

A gift that takes its toll: Emotion recognition and conflict appraisal

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Individuals' attributions about conflict influence their behaviour: Appraising conflict as relationship oriented rather than task oriented increases individuals' likelihood to engage in conflict-escalating behaviour. This study analysed to what extent emotion recognition influences people's conflict appraisal in teams. Seventy individuals assigned to teams reported on their team conflicts once a week over the course of 2.5 months. The results show that team members high in emotion recognition tend to make more relationship-oriented conflict attributions. At the same time, they make less task-oriented conflict attributions. This tendency to relationship-oriented attributions was moderated by team-level agreeableness and extraversion: Individuals high in emotion recognition perceived more relationship conflict the lower the average level of agreeableness and extraversion in their teams.

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Emotion recognition is considered a precondition for successful social interactions, as recognizing others' emotions is necessary to adjust one's behaviour and manage their emotions (Elfenbein, Marsh, & Ambady, 2002; Riggio, 2001; Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Sanchez-Burks & Huy, 2009). Therefore, it may be crucial for effective teamwork. Indeed, the idea that those who are better able to recognize the emotions of their fellow team

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members are more successful in managing interactions within the team is intuitively appealing. If true, emotion recognition should have especially beneficial effects when “the going gets tough”, that is, in the occurrence of conflict in the team.

45 Team members are in conflict if at least one of them perceives subjectively significant differences between him or herself and the other party (Thomas, 1992). These differences can relate to various aspects of a work team’s task or they may concern the relationship between team members. Task conflict concerns substantive issues (such as differences of opinion or ideas about the correct way to approach a task or solve a problem), whereas relationship conflict concerns socioemotional or interpersonal disagreements (e.g., 50 Amason & Sapienza, 1997; de Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jehn, 1997). In general, the occurrence of conflict has been found to be negatively related to team member satisfaction and team performance (de Dreu & Weingart, 2003). Moreover, conflict is strongly related to psychological strain and turnover (Dijkstra, van Dierendonck, & Evers, 2005; Spector & Jex, 1998). As teams have become an important building block of organizations (Guzzo & Dickson, 1996; Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006), it is clear that organizations should try to mitigate negative effects, for instance by staffing teams with employees who are good at conflict management. Emotion recognition may be critical for successful conflict management, as accurately recognizing the affective state of team members in conflict appears necessary for constructively managing them. Besides their emotional skills, conflict management is also dependent on people’s appraisal of conflict: Whether 65 people evaluate conflict as task- or relationship-oriented affects their subsequent behaviour (de Dreu et al., 1999; de Dreu & van Vianen, 2001). Notably, however, there is no objective answer as to the question if conflicts are task related or relationship oriented. Instead, it depends in large part on the evaluation of the conflict parties involved (Bono et al., 2002). When 70 appraising conflict, individuals dispositionally vary in their tendency to focus either on the task aspects or socio-emotional aspects of a dispute (Bono, Boles, Judge, & Lauver, 2002). It is unclear to date which, if any, focus individuals with high emotion recognition ability adopt when appraising conflict. It is known, however, that relationship conflicts are 75 more disruptive to team functioning (de Dreu et al., 1999; de Dreu & van Vianen, 2001; Druckman & Zechmeister, 1973), and relate to more dissatisfaction among team members than task conflicts because they are more difficult to solve (de Dreu et al., 1999; de Dreu & Weingart, 2003). 80 Given this, it would be more beneficial if team members focused on the task-related aspects of conflict rather than on the relationship-related components. We will show that team members with high emotion recognition more strongly concentrate on the relationship-aspects of conflict. Our results further show that individuals’ bias towards focusing on the relationship

dimension of a conflict when their emotion recognition is high is moderated by team members' personality characteristics. 85

Next, we discuss the constructs of conflict and emotion recognition and develop hypotheses regarding the effects of emotion recognition on conflict perceptions. Then we present the results of a study of project teams collaborating over the course of 2.5 months. 90

