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The Influence of Team Emotional Intelligence Climate on Conflict and Team Members’ Reactions to Conflict

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The authors seek to advance research on conflict and emotions by integrating features of conflict, reactions to conflict, and team emotional intelligence climate. They tested hypothesized links between variables with data collected from 528 employees in 97 organizational teams. Results revealed that teams with less-well-defined emotional intelligence climates were associated with increased task and relationship conflict and increased conflict intensity. In addition, team emotional intelligence climate, especially conflict management norms, moderated the link between task conflict and destructive reactions to conflict. Implications for future research and practice are discussed.

Keywords: conflict; emotional intelligence; team climate; teams

Substantial research attention has been focused on understanding the impact of workplace conflict on team process and outcomes (Amason, 1996; Jehn, 1995, 1997; Jehn & Chatman, 2000; Jehn & Mannix, 2001). Researchers have typically conceptualized and combined all conflict features into two broad categories: task and relationship. Many studies based on such broad classifications suggest that task conflict is associated with increased

Authors’ Note: Charmine E. J. Härtel completed this research while she was at the University of Queensland. We are grateful to Vanessa Druskat and two anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments on an earlier version of this article. Please address correspondence to Oluremi B. Ayoko, UQ Business School, The University of Queensland, Australia, QLD 4072; e-mail: r.ayoko@business.uq.edu.au.
team performance (Jehn & Chatman, 2000) and quality decision-making processes (Amason, 1996), whereas relationship conflict elicits stress (Alder, 1991) and decreased group functioning (Coser, 1956). However, recent advances in the conflict literature indicate that conflict types (task and relationship) do not consistently distinguish between positive and negative outcomes in teams and that task conflict does not always have a positive effect in teams (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). This raises the need for further investigation into the effects of task and relationship conflict on team outcomes (Yang & Mossholder, 2004).

In this article, we decouple conflict types (task and relationship) from conflict features (intensity and duration) and test their connection with team members’ productive and destructive reactions to conflict. The separation of conflict types and features and the way in which they elicit productive or destructive conflict will further understanding of the impact of conflict in teams.

Specifically, our intention is to advance research on conflict types, conflict features, and emotions in three ways. First, we build on the work of De Dreu and Weingart (2003) and Yang and Mossholder (2004) by decoupling not just the different types of conflict but also conflict features. We argue that this decoupling will assist in isolating the conflict features that elicit team members’ productive or destructive reactions to conflict. Second, based on the work of Yang and Mossholder (2004), Jordan and Troth (2004), and Druskat and Wolff (2001), we extend the literature on emotions by hypothesizing that team emotional intelligence climate will have a direct effect on conflict and will moderate the relationship between conflict and team members’ reactions to conflict. To achieve this, we developed and tested a model that specifies the links between conflict (types and features), team members’ reactions to conflict, and team emotional intelligence climate.

**Theory and Hypotheses Development**

Figure 1 depicts a model in which we posit that team emotional intelligence climate has a direct effect on conflict types and features. Especially, we propose that team emotional intelligence climate will have an impact on conflict induced among team members. In addition, we argue that the emotional intelligence climate will moderate the hypothesized link between conflict generated in the team and team members’ reactions to such conflict. In the following section, we provide a rationale underlying our model development and the theoretical arguments supporting the hypothesized relationships.
**Conflict**

*Conflict* is a disagreement between two or more parties (Jehn, 1992). Previous studies in conflict usually construct conflict as either task oriented or relationship oriented. Jehn (1997) describes *task conflict* as the awareness that there are disagreements about the actual tasks being performed in the team. Task conflict also occurs when group members have differing perspectives and opinions about the tasks and about the interpretation of information related to the group members’ tasks (Yang & Mossholder, 2004). A number of researchers have shown that task conflict can be positively related to team outcomes. For example, task conflict has been found to encourage greater understanding of issues (Simons & Peterson, 2000) and instill greater team confidence and effectiveness (Alper, Tjosvold, & Law, 1998), and according to Jehn (1997), task conflict is positively associated with innovation, re-evaluation of the status quo, and elimination of complacency. Similarly, results of a study of group members’ perceptions about the amount of conflict in their groups and the proportion of these types of conflict relative to each other showed that when task conflict was in the highest proportion, groups increased in cohesion, satisfaction, commitment, and performance (Jehn & Chatman, 2000). In general, empirical studies show that task conflict has a positive impact on group outcomes.
In contrast, relationship conflict centers on disagreement and incompatibilities among team members about issues that are not task related (Jehn & Chatman, 2000). It involves personal and relationship issues evident as friction, frustration, and personality clashes within the team (Ross, 1989) that are interwoven with personal differences such as attitudes, preferences, interpersonal style, and personality (De Dreu & Van Vianen, 2001). Consistently, relationship conflict is found to be negatively related to team members’ levels of cohesion, commitment, satisfaction, and performance (Jehn & Chatman, 2000), while it produces negative reactions that inhibit personal relationships and limit group cohesion and efficiency (Jehn, 1995; Pelled, 1996).

Although the outcomes of research on conflict (e.g., Jehn, 1995, 1997; Jehn & Chatman, 2000; Pelled, 1996) have led conflict researchers to uphold a traditional view that some amount of task conflict might be advantageous for groups whereas relationship conflict is detrimental to group performance, we know that both task and relationship conflict are linked or correlated (Ayoko, 2003; Simons & Peterson, 2000). Moreover, results of a meta-analysis by De Dreu and Weingart (2003) reveal that both task conflict and relationship conflict are negatively linked with group performance and satisfaction. Given the above, we argue in this research that we still do not fully understand why conflict is a double-edged sword that produces both beneficial and detrimental effects on individual, team, and organizational processes and performance. We go beyond Yang and Mossholder (2004) to propose not only the decoupling of conflict types (task and relationship) but also the decoupling of conflict features (such as intensity and duration). Explicitly, we use team emotional intelligence climate to predict the influences of conflict types and features on team members’ reactions to conflict. In the next section, we discuss conflict features and present specific study hypotheses.

