

Individual Perceptions of Task Conflict and Relationship Conflict

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Abstract

We rely on the existing conflict literature and self-verification theory to examine perceived task and relationship conflict. We set out to contribute to the discussion of whether relationship conflict is dysfunctional and task conflict is functional in terms of the individual evaluations of group efficacy and group mind. Our sample is a field setting of 127 individuals within a Fortune 500 company. Individual perceptions of group efficacy and group mind scores were significantly higher when neither type of conflict was perceived to occur often as compared with when both types of conflict were perceived to occur often. After decoupling types of conflict, we found when only task conflict occurred often, the perceived efficacy and mind scores were significantly higher than when both types of conflict occurred often. This is a contradictory finding based on the existing literature that suggests task conflict negatively impacts emergent states.

Group conflict has received a great deal of attention in the literatures of sociology and organizational studies to demonstrate the maturation and coordination necessary for groups to achieve goals (Bales & Strodtbeck, 1951; Gersick, 1988; Heinen & Jacobson, 1976; Tuckman, 1965; Wheelan, 1994). Studies on groups attempt to address questions about the social structure and maturation of groups as they experience conflict (Seers & Woodruff, 1997). Wheelan's (1994) model of group development consists of five stages: dependency and inclusion, counterdependency and fight, trust and structure, work, and termination. These stages are similar to Tuckman's (1965) model of forming, storming, norming, and performing in that both models point toward conflict. Wheelan (1994) and Tuckman (1965) argued that conflict emerges from different values (counterdependency and fight; storming). If conflict is resolved, there is increased cohesion through trust and norming (Tuckman, 1965; Wheelan, 1994). Based on these models, groups move through periods of conflict. Recent literature suggests that conflict varies in focus in that conflict focused on the task is considered task conflict and conflict focused on personal dislike is relationship conflict (de Wit, Greer, & Jehn, 2011). In this article, we look deeper into how conflict impacts group emergent states by capturing individual perceptions of group conflict and determining whether decoupling conflict types (task and relationship) matters.

Conflict is an important construct in the workplace and is defined as perceived differences and incompatibilities among group members (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008; de Wit et al., 2011). As previously noted, conflict is typically conceptualized as being one of two primary types of conflict: task and relationship (Guetzkow & Gyr, 1954; Jehn, 1994). Task conflict is defined as conflict that includes intellectual opposition concerning the content, viewpoints, and outcomes pertaining to the task (Desivilya, Somech, & Lidgoster, 2010; Guetzkow & Gyr, 1954; Jehn, 1994; de Wit et al., 2011). Relationship conflict is defined as conflict that includes interpersonal emotional tension, anger, and dislike among members (Desivilya

et al., 2010; Guetzkow & Gyr, 1954; Jehn, 1994; de Wit et al., 2011). To illustrate the difference between relationship and task conflict, it is useful to consider the focus of the conflict. The focus of a task conflict is the actual problem at hand, such as critiques regarding the resources needed to complete the task. The focus of a relationship conflict is on the actual people and who they simply are. Relationship conflict consists of personal critiques. Fisher, Ury, and Patton (2011) recommended that functional conflict resolution occurs when individuals involved focus on the *problem* and not the *person(s)*. Task conflict is focused on the problem, and relationship conflict is focused on the person.

Therefore, conflict researchers proposed relationship conflict was dysfunctional and task conflict was functional (Jehn, 1994; Pearson, Ensley, & Amason, 2002). Two meta-analyses were conducted to attempt to validate this claim. De Dreu and Weingart (2003) examined thirty studies from 1993 to 2001. The main conclusion drawn from this study was the lack of difference between task and relationship conflict, as both were significantly and negatively related to effectiveness across the studies. They argue, "it seems safe to stop assuming that, whereas relationship conflict is detrimental to team performance, task conflict improves team performance." (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003, p. 748). A more recent meta-analysis was conducted by de Wit et al. (2011) that examined 116 studies from 1990 to 2010. The findings from this study suggest task conflict does not have a strong and negative relationship to performance, which is one of the distal outcomes, but is negatively related to proximal outcomes categorized as emergent states, which are defined as attitudes, motivations, values, and cognition of group members (Jehn, Greer, Levine, & Szulanski, 2008; Marks, Mathieu, & Zaccaro, 2001).

Based on these studies, conflict merits further attention because task versus relationship issues are contradictory in the current literature. If task conflict is truly functional, then does it make sense for it to negatively relate to emergent states (Jehn et al., 2008)? When we picture a functional group, we would likely assume the group goes through the stages outlined by Wheelan (1994) and Tuckman (1965). Imagine being placed in a group (forming). As the members get to know each other, they describe and perhaps defend their values and perspectives when differences become obvious (storming). This is conflict. If the conflict remains based on the diverse perspectives of the task (task conflict), such as what the best method is for completing the task, then the group is better as it mitigates through differences and decides on an agreed upon strategy (norming). This group experiences conflict but works through differences and emerges as a cohesive unit. However, if the conflict is rooted in personal dislike (relationship conflict) and results in insults, anger, and hurt feelings, then the group may never reach the norming phase, which ultimately negatively impacts performance. Based on these two scenarios, task conflict appears to be functional. So why does research suggest that task conflict will have a negative impact on emergent states? We provide an explanation to this question by relying on individual perceptions of group conflict and point to the importance of decoupling task and relationship conflict.

