Conflict Asymmetries: Effects on Motivation, Attitudes, and Performance

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Abstract

Past research on conflict often makes the assumption that all members involved in a conflict experience the same amount of conflict. In this experimental study, we challenge this assumption and examine asymmetrical conflict perceptions; that is, the degree to which individuals involved in conflict perceive different levels of conflict. We predict and find that when individuals experience different levels of conflict they expect to be less motivated, less satisfied with their workpartner and the exchange, and they perform less well (e.g., increasing errors on the joint task).

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Past conflict research often assumes that all members interacting on a work task perceive and experience the same amount of conflict (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; c.f., Jehn & Chatman, 2000). This assumption ignores the possibility that different parties involved in a conflict may perceive different levels of conflict. For example, one person in a workgroup may perceive that there is a high level of conflict, while another may perceive that there is actually little or no conflict. This view of asymmetric conflict perceptions has often been ignored in past research on conflict (e.g., Amason, 1996; Jehn, 1995; Pelled, 1996; c.f., Jehn & Rispens, 2008). Similarly, research on organizational groups and teams in general often takes the view that groups possess *shared* team properties, or that experiences are commonly held by team members (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000; Mason, 2006), rather than *configural* team properties, or properties that reflect the differences in attitudes and perceptions among individuals working together (Chan, 1998; Klein & Kozlowski, 2000). We argue that it is critical to assess individuals' different perceptions of conflict levels to accurately predict processes occurring between workpartners.

In addition, there is an ongoing debate over whether conflict can ever be beneficial in task settings. A meta-analysis by De Dreu and Weingart (2003) indicates that, on average, task conflict (as well as relationship conflict) among group members is negatively

associated with performance. Task conflicts are disagreements focused on the job that the group is attempting to accomplish, while relationship conflicts are non-task-related and of a more personal nature (e.g., gossip, fashion; Jehn, 1994). However, past research (Amason, 1996; Jehn, 1995; Pelled, 1996), reviews of intragroup conflict (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003), as well as current studies (e.g. Ensley & Hmieleski, 2005; Liang, Liu, Lin, & Lin, 2007; Matsuo, 2006; Olson, Parayitam, & Bao, 2007), all suggest that task conflict can be beneficial to group performance. Unfortunately, however, this past research on the two main reasons for conflicts to be positive, namely constructive debate (e.g., Amason, 1996; Ensley, Pearson, & Amason, 2002; Jehn, 1995; Olsen et al., 2007) and enhanced cognitive processing (e.g., Carnevale & Probst, 1998; c.f., De Dreu & Weingart, 2003), has also assumed that all parties involved perceive the same amount of conflict. Therefore, in this study of conflict and asymmetric perceptions, we provide a new view of conflict by examining the asymmetric perceptions of individuals working together and the effect this has above and beyond the basic conflict level.

Asymmetry of Perceptions

Social cognition research has acknowledged that individuals have different perceptions of reality (Bruner, 1957; Searle, 1995). Social cognitive theory (c.f., Bandura, 2001) and the Social Information Processing approach (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) have been employed to explain different experiences of individuals in organizations. However,

the research on workgroups, as mentioned above, has often ignored these different individual perceptions (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000; Mason, 2006) assuming that people who work together on a task have similar emotions (e.g., George, 1990; c.f., Mason, 2006; Totterdell, Kellett, Teuchmann, & Briner, 1998), attitudes (e.g., Mason & Griffin, 2003), and perceptions (e.g., Cannnon-Bowers, Salas, & Converse, 1993; Klimoski & Mohammed, 1994). However, research on motivation in negotiations and experimental games shows that individuals often have different perceptions of the same situation (Liebrand, Jansen, Rijken, & Suhre, 1986; Sattler & Kerr, 1991; Van Lange & Kuhlman, 1994). For instance, individuals with different levels of power over resources have different experiences within a task group (e.g., Galinsky, Grunefeld, & Magee, 2003; Guinote, Judd, & Brauer, 2002; Smith & Trope, 2006; for a review see Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). And, more specifically, research on diversity and relational demography related to perceptions of conflict shows that individuals in dyadic relationships perceive conflict differently (e.g., Bono, Boles, Judge, & Lauver, 2002; Hojjat, 2000). It seems then, that it is important to consider the different perceptions of individuals in comparison with others in the same work situation when examining the effect of task conflict on motivation expectations, attitudes, and performance within workgroups.

