# RECIPROCALLY CAUSAL: THE LINK BETWEEN TASK AND RELATIONSHIP CONFLICT IN TEAMS

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***Abstract:*** *How and why are task conflict and relationship conflict related? Is the relationship unidirectional or bidirectional? When does this relationship become stronger or weaker? Guided by past findings and existing theory about conflict in teams, we provide a model of a reciprocally causal relationship between task- and relationship conflict in teams. Specifically, we propose that task conflict to trigger relationship conflict in teams via team members' misattribution process, while relationship conflict to trigger task conflict in teams via team members' misjudgement of others' ideas. We also propose that team trust (e.g., integrity-based trust, competence-based trust) and task-routineness to weaken the reciprocal relationships between task- and relationship conflict in teams. We conclude by discussing this model's implications for management scholars and managers interested in actions that enhance team performance.*

***Key words:*** reciprocal causality, conflict management, team performance

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## 1. Introduction

Increased reliance on teamwork coupled with interdependent work assignments in today's organizations has increased the likelihood of conflict, thus task conflict and relationship conflict potentially alter workplace dy-

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namics. Task conflict refers to disagreements that pertain to task-related issues. These issues include but are not limited to the following: How to procedurally approach assigned work, delegation of personnel to tasks; i.e. who should do what, and determining where and to whom resources will be allocated (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). Relationship conflict, interchangeably called emotional conflict, refers to disagreements that pertain to interpersonal-related issues such as differences in expressed or exhibited values or behavioral styles (Jehn, 1995) and the associated feelings of tension and animosity (Jehn, 1995; Von Glinow et al., 2004).

Importantly, the effect of task conflict and relationship conflict on team performance is not clearly known despite their prevalence. In particular, De Dreu and Weingart (2003) found both task conflict and relationship conflict to have a negative effect on team performance, while de Wit and colleagues (2012) reported the negative effect of task conflict on team performance varying as a function of the association between task- and relationship conflict; task conflict became more negatively or positively related to team performance when it either co-occurred or did not co-occur with relationship conflict. Consistent with this, several scholars have advised team members to prevent task conflict from turning into relationship conflict, so it does not harm team performance (De Dreu & Van Vianen 2001, Tekleab and Quigley 2014). This, in turn, requires us to better understand how and when task conflict triggers relationship conflict, and alternatively when relationship conflict leads to task conflict.

While researchers have investigated about this (Choi & Cho, 2011; Simons and Peterson, 2000), most of their research has been limited to the effect of task conflict on relationship conflict but not vice versa, without fully considering mechanisms underlying associations of task- and relationship conflict or conditions determining their magnitude. This raises several important questions that the present research aims to address: How and why are task conflict and relationship conflict related? Is the relationship unidirectional or bidirectional? And when does this relationship become stronger or weaker?

An elaborated model of the mechanisms that link task conflict and relationship conflict is critical for understanding the predication of conflict in teams and necessary for the generation of relevant practical advice on how to manage it. Specifically, based on the findings that a moderate level of task conflict can be beneficial for the team performance (Jehn, 1995; Farh et al., 2010) while relationship conflict is detrimental to it (Janssen et al, 1999; Jehn & Mannix, 2001), one might advise managers to keep a moderate level of task conflict, and a low or minimal level of relationship conflict in teams. Yet, this advice may not be realistic, pragmatic, or effective in producing the desired outcomes if there is a reciprocal causation between task conflict and relationship conflict (Pelled et al., 1999). It is because a minimal level of relationship conflict leads to a minimal level of task conflict which, in turn, leads to low team performance. Furthermore, the degree of causal relationships between task conflict and relationship conflict (and vice versa) might depend on several contextual variables (Peterson & Behfar, 2003; Simons & Peterson, 2000). Unfortunately, however, we still don't understand when this relationship becomes stronger or weaker.

The purpose of this paper is to close this gap by providing theoretical grounds for the reciprocal causation of task conflict and relationship conflict by theorizing interplay among team processes, interpersonal condition, and structural condition in teams. Specifically, we propose that the effect of task conflict on relationship conflict is through team members' misattribution of the task conflict, i.e., the process that involves making incorrect inferences about the causes of disagreement on task-related issues (Kelley, 1973), and the effect of the relationship conflict on task conflict is through team members' misjudgement of the value of their coworkers' task-related ideas and opinions. We further propose that team trust can strengthen or weaken these effects. Researchers have identified team trust based on either team members' personality, values, or intention as integrity-based trust, whereas team trust based on skills and abilities as competence-based trust (Mayer et al., 1995). We propose that integrity-based team trust moderates the effect of task conflict on relationship conflict, while competence-based team trust moderates the effect of relationship conflict on task conflict. Finally, we propose that task-routineness, defined as the extent to which a task has a set of procedures, stability, and low information processing requirements (Diefendorff et al., 2006; Pelled et al., 1999), moderates the reciprocal relationship between task- and relationship conflict; when a task is routine, it weakens the association between them, but when non-routine, it strengthens the association. Our theoretical model is shown in Figure no. 1.