In this article, we extend the literature of conflict by examining individual perceptions of task and relationship conflict and two proximal outcomes captured as the perceived emergent states of group efficacy and group mind. One of the deficiencies in the conflict literature is the understanding of individual perceptions of group conflict because much of this research is conducted at the group level of analysis (Jehn, Rispens, & Thatcher, 2010; Thatcher & Phillips, 2010). We address this deficiency by capturing individual-level perceptions of group conflict. Additionally, another area that merits further research is whether it is possible to detangle task conflict from relationship conflict because the majority of research indicates the two are highly correlated (de Wit et al., 2011; Yang & Mossholder, 2004). We also address this gap by attempting to separate the two and determining differences based on whether co-occurrence exists or not. We rely on the conflict and emergent state literatures and self-verification theory as explanatory mechanisms in exploring the relationship between perceived conflict and these perceived states.

In doing so, we capture the individual perceptions of conflict, group efficacy, and group mind. Group efficacy is a motivational construct and is defined as member's confidence in successfully

handling task responsibilities (Bandura, 1997). Groups with strong collective efficacy are able to establish challenging goals, are persistent in the times of difficulty, and are more likely to be successful. Current literature on group efficacy has shown that groups with higher levels of group efficacy are more effective than those where group members doubt each other (Gully, Incalcaterra, Joshi, & Beaubien, 2002). Thus, collective efficacy is a task- and context-specific variable that ensures a group's belief in handling group tasks and influences the exertion and sustenance of group members' efforts and actions.

Group mind represents heedful interrelations of actions within the group (Weick & Roberts, 1993). Group mind has significant implications for teamwork outcomes. For example, the members with group mind could create social forces for the teamwork by themselves and rationalize what each individual should do to accomplish group goals through representation that includes actions of all team members. Teams with *heedful* group mind can achieve high reliability and efficiency (Weick & Roberts, 1993). Yoo and Kanawattanachai (2001) also suggested that the members with high group mind are able to relate and integrate the expertise and knowledge residing in individuals and generate better team performance.

Specifically, in this study, we ask, "How do individual perceptions about task and relationship conflict impact the perceptions of group efficacy and group mind?" Addressing this question is important for several reasons. First, we examine conflict at the individual level of analysis. Much of the research on group conflict is conducted at the group level of analysis and relies on group averages (Jehn et al., 2010; Thatcher & Phillips, 2010). Individuals likely perceive group conflict differently and derive various perceptions about group states as a result. A reliance on group averages has benefits in studying group conflict; however, there is also a loss of distinction in individual perceptions of conflict (Jehn et al., 2010). According to the theory of planned behavior, perceptions are the basis of attitudes, intentions, and actual behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and are thus important to consider in a conflict study. Jehn et al. (2010) suggested that analyzing individual perceptions is critical in refining our understanding of the role of group conflict. Although much of group conflict research assumes group members share perceptions and experiences as a result of being together, individuals in groups will likely vary in perceptions, emotions, beliefs, and experiences in regard to group processes (Jehn et al., 2010; Thatcher & Phillips, 2010). Additionally, research outside of the group conflict domain highlights the role of individual perceptions of conflict on various factors such as individual behaviors, perceptions, concerns, and evaluations of situations and others (Bazerman & Carroll, 1987; Jehn et al., 2010; Mather & Yngvesson, 1981; Pinkley, 1990; Thatcher & Phillips, 2010; Wish, Deutsch, & Kaplan, 1976). Therefore, individual perceptions of group conflict are also important to analyze.

Second, we further the connection between conflict and the two emergent states of group efficacy and group mind using self-verification theory as an overarching framework. Group efficacy and group mind are established constructs that are proposed to improve group functioning and performance (Bandura, 1997; Weick & Roberts, 1993). Yet, there is very little empirical analysis on how interpersonal conflict is related to these constructs, and therefore, in the examination of this research question, we build on self-verification theory. According to self-verification theory, it is important for individuals to be known and understood in accordance with their strongly held self-beliefs. These self-beliefs not only shape individual personality and self-concept but also influence individual outlook toward work. If these self-beliefs are not confirmed by fellow colleagues, conflict is bound to surface, causing an adverse impact on how individuals feel about their fellow colleagues. Building on the framework of self-verification theory, the present study enhances our understanding of the role of perceived task and relationship conflict on other important constructs, in particular the aforementioned emergent states. Considering that emergent states impact individual performance at work, the examination of the above relationships becomes even more important (Jehn et al., 2008). According to the theory of planned behavior, individual perceptions and beliefs drive actual behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Therefore,

the perceptions one has regarding conflict and group emergent states will ultimately impact individual behaviors and performance. The better we understand the link between the perceptions of conflict and the perceptions of group mind and efficacy, the better we can manage groups.