CONFLICT

Conflicts refer to tensions between individuals due to real or perceived differences (Thomas, 1992). According to Jehn (1995), relationship conflict is often associated with feelings of annoyance and animosity. Moreover, in relationship conflict, the cause of conflict is attributed to the conflict partner or the relationship between the partners, as opposed to the situational attributions made in task conflict (Bono et al., 2002). In contrast, task conflict has been argued to be beneficial to team effectiveness (Jehn, 1995, 1997). Meta-analytical findings have demonstrated that especially relationship conflict is strongly negatively related to team member satisfaction and team performance (de Dreu & Weingart, 2003). More than task conflicts, they threaten personal identity and individuals' self-worth (Pelled, 1996). Moreover, whereas task and relationship conflicts across the board relate to lower team performance (de Dreu & Weingart, 2003), for task conflict, these negative effects can be mitigated, for example by high trust among team members. This is not the case for relationship conflict, which is unequivocally detrimental for teams (de Dreu & Weingart, 2003). Task conflict is also less detrimental, or even beneficial, to team performance when tasks are complex and nonroutine, provided that conflict parties do not avoid conflict but make efforts for cooperation and problem solving (Behfar, Peterson, Mannix, & Trochim, 2008; Jehn, 1995, 1997; Simons & Peterson, 1999; Tjosvold, 1998). Notably, the positive effects of task conflict on team performance are dependent on the amount of relationship conflict within teams. Only when relationship conflict is low, task conflict may lead to higher team performance; however, when relationship conflict is high, the effects are vice versa and task conflict results in lower team performance (Shaw et al., 2011). 95
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It has been noted that in reality, conflicts often contain a mix of task- and relationship issues (de Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jehn, 1995). Therefore, conflicts are rarely exclusively task or relationship oriented. Instead, their nature depends on whether individuals more strongly focus on the task-related or relationship-oriented aspects. Previous research has identified individuals' dispositions as a significant source of conflict attributions. For example, individuals with high agreeableness tend to infer significantly less relationship conflicts than individuals low in agreeableness, irrespective of 115
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contextual parameters that might influence their conflict appraisal (Bono et al., 2002). Likewise, individuals with high neuroticism report more conflicts in general (Bono et al., 2002). Apparently individuals have
130 dispositional tendencies in the attributions they make about their conflict experiences across time, partners, and situations.

EMOTION RECOGNITION

We propose that individual variation in emotion recognition also shapes
135 conflict appraisals. Empirical findings support the idea of emotion recognition as a cognitive ability, which is neither redundant to abstract intelligence nor to dispositional variables like emotional stability or extraversion (Davies, Stankov, & Roberts, 1998). Research has accumulated
140 a series of effects of emotion recognition in various contexts, including work: It has been positively related to transformational leadership (Rubin, Munz, & Bommer, 2005), higher performance ratings (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002), organization citizenship behaviour, salary increases, and negotiation outcomes (Coté & Miners, 2006; Day & Carroll, 2004; Elfenbein, Foo,
145 White, Tan, & Aik, 2007; Lam & Kirby, 2002; Lopes, Grewal, Kadis, Gall, & Salovey, 2006; Mueller & Curham, 2006; Rosete & Ciarrochi, 2005). However, not all of these effects were positive. For example, individuals who were highly skilled at recognizing others' negative emotions received lower performance ratings than individuals whose emotion recognition pertained
150 to detecting others' positive emotions (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002); thus, recognizing others' negative emotions was to their disadvantage. Elfenbein and Ambady (2002) argued that perceiving others' negative emotions might disrupt the smooth course of interactions because the senders' negative emotions are often directed against the receivers of their negative emotions.
155 It might be that receivers high in emotion recognition feel personally attacked and alter their behaviour disfavouredly when perceiving others' negative emotions. In other words, being able to recognize others' emotions might cause individuals to respond in a negative way when the emotions they perceive are negative. In turn, reactions of those who sent the
160 negative emotions might include lower appraisals of perceptive receivers' performance.

