Relationship Conflict and Affect States of theEmployees: Role of Perceived Relationship Conflict Importance

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Abstract
    This paper empirically tries to establish the relationship between relationship conflicts at the work place and affect states of the individual. Relationship conflict at workplace is detrimental to individuals, groups and organisations. Relationship conflict has various individual and organisational level outcomes. Affect states of the individual can influence various individual behaviours. Researches in the conflict domain have considered conflict as a rational process and avoided affect related variables. Hence, this study tries to fill this gap. Standard questionnaires were used for data collection. Data have been collected from 140 IT engineers working in Kerala. Simple linear regression and moderation regression analysis were used for analysis. The result revealed that there is no significant relationship between relationship conflict and positive affect. However, there exists significant relationship between relationship conflict and negative affect. To understand the role of perceived relationship conflict importance moderation regression analysis was done. The analysis proved the moderating role of perceived relationship conflict importance in the relationship conflict – negative affect relationship. Thus the study has proved relationship conflict can increase the negative affect and perceiving relationship conflict as important can increase the negative affect of the individual and vice versa. The studyhas also proved relationship conflict does not create positive affect in individual. Hence, to reduce the negative impact of relationship conflict HR managers should avoid the number of individuals involving in conflict situation.

Keywords: *Relationship conflict, positive affect, negative affect relationship conflict importance*

I.   INTRODUCTION

    Organisations are conflict ridden and conflict free organisations have never existed. Modern workplaces are composed of employees from different culture, life style, status, religion and personality, hence when they work together tensions, antagonism, negative attitudes arises leading to conflict between employees. Conflict is present in interpersonal relations(Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993), in intragroup and intergroup relations(Jehn, 1995), in strategic decision-making(Amason, 1996) and other organizational episodes. As many authors have pointed out(De Dreu & de Vliert, 1997; Pondy, 1967) conflict is a phenomenon that may give rise to both beneficial and dysfunctional effects on individuals, groups and organizations. Conflict difficulties communications between individuals, breaks personal and professional relationships, and reduces effectiveness, because it produces tension and distracts team members from performing the task (Hackman & Morris, 1975; Wall & Callister, 1995). Thus, it is no surprise that today's managers and employees still overwhelmingly view conflict as negative and something to be avoided or resolved as soon as possible. Research by Jehn, (1994, 1995), provides evidence that this double-edged effect is attributable to different dimensions of conflict. Research has shown conflict to be multidimensional (Amason, 1996; Janssen, Van De Vliert, & Veenstra, 1999; Jehn, 1995).Jehn (1995) distinguished between two kinds of intragroup conflict: task conflict and relationship conflict. Task conflict is a perception of disagreement among group members or individuals about the content of their decisions, and involves differences in viewpoints, ideas and opinions. Examples of task conflict are conflicts about the distribution of resources, about procedures or guidelines, and about the interpretation of facts. Relationship conflict is a awareness of interpersonal inaptness, and includes annoyance and animosity among individuals. Examples of relationship conflict are disagreements about values, personal or family norms, or about personal taste.

    Research related to conflict and conflict management have considered conflict as a pure rational process and avoided affect related variables in their domain. Affect states of the individual can play a crucial role how an individual perceives the situation and acts in various situations. Positive and Negative Affect are two independent dimensions. Positive Affect refers to the extent to which an individual experiences positive emotional states such as joy, interest, confidence and alertness. Negative

Affect refers to the extent to which an individual experiences negative emotional states such as fear, sadness, anger, guilt, contempt and disgust (Snyder & Lopez, 2002).

The impact of relationship conflict on affect states of the individual need to be understood for applied and theoretical reasons as affect states influences individual's perception and behaviour. Various situational and dispositional factors can influence the relationship between relationship conflict and affect states.One such variable that could probably influence the relationship between relationship conflicts and affect states of the individual is perceived conflict importance. Relationship conflict which is perceived as more important can have more negative impact than a conflict which is perceived as less important. Hence this study investigates the relationship between relationship conflict at workplace and affect states of the individual and the role of perceived conflict importance.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A substantial body of research demonstrates the significance of positive inter- personal relationships for healthy human functioning(Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Fyson, 1999; Royal & Rossi, 1996)   . Relationships are a major source of happiness and a buffer against stress(McCarthy, Pretty, & Catano, 1990).Through relationships, individuals receive instrumental help for tasks and challenges, emotional support in their daily lives, and companionship in shared activities(Argyle & Furnham, 1983; Gutman, Sameroff, & Eccles, 2002). Conversely, the loss of relationship is a source of unhappiness and distress. Interpersonal relationships are also important for social and emotional development (Kelly & Hansen, 1987; Lonczak et al., 2001).Hence   relationship conflict arising out of different reasons negatively affect the existing harmony among the employees and adversely affect the interpersonal relationships.Relationship conflict, the perception of personal animosities and incompatibility, may be described as the shadow of task conflict. Research on relationship conflict has a long history in the literature dating from the earliest studies of conflict(Deutsch, 1969; Evan, 1965; Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999; Lehmann-Willenbrock, Grohmann, & Kauffeld, 2011). These studies have found out the negative effects of relationship conflict on group satisfaction and commitment. Relationship conflict limits group members' cognitive functioning by increasing their stress and anxiety levels (Jehn & Mannix, 2001; Staw, Sandelands, & Dutton, 1981). Relationship conflicts have generally been found to have negative influence both on proximal and distal group outcomes(Amason, 1996; Jehn, 1995). Disagreements about personal issues heighten