Third, by examining differences based on individual perceptions of the occurrence of task and relationship conflict, we are able to demonstrate the relationships when there is perceived co-occurrence of conflict types versus when perceived co-occurrence is missing. Although the decoupling of relationship and task conflict is regarded as important in the literature (Yang & Mossholder, 2004), the empirical exploration of this is lacking. Our study attempts to address this gap by decoupling through a categorization process. This is important information since research is needed to examine resultant individual reactions when both task and relationship conflict occur often, when neither occurs often, or when one occurs often but not the other (de Wit et al., 2011).

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

Self-Verification Theory

According to self-verification theory, human beings hold certain stable views (thoughts, feelings, and attitudes) about themselves, and they actively strive to make sure that, as result of their social interactions, their views are confirmed by others (Swann, Polzer, Seyle, & Ko, 2004). These self-views play a pivotal role in shaping individual orientations toward the aspects of both their personal and professional lives. Confirmation of self-views by others acts an important source of much sought after coherence and gives a meaning to individual existence (Swann, Kwan, Polzer, & Milton, 2003). Self-verification theory builds heavily on the earlier writings of symbolic interactionism (e.g., Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). According to symbolic interactionism, as a result of social interactions, individuals gain an understanding of what others think about them and consequently are able to make a sense of the world (Swann et al., 2004). Thus, self-views act as instruments that help in “predicting reactions of other people” and pave the way for individual cognitions and behaviors (Swann et al., 2004, p. 12). According to self-verification theorists, the extent to which an individual’s self-views are confirmed by others is instrumental in creating constructive work atmosphere and ensuring the emergence of positive emergent states (Jehn et al., 2008).

Emergent states, which are defined as, “cognitive, motivational, and affective states,” are regarded as principal motivators of group performance (Jehn et al., 2008; Marks et al., 2001, p. 357). As articulated above, conflict, which arises due to perceived incompatibility or differences of opinion between group members, is negatively related to the quality of group emergent states (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008; Jehn et al., 2008; de Wit et al., 2011). The presence of interpersonal conflict jeopardizes the self-verification process, whereby individuals feel that their thoughts and feelings are not confirmed by others, which engenders negative attitudes and cognitions toward fellow colleagues and undermines collective emergent states (Jehn et al., 2008). Although self-verification is an important part of social interactions, in group settings, the process of self-verification holds a greater significance. In group settings, when self-verification efforts are realized through a common understanding of personal and social views, social interactions are free of misunderstandings and conflict, and, consequently, individuals tend to identify with the group and apply greater effort toward group tasks (Chen, Chen, & Shaw, 2004; Swann et al., 2004). But if personal and social views are challenged due to the presence of conflict, it can adversely affect group functioning (Jehn et al., 2008). In the presence of task conflict, dissimilarities of views related to task performance emerge, while in the presence of relationship conflict, individual self-concepts clash. In the presence of either type of conflict, individual self-verification comes under grave danger and individual perceptions regarding groups’ capabilities become adversely affected (Hobman, Bordia, & Gallois, 2003; Swann et al., 2004). Thus, self-verification theory makes explicit predictions regarding the impact of self-verification process on individual perceptions regarding the group’s emergent states.

From Interpersonal Conflict to Emergent States

By its very nature, conflict is viewed as a negative social process, which poses a serious challenge to an individual's perspective and can have damaging impact on what individuals think about their group (Jehn et al., 2008). In clarification of the pivotal role that work groups play in organizational success, researchers often highlighted the importance of emergent states (Jehn et al., 2008; Marks et al., 2001), and two such emergent states are *group efficacy* and *group mind*. If members often argue about personal issues and work issues, this can seriously hurt members' confidence and undermine member interrelations. When self-verification attempts are challenged through conflict, these interactions can be perceived as a lack of respect. When members perceive a lack of respect, the viability of positive emergent states is impaired (Brief & Weiss, 2002; Jehn et al., 2008). Therefore, based on self-verification theory, conflict in groups decreases positive emergent states (Jehn et al., 2008). Specifically, we propose that perceived task and relationship conflict may negatively impact individual perceptions of both emergent states of group efficacy and group mind because of challenges to individual self-verification and social verification.

Perceived Conflict and Group Efficacy

Group efficacy is defined as "a group's shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainments" (Bandura, 1997, p. 447). The construct of group efficacy has its conceptual roots in the construct of *self-efficacy*, which refers to an individual's faith in his or her capabilities to plan, organize, and execute a given course of action toward goal achievement (Bandura, 1997). Group efficacy is often compared with a *motivational hub* that greatly contributes toward group performance (Bandura, 1997; Gully et al., 2002; Locke, 1991; Tasa, Taggar, & Seijts, 2007). In their meta-analysis, Gully et al. (2002) found a strong positive association between efficacy and performance ($\rho = .41$).

