*. As discussed above, job demands refer to aspects of the job that require effort and energy, such as workload and conflict (Demerouti et al., 2001). Job demands cost energy and consume emotional and cognitive resources, which may lead to stress-related outcomes.

According to the challenge-hindrance stressor framework (Cavanaugh et al., 2000), job demands can either be challenging (i.e., consisting of appraised stressful demands that have the potential to promote employees’ growth and achievement, such as workload) or hindering (i.e., consisting of appraised stressful demands that inhibit employees’ growth and ability to

adequately perform their tasks, such as relationship conflict) (Crawford et al., 2010; LePine et al., 2005). Exposure to either type of demand may cause stress and consume energy.

Job resources refer to aspects of the job that activate a motivational process, attenuating job demands and their associated psychological and physiological costs (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). Job resources have either boosting or buffering effects (e.g., Breevaart and Bakker, 2018). As such, for challenging demands, resources may boost workgroup members to stay engaged at work. Alternatively, they may buffer the negative impacts of hindering job demands through replenishing lost energetic resources (Bakker and Demerouti, 2014).

Resources can be personal characteristics and energies. *Conservation of resources theory* (CORT; Hobfoll, 1989) posits that people are motivated to collect and protect their resources. This theory focuses on resources that are valued. The actual or perceived loss of resources, the threat of resource loss, or the failure to reobtain sufficient resources causes psychological stress.

Based upon the above theories, we argue that when workgroup members are exposed to TC or RC, they may appraise the situation as stressful, as it causes harm or loss (e.g., disrespect or distrust) and poses a threat to self- or work-views (or both). This condition triggers negative cognition and emotions, activating the loss of resources. This may escalate emotional loads that might exceed group members' cognitive and physiological resources. Accordingly, workgroup members may experience chronic fatigue and feel drained of energy. Research has shown a positive correlation between RC and emotional exhaustion, burnout, and psychological symptoms (Benitez et al., 2018; Esbati and Korunka, 2020; Tafvelin et al., 2019). Positive correlations also exist between TC and these symptoms (Bruk-Lee et al., 2013; Giebels et al., 2005; Smith, 2017; Tafvelin et al., 2019).

Furthermore, group members strive to obtain and protect resources when a loss of resources is experienced. They may withdraw to maintain their remaining resources or

otherwise lessen resource loss. In such cases, group members would not be dedicating their “full selves” to work. Research has demonstrated that RC (Chen, 2011; Tafvelin et al., 2019; Sliter et al., 2014) and TC (Jungst and Blumberg, 2016; Tafvelin et al., 2019) are negatively related to work engagement.

Taken together, we expected that TC and RC would act as hindrance demands on well-being at work. First, conflict generally is a work stressor (Keenan and Newton, 1985) and is perceived as a hindrance to effective workgroup functioning (e.g., Blake and Mouton, 1984). Second, both TC and RC may cause harm or threat, invoke negative emotions, and activate loss of resources. This may impair health-path between conflict types as demands and well-being indicators.

Thus, we hypothesized that:

1. Relationship conflict is negatively related to well-being, as indicated by work engagement, burnout, and psychological-physiological symptoms.
2. Task conflict is negatively related to well-being, as indicated by work engagement, burnout, and psychological-physiological symptoms.

Figure 1 represents the model of the study.

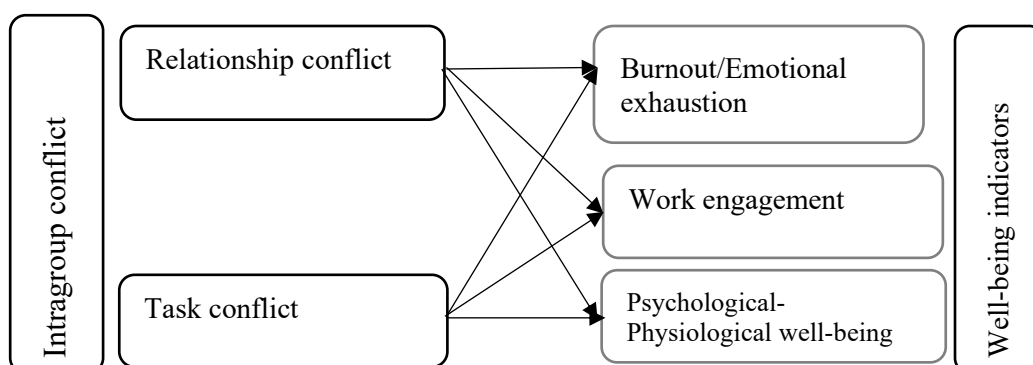


Figure 1. A visual presentation of the study

Method

We conducted systematic searches for articles published between 1995 and March 2020 using Web of Science, APA PsycInfo, Scopus, Google Scholar, and Academy of Management proceedings. We chose 1995 as a beginning point because the vast majority of studies on intragroup conflict have been published since the mid-1990s and have used a measure developed by Jehn (1995).

To find published articles on intragroup conflict, we used the keywords “team(s),” “group(s),” and “workgroup(s)” in combination with terms that scholars have used to discuss intragroup conflict, such as “task,” “cognitive,” “relationship,” “affective,” “personal,” “interpersonal,” and “emotional conflict.” We also searched using combinations of these terms with “work engagement,” “emotional exhaustion,” “burnout,” “well-being,” and “health.” We searched for combinations of these terms across all fields (i.e., title, abstract, and keywords).