member anxiety(Dijkstra, Dierendonck, Evers, & Dreu, 2005)and often represent ego threats because the issues central to these conflicts are strongly intertwined with the self-concept. Relationship conflict usually hurts team and individual functioning(Amason, 1996; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Simons & Peterson, 2000). Relationship conflict is especially associated with anger, tension and other negative emotional states. Relationship conflict takes place in the work place due to individual and social differences. Research in the domain of interpersonal conflict at work across culture and context proved that relationship conflict is detrimental for individual as well as organisations. Relationship conflict is exhibited by animosity, arguments, enmity and lack of trust(Evan, 1965). Relationship conflict reduce respect among group members and involves tension and rejection; thus, it affects the feeling of belonging to a group   and maintaining good interpersonal relationships(Baumeister& Leary, 1995; De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008) Relationship conflict reduces the group cohesion and increases antagonism and tensions between the group members. Relationship conflict prevents the information sharing between the employees and they view each other suspiciously. Relationship conflict reduces the collective effort towards the goal. It deviate the group's focus away from the goal. At the individual level it reduces the commitment towards the group and organisation and reduces his/ her interest towards the work and in turn increases absenteeism and counterproductive work behaviours. It also increases tension, anxiety and affective reactions (Staw et al., 1981). Relationship conflict is considered as a stressor, which can reduce the self esteem and social esteem and can reduce the well being(Semmer, Jacobshagen, Meier, & Elfering, 2007). Relationship conflict naturally tends to increase the negative emotions and moods. Hence the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Relationship conflict is positively related to negative affect than positive affect.

III. ROLE OF CONFLICT IMPORTANCE

The impact of conflict types on individuals differ from individuals to individuals. Employees working in same organisations have reported the outcomes of conflict differently.   The studies addressing the influence of conflict on employees have reported the role of various dispositional and situational factors that influences the relationship. Personality trait is a moderator that influences relationship between conflict and various outcomes. In this study we investigate the role of perceived conflict importance in the relationship between interpersonal conflict types and affect sates of the individual. Jehn(1997) proposes the dimension of conflict importance to refer to the size or intensity of the conflict to those involved and expects that a conflict which is perceived as very important will

have more negative influence than a conflict which is perceived as less important. So, perceived conflict importance can have a moderating role in the relationship between relationship conflict and affect states of the individual. Hence we propose the following hypotheses:

H3. Perceivedrelationship conflict importance moderates the relationship between relationship conflict and positive affect state of the individual.

H4: Perceived relationship conflict importance moderates the relationship between relationship conflict and negative affect state of the individual.
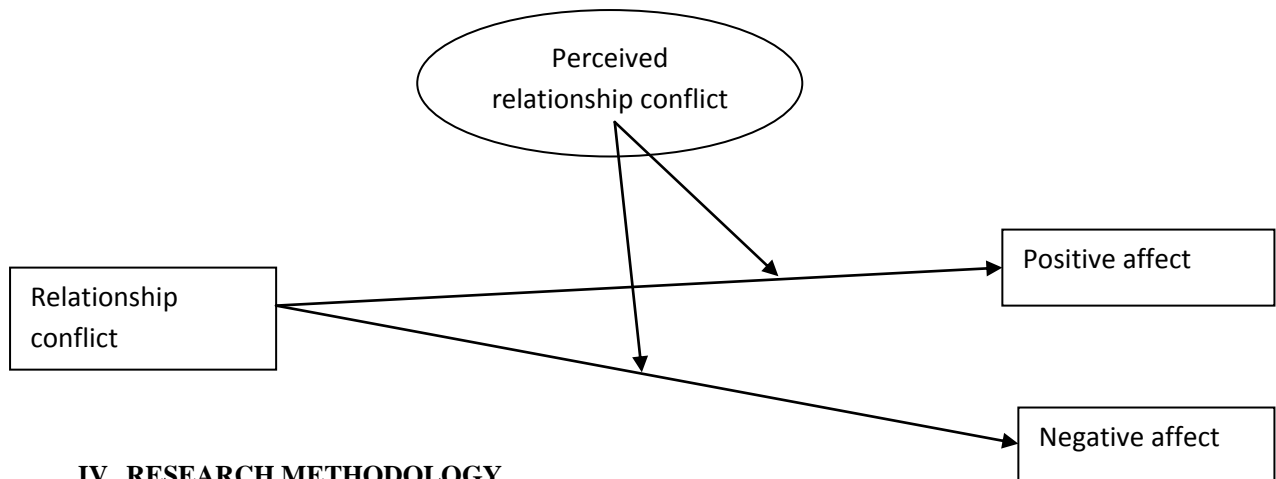
IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Sample*:* The sample consists of 140 it engineers working in organisations with more than 200 employees. Total of 200 questionnaires were distributed and received back 148 questionnaires. 8 questionnaires were removed due to various reasons.