**Conflict Features**

Although conflict types are about the causes of conflict (e.g., task or relationship oriented), this research conceptualizes conflict features as the paraphernalia of conflict such as the intensity and the duration of conflict episodes. According to Andrew and Tjosvold (1983), conflict intensity refers to both the amount of conflict and the frequency of conflict in organizational work groups, whereas Thomas (1992) refers to conflict intensity as the importance of conflict to the parties involved and may include the number of people affected and the interdependence of their relationships with each other. Both Thomas (1992) and Jehn (1995) consider conflict to be intense and serious when it involves a large number of people and more events or when it has a greater influence over future interactions.
Researchers also distinguish between conflicts of shorter and longer durations (Coser, 1956; Jehn, 1995). The former is easily resolved, whereas the latter can escalate to destructive levels (Jehn, 1995). Past studies also reveal that conflict of longer duration has serious damaging effects on group functioning (Coser, 1956), and a lingering conflict is costly in time and effort because it hinders members’ capacities to gather, integrate, and adequately assess valuable information (Jehn, 1995). In addition, groups with extreme amounts of continuing disagreements are unable to progress to the next stage of productive work (Gersick, 1989). Although the studies cited above have investigated the impact of conflict duration and intensity on teams, our understanding of the emotional contexts that give rise to intensive and prolonged conflict in teams and differing employees’ reactions to such conflict is not well documented. We argue in this research that both conflict types and conflict features are partly accountable for the way team members react to conflict.

**Productive and Destructive Reactions to Conflict**

In this research, we use the term *productive reactions to conflict* to refer to conflict with productive outcomes such as learning from disagreements and settling disagreements, whereas the term *destructive conflict* is used to describe conflict that leads to poor outcomes such as failing to learn from the conflict, finding it difficult to settle conflict, and difficulty moving on after a conflict episode.

Evidence reveals that the way individuals react to an event is a critical predictor of the consequence of that event (Felstiner, Abel, & Sarat, 1981). It has also been shown that destructive reactions to conflict are associated with bullying and counterproductive behaviors (Ayoko, Callan, & Härtel, 2003). Recent research also shows that the adoption of positive attitudes to conflict and more active management and recognition of conflict contributes to building stronger relationships, which in turn strengthens team effectiveness and levels of employee citizenship behaviors (Tjosvold, Hui, Ding, & Hu, 2003). Similarly, team members who engage conflict cooperatively had a full exchange of views that led to an improved understanding of the key perspectives and issues and an improved understanding of the position of other individuals (Tjosvold, 1998). In contrast, employees who approach conflict competitively have a propensity to close their minds, avoid conflict, and reject opposing ideas. This, in turn, leads to disruptive relationships and low productivity (Tjosvold, 1998). The foregoing discussion suggests that a crucial barrier to teams’ achieving their potential is not only conflict (Jehn & Chatman, 2000; Pelled 1996) but also team members’ responses to conflict (see Ayoko et al., 2003; Tjosvold, 1991).
Although some studies have investigated employees’ reactions to conflict (Jehn, 1997; Tjosvold, 1998), less attention has been paid to the contextual variables that facilitate such differing reactions. Both productive and destructive reactions to conflict are depicted in our model (see Figure 1) as products of conflict features. We have established that task conflict is linked with positive outcomes (Amason, 1996; Jehn, 1995; Jehn & Chatman, 2000; Jehn & Mannix, 2001), whereas relationship conflict is associated with negative outcomes for groups and organizations (Pelled, 1996). For instance, Jehn and Mannix (2001) report that although task conflict may come with energetic and excited discussions, it is usually without the negative emotions that often accompany relationship conflict. Given that task conflict, by definition, is void of negative emotions (Jehn & Chatman, 2000), we propose that task conflict will be connected with productive reactions to conflict. In contrast, relationship conflict is often associated with negative emotions such as hostility, annoyance, and frustration (Jehn & Mannix, 2001). We argue that such negative emotions may induce destructive reactions to conflict. Consequently, we propose that relationship conflict will be associated more with destructive reactions to conflict. Likewise, conflict duration and intensity are related to negative organizational outcomes (Coser, 1956). Specifically, chronic and intensive conflict may lead to absenteeism and turnover (Van de Vliert, 1996). Based on the above evidence, we propose that conflict duration and intensity will be associated with destructive reactions to conflict. Consequently, we hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 1:** Task conflict is positively related to productive reactions to conflict.

**Hypothesis 2:** Relationship conflict is positively related to destructive reactions to conflict.

**Hypothesis 3:** Conflict duration is positively related to destructive reactions to conflict.

**Hypothesis 4:** Conflict intensity is positively related to destructive reactions to conflict.

### Reactions to Conflict and Team Emotional Intelligence Climate

Many of the complex interactions in teams can be explained by affective events theory (AET; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). According to Weiss and Cropanzano, organizational events are proximal causes of employees’ affective reactions that have direct influences on employees’ behaviors and attitudes. Primarily, AET posits that work environment influences the occurrence...
of positive or negative affective events. These events are proposed to be subjective phenomena that are context driven (Mignomac & Herrbach, 2004) and may lead to affective states. These affective states, in turn, can lead to proximal affective-driven behaviors that contribute to the formation of attitudes. For example, given differences in individual work orientations and personal characteristics, employees may disagree on tasks and the processes of accomplishing tasks. In a specific work environment, such disagreements may lead to anger, fear, frustration, and anxiety in the parties involved in conflict. These emotions may cause employees to perceive the events positively or negatively, and such perceptions can elicit productive or destructive behaviors in the long run. In sum, this suggests that emotions lie at the core of attitude formation and individuals’ perceptions, such as their perceptions and reactions to conflict.