To recap, emotion recognition makes individuals more susceptible to nonverbal emotional information sent by interaction partners. Previous
165 research has shown that people more heavily rely on senders' nonverbal signals like facial expressions, posture, and tone of voice to infer senders' attitudes (Mehrabian & Ferris, 1967). Thus, when receivers are in doubt about the senders' attitudes towards the receivers, it seems likely that they will more heavily weigh the senders' emotional signals than verbal contents of their information. The emotional tone of others' communicative acts will

decide how receivers evaluate the factual aspects of their communication. Transferring these findings to team conflict, we reasoned that because of their higher sensitivity, team members with high emotion recognition will perceive more affective dynamics, including friction and tension between team members. Furthermore, when perceiving tension—which often contains both task and affective components—it will affect their evaluation of the situation giving rise to these emotions. Consequently, when there are disagreements within teams, team members high in emotion recognition should less likely focus on differences in opinion about the task and more likely describe them as emotional and relationship-oriented disputes. That is, people high in emotion recognition ability should be more likely to perceive and label disagreements as relationship conflicts rather than task conflicts. Hence:

Hypothesis 1a. Emotion recognition is positively related to appraising conflicts as relationship oriented.

Hypothesis 1b. Emotion recognition is negatively related to appraising conflicts as task oriented.

THE MODERATING ROLE OF TEAM PERSONALITY

Whereas emotion recognition promotes individuals' awareness of emotions, dispositions shape both the valence of emotions they experience over time and their emotional expressiveness (Costa & McCrae, 1992; McCrae & Costa, 1989). Team members, for example, will vary as to their likelihood to experience negative emotions and to voice them, which will affect prevalence of conflict within teams and team members' evaluation of team climate (e.g., Barry & Stewart, 1997). Thus, teams composed of members with certain personality characteristics should be more likely to experience negative emotions than teams composed of members with other characteristics, and this should influence the occurrence of conflict. To analyse the interplay between team members' dispositions and conflict attributions as reported by team members high in emotion recognition ability, we turned to the Five Factor Model of Personality (Costa & McCrae, 1992), given the consensus among personality researchers that this is a parsimonious yet comprehensive taxonomy of personality (Wiggins & Trapnell, 1997). Two of these five factors—agreeableness and extraversion—appear especially relevant in terms of relationship conflict, as they relate to individuals' interpersonal behaviour (McCrae & Costa, 1989).

Individuals scoring high on agreeableness are described as warm, caring, altruistic, and cooperative (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Agreeable individuals place great value on maintaining harmonious relationships, whereas low

agreeableness has been linked to provoking more conflict (Graziano, Jensen-Campbell, & Hair, 1996). These findings lead to the notion that agreeableness is the factor among the Five Factor Model most strongly concerned with interpersonal relationships (Bono et al., 2002). Accordingly, teams comprised of members who are on average low in agreeableness are likely to experience more relationship conflict than teams with members who on average are high in agreeableness. We predicted team members high in emotion recognition to be more likely to appraise disagreements among team members as relationship conflicts. Based on our reasoning, we anticipated that this effect should be pronounced in teams with low levels of agreeableness, in which relationship conflict may be particularly prevalent. Furthermore, as we anticipated that emotion recognition negatively affects individuals' attention to task-related aspects of conflict, emotion recognition should relate to perceiving less task conflict particularly in teams with low levels of agreeableness. Thus:

Hypothesis 2. Team-level agreeableness moderates the relationship between individuals' emotion recognition and individuals' conflict attributions, such that in teams with low agreeableness, individuals high in emotion recognition perceive more relationship conflict and less task conflict.

