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# **The relationship between conflict and team performance in Taiwan: the moderating effect of goal orientation**

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## **Abstract**

This study is set in Taiwan, a Chinese cultural context. It investigates how team conflict, as task and relationship conflict, relates to team performance. The study also considers the moderating effect of goal orientation on the relationship of task conflict and relationship conflict with team performance. The sample consists of 443 employees in 92 work teams. Results show relationship conflict has a significant and negative relationship, while task conflict has no significant relationship with team performance. The results also show that team goal orientation moderates the relationship between conflict and team performance. For teams with high learning orientation, task conflict positively relates to team performance, whereas for teams with low learning orientation, task conflict will lower team performance. In teams with high performance orientation, task conflict negatively relates to team performance, whereas for low performance orientation teams, task conflict will facilitate team performance. When team performance orientation is high this also increases the detrimental effect of relationship conflict on team performance.

**Key words:** cultural context; goal orientation; negative feedback; relationship conflict; task conflict; team composition

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## **Introduction**

Organizations use teams to respond quickly to environmental changes and to respond to customer needs. Each team member brings different skills, knowledge, and experiences. To be effective each team member should cooperate and share information. However different values and ways of thinking mean conflict is unavoidable when team members are interacting.

Conflict is a long standing focus of organizational and team research (Jehn and Mannix 2001; Pondy 1967). Although conflict has traditionally been considered disruptive, researchers have argued conflict has considerable potential to contribute to team and organizational effectiveness (De Dreu and Van de Vliert 1997). Several researchers investigate the effect of conflict by differentiating task conflict and relationship conflict (Amason and Schweiger 1994; Guetzkow and Gyr 1954; Jehn 1995; Priem and Price 1991). Researchers also propose that the negative responses such as anxiety, affiliation, and hatred resulting from relationship conflict lower the working efficiency of team members and reduce team performance. On the other hand, task conflict helps members to express different ideas, clarify concepts, unify goals, and accept decisions, enhancing team performance (Amason 1996; Jehn 1995). Although both conflict theory and empirical studies support the positive effects of task conflict, research has also found that task conflict may negatively influence team performance (De Dreu and Weingart 2003).

The value of conflict and theories that analyze conflict, as described in extant literature, cannot be assumed to apply to a collectivist culture like Taiwan (Hofstede 1993; Tjosvold Poon and Yu 2005). Chinese people are considered group oriented where relationships are highly valued (Chan 1963; Triandis, McCusker and Hui 1990). Traditionally, collectivists have been considered to value harmony and smoothing over of conflict (Morris et al. 1998; Ting-Toomey 1988). This traditional view means that teams in the Chinese cultural sphere may not be able to make full use of the benefits of conflict.

However, researchers also argue that, although Chinese may emphasize harmony to avoid conflict, harmony seeking behavior may also be driven by trust, relationship building, and sincerity (Chen 2001; Leung, Koch and Lu 2002). With this motive, Chinese people discuss conflicts openly to strengthen their relationships, and thus may be able to discuss conflict productively (Tjosvold et al. 2005).

Although there existed different perspectives about conflict in Western and Chinese culture, the effects of intrateam conflict on team performance are still not clear in both societies. These divergent views about the effects of conflict indicate that context plays a role. One of the most important contexts is the personality composition of team members. Team member personality has been shown to be an important factor in team process and performance (Barrick, Stewart, Neubert and Mount 1998; Barry and Stewart 1997; Bell 2007; Halfhill, Sundstorm, Lahner, Calderone and Nielson 2005; Kichuk and Wiesner 1997; Neuman, Wagner and Christiansen 1999; Neuman and Wright 1999). Because the personality of team members may influence how they interpret and respond to conflict, they should play a role in how conflict relates to team performance. After reviewing the conflict research, it appears that no research has explored whether the composition of team members' personalities will affect the relationship between conflict and team performance. This study proposes that the goal orientation of team members will moderate the relationship between conflict and team performance. To date, little empirical work has examined team members' goal orientation composition (Porter 2005 is an exception). The exploration of team goal orientation will contribute to both the conflict and team composition literatures.

Goal orientation is a disposition which refers to the personal goal preferences in achievement situations (Dweck and Leggett 1988). Goal orientation can be classified into learning orientation and performance orientation (Dweck 1986; Dweck and Leggett 1988). Individual team members' goal orientations lead to particular attitudes and concepts about conflict. Consequently responses to conflict are divergent. The study argues that team

members with a high learning orientation view different perspectives and criticisms as helpful information. This enables them to develop effective interactions with other members, thus escalating positive effects of task conflict and also attenuating the negative effects of relationship conflict. Conversely, team members with high performance orientation will enhance the negative effect of task and relationship conflict. In other words, task conflict and relationship conflict exert different influences on team performance, due to the differing goal orientation composition of team members. The current study also argues that the moderating effect of goal orientation on the relationship between conflict and team performance will be strengthened in teams in a Chinese cultural context.

The current study investigates how task conflict and relationship conflict relate to team performance, and how goal orientation moderates the relationship between conflict and team performance in a Chinese cultural setting in Taiwan. This study contributes to both conflict theory and team composition literatures in two ways. First, it sheds light on the moderating effect of team goal orientation. Second, this study tests the fit of Western conflict theory to a Chinese cultural context.

### **Conflict and team performance**

Conflict can be distinguished into task conflict and relationship conflict (Jehn 1995). Task conflict refers to differences of opinions, ideas and viewpoints among group members about the content of the tasks. Relationship conflict points to interpersonal incompatibilities among group members, which typically includes tension, animosity, and annoyance among members within a group.