On the criterion side, the potency of group efficacy is well established as a predictor of group performance (Gully et al., 2002; Stajkovic, Lee, & Nyberg, 2009), employee withdrawal, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction (Walumbwa, Wang, Lawler, & Shi, 2004); but with regard to the antecedents of group efficacy, scholarly research is still few and far between (Taggar & Seijts, 2003; Tasa et al., 2007). By and large, scholarly work on antecedents of emergent states suggests that social interactions and group experiences shape the occurrence and quality of emergent states in groups (Jehn et al., 2008; Marks et al., 2001; Tasa et al., 2007). One such variable, which is of significant importance in influencing the emergent state of group efficacy, is *conflict*.

According to self-verification theory, as articulated above, the presence of task conflict poses serious challenges to strongly held views, is viewed as a negative assessment by fellow group members, and has a debilitating impact on individual perceptions about group emergent states (Jehn et al., 2008; de Wit et al., 2011). In the determination of the antecedents of the emergent state of collective efficacy, research has shown that among other factors, encouragement and positive feedback by fellow colleagues play a pivotal role (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2004). Encouragement and positive feedback are integral components of self-verification process, whereby individuals feel accepted and acknowledged by their fellow colleagues. The presence of conflict impedes the process of self-verification, and it becomes difficult for individuals to work as a collective and think positively about their group.

Task conflict stands for disagreements between group members with regard to how the task needs to be performed. Examples of task conflict include individual differences related to application of work-related procedures, distribution of resources, and interpretations of work-related facts. The presence of task conflict poses challenges to the strongly held task-related opinions, ideas, and interpretations, which hamper the self-verification process and undermine individual faith in collective capability of the group (Jehn et al., 2008).

Similarly, in the case of relationship conflict, due to interpersonal issues, member anxieties get heightened and members feel a serious threat to their ego and self-concept. In the presence of relationship

conflict, there are clashes between individual personalities, accompanied by rude interpersonal exchanges, cynical comments, and disregard for fellow colleagues (Jehn, 1994). The presence of relationship conflict adversely affects deeply held individual attitudes and self-views and is detrimental to individual self-verification (De Dreu & Van Knippenberg, 2005; Jehn et al., 2008; Li, Zhou, & Leung, 2011; de Wit et al., 2011). The above claims have been substantiated with empirical evidence, whereby both forms of conflict, task and relationship, have been reported to negatively influence group emergent states (Jehn et al., 2008; de Wit et al., 2011). Therefore, we propose a negative association between both forms of conflict (task and relationship) and group efficacy.

Hypothesis 1: Individual perceptions of task and relationship conflict will be negatively related to individual evaluations of group efficacy.

Perceived Conflict and Group Mind

The concept of group or collective mind was proposed by Weick and Roberts (1993) and is conceptualized as “a pattern of heedful interrelations of actions in a social system” (Weick & Roberts, 1993, p. 357). Group mind by nature is an emergent state given its cognitive and social characteristics. As Jehn et al. (2008) pointed out, emergent states include the cognitive and social group properties. Within a group that possesses group mind, interrelations are “constructed and reconstructed continually by individuals through the ongoing activities of contributing, representing, and subordinating” (Weick & Roberts, 1993, p. 365). Group mind helps the group comprehend the unexpected events by facilitating the integration of individual knowledge to correct the possible failures and meet the situational demands (Weick & Roberts, 1993). As a result, group mind has implications for group performance.

Group mind is representative of consideration of each group member toward the actions of fellow group members and builds on reciprocal support and interpersonal trust between group members (Asch, 1952; Campbell, 1990). As articulated in the previous section, conflict between group members has a detrimental effect on group emergent states (Jehn et al., 2008), including group mind. If the group members are frustrated by the conflict with other members, they may get irritated and become unheedful toward their group members and, in other words, attention toward the group gets distracted and diminished (van Fenema, 2005). Within a group, heedful interrelationships between group members promote group effectiveness, but such interrelationships are only possible if individuals are attentive, considerate, and conscientious toward their colleagues. In other words, for group mind to flourish, it is important that group members are able to confirm the views that their fellow group members hold.

Moreover, following the two dimensions of trust suggested by McAllister (1995), task-related conflict might negatively influence role-based trust that is rooted in expertise and capabilities of the other party, while relationship conflict could harm affect-based trust. Interpersonal conflict may incur negative sentiments among group members by interfering with individual motivations and hamper the ability of group members to contribute toward group goals. Consequently, group members may reduce their willingness to interrelate with each other, which is critical in developing group mind. In other words, in the presence of conflict, group members are less likely to muster their individual actions into the joint action of the group as a whole. Therefore, we propose a negative association between both forms of conflict and group mind, as phrased in hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 2: Individual perceptions of task and relationship conflict will be negatively related to individual evaluations of group mind.