Individuals scoring high on extraversion are described as positive, active, energetic, and sociable (Costa & McCrae, 1992). In general, they are interested in others and enjoy their company. Valuing interpersonal relationships is what extraversion has in common with agreeableness. As the latter, it relates to emotional warmth, affiliation, and affection for others (Watson & Clark, 1997). These attributes suggest that extraversion be negatively related to conflict, but other components of extraversion blur the picture, as extraversion also relates to more activeness and dominance (Costa & McCrae, 1992). These attributes suggest that extraversion might associate with more conflict. In student roommate dyads, dyad-level of extraversion was positively related to dyad members' perception of relationship conflict (Bono et al., 2002). However, in work teams, team-level extraversion was neither related to open communication nor cohesion, whereas one would expect negative relationships if extraversion consistently provoked conflict (Barry & Stewart, 1997). Summarizing these findings, extant hints to aggravating effects of extraversion on conflict are inconclusive, especially in work-related contexts. We assume that in newly formed teams, however, team climate will benefit rather than suffer from team members high in extraversion because team members will build

rapport more easily, which, in turn, should foster team collaboration. We therefore expect individuals high in emotion recognition to experience more relationship conflict when the team level of extraversion is low. In line with our previous reasoning, we expect the perception of more relationship conflict to concur with perceiving less task conflict. Therefore, we formally predict: 260

Hypothesis 3. Team-level extraversion moderates the relationship between individual emotion recognition and individuals' conflict attributions, such that in teams with low extraversion, individuals high in emotion recognition perceive more relationship conflict and less task conflict. 265

Summarizing, we suggest that emotion recognition relate to appraising conflicts as relationship oriented instead of task oriented. Moreover, we hypothesize that this effect is moderated by team members' personality. Specifically, we suggest that emotion recognition relate to perceiving more relationship conflict in teams with low levels of agreeableness and extraversion. 270

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METHOD

Participants and procedure

Seventy Dutch university students participated in this study. Mean age was 22.7 years ($SD = 3.6$). For an obligatory study project, students were assigned to 22 self-managing teams working on creative problem-solving tasks (McGrath, 1984) over the course of a 10-week period. The project trained students on developing scientific solutions to applied problems and aimed to enhance their skills regarding teamwork. Teams interacted face-to-face at least once a week and independently coordinated their work process. If task- or team-related problems arose, each team could address a supervisor who was member of the university teaching board. Teams comprised four to six students. As students participated voluntarily in this research, the size of teams participating varied between two and six ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 1.86$). For participation, each student received a personality profile based on their data in the initial questionnaire; additionally, three prizes of 50 € each were raffled among participants at the end of the study. At the official kick-off meeting of the project, before students were assigned to teams, they filled in an online questionnaire on their emotion recognition ability and several other personality measures. Following on from this initial assessment, at the beginning of each week, each participant 280

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300 received an email including a personalized link to an online form which he
 or she was asked to fill in immediately after the pending team meeting. In
 this form, participants commented on their perception of team conflict and
 their conflict management behaviour. If students did not submit the
 questionnaire by the middle of the week, they were sent a first reminder
 305 email; if they did not respond, they received an additional one at the end of
 the week.

Measures

310 *Emotion recognition.* This was measured with the Diagnostic Analysis of
 Nonverbal Accuracy (DANVA) test (Nowicki & Duke, 1994). Specifically,
 the subtest for judging facial expressions was used. The DANVA has been
 shown to be a reliable and valid measure (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002).
 Twenty-four photographs showed adult faces displaying happiness, anger,
 315 fear, or sadness in high or low intensity. Responses were judged as right (1)
 or wrong (0). Internal consistency ($\alpha = .61$) was somewhat lower than
 ⑦ reported in the manual ($\alpha = .78$; Nowicki & Duke, 2001) but comparable to
 ① other findings (e.g., Bechtoldt, Rohrman, de Pater, & Beersma, in press).
 In general, it is less clear how the internal consistency found in this study
 320 compares to other findings in work-related contexts: Previous studies that
 applied the DANVA in work-related settings did not report any reliability
 coefficients (e.g., Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002; Rubin, Munz, & Bommer,
 2005).

325 *Agreeableness and extraversion.* These were measured with Saucier's
 Mini-Markers (Saucier, 1994). Participants rated eight adjectives per trait,
 e.g., warm, kind (agreeableness; $\alpha = .68$) and active, talkative (extraversion;
 $\alpha = .81$). They indicated to what extent these adjectives adequately described
 their personality (1 = "not at all" to 5 = "very much").