Relationship conflict results in interpersonal opposition and encourages team members to switch the focus from the task to their interpersonal relationships. Once relationship conflict exists in a team, time will be consumed by interpersonal matters, instead of task decisions (Evan 1965). Consequently, relationship conflict harms interactions and impedes

decision quality and performance (Amason 1996; Jehn 1995, 1997). Given the foregoing, this paper proposes that relationship conflict negatively relates to team performance.

Task conflict means team members have opposing viewpoints, ideas, and thoughts about a task (Jehn 1995). Conflict over task issues is common. This process leads to setting clear task goals and steps through the exchange and clarification of ideas (Putnam 1994). Constructive criticism and suggestions of alternative approaches also lead to improvements in decision quality (Jehn 1997). On the other hand, researchers argue task disagreement in a team may lead to inefficiencies in reaching an agreement. A lack of consensus interferes with the team's ability to find integrative solutions, reducing team performance (Lovelace, Shapiro and Weingart 2001).

The negative outcomes of task conflict are more serious in a Chinese as opposed to a Western cultural setting. Chinese culture values harmony as a genuine concern for a sense of intimacy, trust, compatibility and mutually beneficial behaviors (Chen and Tjosvold 2002). Leung (1996, 1997) argues that one motive for harmony in Chinese cultural settings is instrumental in nature, to avoid actions that might strain a relationship and lead to its disintegration. Based on this reasoning, task conflict's positive influence in bringing about multiple viewpoints may be counterbalanced by its negative effect on harmony in Chinese cultural settings.

On the basis of past theorizing and evidence, this paper proposes a negative linkage between relationship conflict and team performance. The possible positive outcomes of task conflict will be impeded due to its negative effects on interpersonal harmony in Chinese cultural settings. Therefore, this study does not predict a significant positive relationship between task conflict and team performance. On the basis of the previous discussion:

*Hypothesis 1:* There is a negative relationship between relationship conflict and team performance.

## **The moderating effect of goal orientation**

Goal orientation theory has its origins in the educational psychology and child development literature. It conceptualized the broader goals pursued by individuals as a personality dimension and proposed that individuals have different goal preferences in achievement situations (Dweck 1986; Dweck and Leggett 1988). Goal orientation comprises learning and performance orientations (Dweck 1986). The former refers to individuals seeking to develop competence by acquiring new skills and mastering new situations. The latter leads individuals seeking to demonstrate and validate the adequacy of one's competence by obtaining favorable judgments and avoiding negative judgments about one's competence.

Dweck and Leggett (1988) found individuals hold implicit theories about their degree of control over personal attributes such as intellectual ability. Individuals with a learning orientation tend to hold an incremental theory about their ability. They view ability as a malleable attribute that can be developed through effort and experience. By contrast, individuals with a performance orientation tend to hold an entity theory about their ability. They view ability as a fixed and uncontrollable personal attribute.

The implicit theories held by individuals influence the interpretation of feedback, especially negative feedback. A learning orientation involves a tendency to view feedback as diagnostic information about how to develop task mastery. A high performance orientation results in cognitive-processing patterns that evoke sensitivity to information about failures (Farr, Hofmann and Ringenbach 1993; Gong, Huang and Farh 2009). Team members with learning or performance orientations perceive different ego costs. An individual's ego cost relates to the amount of suffering from hearing negative feedback (Ashford 1989). For individuals with a performance orientation, feedback is a judgment about their fixed ability level (Bobco and Colella 1994; Farr et al. 1993). Therefore negative feedback is costly to

their ego because it conflicts with their goal of ability validation (Janssen and Prins 2007; Park, Schmidt, Scheu and DeShon 2007).

In contrast, learning-oriented individuals perceive ability as transformable. They do not consider negative feedback as a denial of their ability but as a means of improvement. The result is a lower ego cost compared to performance oriented individuals.

During task conflict other team member's disagreement or criticism is potentially be viewed as negative feedback about individual's opinion (Huang, in press). Because of the different attitudes toward negative feedback hold by learning orientation and performance orientation team members, they will respond differently toward task conflict. Team members with a high learning orientation will view different perspectives and criticism (negative feedback) from other members during task conflict as helpful diagnostic information. They hold a positive attitude toward task conflict and this facilitates constructive discussion. Thus task conflict will facilitate team performance in teams with high learning orientation.

Conversely, team members with a high performance orientation find negative feedback during task conflict contradicts their goal of ability validation. Thus team members with high performance orientation tend to view different opinions as a denial of their abilities. Therefore they hold a negative attitude toward task conflict. Consequently, the negative effect of task conflict will increase in teams with high performance orientation.

Competitiveness motivation is also of relevance. This refers to the desire to win in competitive and interpersonal situations (Helmreich and Spence 1978). The relationship between goal orientation and competitiveness motivation is another reason why goal orientation affects the outcomes of task conflict. A performance orientation relies on comparison with others as a judge of performance and ability. That is, individual proves ability by demonstrating superiority to others (Nicholls 1984). So performance orientation should positively relate with competitiveness (VandeWalle 1997). Performance-oriented team members focus on winning when facing others' different opinions. Task conflict creates



opportunities for emotional and angry arguments. Negative outcomes result. By contrast, those with a learning orientation use self-referenced internal standards to assess their performance and ability (Nicholls 1984). Comparison with others is not significant. Consequently, learning orientation has a weak relationship with competitiveness (VandeWalle 1997). Task conflict leads learning-oriented team members to engage in constructive discussion.