Moreover, human conflict does not exist in the absence of emotions (Bodtker & Jameson, 2001). Research suggests that potentially damaging negative emotions can be evoked during conflict (Lovelace, Shapiro, & Weingart, 2001). Specifically, verbal communication during conflict suggests escalation of emotions (Lovelace et al., 2001), whereas competitive approaches to managing conflict can lead to threats, being condescending, and pressuring others—all of which may involve emotions of anger, frustration, and irritation (Alper, Tjosvold, & Law, 2000). Team members’ disagreements can also be interpreted as personal attacks (Simons & Peterson, 2000), and the expression of emotions during conflict can escalate through emotional contagion (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994). We argue, therefore, that conflict is an affective event and that emotions and emotional expressions are part of the immediate team climate (environment) that acts as a cue to influence team members’ reactions toward conflict.

There is a growing awareness of the role of emotional climate as an important factor in determining organizational processes (Brown & Brooks, 2002). These streams of research indicate that climate explains significant variance in employees’ attitudes and behaviors. In particular, Brown and Brooks argue that a key element of climate is the array of largely shared emotions and affective experiences that exist in organizations. In the current research, our spotlight is on affective climate (a specific type of climate), defined by De Rivera (1992) as an objective group phenomenon that can be “palpably sensed” (p. 197) and described as overall interaction patterns or a shared positive perception among group members (Choi, Price, & Vinokur, 2003).

Climate perceptions determine how individuals behave collectively by influencing their perceptions and feelings about certain events at work (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). We are aware that employees seek guidelines from their environment to interpret events, to develop appropriate attitudes, and to
understand expectations concerning their behavior and its consequences (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). For example, constant exposure to negative affects of conflict leads to negative views of conflict, whereas regular exposure to positive affect from group members leads to a more positive view of conflict and an increased likelihood of constructive conflict (Grawitch & Munz, 2004). Based on the above, we propose that conflict is an affective experience (Brown & Brooks, 2002) that is strongly linked to the team emotional climate, which in turn can influence interactions, perceptions, and relationships. We also argue that team emotional intelligence climate is a moderator of the link between conflict and team members’ reactions to conflict (see Figure 1). We discuss the team emotional climate construct next.

**Team Emotional Intelligence Climate**

Salovey and Mayer (1990) define emotional intelligence as the ability of an individual to monitor his or her own and others’ emotions, to distinguish between positive and negative effects of emotion, and to use emotional information as a guide to one’s thinking and behaviors. It involves the ability to perceive and express emotions, understand and use emotions, and manage emotions to promote personal growth (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Druskat and Wolff (2001) propose that the concept of emotional intelligence should be viewed not only as an individual competency but also as a group property and competency. Specifically, Druskat and Wolff (2001) argue that emotional intelligence is crucial not only for individuals but for the team as a collective entity as well as for the team atmosphere or climate in which tasks are accomplished.

We build on this area of research by examining how emotional intelligence climate influences the perception of conflict and the likelihood of productive reactions to it. In particular, we borrow from emotional intelligence literature (Druskat & Wolff, 2001; Goleman, 1998; Jordan, Ashkanasy, Härtel, & Hooper, 2002; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey & Mayer, 1990) to define **team emotional intelligence climate** as the features of a work team environment (such as team empathic concern, emotion management, and norms) that influence team members’ propensity for and orientation toward a given workplace event. We include team empathic concern and emotion management on the emotional intelligence climate for three major reasons. First, empathic concern and emotion management are two key aspects of the emotional intelligence construct that are more relevant to team members’ propensity for and orientation toward conflict. Second, team members can empathize and manage emotions only after they recognize their own emotions...
and those of others. Third, conflict management norm is critical for the way team members interact with each other before, during, and after conflict. Altogether, team emotional intelligence climate (team empathic concern, emotion management, and conflict management norms) is proposed to shape the events in the workplace that are perceived as conflict and how these events have an impact on the two broad categories of reactions to conflict (productive and destructive; see Figure 1). Next, we discuss the constructs that make up the team emotional intelligence climate.

**Team empathic concern.** According to Salovey and Mayer (1990), empathy is core to the construct of emotional intelligence and could be defined as “the ability to comprehend another’s feelings and to re-experience them oneself” (pp. 194-195). Goleman (1998) describes it as “sensing other’s feelings, perspectives and taking an active interest in their concerns” (p. 318). Empathy is a key competency for social awareness and involves the sharing of both positive and negative emotions that is expected to promote a bond between individuals (Plutchik, 1987). The bond that is produced by team members through empathic behaviors is anticipated to create a climate in which their uplifts and hassles can be shared, discussed, and worked through (Rapisarda, 2002). In addition, empathy should facilitate a social and emotional atmosphere that fosters an ambience conducive to increased cohesion and performance (Rapisarda, 2002) and less conflict. Overall, it is anticipated that individuals and teams with a climate that is high in empathy will have fewer conflicts, and when there are conflicts, they will be more successful in comprehending their own and others’ emotions that arise from such conflict events. This should further assist in minimizing the amount of conflict that is generated in teams while moderating the connection between conflict and reactions to conflict. Based on the above, we hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 5:** Team empathic concern is associated with less task conflict.