Conflict Asymmetry

Jehn and Chatman (2000) first discussed the concept of perceptual conflict composition as "the degree to which each individual in a group perceives levels of conflict

differently compared to other member perceptions' in the group" (p. 61). In their study of 105 workgroups, they found that perceptual differences of conflict decreased group performance and satisfaction. In fact, group differences of conflict decreased performance more than when all members consistently perceived high levels of task conflict. Unfortunately, they did not examine the specific motivations, intentions, or expectations of workgroup members who experienced different levels of conflict and how that influenced outcomes. Based on their construct, our definition of asymmetry of conflict is that parties involved in the same conflict perceive different levels of conflict. We extend their research by examining motivations and intentions of individuals in asymmetric conflict situations, as well as attitudes and behaviors, to provide a more complete picture of the effects of asymmetric conflict perceptions. For example, one person may perceive that there is a task conflict while the others working on the common task may perceive that there is really no (or very little) task conflict present. It is precisely these interpretations that members make, and how they react when others have similar or different interpretations, that we predict will influence attitudes, expectations, and performance. We examine three aspects of work interactions relevant to asymmetric perceptions: attitudes, intentions, and behaviors, (Fishbein & Azjen, 1975). Our attitudinal focus is on the satisfaction of the individual with the exchange and with their workpartner. The intentions we examine specifically are the individuals' expectation that they will be motivated during the interaction, as decreased motivation as been shown to be a consequence of asymmetric perceptions in conflict

situations (e.g., Jehn, Rupert, & Nauta, 2006). Our behavioral dependent variable is actual task performance. We specifically focus in this study on task conflict given the ongoing debate regarding task performance outcomes and the expected effects on attitudes, intentions, and behaviors of workpartners involved in conflict.

The Effects of Asymmetry on Motivation, Attitudes, and Performance

We propose that there are several reasons why asymmetrical conflict perceptions will be detrimental in work interactions. We draw on theories of shared mental models, self-verification, and negotiation research. Shared mental models are defined as the cognitive structures of team members that reflect a common understanding of the attributes, skills, responsibilities, and needs of their teammates (Mohammed, Klimoski, & Rentsch, 2000), and can include aspects such as communication and conflict resolution styles (Cannon-Bowers, Salas, & Converse, 1993; Klimoski & Mohammed, 1994). Research on shared mental models (e.g. Lim & Klein, 2006; Gibson & Earley, 2007), and negotiated belief structures (Walsh, Henderson, & Deighton, 1988) suggests that consensus regarding information and ideas among individuals in common-goal work interactions increases positive aspects of these work interactions. When individuals agree on the nature of their anticipated interaction (even if it is negative; Mason & Griffin, 2003), they are more likely to be motivated to cooperate and help one another. Sharedness among members therefore facilitates positive coordination, motivation, and attitudes of group members (Bar-Tal, 1990; Cannon-Bowers, Salas, & Converse, 1993; c.f., Mason, 2006; Salas, Dickinson,

Converse, & Tannenbaum, 1992). Common interpretations of experience are effective in work interactions because they make it easier to formulate and coordinate strategies, to cooperate, and to communicate critical information (Mathieu, Heffner, Goodwin, Salas, & Cannon-Bowers, 2000).

We propose that these positive aspects (motivation expectations, satisfaction with the experience and the work partners) will not be present when individuals involved in the task have asymmetric conflict perceptions. When an employee, for instance, realizes that she has a different view of the level of conflict than others involved in the task situation then these different interpretations of this social process (e.g., conflict between partners), can cause unrest, uncertainty, and discomfort. This is in line with, for instance, self-verification theory, that suggests that if an individual does not feel validated in their view (e.g., of the conflict situation), this will cause dissatisfaction and decreased motivation due to self-questioning and uncertainty (Burke & Stets, 1999; Swann, 1990; Swann, de la Ronde & Hixon, 1994; Swann, Polzer, Seyle et al. 2004).