Culture may influence the effect of team member goal orientation on the relationship between task conflict and team performance. Schwartz (1994) proposed a theory of value structure at the society level. One important value dimension in Schwartz's structure is embeddedness. In societies valuing embeddedness, individuals are strongly connected to a larger collective, and meaning in life is primarily determined by social relationships. There is a strong emphasis on working hard to maintain the order and prestige of the group. By contrast, in autonomous contexts, individuals are expected to find the meaning of their own personal uniqueness and are encouraged to express their own personal preferences. People are free to pursue their own intellectual or experiential endeavors without strong interference or disapproval from others.

Taiwan is at the embeddedness end (Schwartz 2006). We can predict that in embedded contexts, individuals are expected to show contributions to the group and avoid failure as the poor performance of one individual will reflect negatively on the group (Dekker and Fischer 2008; Tao and Hong 2000). Individuals are subjected to social pressure and need to be concerned about other people's opinions of themselves.

As discussed earlier, team members with a high learning orientation will view different perspectives and negative feedback from other members during task conflict as diagnostic information. In an embedded context, high learning orientation team members will be more eager to have open discussions with team members. Therefore they can improve the team proposals and make contributions to their teams. Instead of feeling frustrated, team members

are stimulated by opposing ideas and open-mindedly explore them. Thus the positive result of task conflict will be facilitated. Recent research also finds that the direct, open discussion of conflicts leads to better performance in Chinese cultures (Tjosvold, Hui and Sun 2004). By contrast, team members with high performance orientation view different opinions and negative feedback during task conflict as a denial of their abilities. Under social pressure to perform well and avoid failure, high performance-oriented team members do not want the negative feedback to reveal their incompetence to other team members. The humiliation and shame resulting from others' criticisms hurts their social face (Earley 1997). Thus, they will tend to reject the different perspectives under task conflict. Task conflict will diminish team performance in teams with high performance orientation.

On the basis of previous reasons, this study suggests team members' goal orientations moderate the relationship between task conflict and team performance, especially in Chinese cultural settings. When there is high team learning orientation then task conflict facilitates team performance, and task conflict will be negatively related to team performance when team learning orientation is low. When there is high team performance orientation then task conflict impedes team performance, and task conflict will be positively related to team performance when team performance orientation is low. This reasoning suggests the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 2a:* Team learning orientation will moderate the relationship between task conflict and team performance. Task conflict will be positively related to team performance when team learning orientation is high, and will be negatively related to team performance when team learning orientation is low.

*Hypothesis 2b:* Team performance orientation will moderate the relationship between task conflict and team performance. Task conflict will be negatively related to team performance when team performance orientation is high, and will be

positively related to team performance when team performance orientation is low.

Janssen and Van Yperen (2004) found that subordinates' learning orientation is positively related to the quality of leader-member exchange, and subordinates' performance orientation is negatively related to the quality of leader-member exchange. Learning-oriented employees frequently seek social exchanges with their leaders in order to discuss and learn how to better deal with emerging problems and opportunities when performing their jobs. Employees with performance orientations may prefer to restrict their interactions with their supervisors to the necessary economic exchange behaviors required and mandated by their formal employment contract. Thus, leader-member exchanges are likely to be formal, impersonal and characterized by economic exchange behaviors and social-emotional distance (Graen and Uhl-Bien 1995; Howell and Hall-Merenda 1999).

Since team members are another valuable source of learning, individuals with high learning orientations may also seek to develop high quality interactions with other members. Even under high levels of relationship conflict, learning-oriented team members will try to improve the exchange relationship so they can benefit from learning from one another. In the relationship-oriented Chinese cultural context, the exchange relationship improvement makes team members less distracted by interpersonal concerns about the relationship. Team members focus more on the problem at hand. Thus a high team learning orientation diminishes the detrimental effects of relationship conflict.

High performance orientation members maintain their social-emotional distance from other team members. When relationship conflict is high, performance-oriented team members are not stimulated to try to improve the quality of their interactions with others. Moreover, the high competitiveness of performance-oriented individuals will intensify the negative outcomes of relationship conflict. Particularly among relationship-oriented Chinese, as team

members discuss relational conflicts, they may become highly emotional, worried that they might not be respected and valued (Tjoavold, Law and Sun 2006). This worry contradicts the social face and goal of ability validation of high performance-oriented team members, therefore strengthening their negative emotional response to relational conflict. With their cognitive capacities stretched by emotional coping, they are rigid in their thinking and tend to assume that the conflict is fixed-sum. Thus high team performance orientation increases the detrimental effect of relationship conflict on team performance.

On this basis, the present study suggests the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 3a:* Team learning orientation will moderate the relationship between relationship conflict and team performance. The negative relationship between relationship conflict and team performance weakens when team learning orientation is high.

*Hypothesis 3b:* Team performance orientation will moderate the relationship between relationship conflict and team performance. The negative relationship between relationship conflict and team performance strengthens when team performance orientation is high

## **Method**

### ***Participants and procedures***

Participants consisted of 110 non-production line work teams from four IT companies in Taiwan. Human resource managers from the four IT companies were contacted and asked for their collaboration with the study. The human resource managers identified teams in their company and informed the team supervisors about the survey. Then paper based surveys were sent to team supervisors, who were asked to complete the survey themselves as well as distribute the survey to team members. Because the high power distance and the endemic

lack of trust in Chinese culture may affect the responses from team members, a written statement assured subjects of the voluntary nature of the survey and the confidentiality of their individual responses. Completed materials were mailed directly to researcher. This design was intended to reduce team members' concerns about exposure of their responses to supervisors.