To identify studies not captured in the electronic searches, we reviewed the reference lists of reviews and meta-analyses of the relevant literatures. To broaden our investigation, we also examined the tables of contents of the relevant journals in organizational psychology from the last five years (2015–2020), including the *International Journal of Conflict Management*, the *Journal of Management*, and the *Academy of Management Review*. Finally, we emailed researchers who have published widely on intragroup conflict and have been cited in important articles in the field to request copies of working papers and unpublished data. Figure 2 shows this search process in more detail.

Included/exclusion criteria for the study

We included studies if they (a) measured at least one type of intragroup conflict (relationship or task conflict); (b) included a measure of the well-being indicators defined in the present study; and (c) gave sufficient statistical information to calculate effect size. Given that our research questions concerned intragroup conflict, studies had to include the group as

the unit of analysis; the data could be collected at the level of either the group or the individual, but had to be aggregated at the group level, and the items wording were at the group level. We therefore excluded studies on dyads and those that used organizational level measurements. Finally, as well as intragroup conflict, studies had to include one or more of the other aspects examined in our study. Additionally, to avoid using the results of one data set twice, in cases where two articles used an identical data set, we included only the study that examined the most variables of interest. The coding was completed by the first author. When questions arose in the course of coding, the first author contacted the second author, and the issue was solved through consensus. The second author also coded 15 studies. The first and second authors agreed in 98% of cases, and disagreements were resolved via discussion.

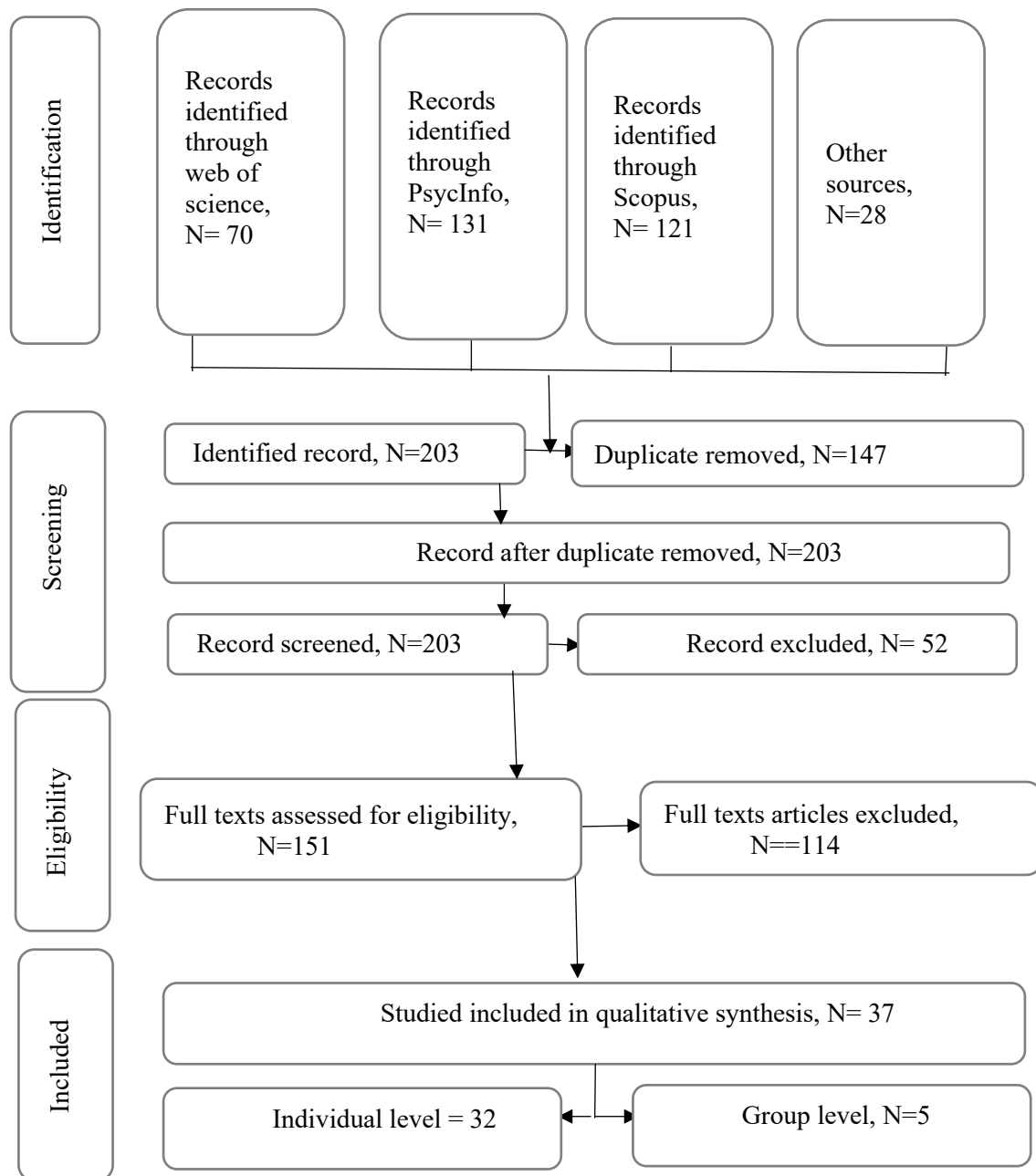


Figure 2. A flow of study selection

Analytic Strategy

As a first step, correlation coefficients based on negative well-being indicators (e.g., stress, depression, or job strain) were recoded. High values on the well-being indicators