Furthermore, in line with the central notion of many other social psychological theories that people have a fundamental need to feel certain about how they perceive the world and their own position in this world (e.g., Festinger, 1954; Hogg, 2000; Weary & Edwards, 1996; Van de Bos & Lind, 2002), uncertainty about one's attitudes, beliefs, and, in this case, perceptions, is generally felt as something aversive (e.g., Hogg, 2000; Van den Bos, Euwema, Poortvliet, and Maas, 2007). This uncertainty is often associated with

feelings of stress and anxiety (Van den Bos & Lind, 2002). It also has been found that individuals in work situations expect that others have similar interpretations and when this does not occur, negative outcomes such as decreased effort and miscommunications due to confusion are likely (Milton & Westphal, 2005; Polzer, Milton, & Swann, 2002). Therefore, we propose that asymmetry of conflict perceptions in work interactions will cause the individuals involved to be less satisfied and less likely to be motivated to be involved in the task than when symmetry of perceptions are experienced (even symmetric levels of task conflict; that is, when both parties perceive high levels of conflict).

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Asymmetrical conflict perceptions decrease positive attitudes (i.e., satisfaction with the exchange and satisfaction with the partner) when working on a task.

Hypothesis 2 (H2)**:** Asymmetrical conflict perceptions decrease expectations of high work motivation on a task.

Research on shared mental models also provides some evidence that the consistency across individuals in views and interpretations of group processes and member involvement increases team performance (e.g., Marks, Sabella, Burke, & Zaccaro, 2002; Mathieu, et al., 2000). The logic provided is that for groups to be high performing, all involved must have a common understanding of the goals of the group and the information that members have (Hinsz, Tindale, & Vollrath, 1997), thus allowing highly effective degrees of coordination (Mohammed, Klimoski, & Rentsch, 2000; Smith-Jentsch,

Campbell, Milanovich, & Reynolds, 2001). We argue that if individuals working together have a common perception of the social processes in the group (e.g., the amount of conflict), it will be easier for them to discuss and resolve a conflict, thus working more effectively on their task (Hinsz, Tindale, & Vollrath, 1997; Marks et al, 2002; Mathieu et al., 2000). For example, if two people agree to disagree, at least they have a common understanding, according to the idea of shared mental models, and will not be as likely to misunderstand or misinterpret communications and behaviors due to asymmetrical perceptions of conflict (i.e., one member perceives a conflict and the other does not). If they do not agree that a conflict exists, there are often inhibitive communication problems that interfere with the constructive resolution of the conflict and effective performance of the workpartners (Kluwer & Mikula, 2002). The individuals involved, given their different perceptions of the situation, will not share the cognitions necessary to allow them effective discussions regarding their joint efforts toward completion of the task.

The research on dyadic negotiations speaks to this point directly. Parties involved in negotiation almost by definition have adversarial and different views regarding the conflict situation and preferred result (De Dreu, Koole, & Steinel, 2000; Schelling, 1960). This fixed-pie assumption, that if you win, I lose, and vice versa, leads to inferior outcomes because of substandard information processing that often impedes integrative agreements (e.g., Bazerman, Curhan, Moore, & Valley, 2000; Bazerman & Neale, 1983; Thompson, 1991; Thompson & Hastie, 1990). Integrative agreements, those that benefit all parties

without decreasing the outcome of one because of the win of the other (Thompson & Hastie, 1990), are integral in common-goal work arrangements. Workpartners must exchange and process information without competing to reach an optimal solution. Therefore, we propose, that if members have different views of the conflict situation it will impede the information exchange (Choi & Thompson, 2005; Ford & Sullivan, 2004) and cooperation needed for high performance (Carnevale & Probst, 1998; Leenders, Van Engelen, & Kratzer, 2003).

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Asymmetrical conflict perceptions decrease performance (i.e., increases in errors) when working on a task.

METHOD

Participants and Design

In a 2 x 2 between-subjects experimental design, we manipulated participants' perception of task conflict (perceive task conflict vs. not to perceive task conflicts) and the perceptual conflict composition of their group (asymmetry vs. symmetry). Participants were randomly allocated to each of the four experimental conditions. Eighty-four psychology students at a Dutch university participated (25 men and 59 women; average age = 21) and received €3.50 (about US$5) for their participation.