The final sample consisted of at least two thirds of the employees in each work team and their supervisors. In all 110 survey sets were distributed to 625 employees. In total 99 sets were returned from 472 employees. Seven sets were excluded because the response rate was under two thirds of the team members. Thus, 92 teams representing 443 employees were included in the data analysis.

Each team had an average of 5.96 ( $SD = 2.37$ ) members. In terms of team function 32.6% were responsible for research and development (R&D), 19.6% for sales and marketing, and 19.6% were project teams. The remaining 28.2% were responsible for other functions. The average age of the participants was 32.19 ( $SD = 7.48$ ), 51.2% of whom were male and 40.9% married. The majority (68.9%) held a bachelors degree. The remaining held a masters degree or above (16.3%) or a high school degree or lower (14.9%). These demographic distributions of final sample are similar to the distribution of non-production line employees of the four companies: average age of 35.27 ( $SD = 8.01$ ), 56.48% male, and 43.51% married. The majority (69.41%) held a bachelors degree. The remaining held a masters degree or above (15.38%) or a high school degree or lower (15.21%).

### ***Measures***

This section describes the choice and implementation of measures.

*Task conflict and relationship conflict.* Jehn's (1995) four-item scale was used to measure the perceived in-team task conflict and relationship conflict. Respondents rated the items on a 7-point Likert scales that ranged from 1 (*Not at all*) to 7 (*A very great deal*).

Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for task and relationship conflict was .85 and .90, respectively.

In the analysis, team members' ratings of task conflict and relationship conflict were aggregated to the team level. In this study three approaches were used to justify aggregating these variables to the team level. The interrater agreement  $r_{wg}^*$  was calculated using the procedure of Lindell, Brandt and Whitney (1999). Means values of .85 and .89 (for task conflict and relationship conflict, respectively) were well above the acceptable value of .70 (George 1990). The ICC(1) and ICC(2) values (Bliese, 2000) were also calculated: task conflict, .17 and .45, and relationship conflict, .16 and .42. These results were also comparable to the median and recommended ICC values reported in the literature (Schneider, White and Paul 1998). Thus, the aggregation of these variables was justified.

*Goal orientation.* Van Yperen and Janssen's (2002) scale measured goal orientation as learning orientation and performance orientation with 11 and 8 items respectively. Respondents used a 7-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*). Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for learning orientation and performance orientation was .90 and .93, respectively. Team learning orientation and team performance orientation were both measured by averaging team member's scores for the respective orientations.

*Team performance.* Hackman's (1990) 5 item scale measured team performance. The team supervisor completed the scale so as to avoid the potential for common method variance. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of the scale items was .89.

*Control variables.* The number of team members is an important influence on team process and performance (Brewer and Kramer 1986). The present study controlled for team size. Tenure with the team also influences team members' socialization and interaction (Jehn, Northcraft and Neale 1999; Pelled, Eisenhardt and Xin 1999). Hence, team longevity, the average tenure of team members with the team (Katz 1982; Pelled et al. 1999), was another control variable.

The study used a confirmatory factory analysis (CFA) to ensure the convergent and

discriminant validity of the task conflict, relationship conflict, learning orientation and performance orientation items. The CFA with maximum likelihood estimations produced a chi squared of 808.42 ( $p < 0.01$ ,  $df = 344$ ) or 2.35 per degree of freedom. This was less than the 3 as suggested by Carmines and McIver (1981). The CFI, NNFI, and IFI were .93, .91 and .93, respectively. RMSEA was .07. All these indices indicated an acceptable goodness of fit (Hu and Bentler 1999) to the measurement model.

Convergent validity was examined further by calculating the average variance extracted (AVE) of the constructs. The results indicated the AVE of each variable was between .56 and .72. These exceeded .50 and this demonstrated acceptable convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker 1981).

Discriminant validity was assessed by determining the confidence interval (under 95%) around the correlation for each pair of factors. Since the confidence interval did not include 1.0 then discriminant validity was demonstrated (Anderson and Gerbing 1988).

Except for control variables, the item responses for each measure were averaged to calculate the variable score.

## Results

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and the zero-order correlation among the study variables. Task conflict is unrelated to team performance ( $r = -.05$ , n.s.). Relationship conflict and team performance have a negatively significant relationship ( $r = -.22$ ,  $p < .05$ ). There is a high correlation coefficient between task conflict and relationship conflict ( $r = .65$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This indicates that task conflict often accompanies relationship conflict in Chinese culture.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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The hypotheses were tested using hierarchical regression analysis (Table 2). The control variables, team scale and team longevity, were entered in the first step. In the second step,

task conflict, relationship conflict, team learning orientation and team performance orientation were entered as independent variables. In the third step, the interaction terms of goal orientation and task conflict and relationship conflict were entered. This was done to test the moderating effect of team goal orientation. The mean-centered variables were used for the main and interaction terms in the regression analysis to reduce multicollinearity (Aiken and West 1991).

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Insert Table 2 about here

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As shown in Model 2, task conflict is not significantly associated with team performance ( $\beta = .15$ , n.s.). Moreover, there is a negative significant relationship between relationship conflict and team performance ( $\beta = -.42$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This supports Hypothesis 1.

Model 3 shows the moderating effect of goal orientation. First, the interaction between task conflict and team learning orientation is significantly positive ( $\beta = .32$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This result support Hypothesis 2a. The interaction between task conflict and team performance orientation is significantly negative ( $\beta = -.48$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and this supports Hypothesis 2b.