**Hypothesis 6:** Team empathic concern is associated with less relationship conflict.

**Hypothesis 7:** Team empathic concern is associated with lower conflict intensity.

**Hypothesis 8:** Team empathic concern is associated with shorter conflict duration.

**Hypothesis 9:** Team empathic concern will moderate the link between task conflict and destructive reactions to conflict.

**Hypothesis 10:** Team empathic concern will moderate the link between relationship conflict and destructive reactions to conflict.

**Hypothesis 11:** Team empathic concern will moderate the link between conflict intensity and destructive reactions to conflict.

**Hypothesis 12:** Team empathic concern will moderate the link between conflict duration and destructive reactions to conflict.
Team emotion management. Research also indicates that good emotion management enhances the information-processing capability in a way that enables greater ability to motivate, plan, and achieve (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). In particular, the successful regulation of emotion allows individuals to refocus their own and others’ attention on more important problems (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) for increased team performance (Jordan & Troth, 2004). Druskat and Wolff (2001) reported that the ability of a group to manage emotions had an impact on group members’ task engagement. Drawing on the above findings, we propose that good emotion management skills will be important in shaping the team’s emotional intelligence climate for conflict. In addition, we propose that emotion management will be directly related to conflict types and features. So, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 13: Team emotion management is associated with less task conflict.
Hypothesis 14: Team emotion management is associated with less relationship conflict.
Hypothesis 15: Team emotion management is associated with lower conflict intensity.
Hypothesis 16: Team emotion management is associated with shorter conflict duration.
Hypothesis 17: Team emotion management will moderate the link between task conflict and destructive reactions to conflict.
Hypothesis 18: Team emotion management will moderate the link between relationship conflict and destructive reactions to conflict.
Hypothesis 19: Team emotion management will moderate the link between conflict intensity and destructive reactions to conflict.
Hypothesis 20: Team emotion management will moderate the link between conflict duration and destructive reactions to conflict.

Team conflict management norms. Conflict management skills comprise an understanding of the conflict triggers and cycle and an understanding of skills for managing conflict as well as how to implement them. According to Hackman (1992), norms are relative, stable behavioral patterns mutually developed and accepted by a team. There are propositions that norms may affect team members’ communication interaction patterns, especially the display of emotions. For example, preventive norms (e.g., openness norms) prescribe positive interaction behaviors or proscribe negative interaction behaviors before they occur, whereas normalizing norms, characterized by a variety of behaviors (e.g., humorous behaviors), may militate against relationship conflict such as norms that diffuse unacceptable emotions and allow members to avert conflict (Yang & Mossholder, 2004). Both preventive and normalizing norms that reduce negative emotionality are suggested to be important to intragroup functioning (Yang & Mossholder, 2004).
Also, Druskat and Wolff (2001) argue that for a team to be emotionally competent, norms must be built, and such norms should respond to emotionally challenging situations by emphasizing proactive problem solving. This allows teams to control their emotions. In line with Druskat and Wolff, we propose that conflict management norms should assist teams in responding to the emotionally challenging situations presented by conflict and are consequently a crucial part of the team context and climate. Specifically, we expect that teams with clearly stipulated conflict management norms will foster a favorable environment where members will be free to engage in a more open debate about tasks, thereby generating more task conflict. Similarly, we anticipate that such conflict management norms (e.g., preventive and normalizing) will minimize relationship conflict. In addition, we argue that the conflict management norms will not only directly impact task and relationship conflict but also moderate the link between conflict and team members’ reactions to conflict. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 21:** Team conflict management norms are associated with more task conflict.

**Hypothesis 22:** Team conflict management norms are associated with less relationship conflict.

**Hypothesis 23:** Team conflict management norms are associated with lower conflict intensity.

**Hypothesis 24:** Team conflict management norms are associated with shorter conflict duration.

**Hypothesis 25:** Team conflict management norms will moderate the link between task conflict and destructive reactions to conflict.

**Hypothesis 26:** Team conflict management norms will moderate the link between relationship conflict and destructive reactions to conflict.

**Hypothesis 27:** Team conflict management norms will moderate the link between conflict intensity and destructive reactions to conflict.

**Hypothesis 28:** Team conflict management norms will moderate the link between conflict duration and destructive reactions to conflict.

### Method

**Sample and Procedure**

Overall, 1,200 team leaders and members from both public and private organizations were approached. Participants received a survey package consisting of the relevant questionnaire, a prepaid self-addressed envelope for returning the completed survey, a consent form, and an information sheet detailing the aims of the study and potential outcomes and feedback from
it. In total, 660 respondents from 122 teams returned completed questionnaires, providing a response rate of 55%. All participants were team based and given the recommendation for valid team size (Brett & Rognes, 1986); any team with fewer than 4 members was excluded from further analyses. Team size was between 4 and 13 members, and the average team size was 5.3 members. In each team, more than 90% of team members were involved in the current research. Altogether, 59% of the participants were men, and 42% were women. Also, 32% of the participants were between ages 41 and 50. The majority (80%) of the participants were Caucasian, whereas the remaining 20% self-identified as Asian, Aborigine, Indian, African, and Middle Eastern. Questionnaires from 528 respondents (including 148 leaders and assistant leaders) in 97 teams were used in the final analyses of the data for the present study.