Procedure

All participants were placed in separate cubicles and asked to take a seat in front of a

computer. The participants were told they were to perform a task together with a fellow student and that their and their dyad-partner's computers were connected so they could exchange information with each other. This partner, in reality, however, did not exist and all communications with the dyad-partner were experimentally simulated and preprogrammed.

Manipulations. At the start of the experiment, participants were asked to answer 12 priming questions, to (allegedly) determine "the way they commonly work together with others" based on the priming procedure of, for instance, Salancik (1974) and De Dreu and Van Kleef (2004). Participants were informed that, when they and their dyad-partner had answered these questions, they would receive feedback about their answers. In the high conflict perception condition, members were asked 7-point Likert questions (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) such as "When performing a task, I think it is important to openly give your opinion" (see Appendix A for the complete list of priming items). In the low task conflict perception condition, members were asked questions such as "Most of the time, I try not to get involved in discussions during a collaboration." Before actually receiving their feedback on the questionnaire they completed, participants were first informed that researchers, based on individuals' ways of perceiving conflicts, commonly place people in one of two categories (i.e. people who *do not* have the tendency to perceive conflict in work situations, and people who *do* have the tendency to perceive conflict in work situations). These statements were made as neutral as possible so that one of the categories was not more desirable as the other.

Subsequently, participants received the feedback which, depending on the condition, indicated to which of the two categories they and their partner belonged (symmetry or asymmetry). In the symmetry conditions, participants were told that they and their partner had similar tendencies to perceive conflicts in work situations (or to not perceive conflicts). Alternatively, in the asymmetry condition they were told that they and their partner had dissimilar tendencies to perceive conflicts in work situations (i.e. when they had a tendency to perceive conflicts in work situations their partner did not, and vice-versa). Again, the feedback they received about their and their partner's perception of conflicts was preprogrammed and solely depended on the condition they were in.

Task. In the next phase of the experiment the participants were asked to solve the NASA-dilemma (see Cammalleri, Hendrick, Pittman, Blout & Prather, 1973). This dilemma, in which participants are presented with a moon landing scenario and a number of available objects, requires participants to rank objects in order of usefulness to survive on the moon. The first time the participants had to solve this dilemma, they did it independently of their dyad-partner to become familiar with the exercise and develop a baseline (Cammalleri et al., 1973). After the first trial and having answered items measuring their subjective performance, the participants had to perform the task another time. This time, they were told, their score and their partner's score would be averaged, and the best performing dyad would be awarded 50 additional Euros. Also, they were told that, before doing the task a second time, they and their dyad-partner would have the opportunity to

discuss the relevance of several of the objects which featured in the task.

Participants were asked to type a message to their partner about one of the objects (100% did so, indicating their belief in the real interaction). They then received a pre-programmed message about this object to stimulate real interaction. The message provided an opinion about the usefulness of that object on the moon. After the exchange, the participants were asked to solve the dilemma and reminded that their answers would be combined with their partners for their overall group outcome score.

Participants then completed a post-experimental questionnaire regarding their attitude towards the work interaction (i.e., their satisfaction with the task exchange), and how their own and their dyad-partner's perceptions of conflict had affected them (e.g., motivation and expected motivation of dyad partner). Specific measures of all dependent variables are provided below.

Measures

Manipulation checks. The manipulations were checked with six statements, adapted from Jehn's Intragroup Conflict Scale (1995). Each of these statements focused on whether the participants' expected them and their partner to perceive task conflicts in the upcoming collaboration on 7-point scales. Two questions assessed whether the participants expected to experience task conflict themselves, for example, "I expect that I will have different viewpoints from my partner on the issues to discuss", $\alpha = .88$. Two statements

assessed whether they expected their dyad-member to perceive task conflict, for example "I expect that my partner will think we have different ideas on the issues to handle", $\alpha = .89$. Two questions assessed asymmetry directly: e.g., "I expect we will perceive the same amount of diverging viewpoints on the issues to discuss", "I expect one of us will and one of us will not perceive diverging viewpoints on the issues to discuss", $\alpha = .90$. Additionally, as in the pretest of the manipulations, at the end of the experiment participants were asked to indicate on five statements to what extent they agreed with the condition to which they were assigned (that they would be a high or a low perceiver) on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (totally agree) to 7 (totally disagree; $\alpha = .82$).