Second, the interaction between relationship conflict and team learning orientation is not significant ( $\beta = .07$ , n.s.). The interaction between relationship conflict and team performance orientation is significantly negative ( $\beta = -.25$ ,  $p < .05$ ). These results support Hypothesis 3b but not Hypothesis 3a.

Figure 1 demonstrates the moderating effect of team learning orientation on the relationship between task conflict and team performance. For teams with a high learning orientation, task conflict positively relates to team performance, whereas for teams with low learning orientation, task conflict will reduce team performance. This supports hypothesis 2a.

Figure 2 demonstrates the moderating effect of team performance orientation on relationship between task conflict and team performance. In teams which have a high



performance orientation, task conflict negatively relates to team performance, whereas for low performance orientation teams, task conflict positively relates to team performance. This result supports Hypothesis 2b.

Figure 3 demonstrates the moderating effect of team performance orientation on relationship between relationship conflict and team performance. Higher levels of team performance orientation strengthen the negative relationship between relationship conflict and team performance. This confirms Hypothesis 3b.

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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Insert Figure 2 about here

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## **Discussion**

The study explores the relationship between intrateam conflict and team performance and the moderating effect of team goal orientation on the relationship between conflict and team performance in Taiwan, a Chinese cultural setting.

This study shows a negative association between relationship conflict and team performance. Other studies have also found this (Amason 1996; Jehn 1995, 1997). Relationship conflict limits how much information the team processes. When relationship conflict occurs, team members spend time and energy on interpersonal issues rather than discussing tasks and making decisions (Simons and Peterson 2000). In contrast to relationship conflict, task conflict is not significantly associated with team performance. Teams that experience task conflict make better decisions than those that do not because they achieve a greater cognitive understanding of the focal issue. However, in Chinese culture, the

basis of interpersonal interaction is harmony (Leung 1996, 1997). The quality of team member interaction deteriorates as debates over task issues threaten group harmony. Task conflict acts to both the benefit and detriment of team performance.

Although harmony is the core principle of interpersonal interaction, the current study finds that conflict still can result in effective team work in a Chinese cultural context. Leung et al. (2002) argued that harmony as conflict avoidance is not a main feature of classical Confucianism but a characteristic of the secular version that is associated with cultural collectivism. The classical Confucian view suggests, however, that a harmonious relationship should not be pursued for self-gain or at expense of the more important values of benevolence and righteousness. Under this philosophy, individuals can perform conflict behavior like constructive confrontation, respectful communication, and compatible and mutually beneficial behavior. Recent research also shows that open discussion leads to better problem solving and more positive outcomes in Chinese cultural settings (Tjosvold, Nibler and Wan 2001). The findings of this study confirm such research. Conflict can result in positive team performance under certain conditions.

This study shows team goal orientation is an important moderator in the relationship between conflict and team performance in Chinese culture. For teams with a high learning orientation, task conflict positively relates to team performance, but for low learning orientation teams, task orientation results in low team performance. On the other hand, in teams with a low performance orientation, task conflict positively relates to team performance, but in high performance oriented teams task conflict reduces team performance.

Chinese people are relationship-oriented and the social face concerns play an important role in interpersonal interaction. Previous study has demonstrated that affirmation of social face promotes open-minded exchange and direct discussion in Chinese cultural contexts (Tjosvold et al. 2004). Team members with a high learning orientation subscribe to an incremental theory about their skills, believing in the potential to improve their abilities

(Dweck and Leggett 1988). Criticism from task conflict provides information for self improvement, but does not question their ability (VandeWalle 2003). High learning-oriented team members feel no harm to their social face when they confront disagreement or criticism. Under this situation, team members are prone to open-minded discussion, so they can obtain the benefits from intrateam task conflict. Thus task conflict facilitates the performance of teams with a high learning orientation.

By contrast, team members with a high performance orientation hold to an entity theory about themselves. They believe in fixed abilities and are highly competitive (Dweck and Leggett 1988; VandeWalle 1997). During task conflict individuals perceive disagreement and criticism as having a high ego cost. Individuals conclude that others evaluate their ability as low (Farr et al. 1993; Bobco and Colella 1994). The motive of social face affirmation is not satisfied under this kind of perception. The social norm to perform well and avoid failure in groups in Chinese culture further gives high performance-oriented team members the hope that retrieve their social face during task conflict, because they do not want the negative feedback to reveal their incompetence to other members. Thus in task conflicts the overwhelming desire of performance-oriented team members to win leads to irrational opposition. Team members cannot deal with task conflict with a positive attitude. Hence, task conflict tends to result in negative outcomes in high performance-oriented teams.

These findings show that even though harmony is a dominant principle in interpersonal interactions, Chinese team members may still obtain benefits from task conflict. The key factor appears to be an appropriate composition of team members. By including more team members with high learning orientation and low performance orientation, team members confront task conflict open-mindedly and discuss issues cooperatively. The possibility of disharmony during task conflict can be minimized.

The current study also finds that in high performance-oriented teams relationship conflict harms team performance more seriously, but team learning orientation has no

significant effect on relationship between relationship conflict and team performance. Relationship between team members is pivotal for team work in a Chinese cultural setting (Tjosvold et al. 2005). High performance orientated members also tend to maintain their social-emotional distance from other team members. When there is relationship conflict performance-oriented team members will not try to improve the quality of interaction. Moreover, since performance-oriented individuals are highly competitive, this worsens an already negative outcome even further.

The non-significant moderating effect of team learning orientation does not support hypothesis. One reason could be that although learning-oriented team members will try to improve the exchange relationship to benefit from learning from each other under relationship conflict, the inherently poor relationship resulting from relationship conflict makes open-minded discussion difficult. This finding demonstrates that intimate relationships are a key component of team work in Chinese culture. If severe affective dissension exists among team members, even open-minded learning-oriented team members find it hard to avoid becoming involved.