indicated consistently high well-being. Following standard practice for r -based meta-analyses, Fisher's Z transformation was applied to correlation coefficients to conduct the main analyses, which were subsequently back-transformed for ease of interpretation. Random effects models were used because we did not assume that the included correlation coefficients would have originated from an identical effect size distribution. Cluster-robust variance estimation was used to compute statistical tests and confidence intervals of the model coefficients in order to take into account the dependency of effect sizes due to multiple correlation coefficients extracted from one study. In order to investigate heterogeneity of effect sizes, Q -statistics and their associated p -values, as well as I^2 values, are provided. The I^2 represents the proportion of the observed variance that would remain after eliminating the sampling error (Borenstein et al., 2017), with I^2 values smaller than 25% typically interpreted as evidence for trivial, 25%–30% for small, 50%–75% for moderate, and 75%–100% for large between-study heterogeneity. Subsequently, moderation analysis was conducted by way of mixed-effects subgroup analyses using the following predictors: well-being indicator (well-being vs. burnout vs. engagement), positive vs. negative indicators of well-being, and psychological vs. physiological indicators of well-being. Last, we conducted sensitivity analyses by estimating summary effects, while omitting one individual correlation coefficient within k turns (i.e., the leave-one-out method) to investigate potential bias of the summary estimate of the correlation resulting from individual studies.

In order to investigate publication bias, funnel plots were visually inspected for asymmetry (Ioannidis et al., 2014). In addition, the rank-order correlation method (Begg and Mazumdar, 1994) was used to test the correlation between the effect-size estimates and sampling variance, which should not be significant in the absence of publication bias. Moreover, Sterne and Egger's (2005) regression approach was used to investigate the relationship between study precision and the standard normal deviate of the effect size (i.e.,

effect size divided by the standard error). A regression intercept that is not significant indicates no publication bias. Lastly, trim-and-fill analyses (Duval and Tweedie, 2000) were conducted to provide adjusted estimates for the summary effects, as well as the number of imputed missing studies based on funnel plot asymmetry.

All analyses were conducted in R 4.0.5 (R Core Team, 2021) using the R package metafor 2.4-0 (Viechtbauer, 2010).

Results

Relationship between conflict and well-being

At the individual level, the results of the random-effect models based on 22 correlation coefficients stemming from 15 studies revealed a statistically significant negative overall correlation of $r = -.191$ (95% CI $[-.259, -.122]$) between task conflict and well-being (see Figure 3). However, there was considerable effect heterogeneity across studies ($Q(21) = 89.58$, $p < .001$, $I^2 = 78.85\%$). As for the correlation between relationship conflict and well-being, results based on 63 correlation coefficients stemming from 33 studies showed a statistically significant negative overall correlation of $r = -.288$ (95% CI $[-.335, -.239]$) (see Figure 4). Again, there was large effect heterogeneity across studies ($Q(62) = 390.20$, $p < .001$, $I^2 = 87.87\%$). Sensitivity analyses did not show any noteworthy effects of single studies on the summary effect-size estimates, which ranged from $-.201$ to $-.184$ for the correlation between task conflict and well-being, and from $-.297$ to $-.279$ for the correlation between relationship conflict and well-being.