Measures

Demographic information. We followed Pugh (2001) to measure participants’ ethnicity and collected other demographic information such as gender, age, and education. Individual characteristics were aggregated to the group level.

Conflict. Researchers tend to use Jehn’s (1995) conflict scales to measure conflict (see Jehn & Chatman, 2000; Pelled, 1996). We have previously argued for the need to theoretically decouple conflict types from conflict features. In the current research, we dissociated and adapted conflict scales to enable us to measure the separate items related to task and relationship conflict as well as conflict intensity and duration. Then, we measured task conflict with a three-item scale adapted from Jehn’s (1995) conflict scale. Relationship conflict was measured with a three-item Likert-type scale also adapted from Jehn (1995). Conflict intensity was measured with a three-item scale adapted from Jehn (1997). In addition, we measured conflict duration with a new two-item scale developed for a larger but related study. In the same way, we measured productive reactions to conflict with two items adapted from Jehn’s (1995) general conflict measure, whereas destructive reactions to conflict were measured with another two-item scale also adapted from Jehn (1995). Responses were rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Team emotional intelligence climate. The features of team emotional intelligence climate included team empathic concern, team emotion management skills, and team conflict management norms. We used four of the five items from Subscale 7 of Jordan’s (2001) Workgroup Emotional Intelligence Profile
to measure team empathetic concern (see also Jordan et al., 2002). The scales include items such as “I feel happy when my fellow team members are treated well.” Likewise, we used six items from an eight-item subscale of the Workgroup Emotional Intelligence Profile to measure the management of one’s own and others’ emotional states. Finally, conflict management norms were measured with five of Jehn’s (1997) nine-item conflict management norms scale. Items on the scale include “People in my workgroup avoid disagreement at all cost” and “If there was tension or friction in my workgroup, the workgroup leader with the members has evolved steps to resolve the problem.”

Data Analysis

Data preparation. An initial exploratory factor analysis was conducted to determine the underlying structure of the data and to establish empirical distinctiveness of the scales used in the current study, and factor loadings were examined across the analyses. All factor analyses support our proposed factors. Table 1 presents the reliabilities and correlations of items finally used in the study.

Data aggregation. According to Bliese (2000), aggregating variables to a team level requires both theoretical and statistical support. Given that our
study is about the interactions between team members, theoretically our unit of analysis is at the team level. For statistical support to aggregate our data to the team level, we followed Bliese’s (2000) recommendations. Specifically, we conducted a series of one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) to examine within- and between-team variance for the constructs hypothesized in this study. All of our intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) (1) values were significantly different from zero because all of our ANOVA outputs were significant at the .01 and .001 levels and showed that the within-team variance was small, indicating a greater-than-chance similarity among team members (Bliese, 2000). Because all ANOVA outputs were significant, we proceeded to compute intraclass correlation coefficient ICC (1) (Bliese, 2000) for the constructs. The average ICC (1) score for all the scales used in our study was .20, whereas the average ICC (2) was .51. The average of our ICC (1) for all the scales (.20) was well above the standard average (Dirk, 2000). Overall, given our theoretical justification for data analysis and also the fact that the results of the one-way ANOVAs were significant at the .001 and .01 levels and the ICC (1) was within the typical range of .05 to .20 (Bliese, 2000; James, 1982), we concluded that there was enough justification for data aggregation.

To test the moderating relationships as hypothesized in our model, we followed Baron and Kenny’s (1986) recommendations in testing moderation using multiple regressions. None of the analyses had enough levels of collinearity to breach the levels of collinearity for SPSS analysis.

Results

This research has three primary objectives. First, we aim to investigate the direct impact of conflict types and features on team members’ reactions to conflict. Second, we aim to test the direct effects of team emotional intelligence climate on conflict types and features. Finally, we seek to investigate the moderating effects of emotional intelligence climate in the connection between conflict and productive reactions to conflict. In the following sections, we present the results of the link between conflict and reactions to conflict and the direct effect and moderating effects for each of the emotional intelligence climate constructs.

Link Between Conflict and Reactions to Conflict

Our first four hypotheses predicted links between conflict types (task and relationship), conflict features (conflict intensity and duration), and team
members’ reactions to conflict (productive and destructive) variables. We tested the hypothesized relationships using multiple regressions. Regression outputs revealed that task conflict was significantly but inversely associated with productive reactions to conflict, $F(1, 97) = 69.38, p < .001$, explaining 60% of the variance. Lower levels of task conflict ($\beta = -.604, p < .001$) were associated with increased levels of productive reactions to conflict; thus, Hypothesis 1 was not supported.

Also, relationship conflict was significantly associated with destructive reactions to conflict, $F(1, 97) = 79.47, p < .001$, explaining 63% of the variance. This suggests that higher levels of relationship conflict ($\beta = .630, p < .001$) were associated with increased destructive reactions to conflict; thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

As predicted in Hypothesis 3, teams with longer conflict duration were associated with destructive reactions to conflict, $F(1, 97) = 126.94, p < .001$, explaining 70% of the variance. However, conflict duration ($\beta = -.716, p < .001$) was inversely related to team members’ destructive reactions to conflict, suggesting that teams with shorter conflict duration were more likely to experience destructive reactions to conflict. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was not supported. Finally, conflict intensity was significantly associated with destructive reactions to conflict, $F(1, 97) = 117.21, p < .001; \beta = .701, p < .001$. The result suggests that high levels of conflict intensity were associated with increased destructive reactions to conflict, thus supporting Hypothesis 4.