### ***Practice implications***

This study provides practical insight for structuring teams and stimulating their performance in a Chinese cultural setting. First, relationship conflict negatively relates to team performance. Relationship conflict arouses member anger and anxiety and results in mutual distrust. Since the locus of the conflict is not the task, completion of the work is obstructed. Relationship conflict may have a more detrimental effect on team performance in the relationship-oriented Chinese cultural context. Hence, team managers should attempt to reduce the frequency and the intensity of relationship conflict.

Second, team members' goal orientations have a significant influence on team performance. This offers practical insight for recruiting members. There is a positive

relationship between task conflict and performance in teams with a high learning orientation or a low performance orientation. Innovative, complex, or uncertain tasks may require teams to create multiple ideas to arrive at a deep understanding and high quality decisions. In these circumstances team supervisors may need to use goal orientation disposition as a criterion for selecting team members. Teams with a high learning or low performance orientation can take advantage of task conflict.

Finally, this study considers goal orientation as an individual disposition. However, some researchers propose various interventions to trigger goal orientation states, goal orientation mindsets, and behavioral manifestations (Chen and Mathieu 2008; Kozlowski and Bell 2006). Managers can frame their team members' tasks and discussion towards learning rather than performance goals. In collectivistic cultures, people tend to be other-referenced, concerned about the evaluations of others. In this context, it is imperative for managers to guide team members in perceiving different opinion or criticism as valuable diagnostic information instead of a denial of their abilities. Thus team members will be able to openly share divergent opinions and take advantage of task conflict.

### ***Limitations and future directions for research***

There are a number of limitations to this study. First, a cross-sectional design is employed. This design element limits the ability to make causal assertions about the links between conflict type and team performance. Reverse causality is possible; team performance may affect conflict among team members. This study does not examine the reciprocal nature of these processes. Future research may use a temporally lagged design and collect independent and dependent variables at different times. This offers the opportunity to explain the lines of causality. A better way would be to design a field experiment to establish causality.

A second limitation is the use of self-reported data. This is subject to biases and so may

not be accurate, although recent research suggests that self-reported data are not as limited as commonly expected (Balzer and Sulky 1992; Spector 1994).

Third, some studied variables emerged from the same survey instrument and so common method variance is a potential problem. However, employees completed measures of conflict and goal orientation, while their supervisors completed the measures of team performance. Using different information sources for the independent and dependent measures should reduce the possibility of common method variance.

Fourth, the current study tested the hypothesis using work teams. It is not clear if the results are generalizable to other types of teams. Future research could replicate the current study in the context of different types of teams, such as top management teams.

Fifth, the current study collected empirical data from Taiwan, a Chinese culture setting. Although the theory being explored in this study may apply to Western societies, the cultural characteristics of the sample limit the generalizability of research findings. Future research may investigate the theory in Western cultural context to test the generalizability of findings of this study.

Finally, there is disagreement regarding the dimensionality of performance orientation. VandeWalle (1997) argued that performance orientation should be distinguished into two dimensions: prove goal orientation and avoid goal orientation. Prove goal orientation refers to the desire to prove one's competence and to gain favorable judgments. Avoid goal orientation refers to the desire to avoid the disproving of one's competence and to avoid negative judgments about it. These two different performance orientations may lead to different cognitions and responses toward conflict. The results of conflict would thus vary as a consequence. In Chinese culture, people tend to be other-referenced, concerned about the evaluations of others. To prove individual competence and to avoid disapproval of individual competence are both important in Chinese culture. How these two motivations work during conflict and how they affect the results of conflict are still unclear. Empirical testing of the

different moderating effects of prove and avoid goal orientation, along with investigation of how prove and avoid goal orientation affect the conflict management approaches individuals take in a Chinese cultural context, would be interesting.

## **Conclusions**

The study shows the impact of team composition on the outcomes of task conflict in a Chinese cultural context. Conflict among Chinese team members do not necessary producing a negative effect on team performance, as traditionally conceived. An appropriate composition of team members' goal orientations enables teams to take advantage of task conflict to reach their full potential. Further research can deepen our understanding of how team composition interacts with conflict.

## **Acknowledgements**

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Table 1. Descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients, and correlation coefficients

<i>Variables</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>
1. Team Scale	5.96	2.37							
2. Team longevity	2.81	2.56	.08						
3. Task Conflict	4.23	.56	.05	.03	(.85)				
4. Relationship Conflict	3.61	.73	.02	.04	.65**	(.90)			
5. Learning orientation	5.26	.45	-.01	-.01	.18	.26*	(.90)		
6. Performance Orientation	4.54	.64	-.07	-.01	.02	.20	.30**	(.93)	
7. Team Performance	5.03	.49	-.06	-.07	-.05	-.22*	.34**	.03	(.89)

Note.  $N=92$ . Cronbach's alphas are reported in parentheses on the diagonal.

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

Table 2. Results of regression analyses for team performance

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>
Control variables			
Team Scale	-.05	-.05	.01
Team longevity	-.06	-.05	-.05
Conflict type			
Task conflict (TC)		.15	.17
Relationship conflict (RC)		-.42**	-.36**
Team goal orientation			
Learning orientation (LO)		.43**	.30**
Performance orientation (PO)		-.02	.13
Conflict $\times$ team goal orientation			
TC $\times$ LO			.32*
TC $\times$ PO			-.48**
RC $\times$ LO			.07
RC $\times$ PO			-.25*
$R^2$	.01	.23	.33
$F$	.32	4.24**	4.01**
$\Delta R^2$		.22	.10
$F$		6.16**	3.05*

Note.  $N=92$ . Standardized regression coefficients are reported.