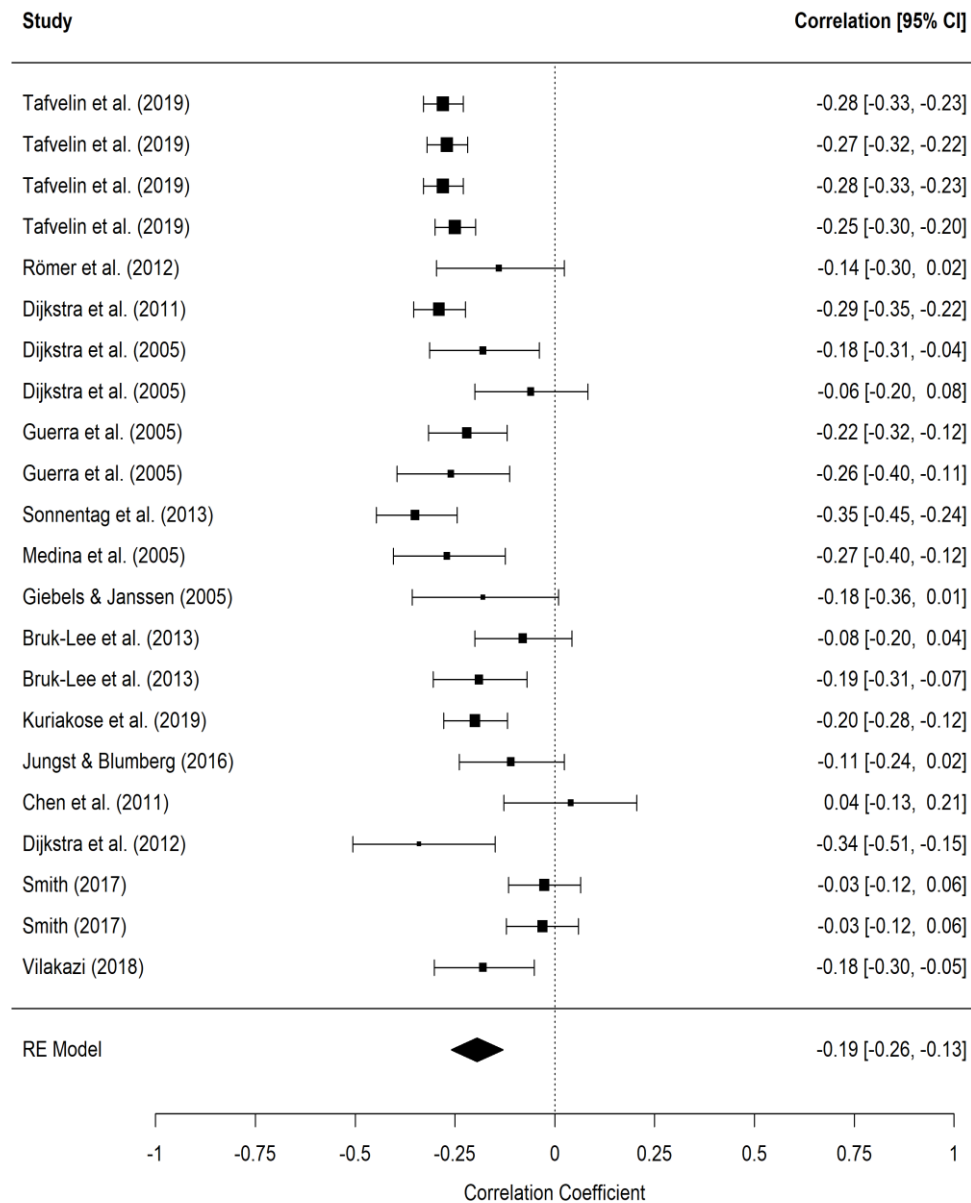


Figure 3. Forest plot: correlation between task conflict and well-being indicators at the individual level

INTRAGROUP CONFLICT AND WELL-BEING: A META-ANALYSIS

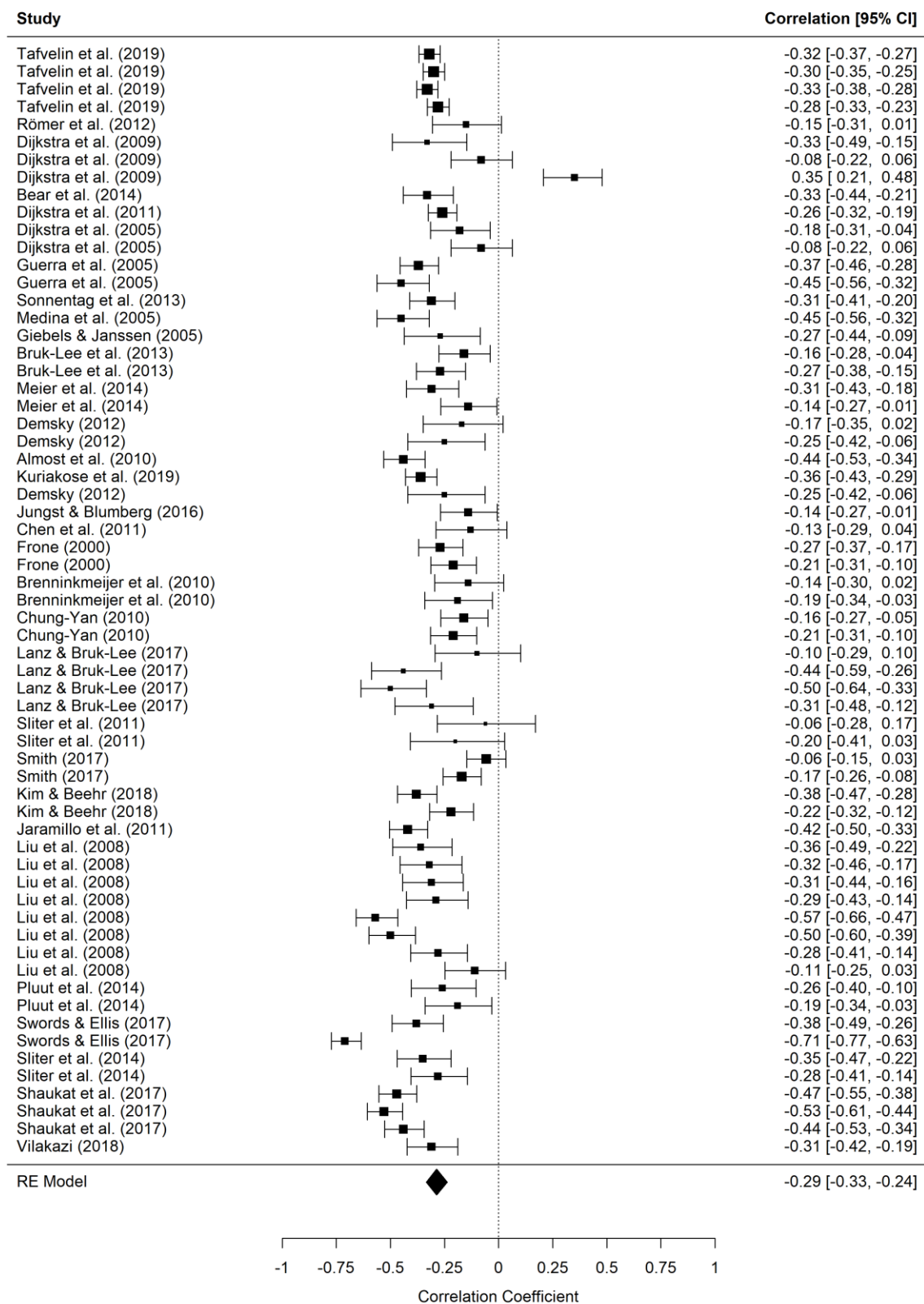


Figure 4. Forest plot: correlation between relationship conflict and well-being indicators at the individual level