Decoupling Task and Relationship Conflict

Essentially, all conflict is relational in the sense that it occurs between individuals. However, the distinction is the content of the conflict. If the content is focused solely on the task and does not involve

personal issues of dislike, then this task conflict should have a different impact on individuals than relationship conflict. Relationship conflict content is not related to the task, instead it is conflict of a personal nature in which individuals do not like each other, and therefore, anger develops between the individuals. However, task conflict and relationship conflict are often highly correlated (Huang, 2010; de Wit et al., 2011). The high correlation points to the question of whether task and relationship conflict are parallel concepts. To address this question, it is critical for researchers to attempt to decouple task and relationship conflict to enhance our understanding of how conflict impacts group functioning (Huang, 2010; de Wit et al., 2011). Simons and Peterson (2000) found when there is high trust, task-related conflict is less likely to be misattributed to relationship conflict. Their findings also imply that, compared with the situation where both conflicts occur often, a relative high level of trust might exist when task conflict occurs often but relationship conflict does not.

Other studies have suggested the negative impact of co-occurrence of both types of conflict on group functioning (see de Wit et al., 2011, for a summary). Yang and Mossholder (2004) argued when task conflict occurs without relationship conflict, task conflict, which is less emotional, is less detrimental. Task conflict is also less likely to escalate when there is not a co-occurrence with relationship conflict (Greer, Jehn, & Mannix, 2008). Task conflict that is not emotional and does not unnecessarily escalate should promote healthy functional interactions among group members. Based on self-verification theory, when there is greater respect and trust among members, the group is less likely to experience negative outcomes (Jehn et al., 2008; Swann et al., 2004). Thus, in the case of co-occurrence of both task and relationship conflicts, the level of group mind and group efficacy might be even lower than in the occurrence of only task conflict. A group with a less developed group mind would demonstrate heedless interactions and have less effective exchanges between members resulting in poor performance when compared with a group with a more developed group mind (Weick & Roberts, 1993). By decoupling task conflict from relationship conflict, we expect perceptions of heedful interactions (intelligently combined actions) to be higher and thus expect these individuals to perceive a more developed group mind. A group with low efficacy would represent groups who are not as motivated or confident in their abilities and thus would likely show a lack of commitment to group tasks when compared with a group with high efficacy (Bandura, 1997). By decoupling task conflict from relationship conflict, we expect perceptions of efficacy to be higher as the personal insults associated with relationship conflict, which can be seriously damaging to esteem, are missing. Therefore, we raise another hypothesis stating different levels of group efficacy and group mind with respect to two types of conflict.

Hypothesis 3: Individual evaluations of group efficacy and group mind will be significantly lower when individuals perceive that *both* task and relationship conflict occur often than in the situation when individuals perceive that *only* task conflict occurs often.

Methods

Participants

The hypotheses are tested in a quantitative field study consisting of 127 employees in ten work groups within a Fortune 500 company in the construction industry. One of the authors was granted access to these ten work groups to aid the regional manager in understanding team dynamics with the groups. These ten work groups were deemed appropriate to address our research questions related to perceived group conflict for two primary reasons. First, these participants are part of intact work groups rather than temporary groups, and thus, conflict has long-term implications. The intact nature of the groups makes it more likely that the members have experienced conflict and can accurately provide perceptions of group conflict. Second, conflict within these work groups has more serious implications due to the real-world setting rather than a laboratory setting. Conflict within these groups has the potential to

impact members' long-term daily interactions with their actual work peers, which is potentially more salient to members' perceptions than a simulated work situation in a laboratory study. The company labeled each work group as a separate branch. The employees were, on average, almost 40 years old and were predominantly males (86%). All but one of the work groups had at least one female. This low percentage of women is quite common in the construction industry. The average tenure of work group members was approximately 3.5 years, and 24% of the participants held college degrees. These work groups operate under the supervision of the same manager and are responsible for renting and servicing construction equipment, with equipment ranging from large-scale items, such as excavators, to smaller items, such as jackhammers. The work groups' customer base ranges from major construction companies to individuals involved in domestic do-it-yourself projects. Although the work groups are within the same company and under the direction of the same supervisor, they operate independently.

Each individual completed a questionnaire. The items for this particular study were included as part of a larger study that looked at multiple variables of work group interactions. The data were collected in person, and each respondent received an explanation of the purpose of the questionnaire. To minimize the potential social desirability response bias, three steps were taken. First, there was no identifying information included in the questionnaires that could potentially link the person to the responses. Second, the data collecting author was not associated with the respondent's overarching organization and personally handed the questionnaires out and picked them up as soon as the person completed it. Respondents saw that the questionnaires were immediately placed in a large folder containing all anonymous questionnaires. Third, all respondents were informed by the collecting author that no one in their organization would have access to the questionnaires. Of the 142 employees within the ten work groups, 127 completed the questionnaire. The face-to-face approach yielded an average response rate of 89% across the ten work groups, with a low response rate of 75% and a high response rate of 100%. Across the ten work units, only one individual refused to fill out the questionnaire. Variation in response rate was due to potential informants being absent from work on the day the data were collected.