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$



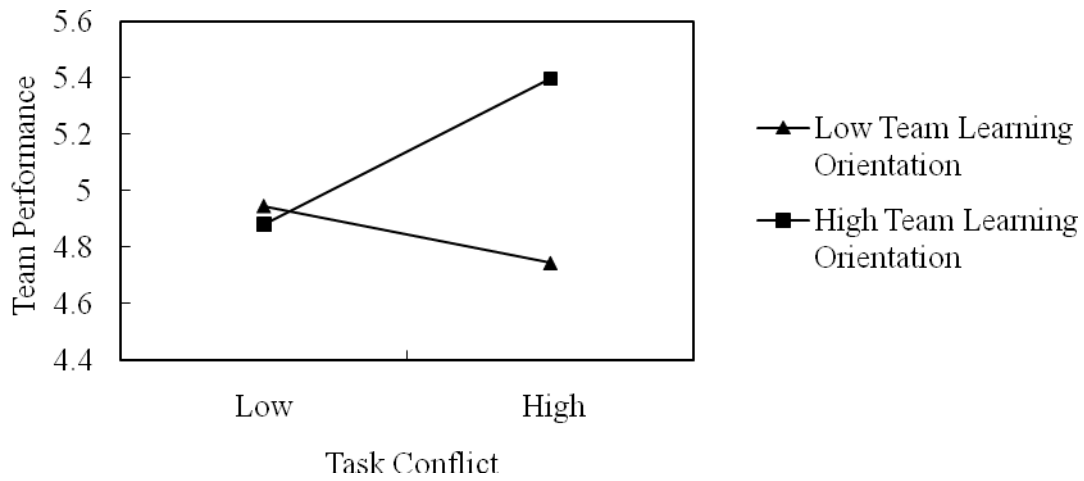


Figure 1. Interaction effect of task conflict and team learning orientation on team performance

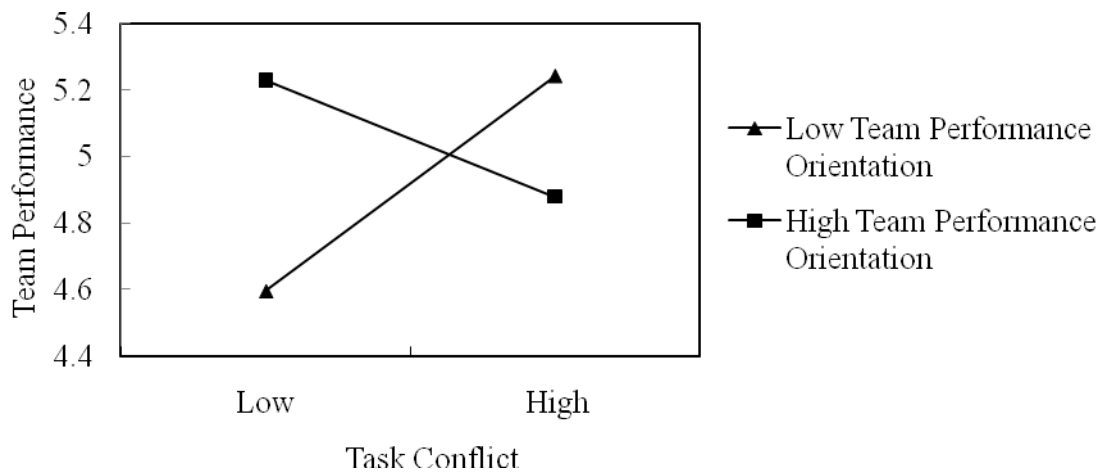


Figure 2. Interaction effect of task conflict and team performance orientation on team performance

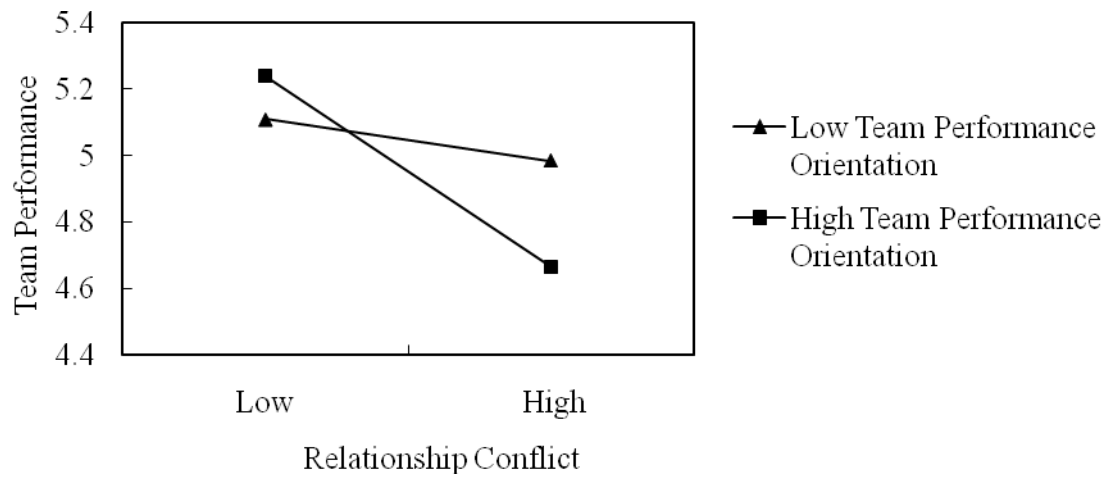


Figure 3. Interaction effect of relationship conflict and team performance orientation on team performance