### Direct Effects of Team Empathic Concern on Conflict

Table 2 presents the summary of our regression analyses for the link between team emotional intelligence climate, conflict types, and conflict features. Hypotheses 5 to 8 predicted that empathic concern would be associated with less task and relationship conflict and with intensive and prolonged conflict, respectively. Multiple regressions were conducted to test each of the hypotheses using team empathic concern as the predictor. Results of the multiple regressions revealed that empathic concern was significantly associated with task conflict, $F(1, 97) = 7.46, p < .001$, explaining 24% of the variance. Outputs also showed that team empathic concern ($\beta = -.241, p < .001$) was inversely linked with task conflict, suggesting that teams with less-well-defined empathic concern were more likely to be associated with increased task conflict. Similar patterns of results were obtained for relationship conflict, $F(1, 97) = 15.46, p < .001$, explaining 38% of the variance. Team empathic
### Table 2
Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Team Emotional Intelligence Climate on Conflict Types and Features

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Task Conflict</th>
<th>Relationship Conflict</th>
<th>Conflict Intensity</th>
<th>Conflict Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>R²</td>
<td>ΔR²</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main effect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team empathetic concerns</td>
<td>-.241***</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.337****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team emotion management</td>
<td>-.192*</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.265**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team conflict management norms</td>
<td>-.288***</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.419***</td>
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<td>Note: N = 97.</td>
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<tr>
<td>*p &lt; .05, **p &lt; .01, ***p &lt; .001.</td>
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</table>
concern ($\beta = -0.337, p < .001$) was inversely linked with relationship conflict. Results indicated that, as with task conflict, teams that reported lower levels of empathic concern were associated with increased relationship conflict. Both Hypotheses 5 and 6 were supported.

Results of the regression outputs also revealed that empathic concern had direct effects on conflict intensity, $F(1, 97) = 4.01, p < .05$, explaining 18% of the variance. A closer examination of the results revealed that lower levels of empathic concern ($\beta = -0.179, p < .05$) were associated with increased conflict intensity in the teams. This supports Hypothesis 7. In addition, the results of the effect of empathic concern on conflict duration were significant, $F(1, 97) = 4.45, p < .05$, explaining 19% of the variance. In particular, the results showed that increased empathic concern ($\beta = 0.188, p < .05$) is linked with longer conflict duration. Hypothesis 8 was not supported.

**Moderating Effects of Team Empathic Concern on the Link Between Conflict and Reaction to Conflict**

In Hypotheses 9 to 12, we predicted that team empathic concern would have moderating effects on task and relationship conflict as well as on conflict intensity and duration for destructive reactions to conflict. Results of the multiple regressions testing the moderating effects of empathic concern on these variables were nonsignificant. Hypotheses 9 to 12 were therefore not supported.

**Direct Effects of Team Emotion Management on Conflict**

Hypotheses 13 to 16 predicted that teams high in emotion management would be associated with less task and relationship conflict and with less conflict duration and intensity. Although the result of multiple regressions testing the direct effects of team emotion management on task conflict was significant, $F(1, 97) = 4.65, p < .05$, explaining 19% of the variance, emotion management ($\beta = -0.192, p < .05$) was inversely related to task conflict, suggesting that teams with less defined emotion management skills were associated with increased task conflict. Hypothesis 13 was not supported. Also, emotion management was significantly linked with relationship conflict, $F(1, 97) = 9.11, p < .01$, and explained 27% of the variance. Results further showed that teams with fewer emotion management skills ($\beta = -0.265, p < .01$) were linked with increased relationship conflict and conflict intensity,
Hypotheses 14 and 15 were both supported. For conflict duration, emotion management was shown to be significantly and positively related, \( F(1, 97) = 10.32, p < .01 \), to conflict duration. In this case, teams with increased emotion management (\( \beta = .280 \)) reported increased (prolonged) conflict duration. Therefore, Hypothesis 16 was not supported.

The Moderating Effects of Emotion Management on the Link Between Conflict and Reactions to Conflict

In Hypotheses 17 to 20, we predicted that team emotion management would have moderating effects on task and relationship conflict and on conflict intensity and duration for destructive reactions to conflict. Results of the multiple regressions testing the moderating effects of emotion management on these variables were not significant. Hypotheses 17 to 20 were therefore not supported.

Direct Effects of Team Conflict Management Norms on Conflict

We predicted direct effects of team conflict management norms on conflict in Hypotheses 21 to 24. Results of the effects of team management norms on task conflict were significant, \( F(1, 97) = 10.90, p < .001 \), and explained 28% of the variance. In the same vein, results obtained for relationship conflict, \( F(1, 97) = 25.83, p < .001 \), were significant, explaining 42% of the variance. Teams scoring low in conflict management norms (\( \beta = -.288, p < .001 \)) were linked with task conflict. Similarly, teams with lower conflict management norms (\( \beta = -.419 \)) were linked with increased relationship conflict. Hypothesis 21 was not supported, whereas Hypothesis 22 was supported.

In addition, team conflict management norms were significantly associated with conflict intensity, \( F(1, 97) = 33.01, p < .001 \) (46% variance), and conflict duration, \( F(1, 97) = 105.70, p < .001 \), and explained by 68% variance. Specifically, conflict management norms (\( \beta = -.463, p < .001 \)) were linked with conflict intensity, showing that low levels of conflict management norms were associated more with increased conflict intensity, supporting Hypothesis 23. Contrary to our expectations, teams with high levels of conflict management norms (\( \beta = .682, p < .001 \)) reported increased levels of prolonged conflict. Therefore, Hypothesis 24 was not supported.
We hypothesized that team conflict management norms would moderate the link between task conflict and destructive reactions to conflict (Hypothesis 25). The result of the multiple regression was significant, $F(3, 97) = 48.47, p < .01$, explaining 74% of the variance. Less-well-defined team conflict norms ($\beta = -.164, p < .05$) and lower levels of task conflict were related with increased team members’ destructive reactions to conflict, thus supporting Hypothesis 25 (see Figure 2).