Dependent variables. We examined attitudes, intentions, and behaviors (i.e., performance) as dependent variables (Fishbein & Azjen, 1975). We assessed positive attitudes with three items measuring satisfaction with the task partner (e.g. "I expect I will be satisfied with my workpartner") and three items measuring satisfaction with the exchanges, (e.g. "I expect that exchanging ideas with my partner about the task will be very useful"), both with Chronbach's α's of .93. We examined members' intentions about the interaction by assessing their views of their motivation during the task interaction. We asked participants three questions (e.g., "I expect I will feel very involved with my workpartner to complete the task"; $\alpha = .73$; Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999). All items were presented as statements, and participants were asked to indicate on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree) to what extent they agreed

with these statements.

Objective Performance was measured both the first and the second time the participants completed the task. For both trials, besides the total number of correct items, the participant's total rank order was compared with the correct order (Cammalleri et al., 1973). This comparison enabled us to determine for each item an error score (i.e. the differences between the correct ranks and the participant's ranks). All of these error scores were summed to obtain a total error score. Furthermore, the number of correct items of the first trial was subtracted from the number of correct items of the second trial to produce a difference score, reflecting the improvement made between the two tasks. Similarly, the total error score of the first trial was subtracted from the total error score from the second trial, also reflecting the improvement between the two tasks.

RESULTS

Manipulation Checks

The results of our manipulation checks indicate that all our manipulations worked. Participants in the 'tendency to perceive conflict' condition expected to perceive more task conflict ($M = 5.71$, $SD = .85$) than participants in the 'tendency not to perceive conflict' condition ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 1.34$), $F(1, 83) = 130.63$, $p < .001$. Participants linked with workpartners who had low tendencies to perceive conflict, indeed expected their partner to more perceive less task conflict ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 1.27$) than participants linked with

workpartner with high tendencies to perceive conflict (M = 5.92, SD =.97), F(1,83) = 18.7, p < .001. In line with our (a)symmetry manipulation, participants in the symmetrical condition expected that they and their group members would not perceive different levels of conflict (M = 2.67, SD =1.32) whereas those in the asymmetry condition were expecting that they and their workpartner would perceive different levels of conflict (M = 5.40, SD =1.36), F(1, 83) = 86.32, p < .001.

Attitudes

Our first hypothesis suggested that asymmetrical conflict perceptions would decrease positive attitudes (i.e., satisfaction with the exchange and satisfaction with the partner) when working on a task. To test this hypothesis, we performed analyses of variance (ANOVA) with the level of positive attitude as the dependent variable, and perception of task conflict (expect to perceive task conflict vs. not expect to perceive task conflicts) and the perceptual conflict composition of the workpartner (asymmetry vs. symmetry) as the factors. The results for expectations of satisfaction with the workpartner were in line with our prediction; we found a significant main effect of symmetry F(1,83) =6.14, p < .05; indicating that participants in the symmetry condition (M = 5.07, SD = .95) expected to be more satisfied with their partner than the participants in the asymmetry condition (M = 4.50, SD = 1.16). As expected, this was independent of the main effect of the level of conflict (high or low); the main effect (as well the interaction-effect) of the level

of task conflict was not significant.

Similarly, for satisfaction with the exchange, we also found support for hypothesis 1. We found a significant main effect of symmetry $F(1,83) = 5.02$, $p < .05$; indicating that participants in the symmetry condition ($M = 5.00$, $SD = 1.03$) expected more satisfaction with the exchange than the participants in the asymmetry condition ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 1.24$). The main effect (as well the interaction-effect) of the level of task conflict was again not significant, as expected.

Motivation

As predicted in Hypothesis 2, asymmetrical conflict perceptions decreased expectations of high work motivation on a task. We found a significant main effect of symmetry on expected motivation $F(1,83) = 5.44$, $p < .05$; indicating that participants in the symmetry condition ($M = 4.82$, $SD = .97$) expected to be more motivated than participants in the asymmetry condition ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 1.05$). Again, the main effect of task conflict level was not significant, nor was the interaction-effect including both our manipulations, as expected.