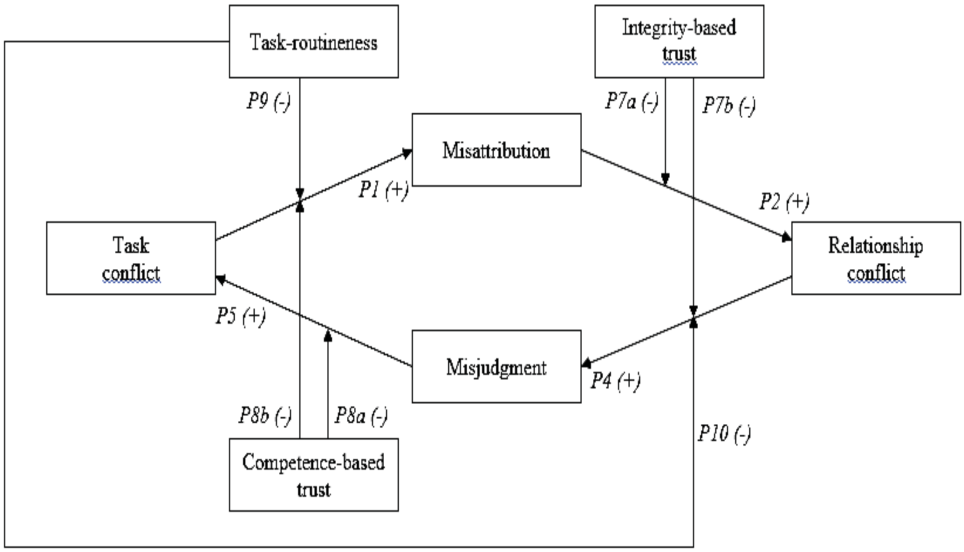


*Figure no.1. The reciprocally causal relationship between task conflict and relationship conflict in team*

## 2. Reciprocity between task- and relationship conflict

Past studies have evidenced a strong positive synchronicity between the task- and relationship conflict; Simons and Peterson (2000), based on 11 studies, reported strong association between them (range $r$ = .17 to .99, mean $r$ = .47). The meta-analysis by de Wit et al. (2012), based on 73 studies, reported a meta-analytic correlation of .54 between them. Several recent studies have also provided similar findings (Curşue & Schruijer, 2010; Jimmieson et al., 2017), implying the two types of conflict tend to go hand in hand. Regarding these findings, we argue that it is not just due to a correlated occurrence but there may be causality behind it. Indirect support to our argument is found from a recent theoretical work by Weingart and colleagues (2015); by conceptualizing a process of conflict spiral where "an individual initiates a conflict communication, the other party responds with a similar kind of conflict expression, and the first person continues in a consistent manner" (p. 244), they imply different types of conflicts may be influenced and escalated by the manner in which team members express conflict in teams. Taken together, we propose a possibility of either type of conflict predicting or being predicted by the other type of conflict – i.e., a reciprocally causal relationship between task conflict and relationship conflict (Choi & Cho, 2011).

## 3. From task conflict to relationship conflict

In the first section of our paper, we explain how task conflict is associated with relationship conflict by theorizing a causal, rather than a merely co-varying relationship where task conflict triggers relationship conflict. Specifically, we propose that (1) task conflict in teams triggers team members' misattribution of the disagreement, (2) the misattribution leads to relationship conflict in teams, and thus (3) the causal relationship between task conflict and relationship conflict is mediated by team members' misattribution (Simons & Peterson, 2000).

*The effect of task conflict on misattribution*

Team members devote a considerable amount of resources to interpret and explain events in teams and behaviors of other team members – they infer others' causes and intentions for the events and behaviors. This process of making an inference about events and others' behaviors is called attribution (Kelley, 1967). Researchers have identified two conditions when team members become greatly motivated to engage in the attribution process. The first condition is when the events are unexpected or unusual (Hastie, 1984). Those events create a need for greater predictability in team members to avoid surprises and thus to successfully adapt to them. The second condition is when the events are unpleasant and painful to the members (Bohner et al., 1988). For example, team members who just heard of a layoff may need an adequate explanation for it.

Importantly, task conflict should be an unexpected and unpleasant experience to the team members. Because team members assume that they have, or at least they are supposed to have common and shared goals, they prefer to have an agreement and consensus about what to achieve and how to do it (Kabanoff, 1985). Accordingly, finding different ideas and opinions from others about how to, for example, complete their task might be unexpected and unpleasant in teams. Besides, task conflict is a painful experience to team members, because it requires them to revise their preferred actions for the task achievement (Brehm, 1966). Accordingly, task conflict triggers a great need for team members to engage in the attribution process.

The process of attribution, however, is seldom free of biases and thus team members are likely to attribute task conflict to inaccurate and wrong causes – namely, misattribution (Schachter & Singer, 1962). For example, team members are likely to explain others' unexpected ideas and behaviors as resulting from their personality and values, while overlooking the importance of contexts. This tendency of overestimating the influence of dispositions and underestimating the influence of situation is so common that Ross (1977) called it the fundamental attribution error. Besides, members are less likely to admit that their ideas and behaviors are incorrect or irrelevant but more likely to believe that others' ideas and behaviors are inappropriate and atypical, and thus considering them as the cause of task conflict (Miller & Ross, 1975). Cumulatively, team members with task conflict have unexpected and unpleasant experience, which leads them to engage in misattribution process about other team members' disposition.

