

Harnessing the Positive Power of Task Conflict without the Negative Effects of Relationship Conflict: the Key Role of Personal Values

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Abstract

Recent research suggests that task and relationship conflict are highly intercorrelated, implying a dilemma such that the associated negative effects of relationship conflict can outweigh the potential benefits of task conflict (e.g., de Dreu & Weingart, 2003). Simons and Peterson (2000) suggest, however, that trust moderates this association so that task and relationship conflict are unrelated in groups with high intragroup trust, arguing that the groups with high intragroup trust can benefit from task conflict (e.g., divergent thinking, information exchange, etc.) without the attendant problems of relationship conflict. We will argue in this session that this effect is vulnerable in two ways. First, the moderating effect of trust may be limited to individuals who strongly value self-direction over security (individualists) because those who value security over self-direction (collectivists) can see only the destructive threat of conflict and no benefits, even in the presence of high intragroup trust. The second way in which this moderation effect is vulnerable is amongst those who do not value trust highly. For those who value power and achievement over benevolence and trust, the presence of trust in their relations with others is irrelevant to their drive for self-enhancement. In short, we argue that the moderating effect of trust is functional for people who value self-direction and/or benevolence, but does not provide the “buffering” effects against task conflict mutating into relationship conflict for those who value both power and security. For that group, the entanglement between task and relationship conflict is very hard to avoid. We will discuss these ideas in the context of a sample of 90 work teams from Taiwan where we find broad support for our proposal.

Keyword : team conflict