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Performance

Hypothesis 3 suggested a negative relationship between asymmetric conflict

perceptions and team performance. Although the number of errors made by participants in the asymmetrical and symmetrical conditions was not significantly different (Time 1, $F(1, 83) = 0.95$, $p = 0.33$; Time 2: $F(1, 83) = 0.41$, $p = 0.53$), participants in the asymmetrical and symmetrical conditions had significantly different error-improvement scores $F(1, 83) = 5.64$, $p < .05$ (see Table 1). That is, participants in the symmetry condition were able to improve their performance ($M = 2.00$, $SD = 6.70$), so compared to first round, they made fewer errors in the second round, while participants in the asymmetry condition saw their performance worsen ($M = -1.33$, $SD = 6.10$); that is, compared to first round the participants in the asymmetry condition made more errors the second round.

DISCUSSION

The study reported here was designed to assess the consequences of asymmetric conflict perceptions on work-attitudes, intentions, and subsequent task performance. We examine the concept of asymmetric conflict perceptions and define this as when the parties involved in a conflict situation perceive it differently. We examine attitudes (satisfaction with partner, satisfaction with the exchange), intentions (motivation to work together), and behaviors (task performance; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), to gain a more complete picture of the effects of asymmetric task conflict on work interactions than past research has done (e.g., Jehn & Chatman, 2000; c.f., Jehn & Rispens, 2008).

We predicted and found that expectations of being satisfied with a workpartner and the goal-oriented exchange is more positive when individuals have symmetrical views of

conflicts than when those interacting have asymmetrical views of conflict (i.e. where one member is more likely to perceive conflict than another member of a team). Similarly, we found that motivation to work well on a task is lower when people perceive conflicts differently. Finally, participants in the symmetrical condition were able to improve their performance on a task while participants in the asymmetrical condition had a decline in performance indicated by increased errors.

We contribute to the existing literature on team conflict (e.g., De Dreu & Weingart; c.f., Jehn & Bendersky, 2003) by showing that the way a conflict is perceived (i.e., symmetrical or asymmetrical) is an important factor in determining attitudes, intentions, and joint outcomes. In line with our expectations, we found that individuals working together who have symmetrical perceptions of conflict expect to have more positive attitudes and intentions regarding an upcoming collaboration, than people working together who have asymmetrical perceptions of conflict. Therefore, we also contribute to the research on work interactions and perceptions by challenging the existing predominant assumption that all members working together and experiencing a situation will perceive and respond to the situation in the same manner. In addition, we suggest a new insight to inform the ongoing debate of whether task-related conflict can be beneficial by examining the asymmetric perceptions of workpartners and the effect of this above and beyond the basic conflict level during the interaction. The conflict asymmetry perspective suggests that it is not necessarily the type and average amount of conflict that matters during work interactions, but whether

individuals agree or disagree as to the level of the conflict within the group. In our study, we found that symmetrical perceptions of conflict (both partners perceiving high levels, or both partners perceiving low levels) were both better for the work interaction (i.e., motivation, attitudes, performance) than were asymmetrical perceptions of conflict (one member perceiving a low level of conflict and the other a high level, and vice versa).

Limitations and Future Directions

This study has a number of limitations. First, we conducted this study in a laboratory setting to ensure strict differences in our conditions for hypotheses testing the differences between symmetrical and asymmetrical conflict perceptions. While future research should be conducted in the field, our reasoning for using the experimental method is that past research on asymmetrical conflict to date (Jehn & Chatman, 2000; Jehn, Rupert, & Nauta, 2006; Kluwer & Mikula, 2002) has been conducted mainly in the field (i.e., marital couples, c.f., Kluwer & Mikula, 2002; mediating dyads, Jehn, Rupert, & Nauta, 2006; and organizational teams, Jehn & Chatman, 2000) without control over the degree to which asymmetry exists. The laboratory setting allows us to examine the differences in perceptions in a controlled environment with comparable outcomes for task performance, not easily accomplished in the field.

In addition, in this study we focus specifically on task conflict given the ongoing debate regarding task conflict and performance outcomes. Future research should also

examine the effects of relationship and process conflict asymmetries and how these are similar or different from the effects of differences in task conflict perceptions in work interactions. Researchers should also consider investigating the micro-mediating chain linking asymmetric perceptions of conflict to attitudes and performance. For instance, one explanation for our results is that asymmetric perceptions interfere with cognitive processing such that when individuals feel uncertain about their own perceptions, they employ their cognitive efforts to make sense of and resolve the inconsistencies, (e.g. Weary & Edwards, 1996; Weary, Vaughn, Stewart & Edwards, 2006) rather than focusing on the task completion goals.