*Proposition 1: The greater the task conflict in teams, the greater the misattributions made by team members.*

*The effect of misattribution on relationship conflict*

There are at least two reasons why misattribution leads to relationship conflict in teams. First, team members' misattribution leads them to realize the dispositional incompatibilities with others (Tajifel & Turner, 1979). Because team members are likely to be cognitively and motivationally biased in their attribution process, they may consider others with different task-related ideas and behaviors as someone with incompatible and inappropriate dispositions. They are also likely to infer the intentions of the others with disagreement due to personal or malicious hidden agenda (Amason, 1996; Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988). For example, let's consider a hypothetical team of four members, namely, Paul, Jane, Katy, and Max. When Paul made a suggestion but Jane, Katy, and Max disagree with it, Paul might think they were wrong and their criticism was personal – and started to experience relationship conflict with them. Paul might respond to them in defensive and hostile manners, which in turn, might yield their experiences of incompatibilities and animosity with Paul. In consequence, relationship conflict among all four team members occurred. Through this dynamic process of interaction, which is similar to Weingart and Colleagues' (2015) conceptualization of conflict spiral, one team member's misattribution becomes shared and escalates into relationship conflict in teams.

Second, and related to the first reason, there is variance among team members in their inferences of the disagreement and criticism. In particular, research suggests that individual team members selectively emphasize and de-emphasize certain aspects of information to match their emotional experiences (Forgas & Goerge, 2001) or to bolster their self-esteem (Forsyth & Kelley, 1994). As a result, they will make unique and idiosyncratic inferences about the disagreement and criticism. For example, using the same situation above, there would be inconsistent inference among Jane, Katy, and Max about Paul's intention; while Jane believed Paul had a sinister intention against her, Max believed Paul just had hidden agendas like increasing his salary and power (Amason, 1996). Importantly, this variance among members' inferences also becomes the foundation of relationship conflict. Specifically, we draw on Chan's (1998) dispersion composition model and Harrison and Klein's (2007) separation index to introduce a team-level construct, misattribution dispersion, which reflects the extent to which team members differ in their inferences of others' disagreement and criticism. While we do not base our proposition solely on this construct, we would like to highlight that it is fairly common phenomena in teams (DeRue et al., 2010; De Jong & Dirks, 2012). A large amount of variability in the distribution of team members' misattribution may generate cliques, negative feelings, and interpersonal clash – all of which heightens relationship conflict and lowers team performance (Tsui et al., 1995). Indirect support to our argument is also found in the literature on conflict asymmetry; for example, Jehn and colleagues (2010) showed that the degree to which members differ in perceptions of the level of conflict in their team decreased team performance.

Taken together, team members' engagement in misattribution process makes them experience differences of other team members, which in turn results in their experiencing relationship conflict with the other members.

*Proposition 2: The greater the misattributions by team members, the greater relationship conflict in teams.*

Given that task conflict leads to misattribution process of team members (proposition 1) and the misattribution process leads to relationship conflict (proposition 2), task conflict leads to relationship conflict through team members' misattribution process; if team members do not engage in misattribution process, they are less likely to experience relationship conflict as a result of task conflict. Therefore, we propose that the effect of task conflict on relationship conflict should be mediated by misattribution process of team members.

*Proposition 3: The effect of task conflict on relationship conflict should be mediated by misattribution process of team members.*

## 4. From relationship conflict to task conflict

While most researchers agree that task conflict leads to relationship conflict in teams, there are still ongoing debates on whether the opposite is possible. Specifically, Jehn (1995) suggests that relationship conflict generates task conflict in the form of an attempt by a member to make the situation difficult for another. But Simons and Peterson (2000) argue that relationship conflict does not trigger task conflict because relationship conflict tends to be stable across issues, while task conflict is unstable and varying from task to task.

We, however, believe the latter argument does not completely exclude the possibility of the positive effect of relationship conflict on task conflict. The literature on the role of distorted perception in social conflict, for example, suggests that when negative attitudes toward team members are formed, they develop disagreements and criticisms with the disliked team members (Cooper & Fazio, 1979; Pruitt & Rubin, 1986). This tendency, also known as a halo effect bias (Nisbett and Wilson, 1977), serves as a mechanism in the process of forming task conflict from relationship conflict. For example, a member who feels irritated by or hostile toward others is likely to judge their ideas and opinions negatively, regardless of the issue (Pelled et al., 1999). It is also supported by the findings that negative feelings such as anger is related to disagreeability and lack of compliance (Milberg & Clark, 1988). Indeed, Choi and Cho (2011), using a longitudinal study with 74 project teams, found that relationship conflict during the first half period of the project predicted task conflict during its the second half period.

In this section, we further theorize how relationship conflict can trigger task conflict. We start by proposing that (1) relationship conflict in teams influences team members' misjudgement of others' suggestions and ideas, (2) the misjudgement triggers task conflict in teams, and thus (3) the causal relationship between relationship conflict and task conflict is mediated by team members' misjudgement. Importantly, judgment is different from attribution, in that judgment refers to cognitive process "that are concerned with assessing, estimating, and inferring what events will occur and what the decision-maker's evaluative reactions to those outcomes will be" (Hastie, 2001, p. 657) while attribution refers to the process of making an inference about cause of behaviors and intentions of actors (Kelley, 1967). In short, judgment involves evaluative components while attribution does not.