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# 出席「6th International Strategic Management Conference」報告

報告人：黃家齊

## 一、參加會議經過

會議於 2010 年 7 月 8 日至 10 日於俄羅斯聖彼得堡舉辦，區分 38 個場次進行各項主題的研討。於 7 月 8 日晚間抵達聖彼得堡並入宿旅館，7 月 9 日及 7 月 10 日即赴研討會參與各論文發表場次，並與與會學者進行交流。

其中參與之“Strategic Management in SMEs”場次中，其中一篇發表論文”Female directors and SMEs: An empirical analysis”，探討董事會女性成員的出現、比例及多樣性等與組織績效的關聯性，以及組織特性與董事會女性成員組成的關聯性議題，雖然理論基礎較為缺乏，但卻是相當有趣的研究議題。再如”Business Ethics”場次中，”Adverse selection and moral hazard in outside equity project financing: Evidence from the U. S. motion picture industry”一文，以代理理論觀點，探討美國電影產業中，影響 state financing 的因素，以及 co-financing 對影片品質與獲利的影響，同樣也是相當有趣的研究議題，也引起與會者相當熱烈的討論。

研討會期間個人亦尋求與來自世界各國的學者交流、討論，個人亦感覺受益匪淺，對未來的學術研究工作實有相當的啟發。同時亦藉參與此次研討會之便，與國外合作學者進行了一些研究想法的溝通，因此亦構思了新的研究主題。

## 二、與會心得及建議

參加國際會議可以把個人的研究心得與各國的學者專家交流，擴大思考角度，對於研究品質的提昇確實很有幫助。雖然國內也有不少嚴謹的論文研討會，但在國

際學術會議上發表論文，將更能促使學者更認真、嚴謹地從事研究工作，因為國際會議可能參加者較多且論文品質較高之外，畢竟也還牽涉到一個國家學術水準的問題。由於我國政府與學校都在鼓勵教師加強研究工作，國內學者的研究水準已具國際水準。參加此研討會後讓個人接觸到許多新的觀念與方法，對未來的研究方向亦有所啟發。

### 三、攜回資料

- (一) 大會議程 1 冊。
- (二) 其它會議資料。

無研發成果推廣資料

96 年度專題研究計畫研究成果彙整表

計畫主持人：黃家齊		計畫編號：96-2416-H-004-050-SS3				計畫名稱：目標導向特質對衝突結果、目標設定與績效影響之團隊與個人層次研究	
成果項目		量化			單位	備註（質化說明：如數個計畫共同成果、成果列為該期刊之封面故事...等）	
		實際已達成數（被接受或已發表）	預期總達成數（含實際已達成數）	本計畫實際貢獻百分比			
國內	論文著作	期刊論文	2	2	100%	篇	
		研究報告/技術報告	0	0	100%		
		研討會論文	0	0	100%		
		專書	0	0	100%		
	專利	申請中件數	0	0	100%	件	
		已獲得件數	0	0	100%		
	技術移轉	件數	0	0	100%	件	
		權利金	0	0	100%	千元	
	參與計畫人力（本國籍）	碩士生	0	0	100%	人次	
		博士生	0	0	100%		
		博士後研究員	0	0	100%		
		專任助理	0	0	100%		
國外	論文著作	期刊論文	0	0	100%	篇	
		研究報告/技術報告	0	0	100%		
		研討會論文	0	0	100%		
		專書	0	0	100%	章/本	
	專利	申請中件數	0	0	100%	件	
		已獲得件數	0	0	100%		
	技術移轉	件數	0	0	100%	件	
		權利金	0	0	100%	千元	
	參與計畫人力（外國籍）	碩士生	0	0	100%	人次	
		博士生	0	0	100%		
		博士後研究員	0	0	100%		
		專任助理	0	0	100%		

<p style="text-align: center;">其他成果</p> <p>(無法以量化表達之成果如辦理學術活動、獲得獎項、重要國際合作、研究成果國際影響力及其他協助產業技術發展之具體效益事項等，請以文字敘述填列。)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">無</p>
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	成果項目	量化	名稱或內容性質簡述
科 教 處 計 畫 加 填 項 目	測驗工具(含質性與量性)	0	
	課程/模組	0	
	電腦及網路系統或工具	0	
	教材	0	
	舉辦之活動/競賽	0	
	研討會/工作坊	0	
	電子報、網站	0	
	計畫成果推廣之參與(閱聽)人數	0	





## 國科會補助專題研究計畫成果報告自評表

請就研究內容與原計畫相符程度、達成預期目標情況、研究成果之學術或應用價值（簡要敘述成果所代表之意義、價值、影響或進一步發展之可能性）、是否適合在學術期刊發表或申請專利、主要發現或其他有關價值等，作一綜合評估。

1. 請就研究內容與原計畫相符程度、達成預期目標情況作一綜合評估

達成目標

未達成目標（請說明，以 100 字為限）

實驗失敗

因故實驗中斷

其他原因

說明：

2. 研究成果在學術期刊發表或申請專利等情形：

論文： 已發表  未發表之文稿  撰寫中  無

專利： 已獲得  申請中  無

技轉： 已技轉  洽談中  無

其他：（以 100 字為限）

3. 請依學術成就、技術創新、社會影響等方面，評估研究成果之學術或應用價值（簡要敘述成果所代表之意義、價值、影響或進一步發展之可能性）（以 500 字為限）