As expected (Hypothesis 27), conflict management norms interacted with conflict intensity for destructive reactions to conflict, $F(3, 97) = 70.47, p < .001$, explaining 80% of the variance. Teams with intensive conflict but with lower levels of team conflict management norms ($\beta = -.101, p < .07$) were partially linked with increased destructive reactions to conflict (see Figure 3). On the contrary, conflict management norms had no moderating effects on relationship conflict and conflict duration for destructive reactions to conflict. Therefore, Hypotheses 26 and 28 were not supported.

**Moderating Effect of Team Conflict Management Norms on the Link Between Conflict and Reactions to Conflict**
Discussion and Implications

Our major focus in the current study was on team emotional intelligence climate. Essentially, we investigated the direct effects of team emotional intelligence climate (team empathic concern, team emotion management, and team conflict management norms) on conflict types and conflict features and team members’ reactions (productive and destructive) to conflict.

Conflict and Reactions to Conflict

Our findings reveal that lower levels of task conflict are associated with productive reactions to conflict. Literature in this area shows that task conflict is positively related to group performance (Jehn, 1995, 1997). Thus, we anticipated that increased task conflict would be positively related to employees’ productive reactions to conflict. Our findings reveal that lower levels of task conflict are associated with increased productive reactions to conflict. Our findings, therefore, support those of De Dreu and Weingart (2003), suggesting
that task conflict does not always have a positive effect in teams and that only some amount of task conflict is necessary for a positive impact on the team’s task and social outcomes (Jehn, 1995). Our results indicate that to elicit team members’ productive reactions to conflict, there must be less task conflict.

Our finding that relationship conflict induces destructive reactions to conflict is not surprising given that the negative emotions (e.g., anger, frustration, and fear) usually accompanying relationship conflict easily trigger team members’ destructive reactions to conflict. In addition, the conflict literature is replete with studies linking relationship conflict with negative team outcomes (Jehn & Chatman, 2000). For example, Jehn and Chatman reported that relationship conflict increases process loss and members spend more time resolving conflict rather than completing tasks, whereas emotional reactions to relationship conflict lower members’ willingness to engage in productive task conflict. Our findings confirm those from these previous studies.

Conflict Intensity

Conflict intensity was linked with destructive reactions to conflict. Research on the effect of conflict intensity on team outcomes is limited. Our findings suggest that increased conflict intensity is more likely to elicit increased destructive reactions. As we see in our other findings in this study, teams with intense conflict, especially involving a large number of people, more events, and with greater influence over future interactions in the team, will need an emotional intelligence climate to limit the spread of conflict in the team.

Conflict Duration

Another key finding in this study is that shorter conflict duration was positively linked with increased destructive reactions to conflict. This is an interesting result. We had expected that prolonged conflict would soften the emotional experience of conflict and therefore minimize team members’ destructive conflict reactions. However, our result suggests the opposite. A possible explanation is that with shorter conflict duration, team members may still be experiencing a great deal of the negative emotions that often accompany conflict. This, in turn, may elicit destructive reactions to conflict, especially in the short run. In addition, longer conflict duration gives team members an opportunity for conflict reappraisal. This reappraisal, coupled with time for conflict management, may stimulate more productive reactions from team members.
Empathy and Conflict

Our findings about team empathy are also interesting. First, less empathic concern was related to increased task conflict. Recent findings by Kellett, Humhrey, and Sleeth (2006) show that empathy may assist in task-related cognitive processes without specifying the amount of empathy that is needed to facilitate such cognitive task processes. Our finding suggests that less team empathic concern will be needed for increased task processes that include task conflict. A possible explanation for our result may be that with high levels of empathy, team members may be too involved with each other; this might limit the discussion and open debate of task-related issues that may generate conflict. Managers who would like to stimulate more task conflict may need less team empathic concern in their teams.

Second, our study identifies lower levels of empathic concerns as associated with increased relationship conflict and conflict intensity. We offer a possible explanation. Given that relationship conflict is about personal issues, teams with lower emphatic concerns will indicate a climate where team members may not have the freedom and/or ability to express their emotions. Such teams would also be less likely to understand and accept members who have different perspectives and orientations. This could exaggerate relationship conflict in the team and generate increased conflict intensity. Generally, our results indicate that managers who are interested in reducing relationship conflict and conflict intensity may need to increase empathic concern in their teams.

Third, that empathy is positively linked with prolonged conflict duration is surprising. Our findings suggest that too much emphatic concern can be counterproductive. Managers and team members who experience prolonged conflict may need training in determining constructive levels of empathy. Although prior theory and empirical findings offer no clear link between empathy, conflict types, and conflict features, our results show clearly (and as far as we know for the first time) that empathy may be instrumental not only in the duration and intensity of intrateam task and relationship conflict but also on how they can be managed.

Emotion Management and Conflict

Similar results to the above were identified for the direct effects of emotion management on task and relationship conflict and conflict intensity and duration. Research shows that ability to excite and enthuse others or make them cautious and wary are found to be important interpersonal skills vital for social influence (Wasielewski, 1985). In light of these findings, our results
showing that teams that are less able to manage their emotions also reported increased task and relationship conflict and increased conflict intensity are not surprising. To minimize task and relationship conflict and conflict intensity, managers will need to increase the management of emotion in their teams. On the other hand, more emotion management leads to longer conflict duration. To reduce chronic conflict in the team, managers may need to achieve a balanced amount of team emotion management.