*The effect of relationship conflict on misjudgement*

Because relationship conflict is based on interpersonal incompatibilities of dispositions such as personality and values, team members experiencing relationship conflict with others are likely to believe that their personality or values are not preferred or respected by others. This belief, in turn, provokes negative affective experiences such as emotions like resentment, jealousy, and hatred to others and attitudes like anxiety, frustration, and discomfort (Jehn, 1995). The negative affective experiences influence the team members' judgments about others' ideas and opinions in three ways. First, negative affective experiences tend to sway members' attention into limited aspects of an event (Forgas & George, 2001), which often result in a biased and inaccurate judgment about it. For example, members with negative feelings may not be able to consider all important aspects of others' ideas and suggestions; instead, they become selectively sensitized to take in negative information that is consistent with their prevailing negative feelings. Negative affective experiences also impact members' recollection of the other members-related information (Bower, 1991); members with negative feelings are likely to be overrepresented with negative mood-congruent information (Blaney, 1986). Because judgment is based on the integration of recalled information, team members with overrepresented negative information are likely to make misjudgement of others' suggestions by over-integrating negative information while under-integrating positive information (Pelled et al., 1999). Second, negative affective experiences hamper team members' cognitive capacity and resources (Loewenstein & Lerner, 2003). Team members with negative feelings, thus, tend to overgeneralize certain aspects of others' suggestions instead of considering most of their relevant aspects. Third, team members with negative feelings are likely to use their negative feelings at a particular moment as information about their attitudes toward others' suggestions and ideas, which in turn leads to their inaccurate and oversimplified judgment about them (Schwarz, 1990).

Cumulatively, team members with relationship conflict are likely to have negative affective experiences, leading to greater misjudgement of others' suggestions and ideas. Similar to this, Amason (1996) showed that the relationship conflict in teams hurts team members' understanding of team decisions. Accordingly, we propose:

*Proposition 4: The greater the relationship conflict in teams, the greater the misjudgement made by team members.*

**The effect of misjudgement on task conflict**

We argue that team members' misjudgement of others' suggestions will lead to the occurrence of task conflict in teams in at least two ways. First, misjudgement triggers task conflict directly. For example, let's imagine another hypothetical team of Paul, Jane, Katy, and Max. When Paul made a suggestion but Jane, Katy, and Max committed misjudgement and made an inaccurate and negative evaluation of it, Paul might not agree with them easily because he believed his suggestion was relevant and appropriate. He also would conclude that Jane, Katy, and Max had different ideas and assumptions about, for example, what should be done first and how it should be done – thus experiencing task conflict with them. This unexpected and unpleasant and experience, furthermore, would lead Paul to make another misjudgement about their suggestions, developing Jane, Katy, and Max's experiences of task conflict with Paul. As a result, task conflict among all four members occurs. In short, team members' misjudgement becomes shared and translated into task conflict in teams.

Second, similar to our conceptualization of the misattribution dispersion, there should be variance among team members in terms of their misjudgement, namely, misjudgement dispersion. For example, in the same four-member team example, there would be inconsistent judgment among Jane, Katy, and Max about the value of Paul's suggestions; if Jane was feeling strong negative emotions, she might make a highly negative judgment about them. However, that might not be the case for Katy or Max who were feeling moderately negative emotions. It is because team members have unique and different affective experiences in terms of affective valence, clarity, and intensity (Gohm & Clore, 2000; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Furthermore, there are individual differences among team members in terms of the ability to reason about and use their affective experiences in cognitive processes – namely, emotional intelligence (Mayer et al., 2008); although Katy in the above example was feeling similar degrees of negative emotions with Max, her judgment to Paul's suggestions might not be negative as Max' judgment when she was highly emotionally intelligent. Importantly, the misjudgement dispersion in teams about the given suggestions and ideas refers to, by definition, task conflict in teams in that it represents disagreements among team members regarding the relevance and appropriateness of task-related issues (Jehn, 1995). Furthermore, a large amount of variability in the team members' misjudgement may generate cliques and information asymmetry among members, all of which increase task conflict (Jehn et al., 2010). Cumulatively, we propose that team members' misjudgement should lead to task conflict in teams.

*Proposition 5: The greater the misjudgement by team members, the greater task conflict in teams.*

Given that relationship conflict leads to misjudgement by team members of others' ideas (proposition 4) and the misjudgement leads to task conflict (proposition 5), relationship conflict should lead to task conflict through team members' misjudgement; if team members do not make misjudgement due to relationship conflict but rather make an accurate evaluation about others' suggestions and ideas, they are less likely to develop task conflict in teams. Accordingly, we propose that the effect of relationship conflict on task conflict should be mediated by misjudgement by team members.

*Proposition 6: The effect of relationship conflict on task conflict should be mediated by misjudgement of team members.*

## 6. Contingencies of the reciprocal causality between task- and relationship conflict

In this section, we turn to two key contingencies expected to moderate this foundational model, namely, trust in teams (Mayer et al., 1995) and task-routineness (Diefendorff et al., 2006). As an interpersonal factor modifying the relationship between task conflict and relationship conflict, trust in teams is categorized into integrity-based trust (i.e., trust in others' intention and will of others) and competence-based trust (i.e., trust in others' skills and capabilities; Mayer et al., 1995). We expect the two types of trust to play distinct moderating roles in the relationship, in that the integrity-based trust should attenuate the effect from, and the effect on relationship conflict, while the competence-based trust should attenuate the effect from, and the effect on task conflict. As a structural factor restraining the effect of task conflict and relationship conflict on their proximal consequence, we expect task-routineness should attenuate the relationship between task conflict and misattribution; and between relationship conflict and misjudgement (Pelled et al., 1999). In doing so, we introduce the interplay among team processes (such as conflict in teams, misattribution, and misjudgement), interpersonal condition (such as trust) and structural condition (such as task-routineness), which may provide a better understanding and explanation about the dynamic and complex relationship between task conflict and relationship conflict in teams (Jehn & Mannix, 2001).[1]