At the group level, the results of the random-effects model based on seven correlation coefficients stemming from three studies revealed a statistically significant negative overall correlation of $r = -.201$ (95% CI $[-.305, -.091]$) between task conflict and well-being (see Figure 5). There was no statistically significant effect heterogeneity across studies ($Q(6) = 8.59$, $p = .198$, $I^2 = 32.28\%$). As for the correlation between relationship conflict and well-being, results based on eight correlation coefficients stemming from five studies showed a statistically significant negative overall correlation of $r = -.322$ (95% CI $[-.361, -.282]$) (see Figure 6). Again, there was no statistically significant effect heterogeneity across studies ($Q(7) = 2.63$, $p = .917$, $I^2 = 0.00\%$). Sensitivity analyses did not show any noteworthy effects of single studies on the summary effect-size estimates, which ranged from $-.240$ to $-.177$ for the correlation between task conflict and well-being, and from $-.331$ to $-.307$ for the correlation between relationship conflict and well-being.

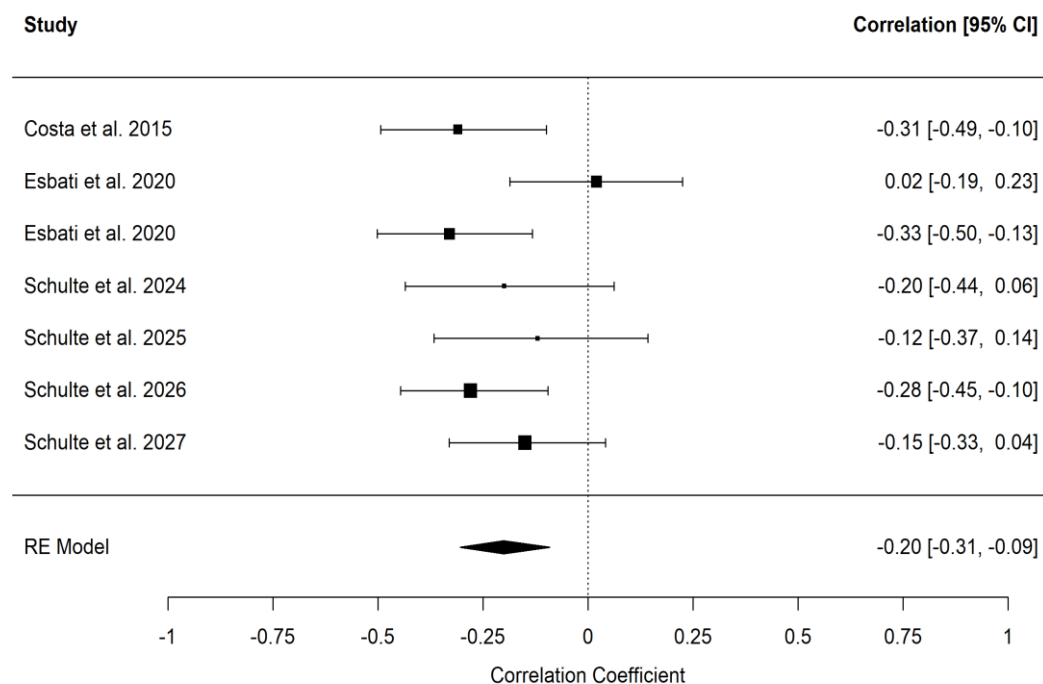


Figure 5. Forest plot: correlation between task conflict and well-being indicators at the team level