Measures

Conflict Types

Both task and relationship conflict were measured based on an adapted version of a previously validated Intragroup Conflict Scale developed by Jehn (1999) and refined by Pearson et al. (2002). The items assessed the perceptions of how often each type of conflict occurs. Relationship (affective) conflict was measured by three items that captured tension, anger, and personal friction. The items include the following: There is often anger among branch employees; there is often personal friction among branch employees; there is often tension among branch employees. Task (cognitive) conflict was measured by three items that captured the disagreement about work-related ideas and opinions. The items include the following: There are often differences of opinion among branch employees; branch employees often have to work through differences in the content of decisions; there are often disagreements over different ideas among branch employees. Participants rated the frequency of each type of conflict by responding to a 7-point Likert scale. The average of the three relationship conflict items and the average of the three task conflict items were calculated for each individual. The Cronbach's alphas were .77 for task conflict and .93 for relationship conflict. These Cronbach's alphas are consistent with the six samples discussed in detail in Pearson et al. (2002). Based on these six samples, the average Cronbach's alpha for task conflict was .82, with a range of .72–.91, and the average for relationship conflict was .86, with a range of .85–.87.

Group Efficacy

Individual evaluations of group efficacy were measured using an adapted three-item scale developed by Spreitzer (1995), which was developed based on Jones' (1986) efficacy scale and on Gist's (1987) conceptualization of efficacy. For the purpose of this study, the items reflect individuals' perceptions of their

work group efficacy. The items assessed the perceptions of how confident the individuals are that their work group can accomplish their tasks successfully. The items include the following: I am confident about our ability to do our tasks; I am self-assured about our capabilities to perform our activities; We have mastered the skills necessary for our tasks. Participants responded to the items using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). The average of the items was calculated for each individual. The Cronbach's alpha was .75. This Cronbach's alpha is similar to the three alphas discussed in detail in Spreitzer (1995). Based on these three data collections of this measure, the average Cronbach's alpha was .83 with a range of .81–.84.

Group Mind

Individual evaluations of group mind were based on an adapted four-item scale, developed by Yoo and Kanawattanachai (2001), that was grounded in the work of Weick and Roberts (1993). The items assessed the perceptions of the extent that work group behaviors are combined in an intelligent and heedful manner by addressing whether there is a clear understanding of how work should be coordinated and whether decisions and actions are carried out carefully. The items include the following: Our branch has an overall perspective that includes each other's decisions and the relationship among them; our branch employees carefully relate actions to each other; our branch employees carefully make their decisions to maximize overall performance; our branch employees have developed a clear understanding of how each business function should be coordinated. Participants responded to the items using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). The average of the four items was calculated for each individual. The Cronbach's alpha was .87. This Cronbach's alpha is consistent with the five alphas discussed in detail in Yoo and Kanawattanachai (2001) and Kanawattanachai and Yoo (2007). Based on these data collections of this measure, the average Cronbach's alpha was .89 with a range of .85–.92.

Control Variables

We used two control variables to account for variance in individual evaluations of group efficacy and group mind. These variables include the size of the work group and the tenure within the work group. We included the *size* (number of individuals in the work group) because work group processes likely differ depending on the number of members in the group. Size is often included as a control variable in conflict studies (Desivilya et al., 2010; Jehn et al., 2008; Pearson et al., 2002) because a large team has increased possibilities of conflict when compared with a smaller team as there are more perspectives incorporated in completing tasks. The range of team size was 7–22, and the average team size was 14. We also felt that *tenure* might impact the role of conflict, since the more time people work together, the greater the opportunity there is for task and relationship conflict. Others have argued that tenure is important to consider when individuals gauge dissimilarity and interact among group members (Hobman et al., 2003; Zenger & Lawrence, 1989). Tenure was measured by asking respondents how many years they have worked within their group. The range of tenure was from less than 1 year to 20 years, and the average team tenure was 3.5 years.

Results

The descriptive and correlation information for the 127 respondents is shown in Table 1. Given that task and relationship conflict have a correlation greater than .7, regression analysis was not appropriate to address our relational hypotheses. A high correlation between task and relationship conflict is common (Simons & Peterson, 2000; de Wit et al., 2011). However, these correlations do support hypotheses 1 and 2, as task and relationship conflict are both significantly and negatively related to group efficacy and group mind. To address hypothesis 3, the individuals are placed in categories based on the frequency of conflict occurrence. The individuals were categorized based on whether or not they agreed that

Table 1
Descriptive Data and Correlations

	Group efficacy	Group mind	Relationship conflict	Task conflict
Mean	5.44	4.79	3.25	4.26
Standard deviation	1.14	1.3	1.79	1.36
Group efficacy	1			
Group mind	.588**	1		
Relationship conflict	-.492**	-.584**	1	
Task conflict	-.283*	-.447**	.729**	1

* $p < .01$. ** $p < .001$.