*The moderating effects of trust in teams*

Trust is an integral part of the social glue that allows members to engage in effective teamwork (Mayer et al., 1995). When trust between certain team members is reciprocated and generalized towards other team members,

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[1] We note that trust in teams and task-routineness are not the only interpersonal and structural contingencies that modify the reciprocal conflict relationship in teams. For example, past studies showing the modifying effect of role ambiguity (Tidd et al., 2004) and goal interdependence (Janssen et al., 1999). There is also theoretical argument that cohesion among team members moderate the relationship between task- and relationship conflict (Yang & Mossholder, 2004). We, however, found that arguments about their modifying roles are quite similar to those of trust and task-routineness. In order to offer a parsimonious but also generalizable framework, we focus on trust and task-routineness in our theoretical model.

it becomes a collective form of trust (Ferguson & Peterson, 2015). High levels of trust in teams have been found to be positively associated with a range of team processes and outcomes, such as positive job attitudes (Ward, 1997) and active information exchange (Boss, 1978). This stream of research implies that the levels of conflict in teams should vary according to the levels of trust in teams. For example, when members trust each other and thus actively exchange and discuss their unique suggestions with others, they are less likely to experience task conflict (Boss, 1978). Similarly, because those members tend to be highly satisfied with others and accept others as they are (Ward, 1997), they are less likely to experience relationship conflict. Past research also suggests that trust in teams should weaken or neutralize the negative effect of conflict in teams on team processes and performance. Specifically, because trust in teams lowers the tendency of team members to engage in misattribution processes about others' suggestions and criticisms (Simons & Peterson, 2000), the negative effect of task conflict on team processes and performance should be weakened in teams with high levels of trust. Similarly, because trust triggers positive affective experiences like satisfaction and comfort (Ward, 1997), members with high levels of trust in others are less likely to misunderstand or misjudge suggestions and behaviors of other members.

Therefore, trust in teams should be an important contingency that moderates the reciprocal relationship between task conflict and relationship conflict. Simons and Peterson (2000, p. 104) proposed that if team members trust others, "they will be more likely to accept stated disagreements at face value and less likely to misinterpret task conflict behaviors by inferring hidden agendas or personal attacks as the driving force behind the behavior", but when team members do not trust others, "they are likely to interpret the ambiguous behavior of others negatively and infer relationship conflict as a plausible explanation for the behavior." Choi and Cho (2011, p. 1111) also proposed that trust alleviates the transformation of relationship conflict into task conflict because "when group members trust one another, they are less likely to disagree or refute disliked members' opinions by relying on their negative impression of the persons."

As an extension of the existing knowledge, we propose that the integrity-based trust should play a moderating role in the relationship between misattribution and relationship conflict. As proposed earlier, misattribution process brings interpersonal incompatibilities and relationship conflict in teams by making team members perceive differences among them in terms of values and personality traits (proposition 2). However, when team members believe that their team members have good intentions toward others with acceptable principles, they are less likely to experience the relationship conflict despite the perceived differences. Instead, they may accept the differences and consider them as non-issues to impede their collaboration. In contrast, when team members do not trust others' integrity, they are more likely to believe that the differences are caused by others' untrustworthy characteristics, which, in consequence, will trigger stronger relationship conflict.

*Proposition 7a: Integrity-based trust will negatively moderate the effect of misattribution on relationship conflict; when integrity-based trust is higher (or lower), the relationship between misattribution and relationship conflict becomes weaker (or stronger).*

We also propose that integrity-based trust will play another moderating role in the relationship between relationship conflict and misjudgement (proposition 4). As theorized above, the relationship between relationship conflict and misjudgement is explained by team members' negative affective experiences, which contributes to their selective attention and limited cognitive capabilities. However, when team members trust others' integrity believing that their team members have good intentions toward others with acceptable principles, the members are less likely to have negative feelings in teams. Relatedly, Dunn and Schweitzer (2005) showed that trust is negatively associated with negative feelings (like anger) but positively associated with positive feelings (like happiness and gratitude). Research in violations of trust, distrust, and retaliation (Lewicki et al., 1998; Robinson, 1996) also provides similar conclusions. Furthermore, because positive feelings tend to broaden the scope of attention and build enduring cognitive resources (Fredrickson, 2001), when team members perceive higher-levels of integrity-based trust, they would experience more positive feelings and thus, they deal with others' suggestions and ideas using a wider range of perspectives and potential courses of actions instead of committing misjudgement. Cumulatively, we propose that:

*Proposition 7b: Integrity-based trust will negatively moderate the effect of relationship conflict on misjudgement; when integrity-based trust is* *higher (or lower), the relationship between relationship conflict and misjudgement becomes weaker (or stronger).*

Contrary to the integrity-based trust, we propose that the competence-based trust should play a moderating role in the relationship between misjudgement and task conflict (proposition 5). While few studies have investigated this proposition, indirect support is found from the leadership literature. Specifically, leadership scholars posit that, under charismatic leaders, followers tend to take the leaders' visions and requests for granted and follow them without evaluating or questioning their validity. With the strong trust in the leaders' divinely inspired gift or exceptional qualities to perform miracles or predict future events (Yukl, 2013), the followers become less likely to point out flaws or suggest alternatives to their leaders' visions and requests (Conger, 1989). Even when the followers fail to fully understand and accurately evaluate the leader's visions and ideas, they tend to take them as appropriate and beneficial to themselves and their organizations. Similar to this, team members with high competence-based trust in other members are less likely to perceive task conflict with them in teams. Accordingly, we propose that competence-based trust will weaken the effect of misjudgement of team members on task conflict.