Team Conflict Management Norms

Our results indicate that lower levels of team conflict management norms were associated with increased task conflict. Because research on the effect of norms on team processes and performance suggests that general norms (e.g., openness) facilitate increased beneficial effects of task conflict on team performance (Jehn, 1995), we had expected that more team norms should assist open debate and discussions and that this, in turn, should facilitate more task conflict for increased team performance. However, our finding is contrary to our expectation. One possible explanation is that excessive team norms may create too many rules, agreement to which might constrain team members from expressing their varying perspectives on tasks and consequently limiting task conflict necessary for improved performance.

Our results also reveal that lower levels of team conflict management norms are related to increased relationship conflict. This finding reinforces previous findings in this area. For example, Amason and Sapienza’s (1997) study of top management teams suggests that openness is related to less relationship conflict, whereas normalizing norms (Yang & Mossholder, 2004), such as humor (see Avolio, Howell & Sosik, 1999), are proposed to ameliorate the effect of conflict on teams. Yang and Mossholder (2004), particularly, argue that norms for preventing and reducing negative emotionality would be instrumental in tempering unbridled emotionality within groups (p. 598). Our finding suggests that to minimize relationship conflict, team members may need some well-defined conflict management norms. In addition, our finding that lower levels of team norms are related to increased conflict intensity is one of the first few in this area. Managers who seek to reduce the intensity of conflict in their teams may need to increase their team conflict management norms.

Also contrary to our expectation, team conflict management norms were related to prolonged conflict duration. An explanation might be that, given well-defined norms, it would be expected that the process of managing conflict will be longer, and consequently, conflict may be prolonged. An advantage of prolonged conflict might be the opportunity for conflicting
parties to reappraise the conflict. Reappraisal of conflict may eventually stimulate a more productive reaction to conflict.

Overall, our results that teams with less-well-defined conflict management norms were linked with more task conflict, relationship conflict, and conflict intensity further strengthens the critical need for the development of team norms for team viability and productivity.

**Moderating Role of Team Conflict Management Norms**

Finally, findings about the moderating role of team conflict management norms (an aspect of the team emotional intelligence climate construct) in the link between conflict (types and features) and reactions to conflict are especially interesting. Teams with task conflict but with lower levels of team conflict management norms reported destructive reactions to conflict. As previously noted, De Dreu and Weingart (2003) indicated that task conflict leads to negative team outcomes. Our result offers a possible explanation for their findings—a team with task conflict but with low emotional intelligence climate (especially lower levels of team conflict management norms) may experience a negative outcome for task conflict.

Team conflict management norms also moderated conflict intensity for destructive reactions to conflict. Our research is one of the few that reports on the effect of conflict intensity on team reactions to conflict. Teams that experience conflict intensity but with fewer team conflict management norms also experience destructive reactions to conflict. The preceding results suggest that when task conflict is managed through conflict management norms, destructive reactions to conflict may be lessened. This has implications for team leaders, who will need to know how to minimize destructive reactions to emotional events (e.g., conflict) to facilitate increased team performance.

**Summary**

Overall, our results represent three key contributions to the literature. First, we followed Yang and Mossholder (2004) to decouple theoretical and methodological conflict types (task and relationship), conflict features (intensity and duration), and reactions (productive and destructive) to conflict. As far as we know, this study is one of the first that systematically and quantitatively differentiates between the effects of conflict and reactions to conflict using emotional intelligence climate as a launch pad. Decoupling
these conflict characteristics has assisted in the isolation of specific team emotional intelligence climate variables that are relevant to the generation of task conflict, relationship conflict, conflict intensity, and prolonged conflict in the team. In addition, the isolation of these conditions has facilitated a better understanding of the connection between team emotional intelligence climate and destructive reactions to conflict in teams. Second, our results extend the notion put forward by other researchers (e.g., Druskat & Wolff, 2001) that team emotional intelligence climate can help a team manage task conflict, relationship conflict, and conflict intensity as well as influence reactions to conflict. Third, our results extend small-group literature by demonstrating the fundamental impact of emotional intelligence climate in the generation of conflict types and features in small teams.

Limitations, Future Research Directions, and Conclusion

Although understanding about the role of affect in conflict resolution is growing, little research has examined team emotional intelligence climate as an antecedent or moderator of team conflict and team reactions to conflict. Our findings have illuminated the link between emotional intelligence climate, conflict, and team members’ reaction to conflict. However, our research has some limitations. First, it is cross-sectional research, and our results should be generalized with caution. Second, it does not investigate the impact of negative emotional climate. Nevertheless, we believe these limitations do not detract from the quality of our results, which have revealed the crucial effect of conflict management norms and team emotional intelligence climate in engendering productive reactions to conflict at the team level. Future research should continue to explore the relationship between emotional intelligence climate and types and features of conflict that are prevalent in teams. In particular, this exploratory study should now be followed by a multilevel analysis of how team emotional climate triggers and affects conflict and reactions to conflict.

Finally, results from this research have implications for managers. Team leaders and members need to be aware of their team members’ reactions to conflict. More specifically, teams that are experiencing destructive reactions to conflict need training in skills related to empathy, emotion management, and conflict management norms. The application of these skills in the team environment is expected to assist team leaders and members in minimizing conflict and in managing conflict for team effectiveness.
References


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