Table 2
Descriptive Data for the Conflict Type Categories

	Category 1: Task conflict and relationship conflict do not occur often		Category 2: Task conflict occurs often; relationship conflict does not		Category 3: Task conflict and relationship conflict occur often	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Group efficacy	5.67	0.99	5.70	0.94	4.68	1.29
Group mind	5.22	1.03	4.74	1.30	3.88	1.39

relationship and task conflict occurred often within their work group. Based on this categorization process, 69 individuals agreed that neither occurred often, 27 individuals agreed that task conflict occurred often but relationship conflict did not occur often, and 31 individuals agreed that both task and relationship conflict occurred often. In this sample, no respondent indicated relationship conflict occurs often and task conflict does not occur often. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics based on the categorization of whether task and relationship conflict occurred often.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test for differences in individual evaluations of group efficacy and group mind depending on the perceived frequency of relationship and task conflict occurrence. The data did not violate the assumption of homogeneity of variance required to run ANOVA even though there are unequal sample sizes within the categories. By relying on the significance value of Levene’s test, the assumption is not violated because the significance is more than .05. The ANOVA results in Table 3 show that there are significant differences in group efficacy and group mind scores based on the conflict categorizations. The effect size, calculated using eta squared, was .15 for group efficacy, which is a large effect, and .18 for group mind, which is also a large effect according to Cohen (1988). *Post hoc* comparisons using the Tukey method indicated that group efficacy and group mind scores for Category 1 and Category 2 are both significantly higher than Category 3. This result suggests that task conflict alone was not significantly detrimental to individual evaluations of group efficacy and group mind. Thus, hypothesis 3 is supported: Category 1 and Category 2 are significantly higher in group efficacy and group mind scores than Category 3. Category 1 and Category 2 are not statistically different from one another; actually Category 2 has slightly higher group efficacy scores than Category 1.

As an extension of ANOVA, analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to examine whether the conflict categorization is significant while controlling for work group size and tenure. By removing the influences of size and tenure, ANCOVA increases the power of the *F* test. Based on this analysis, the conflict categorization is still significant for both group efficacy ($F = 12.57$; $p = .00$) and group mind ($F = 14.69$; $p = .00$) when size and tenure are accounted for.

Table 3
Analysis of Variance

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F
Group mind				
Between groups	38.38	2	19.19	13.68**
Within groups	173.93	124	1.40	
Total	212.30	126		
Group efficacy				
Between groups	23.60	2	11.80	10.53**
Within groups	138.96	124	1.12	
Total	162.56	126		

** $p < .001$.

Discussion

By bringing together disparate literatures, our study explains the impact of interpersonal conflict on individual perceptions of group emergent states using self-verification theory. Self-verification theory suggests that individuals hold certain stable views, and they not only want others to respect those views but also expect to be known and understood based on their self-views and social views (Swann et al., 2004). Conflict threatens this self-verification process (Jehn et al., 2008). Specifically, conflict impairs positive emergent states. In this article, we evaluated task and relationship conflict and two emergent states that have received little attention in the conflict literature: group efficacy and group mind. We relied on the existing literature of conflict and self-verification theory to develop hypotheses about the relationship of these variables at the individual level. We also decouple task and relationship conflict to identify potential differences. In our analysis, we examined how individual perceptions about the occurrence of task and relationship conflict relate to individual evaluations of group efficacy and group mind. As a result of our study, we have significant findings that contribute to the conflict and emergent state literatures. Our results that task and relationship conflict are significantly and positively correlated are consistent with the conflict literature. The correlation results also support hypotheses 1 and 2 as task and relationship conflict are both statistically, negatively related to group efficacy and group mind. This finding is consistent with other research that relates conflict types to emergent states (e.g., de Wit et al., 2011).

Through further analysis in which task and relationship conflict are decoupled as individuals are categorized based on the perception of conflict occurrence, we found significant differences depending on the type and co-occurrence of conflict. Specifically, our results show that when task conflict is decoupled from relationship conflict, the individual evaluations of group efficacy and group mind are not significantly lower when compared with individuals who perceive neither type of conflict to occur often. Furthermore, those who only perceived task conflict to occur often have significantly higher individual evaluations of group efficacy and group mind than those who perceive both types of conflict to occur often. This shows support for hypothesis 3. This finding is a valuable contribution to the conflict literature as it demonstrates when decoupled from relationship conflict; task conflict is potentially not detrimental to the emergent states of group efficacy and group mind. In regard to group efficacy, those who perceived task conflict to occur often had slightly higher scores than individuals who perceived neither type of conflict to occur often. Previous research suggests task conflict can be functional in terms of distal outcomes, such as group performance, but is dysfunctional in terms of proximal outcomes, such as emergent states (de Wit et al., 2011). In contrast, our study demonstrates task conflict can also be functional for proximal outcomes, such as emergent states. This finding suggests that more research needs to be carried out that examines conflict and proximal outcomes and combines an individual-level and group-level of analysis.

We had another interesting finding that was not intended. Through the categorization process, we expected to have four categories based on the occurrence of task and relationship conflict: neither occur often, both occur often, only task conflict occurs often, and only relationship conflict occurs often. However, in our study, not one person perceived that relationship conflict occurs often without task conflict. In this setting, when relationship conflict occurs, so does task conflict. Perhaps it is natural for task conflict to occur among group members who experience the social dislike of one another, which makes up the essence of relationship conflict. This finding might help explain why past research is inconsistent in terms of whether task conflict is functional or not. If researchers do not decouple task and relationship conflict, then results will continue to be mixed as their effects on one another are not detangled.