*Proposition 8a: Competence-based trust will negatively moderate the effect of misjudgement on task conflict; when competence-based trust is higher (or lower), the relationship between misjudgement and task conflict becomes weaker (or stronger).*

Besides, competence-based trust might moderate the relationship between task conflict and misattribution (proposition 1) with two reasons. First, team members with high competence-based trust in others are likely to resolve the uncertainty and ambiguity in a situation with task conflict better. For example, team members with high competence-based trust should consider others as good sources of information and openly ask others for help when they can't understand certain ideas and perspectives. The team members also assume that others can understand their suggestions and opinions, so that they become willing to share them with others (Edmondson, 2002). In this vein, Costa and Anderson (2011) showed that trust is positively associated with open communication. Through open communication, the members may experience lowered uncertainty and ambiguity, and thus become less likely to engage in misattribution process. Second, team members with high competence-based trust may become less motivated to protect their ego via defensive actions against others, but more likely to admit others' suggestions and ideas might be better than their own. Some parallel support to this reasoning is found from a study on the role of transformational leaders in teams (Joshi et al., 2009); under transformational team leaders, members become highly confident about their team's capabilities, and thus more likely to transcend their personal ideas or interests. By doing this, the team members are less likely to believe that others' ideas and behaviors are inappropriate and atypical. Taken together, we propose competence-based trust will attenuate the effect of task conflict on misattribution.

*Proposition 8b: Competence-based trust will negatively moderate the effect of task conflict on misattribution; when competence-based trust is higher (or lower), the relationship between task conflict and misattribution becomes weaker (or stronger).*

*The moderating effects of task-routineness*

Task-routineness refers to the extent to which a task has set of procedures, stability and low information processing requirements (Diefendorff et al., 2006; Pelled et al., 1999); tasks such as production and planning are relatively more routine because they are well defined and that they have been carried out by team members a number of times in the past with pre-established scripts. Tasks such as decision-making and innovation project are relatively more non-routine because they involve frequent changes in work methods and demands to be met (Aubé et al., 2015).

We propose that, for two reasons, task-routineness should attenuate the extent to which task conflict triggers misattribution (proposition 1). First, in line with Pelled and colleagues (1999), we expect that team members, when working on routine tasks, are likely to perceive their situation highly predictable and stable, and thus experience low levels of uncertainty and unpleasantness – which tends to lower members' tendency to engage in misattribution process. In this situation, members are also likely to become less sensitive to task conflict, because they seldom have to change their predetermined scripts or programs to finish their task (Chung & Jackson, 2013). Second, the fact that non-routine tasks increase team members' arousal level offers an additional explanation for the moderating roles of task-routineness in task conflict-misattribution link. Specifically, theory of optimal arousal (Hebb, 1955) suggests that individuals prefer a moderate level of arousal, and thus when individuals find the level of arousal is too high (because of, for example, task conflict), they attempt to find balance and adjust it accordingly (through misattribution). We suggest this tendency should become stronger when team members perform non-routine tasks, because their tasks increase the team members' already-heighted arousal levels. Taken together, we propose that the effect of task conflict on misattribution depends on the degree of task-routineness in teams.

*Proposition 9: Task-routineness will negatively moderate the effect of task conflict on misattribution in teams; when task-routineness is higher (or lower), the relationship between task conflict and misattribution becomes weaker (or stronger).*

Finally, we propose that task-routineness should decrease the effect of relationship conflict on misjudgement (proposition 4). According to affect-infusion theory (Forgas & George, 2001), affective experiences tend to be infused with cognitions and influence evaluation and judgment process. This tendency becomes stronger when individuals engage in the constructive and extended processing of all available information, or adopt a substantive strategy; but weaker when they rely on pre-established responses, or adopt a direct access strategy (Forgas and George, 2001). Since team members performing non-routine tasks are supposed to exchange ideas with others and leverage differing perspectives for creative problem-solving and critical thinking (Pelled et al., 1999), they are likely to adopt a substantive strategy, which, in turn, leads them to engage in heavily affect-infused cognitive processes. However, because team members performing routine tasks may rely on a pre-established responses and scripts, they are likely to adopt a direct access strategy, which, in turn, keeps them from affect-infused cognitive processes. Given that relationship conflict involves strong negative feelings such as animosity and distress, the effect of relationship conflict on misjudgement should become stronger when team members are performing non-routine tasks. In contrast, for members performing routine tasks, the effect of relationship conflict on misjudgement should become weaker. Accordingly:

*Proposition 10: Task-routineness will negatively moderate the effect of relationship conflict on misjudgement in teams; when task-routineness is higher (or lower), the relationship between relationship conflict and misjudgement becomes weaker (or stronger).*

## 7. Discussion

Past research has found task conflict and relationship conflict to have a strong and unique impact on team performance (de Wit et al., 2012). At the same time, task and relationship conflict have been found to be closely related (Choi & Choi, 2012). Yet, these two findings have not well integrated. Our model offers more holistic and process-oriented insights by providing a theoretical model of reciprocal causality between task- and relationship conflict, in which misattribution and misjudgement play mediating roles and trust and task-routineness play moderating roles. In doing so we contribute to knowledge on conflict in teams and team performance, as well as provide a number of practical suggestions.