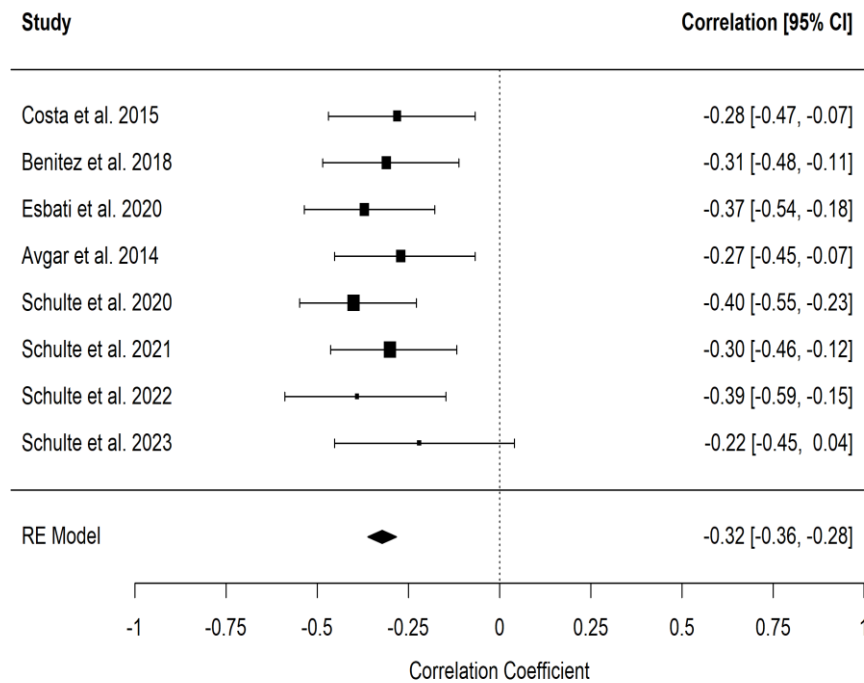


Figure 6. Forest plot: correlation between relationship conflict and well-being indicators at the team level

Moderators of the Relationship between Conflict and Well-Being

Mixed-effects subgroup analyses were conducted to investigate moderators of the relationship between conflict and well-being on the individual level. As for the group level, we did not conduct any subgroup analyses because there was no statistically significant effect heterogeneity and because of the limited number of studies at this level.

Well-Being Indicator

Mixed-effects subgroup analysis using the predictor *well-being indicator* (well-being vs. burnout vs. engagement) did not show any statistically significant moderation effect for task conflict ($F(2, 12) = 1.34, p = .300$) or relationship conflict ($F(2, 30) = 0.08, p = .926$).

Positive and negative indicators of well-being

Mixed-effects subgroup analysis using the predictor *positive vs. negative indicators of well-being* did not show any statistically significant moderation effect for task conflict ($F(1, 13) = 0.02, p = .905$) or relationship conflict ($F(1, 31) = 0.26, p = .613$).

Psychological and Physiological Indicators of Well-Being

Mixed-effects subgroup analysis using the predictor *psychological vs. physiological indicators of well-being* did not show any statistically significant moderation effect for task conflict ($F(1, 13) = 2.95, p = .110$) or relationship conflict ($F(1, 31) = 0.38, p = .541$).

Publication Bias

At the individual level, visual inspection of the funnel plots did not suggest any evidence for publication bias regarding the correlation between task conflict and well-being (see Figure 7, Panel A) or the correlation between relationship conflict and well-being (see Figure 8, Panel B). Accordingly, standard methods for publication bias detection showed no statistically significant results for the rank-order correlation method ($p = .192$ for task conflict and $p = .399$ for relationship conflict) or Sterne and Egger's regression approach ($p = .163$ for task conflict and $p = .434$ for relationship conflict). Moreover, the trim-and-fill method added only one study left of the estimated summary effect for the correlation between task conflict and well-being, resulting in a slightly higher correlation ($r = -0.199$) than without the estimated missing study. Similarly, the trim-and-fill method added 15 studies remained of the estimated summary effect for the correlation between relationship conflict and well-being, resulting in a somewhat higher correlation ($r = -0.343$) than without the estimated missing studies.

At the group level, visual inspection of the funnel plots did not suggest any evidence for publication bias regarding the correlation between task conflict and well-being (see Figure 8, Panel A) or the correlation between relationship conflict and well-being (see Figure 8, Panel B). Accordingly, standard methods for publication bias detection showed no statistically

significant results for the rank-order correlation method ($p = .756$ for task conflict and $p = .254$ for relationship conflict) or Sterne and Egger's regression approach ($p = .780$ for task conflict and $p = .675$ for relationship conflict). Moreover, the trim-and-fill method added no studies for either the correlation between task conflict and well-being or that between relationship conflict and well-being; thus, no effect adjustments were needed.

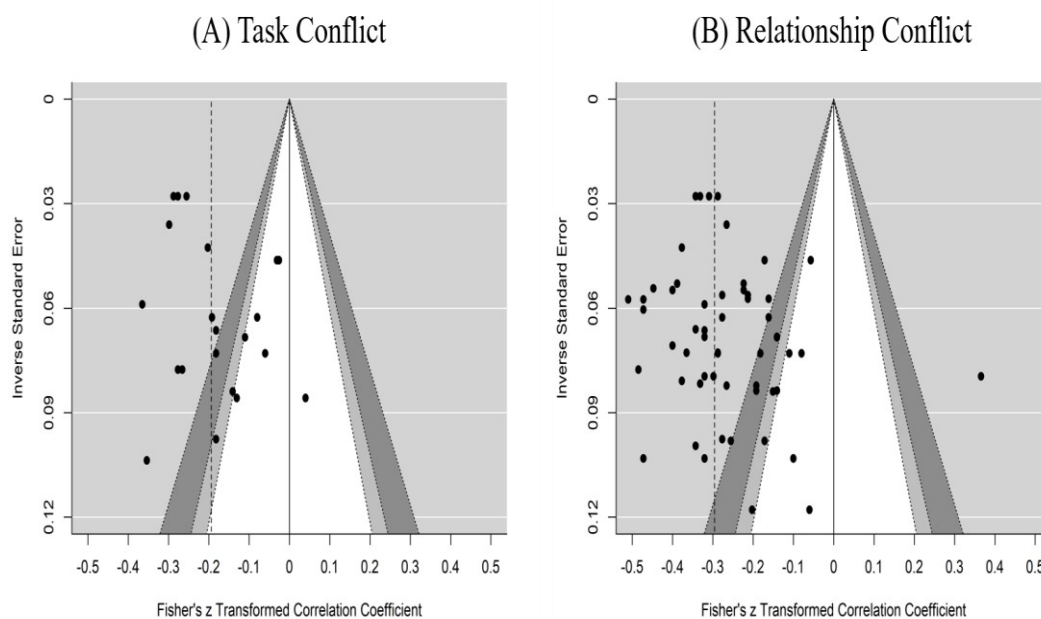


Figure 7. Funnel plot of all effect size of task (panel A) and relationship (panel B) conflict at the individual level