The results of this study also strengthen the claims of self-verification theory by reiterating the importance of confirmation of self-view by others as the basis of individual cognitions. According to self-verification theory, the process of self-verification is a way for individuals to establish their authenticity, whereby individuals choose to act in accordance with their true self. When individual self-views are verified by others, authenticity is bolstered, but the presence of conflict poses challenges to authenticity, endangering individual cognitions. Thus, our study widens the lens of self-verification theory by including interpersonal conflict as an important antecedent in the modeling of group emergent states.

Practical Implications

There are several practical implications of these findings. Based on our study, relationship conflict should be carefully managed as it is detrimental to group functioning by affecting individual perception of emergent states such as group efficacy and group mind. In addition, relationship conflict did not occur alone in our study. Therefore, managers should be cognizant of the possibility that relationship conflict will naturally promote additional conflict about the task. The more efficiently relationship conflict is removed or significantly reduced, the more likely the group will function properly. In terms of task conflict, group members and managers should welcome some disagreement about the task, as productive outcomes are possible when these differences are worked out.

Incorporating previous studies into our findings, we suggest several possible strategies to deal with intragroup conflict. For example, a cooperative and integrative rather than competing approach of conflict management might minimize the negative effect of conflict, especially relationship conflict, on team effectiveness (e.g., Bradforda, Stringfello, & Weitz, 2004; DeChurch & Marks, 2001). Proper team goal orientation could also alleviate the negative impact of conflicts (Huang, 2012). Given that relationship conflict is considered more harmful to teamwork, setting up teams with a high level of consensus about work values and a low level of diversity could be useful to prevent the generation of relationship conflict (De Dreu & Van Vianen, 2001). To minimize relationship conflict possibly triggered by task conflict, group leaders should avoid escalated task conflict (Medina, Munduate, Dorado, Martínez, & Guerra, 2005) and promote intragroup mutual trust and goal clarity to reduce the misattribution of task conflict (Simons & Peterson, 2000; Tidd, McIntyre, & Friedman, 2004).

Limitations and Future Research

Although there are significant results and practical implications, there are also several limitations of this study that highlight future research opportunities. One limitation is the small sample size. A larger study from multiple organizational settings would increase the generalizability of the study. However, it is important to note that a study of individuals from intact working groups with several years of tenure together, who have real impact on their organization's long-term success and individual group member career success and satisfaction, is a better setting to study conflict than a laboratory setting. A laboratory setting where individuals are placed in temporary groups lacks realism and actual career implications and is not an optimal setting to study conflict given that its emergence and significance hinges on past

and future interactions. Therefore, although a small sample size is a limitation of our field study, we call for more field studies to explore the role of conflict.

A second limitation is the reliance on survey data to capture individual perceptions of conflict and the emergent states. This common method bias could have affected our results. Future research that relies on multiple sources and multiple data collection techniques would resolve this issue. Specifically, future research that examines personal narratives of experiences with conflict might prove to be especially important as the content of conflict is evident rather than merely the frequency. It is possible that conflict content is just as meaningful, if not more, than conflict frequency. Linking conflict to other meaningful outcomes such as interpersonal communication satisfaction (Hecht, 1978), relational competency (Spitzberg & Hecht, 1984), and team identification (Henry, Arrow, & Carini, 1999) also warrants future examination. Finally, our data are cross-sectional and do not allow for examination of developmental relationships between conflict and emergent states. A study that is designed to capture these variables through multiple points of time and through longitudinal observation would provide valuable insight into the relationship of these variables as they develop over time.

An additional area that merits future research is how conflict can serve as a clarifying mechanism. Although past research has found evidence for the negative relationship between conflict and emergent states, in our study, when task conflict is decoupled from relationship conflict, group mind and group efficacy are significantly higher. This finding alludes to the possibility of task conflict serving as a clarifying mechanism of values and perspectives. We believe the clarifying potential of conflict merits further investigation. Specifically, is there a tipping point when conflict can appropriately serve as a mechanism for group members to better understand each other versus undermine each other? Our study would suggest that this tipping point occurs when relationship conflict accompanies task conflict. We recommend more research in this area to better comprehend how the coupling and decoupling of conflict types impact performance outcomes as well as emergent states.

Conclusions

The findings and implications of this study are hoped to further our understanding of conflict. We offer four primary contributions in this study. First, we replicate the strong association between task and relationship conflict. Second, we relate perceived conflict to two emergent states that have not received attention in this context and rely on self-verification theory as an explanatory framework. Third, we decouple task and relationship conflict and show task conflict is more functional when it does not co-occur with relationship conflict. A fourth contribution of this study was unintentional. None of our respondents indicated that relationship conflict occurs often without task conflict. Although these contributions are important, more work is needed. Conflict is a fact of life and managing and understanding it is crucial.

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