*Theoretical contributions*

***Conflict in teams.*** Our theoretical framework builds on the extant literature on team conflict in three important ways. First, although it is well-recognized that task conflict may cause relationship conflict (Peterson & Behfar, 2003; Simons & Peterson, 2000), there is limited interest and explanation in the opposite causal relationship. For example, while Choi and Cho (2012) reported the causal effect of relationship conflict on task conflict in student teams, their theoretical explanation was incomplete in that they didn't specify how and why the relationship was observed. By highlighting the mediating role of misjudgement and the moderating role of competence-based trust and task-routineness in the relationship, we offer a more elaborated and complex explanation on it.

Second, we advance research on the role of trust in the relationship between task conflict and relationship conflict (Choi & Cho, 2012; Peterson & Behfar, 2003; Simons & Peterson, 2000). In particular, we theorize the role of specific types of trust on different types of relationships such that integrity-based trust moderates task conflict-relationship conflict link and competence-based trust moderates relationship conflict-task conflict link. This is important because in past work scholars have tended to combine these as the intrateam trust (Choi & Cho, 2012), or overly rely on integrity-based trust (Peterson & Behfar, 2003; Simons & Peterson, 2000). Thus, we add theoretical precision to the conflict literature, highlighting the need to focus on both integrity-based as well as competence-based trust depending on the nature of the relationship.

Third, our theoretical framework also enriches existing research on conflict spiral, a process that suggests that conflict experienced by an individual, whether task-related or relationship-related, may escalate into a conflict of the other party (Brett et al., 1998; Weingart et al., 2015). In particular, Weingart and colleagues (2015) theorized that, when a sender expresses conflicting message with an explicit opposition to a receiver and with great force, the receiver tends to perceive threats and negative emotions and thus escalate the conflict with the sender. In this dynamic process, thus, the receiver's perception of the directness and oppositional intensity in the message plays a pivotal role. Our theoretical framework complements this process by identifying team members' misattribution and misjudgement as two mediators playing similar roles to the perception; when team members perceive others' suggestions are explicitly communicated and directly opposed to their own, they may focus on the threatening aspects of the suggestions (hence misattribution) and experience strong negative feelings (hence misjudgement). In addition, our framework adds theoretical precision by identifying misattribution as a mediator for the escalation from task conflict to relationship conflict, and misjudgement as a mediator for the escalation from relationship conflict to task conflict. We also extend their framework by proposing both interpersonal and structural contingencies. Our identification of team trust as an interpersonal characteristic and task-routineness as a structural characteristic offers a broader window on the conflict escalation process in teams.

In sum, we believe that our theoretical framework will allow researchers to better explain the important but overlooked question of how, why and when conflict in teams are related to each other. In doing so, we also answer the call of de Wit and colleagues (2013) as to the need to a process-oriented framework of team conflict focusing on, for example, what happens within a team when conflicts occur and how these dynamics evolve within the team.

***Team performance***. We also provide important contributions to research on team performance. Prior research has distinguished two forms of conflict in teams, namely, relationship conflict and task conflict, and explored their associations with effective team functioning. This literature, however, has identified inconsistent findings across studies about, for example, the effects of task conflict on team performance; task conflict has been shown to be positively associated with team innovativeness (Amason, 1996; De Dreu, 2006); negatively associated with task performance (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003); and a curvilinear association with team creativity and overall performance in the shape of an inverted U (Jehn, 1995; Jehn & Mannix, 2001; Farh et al., 2010) such that team performance is greatest at moderate levels of task conflict.

Our theoretical model helps elucidate this inconsistency by elaborating on the positive association between task conflict and relationship conflict. First, given that task conflict leads to relationship conflict (Peterson & Behfar, 2003; Simons & Peterson, 2000) and relationship conflict is detrimental to team performance (Janssen et al., 1999; Jehn & Mannix, 2001), we suggest that task conflict tends to lead to poor team performance, consistently with De Dreu and Weingart's (2003) findings. Our suggestion further explains the recent findings of de Wit and colleagues (2012) that the negative effect of task conflict on team performance becomes stronger when the task conflict co-occurs with relationship conflict; if task conflict leads to relationship conflict, as we suggest, it becomes more emotional (Yang & Mossholder, 2004) and escalating (Greer et al., 2008), and thus, its effect on performance becomes increasingly negative.