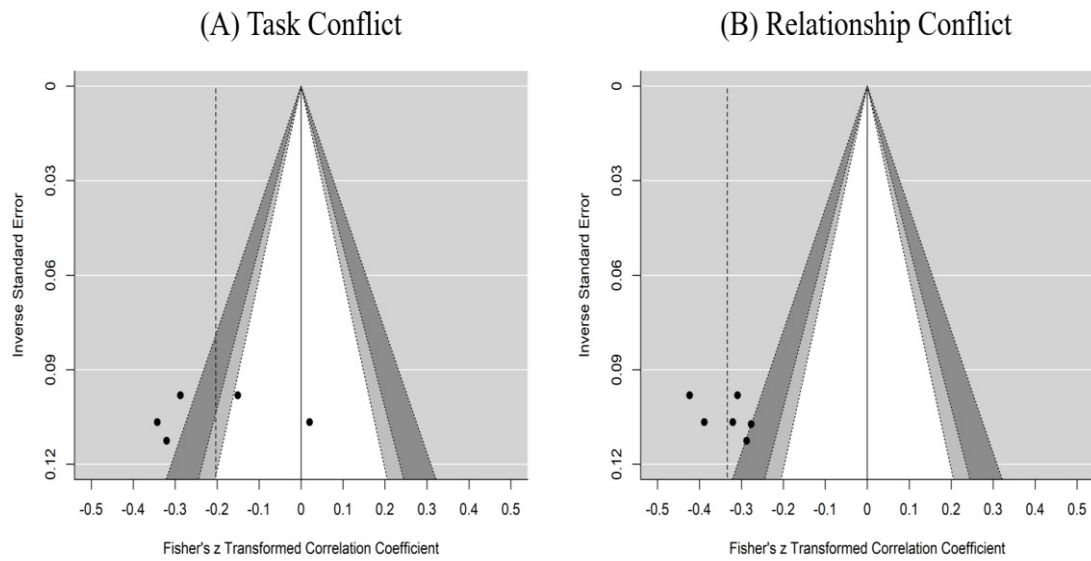


Figure 8. Funnel plot of all effect size of task (panel A) and relationship (panel B) conflict at the team level

Discussion

In this meta-analysis of studies on intragroup conflict, we investigated the relationship between (a) task conflict (TC) and relationship conflict (RC) and (b) work-related well-being outcomes, including work engagement, burnout, and psychological-physiological symptoms. We examined studies conducted at the individual and group levels. The results at each level revealed that both TC and RC are negatively related to the well-being indicators examined. Our meta-analysis is consistent with Crawford et al.'s (2010) meta-analytic findings: demands appraised as hindrances were negatively associated with work engagement.

According to our meta-analysis, it is plausible to consider TC and RC to be hindrance demands for the work-related well-being indicators examined in our study—particularly in the results of studies undertaken at the individual level. This is supported by a wealth of applicable theories and models, such as CORT, the transactional model of stress (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), and affective events theory (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996), elaborated below.

Opposition to one's personal or work-based opinions poses a threat to self. Such opposition may be appraised as disrespect, rejection, or affront, causing affective reactions. When an individual judges an event threatening or harmful, negative emotions such as frustration are elicited. As a result, the individual's emotional and attentional resources are consumed. The resource consumption caused by negative emotions leads workgroup members to feel overextended and burned out (Hobfoll, 1993), motivating them to protect their remaining resources through withdrawal. Workgroup members might then be less willing to invest effort and energy in dealing with TC or RC. When resources are consumed to deal with negative emotions and the psychological threat associated with TC or RC, the individual's level of engagement decreases (Chen, 2011; Jungst and Blumberg, 2016; May et al., 2014). Therefore, our results suggest that when it comes to work-related well-being indicators, both TC and RC act as hindrance demands on positive (in this case, work engagement) and negative (in this case, burnout and psychological-physiological symptoms) aspects of work-related well-being.

Theory and practice implications

The suggestion that TC and RC act as hindrance demands on work-related well-being indicators recalls the early research on conflict, in which organizational scholars thought of intragroup conflicts as hindrances to workgroup effectiveness (Blake and Mouton, 1984; Pondy, 1967).

Existing research linking types of conflict to work-related indicators of well-being has not differentiated between hindrance demands and challenge demands and has generally focused on links between demands and burnout and between resources and work engagement. Our findings indicate that demands also influence work engagement; it appears that there is a link between the two. This finding is consistent with two other meta-analyses. De Drue and Weingart's (2003) meta-analysis showed that both TC and RC were negatively related to job

satisfaction—an indicator of well-being. Crawford et al.'s (2010) meta-analytic findings on work engagement and burnout showed that hindrance demands were positively related to burnout, and that demands were negatively related to work engagement if they were appraised as hindrance demands.