B.Measures

1) Relationship conflict: is measured using a subscale from extended intragroup conflict scale(Jehn, Greer, Levine, & Szulanski, 2008). The scale consists of 4 items. Respondents were asked to rate the occurrence of relationship conflict using a five point likert scale. The five point likert scale consists of never, very little, some, quite a bit and very much.

2) Perceived relationship conflict importance: is measured using a subscale from extended intra group conflict scale(Jehn et al., 2008). The scale consists of 3 items and participants were asked to report the perception of relationship conflict importance on a five point likert scale.

3) Affect states of the individual: The affect states of the individual is measured using Positive Affect and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson, Clark, &

Tellegan, 1988). The scale consists of 20 adjectives, 10 items each for positive affect and negative affect. Participants were asked to rate to what extent they felt each of the following in a five point Likert type scale when they were in conflict. The measures are 1=very slightly, 2= A little,3 = Moderately,4= Quite a Bit.,5= Extremely at all.

4) Demographic variables: Socio demographic details of the participants were collected to analyse whether there is any difference across these variables. The socio demographic information collected includes *age, gender, marital status, designation, religion, academic qualification, work experience and annual income.*

5) Data Analysis and Discussion: To test the hypothesis of this study simple linear regression analysis and Moderation Regression Analysis is used (MRA).The data set have been verified to full fill the assumptions to perform the regression analysis. Reliability of the scales is also established. Descriptive statistics and inter-correlations are presented in Table 1 below. Further, hypotheses analysis is carried out using statistical packages for social sciences (SPSS-Version 20).

Table 1: Means, standard deviations, and inter correlations among variables

	M	SD	1	2	3	4
Positive Affect	3.14	.84	-			
Negative Affect	2.31	.75	.19*	-		
Relationship Conflict	2.43	1.04	.12	.65**	-	

Relationship Conflict Importance	3.39	.92	.17*	.18*	.21*	-

Note. n = 143. * p<.05.**p<.01.

The regression analysis is shown in table 2. The result shows that relationship conflict at work place is positively related to negative affect alone. Since the p value of positive affect is is insignificant it shows that relationship conflict at work place increases the negative affect only. Hence the first hypothesis is accepted. Therefore positive affect is eliminated from further analysis.

In line with previous research relationship conflict is a negative stimulus capable enough to stimulate the negative affect states of the individual. Relationship conflict is a negative event which can negatively affect the employees in organisation. Hence, the occurrence of relationship conflict should be reduced.

Table 2: Regression Analysis

	Positive Affect Model 1		Negative Affect Model 2	
	β	**P**	**β**	**ρ**
Relationship Conflict	.02	Ns	.65	<0.0001
R^2	.014		.42	
Adjusted R^2	.007	Ns	.42	<0.0001

V. MODERATION ANALYSIS

To test the role of perceived conflict importance in the relationship between relationship conflicts and affect states of the individual, a moderation regression analysis was conducted. The results are shown in table three. Centering of interaction term is done to avoid the problem of multi collinearity(Aiken, West, & Reno, 1991).As stated earlier the positive affect is eliminated from moderation analysis as there is no significant relationship between relationship conflict and positive affect. Hence, the role of perceived relationship conflict importance is analysed on relationship conflict and negative affect. The results are shown in table 3 below.

Table 3: Moderation Analysis of Relationship Conflict Importance

	Negative affect	
	B	**ρ**
Relationship Conflict	.61	<.01***
Relationship Conflict Importance (RCI)	.07	.24
Relationship Conflict*RCI	.14	< .05**
Adjusted R^2	.43	
Incremental F	37.13	<.01***

** P < 0.05. *** P < 0.01

The results of moderation regression analysis shows that perceived conflict importance has an interaction role in the relationship between relationship conflict and negative affect $\Delta R^2=.44, \Delta F(3,139)=37.13, \rho=<.01, =.14, t(139)=2.2 \rho=<.05$. This implies that a conflict which is perceived as more important increases the negative affect than a relationship conflict which is perceived as less important. This could probably the reason for the differential effect of relationship conflict on individuals.

The study established the influence of relationship conflict on affect states of the individual. Previous research in the conflict domain has established the negative impact of relationship conflict on individual. However, influence of relationship conflict on affect states of the individual have been neglected for long time. It is understood that relationship conflict evokes negative affect states of the individual and does not increases positive affect states. Involving in conflict increasesanxiety, depression and other negative emotions of an

individual. The study also proved the importance of moderating role of perceived relationship conflict in the relationship between these two variables. This could be one of the variables among different variables which explain the differential effect of conflict on individuals.The importance an individual gives for a conflict episode influences the impact of relationship conflict on negative affect. Since negative affect can influence the cognition and behaviour of individuals and organisations should take steps to reduce perception of conflict as important.

VI. CONCLUSION

The research in the domain of conflict literature have ignored affect related variables and emphasised on rational aspect. This study extended the conflict literature to the affect domain. Hence, further research is needed to understand how negative affect due to relationship conflict influences the individual. Also research should link the affect states to the conflict management domain also.

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