Second, our model implies that previous findings such as the positive association between task conflict and team performance (Amason, 1996; De Dreu, 2006) and the curvilinear association between task conflict and team performance (Jehn, 1995; Farh et al., 2010) might be observed when task conflict is less associated with relationship conflict and thus its direct (rather than indirect via relationship conflict) effect on team performance is assessed. Indeed, most studies with such findings measured both task conflict and relationship conflict, and empirically controlled for the negative effect of relationship conflict on team performance in advance to assess the effect of task conflict on team performance in their analyses (De Dreu, 2006; Jehn, 1995; Farh et al., 2010). Show and colleagues (2011) supported this by showing the relationship between task conflict and team performance becomes curvilinear when relationship conflict is low, but the relationship becomes negative and linear when relationship conflict is high. In addition, our model provides an alternative explanation on why team performance is highest when task conflict is moderate (Jehn, 1995; Jehn & Mannix, 2001;

Farh et al., 2010). The negative effect of task conflict on team performance is through relationship conflict, and the link between task- and relationship conflict depends on interpersonal- (e.g., team trust; Ferguson & Peterson, 2015; Simons & Peterson, 2000) and structural contingency (e.g., task-routines; Diefendorff et al., 2006; Pelled et al., 1999). Therefore, the least negative (and thus the most positive) association between task conflict and team performance exists with certain situation, like high team trust. Importantly, one of recent studies reported that team trust is greatest at moderate levels of task conflict (Chang, 2017); Chang (2017) found an inverted U-type relationship between task conflict at a team's formation stage and team trust in a year later; levels of team trust increase when task conflict increases but is still under a moderate level, but they decrease when task conflict increases over a moderate level. Accordingly, when task conflict is higher or lower, it tends to decrease team trust, and thus to trigger relationship conflict, which in turn, strengthens its negative effect on team performance. However, when task conflict is moderate, it tends to lead to high team trust and not to trigger relationship conflict, which in turn, weakens its negative effect on team performance.

Third, we highlight the importance of managing team conflict by managing the reciprocal relationship between task conflict and relationship conflict. For example, we identified task-routines and team trust as two important contingencies playing pivotal roles in the relationship. In this vein, we provide two potential ways to better manage team conflict for high team performance. First, we suggest team members need to be better trained and developed to perform given tasks, so that they can conduct their task in a relatively routine, predictable, and stable manner with low levels of uncertainty and unpleasantness (Aubé et al., 2015; Chung & Jackson, 2013). By doing this, they become less likely to make misattribution or misjudgement about others' ideas and suggestions. As a result, they will develop relatively low levels of relationship conflict from task conflict, and vice versa. Second, we suggest trust in others' integrity and competence need to be well developed among team members. Given that integrity-based trust attenuates the effect of misattribution on relationship conflict and competence-based trust attenuates the effect of misjudgement on task conflict, team members with high team trust are less likely to develop relationship conflict from task conflict, and vice versa. In both cases, teams may perform better due to lower levels of relationship conflict (Janssen et al., 1999; Jehn and Mannix, 2001) and task conflict (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). This supports the findings of de Wit and colleagues (2012) that the average association between task- and relationship conflict among top management teams with high performing members in the past (Connelly et al., 2014; Lazear and Rosen, 1981) was significantly lower than among non-top management teams. This explains why the association between task conflict and team performance was less negative and more positive in top management teams than non-top management teams (de Wit et al., 2012).

Finally, our model offers task conflict as an additional mechanism explaining why relationship conflict impairs team performance. Relationship conflict is known to harm team performance because it reduces team members' commitment and satisfaction (Jehn, 1995) and collaborative problem solving (De Dreu, 2006). Yet, our model suggests that it may also do so by causing unnecessary and inefficient debates and disagreements in teams in that relationship conflict leads to task conflict via misjudgement about task-related issues, and task conflict leads to poor team performance (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003).

*Managerial implications*

We provide a compelling reason for managers to develop trust among team members and provide sufficient training and development opportunities to members in order to manage the relationship between task- and relationship conflict, which ultimately improve team performance. Team managers thus will need to determine what their members trust about their peers, for example, integrity or competence, and how high their levels of trust are on each. This suggests that managers may want to be more intentional and strategic to, for example, build a climate where team members can communicate with honesty and support each other (Bartolomé, 1989; Elsbach & Elofson, 2000). This will lead them to believe that other team members possess positive personality and intentions and that they are capable of conducting the team task. In addition, managers themselves should attempt to earn the trust of their employees since trust is contagious and expandable (Ferguson & Peterson, 2015).

In addition, we identify that routine tasks reduce the likelihood of the conflict escalating due to misattribution or misjudgement. While some team tasks may be routinized, certain situations may call for both complex and uncertain tasks – a situation that is conducive to conflict. In this case, members can receive training to practice response to conflict, thus routinizing the conflict process itself. For example, members may be provided with role play opportunities to respond to both task and relationship conflict. These role plays can provide them with an opportunity to develop scripts that can help them respond to conflict in a way that may de-escalate the conflict.

Finally, we would like to highlight the importance of preventing the negative team psychological processes, such as misattribution and misjudgement that may lead to an escalation of the conflict. Importantly, given that both misattribution and misjudgement are a result of individual biases, one of the feasible ways to lower them is helping members become aware of their existence. In this regard, research has found beneficial effects of mindfulness on reducing several biases (Hopthrow et al., 2017). For example, if members are made aware of the potential pitfalls of biases during team formation, they are more likely to become aware of misattribution and misjudgement as and when they present themselves. Within this context, regular mindfulness sessions may further improve the member's ability to avoid these pitfalls. In addition, given that emotional distraction reduces the effect of biases (Lench et al., 2016), providing training sessions to members not to focus on emotional information may also be helpful in avoiding these negative team processes.

## Conclusion

Task conflict and relationship conflict are reciprocally causal; they are thus two sides of the same coin. How we manage the task- and relationship conflict in teams can have a direct impact on team performance outcomes because conflict in teams is unavoidable but manageable. Our theoretical model extends our understanding of this relationship as well as how best to do it.

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