It does appear that RC and TC are appraised as hindrance demands. This opens an avenue for research in the framework of the JD-R model. A key research question in this framework may be whether there is a link between TC or RC as demands and work engagement.

We did not focus on resources in our study, so we cannot rule out the possibility that these could mitigate the effects of RC and TC on work engagement and burnout. It does seem reasonable, however, to suggest that managers should consider both types of conflict to be hindrance demands on well-being in workgroups, so that they can provide proper resources for mitigating the adverse effects of these demands.

Limitations and future study

Our meta-analysis yields important insights on the effects of TC and RC on work-related well-being indicators, including work engagement, burnout, and physical-psychological symptoms. However, there are limitations to our findings. First, and perhaps most importantly, the number of studies at the group level that we examined was relatively small, and the interpretation of our findings at this level should therefore be undertaken cautiously. Second, our meta-analysis includes correlational studies. This does not afford causal inferences overlooking the possibility of reverse or mutual causality. It is possible that being worn out or demotivated affects the primary appraisal of TC or RC as hindrance demands. Third, due to the limits of the literature on the types of conflict and well-being indicators, we did not include possible moderating variables. Future studies should explore the role of moderators, such as emotion regulation, in the association between TC, RC, and well-

being indicators at work. Fourth, there are limitations concerning the primary research on the variables of interest. The studies included in our meta-analysis were published in English-language journals, the number of studies examined in the review was small, and the authors may have failed to retrieve all relevant studies. All these factors may have reduced the generalizability of the research. It is therefore desirable that follow-up meta-analyses include more studies to achieve a more accurate estimate of the relationship between conflict and work-related well-being indicators. As these indicators could affect other valued workgroup outcomes, future research should examine and focus on the influences of conflict on indicators of work-related well-being. The primary research shows that studies have focused largely on RC and burnout, and less on TC and burnout; future studies should therefore also examine the latter link. Furthermore, the primary research design of studies included in our meta-analysis was cross-sectional. Thus, our meta-analytic estimates should not be interpreted as directly supporting the causal relationship between types of conflict and well-being indicators. It is necessary to decouple TC and RC experimentally and measure their individual effects on work-related well-being indicators.

Conclusion

We have provided the first meta-analysis of the influences of TC and RC on work-related well-being indicators, including work engagement, burnout, and psychological-physiological symptoms of well-being. Our meta-analysis shows that TC and RC are negatively associated with well-being indicators, and that both TC and RC are equally disruptive for these indicators. However, due to the limited number of studies available on types of conflict and work-related well-being, our findings should not be taken as conclusive evidence. Future research should pay more attention to this topic and attempt to determine which resources could boost the positive effects and buffer the negative effects of job demands on workplace well-being.

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6. Zusammenfassung(Abstract in German)

Konflikte sind unvermeidlich, wenn Menschen mit unterschiedlichen Hintergründen und unterschiedlichen Arbeitsstilen und Meinungen in Arbeitsgruppen zusammengebracht werden. Arbeitsgruppenkonflikte, die als "gruppeninterne Konflikte" bezeichnet werden, fallen typischerweise in zwei große Kategorien: Aufgabenkonflikte und Beziehungskonflikte. Trotz der weiten Verbreitung von Arbeitsgruppen als primäre Organisationseinheit ist wenig über die Auswirkungen der Konflikttypen auf (a) Indikatoren des Wohlbefindens bei der Arbeit und (b) den besten Umgang mit ihnen bekannt.

Diese kumulative Dissertation erweitert die bestehende Literatur um eine Reihe von drei Studien, die einen Einblick in die Einflüsse von Konflikttypen auf emotionale Erschöpfung und Arbeitsengagement geben, und wie diese Beziehungen durch Konfliktmanagement und Emotionsregulation moderiert werden.

- 1) Studie 1 ging der Frage nach, wie Emotionsregulation den Zusammenhang zwischen Beziehungskonflikt und emotionaler Erschöpfung moderiert und wie Konfliktmanagement den Zusammenhang zwischen Aufgabenkonflikt und Arbeitsengagement moderiert.
- 2) Mittels einer experimentellen Erhebung wurde in Studie 2 die Frage beantwortet, ob die Intensität (niedrig versus hoch) der beiden Konflikttypen eine Rolle spielt, um das Arbeitsengagement zu steigern und die emotionale Erschöpfung abzuschwächen und ob diese Zusammenhänge durch kooperatives versus kompetitives Konfliktmanagement moderiert werden. Um die Effekte der Emotionsregulation auf die Studienvariablen zu kontrollieren, wurde diese als Kovariate erhoben.
- 3) Studie 3 bot die erste Meta-Analyse von Aufgaben- und Beziehungskonflikten auf Wohlbefindensindikatoren einschließlich Arbeitsengagement, Burnout und psychophysiologische Symptome des Wohlbefindens.

Insgesamt wirft diese Dissertation Licht auf die unterschiedlichen Auswirkungen von Aufgaben- und Beziehungskonflikten auf das Arbeitsengagement und die emotionale Erschöpfung. Darüber hinaus hat sie gezeigt, dass die Konfliktintensität eine Rolle spielt. Sie zeigte auch, dass Konflikte handhabbar sind. Implikationen für das wissenschaftliche Wissen und die Managementpraxis werden diskutiert.