Another area for future research is the concept of conflict *type* asymmetry; that is, where one member perceives the conflict as a task-related conflict but the other member involved in the work interaction perceives the conflict as a relationship conflict. This could have extreme consequences for the interaction where one member is focusing on the task, while the other is focusing on the relationship and also feeling dismissed because their partner is apparently ignoring their relationship concerns and only focusing on task goals. In addition, while we examined a profile of consequences of asymmetrical conflict perceptions (attitudes, motivation, and performance of workpartners), future research would also benefit from examining more work outcomes such as absenteeism, bonuses, and intent to continue working together.

Conclusion

In sum, this research contributes to the understanding of work interactions and the different perceptions that employees may have when working together, and how this affects their attitudes, motivation, and performance. Specifically, workpartners involved in the same situation can perceive a conflict differently, thus interfering with their satisfaction, future intentions for the work interaction, and their performance on a joint task. Managers, and employees as well, should be aware that not all people necessarily have the same perception of the same situation. This suggests that a first step in managing work conflicts is for managers and team leaders to facilitate a common understanding of the situation occurring and to provide a forum for perspective taking (Galinsky, Ku, & Wang, 2005; Galinsky & Mussweiler, 2001) so that each party involved understands the other and can react with that in mind. In this way, individuals can agree that they disagree and move forward in their discussions toward more effective task outcomes.

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12. People with whom I collaborated describe me as a strong person with an

Appendix 1

Questions to prime participants tendencies to perceive -- or not perceive -- conflicts during collaborative tasks

Tendency to Perceive	Tendency Not to Perceive
1. In work situations I think it is important for people to have their own opinion.	1. I think it is important for people to be cooperative in work situations.
2. When I am working on something with somebody else, I think it is important to get the most out of myself.	2. When I am working on something with somebody else, I think it is important to find some common ground.
3. When I work together with others, I think it is important for people to understand me.	3. When I work together with others I think it is important that people agree with each other.
4. During collaborations with others, it is easy for me to tell others I am unhappy with something.	4. During collaborations with others, I find it difficult to tell people I am unhappy with something.
5. When realizing certain goals, I stand up for myself.	5. When realizing certain goals, I do not always stand up for myself.
6. In work situations I am task-orientated.	6. In work situations I am a socially-orientated.
7. When performing a task I think it is important to openly give your opinion.	7. I think modesty is important during the performance of a task.
8. Most of the time, I try to be open for a good discussion during a collaboration.	8. Most of the time, I try not to get involved in discussions during a collaboration.
9. During a collaboration, I enjoy to convince other people.	9. During a collaboration, I enjoy working together with others.
10. When necessary to perform a task I will not try to escape from facing a conflict.	10. Generally, I experience only little conflict in work situations.
11. I am bothered by differences of opinion that are not articulated during the completion of a task.	11. During the completion of a task, I sometimes think it is wise to stop continuing a discussion.

12. People with whom I collaborated describe me as a strong person with an own opinion.	12. People with whom I collaborated describe me as a easy-going person.

Table 1

Performance Results: Error-scores and Error-Improvement-scores

	Symmetrical Conditions	Asymmetrical Conditions
Number of Errors Round 1	40.90 (8.88)	38.90 (8.74)
Number of Errors Round 2	38.90 (8.57)	40.23 (9.45)
Error-Improvement [a]	2.00 * (6.70)	-1.33 * (6.10)

Standard deviations are given within parentheses

[a]Error-Improvement : the number of errors in Round 2 *minus* the number of errors in Round 1; positive scores imply that, compared to the first time they did the task, participants improved and made fewer errors on task 2

* Significantly different: $p < .05$

A pilot study of the manipulations was conducted with 44 undergraduates. Results showed that our manipulations worked; participants expected themselves (or their workpartner) to perceive more conflict when they were told that they (or their workpartner) had a tendency to perceive conflicts compared to participants being told that they (or their workpartner) did not have a tendency to perceive conflict. Furthermore, we asked five questions regarding their assigned tendency to perceive conflicts; the results showed that participants indeed believed it to reflect their actual tendencies.