330 *Relationship conflict.* This was measured with three items deriving from
 Jehn (1995): "There was tension among team members", "There was a lot of
 emotional conflict among team members", and "There was a lot of friction
 among team members" (1 = "not at all" to 5 = "very much"). Cronbach's
 335 alpha of average scores across 10 weeks was .96.

Task conflict. This was measured with three items that derived from
 Jehn (1995): "We argued about task-related issues", "We engaged in debate
 about task related ideas", and "We argued about team member actions that
 340 are related to the task" (1 = "not at all" to 5 = "very much"). Cronbach's
 alpha of average scores across 10 weeks was .85.

RESULTS

Given that individuals were grouped in teams, hypotheses were tested with multilevel analyses (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). For testing the hypotheses, we set up two-level models that on Level 1 included individual team members' emotion recognition as the independent variable and conflict appraisal as the dependent variable. As response rates per week varied between 87.0% (Week 1) and 29.6% (Week 10), we aggregated individuals' conflict appraisal scores across weeks and entered it as the dependent variable on Level 1. 345

For analysing Hypotheses 2 and 3, team-level scores of agreeableness or extraversion were added on Level 2. When individual team member characteristics are used to build team-level predictors, they must be aggregated (Neuman & Wright, 1999). The strategy how to aggregate personality variables should vary depending on the type of task (Barrick, Stewart, Neubert, & Mount, 1998; LePine, Hollenbeck, Ilgen, & Hedlund, 1997; Moynihan & Peterson, 2001). Specifically, in case of additive tasks (Steiner, 1972), team-level personality is adequately operationalized as the group's mean in the personality variable under scrutiny. Additive tasks require the input of each team member, and team performance is a function of team members' joint efforts. This is contrary to both disjunctive and conjunctive tasks. Whereas in case of disjunctive tasks (e.g., cognitive problem solving) team performance is solely dependent on the team member who scores highest on a certain disposition (e.g., intelligence), team performance in conjunctive tasks (e.g., a team of mountain climbers) is dependent on the weakest member. Group tasks in this study were additive, given that all group members had to contribute to the group's outcome but could compensate for each others' differences in capability and engagement. Thus, we followed an additive model in aggregating the personality data (Chan, 1998) and entered group mean scores of agreeableness and extraversion on Level 2.¹ 355 360 365 370

Before testing interactions between team-level personality and individual emotion recognition, the main effects of mean team-level personality were entered into the equation on Level 2. It has been suggested that besides the mean levels, one should also control the effects of personality dispersion 375

¹These group-mean scores also included the scores of the individual team members whose conflict appraisals were analysed. We did not exclude these individuals from computing the group-mean score, as each team member who is exposed to the climate created by team members' personality also contributes to creating it. For example, one may think of gender effects: Women feel more committed to female-dominated teams than to male-dominated teams (Chatman & O'Reilly). The woman whose team commitment is analysed, however, may be crucial for if women or men are in the majority. Thus, this woman both contributes to the degree of "femaleness" in her team and at the same time is affected by it. 380

385 within teams (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000). Thus, we also included the
 standard deviations of agreeableness and extraversion on the team level. As
 they did not have any effects in the analyses, these results are not reported
 any further. Emotion recognition on Level 1 was group-mean centred.
 390 Group-mean centring removes any between-group variance, resulting in
 coefficients that purely reflect individual variance in conflict appraisal
 (Hofmann, Griffin, & Gavin, 2000). Analyses were performed with HLM 6
 (Raudenbush, Bryk, Cheong, & Congdon, 2000).

395 Table 1 displays descriptive statistics and intercorrelations between
 variables. Emotion recognition ability did not correlate with personality or
 conflict measures. Task conflict was significantly related to relationship
 conflict. The magnitude of this correlation was consistent with meta-
 analytical findings pertaining to teams working on complex tasks (de Dreu
 & Weingart, 2003).

400 Hypothesis 1 predicted that individuals high in emotion recognition
 report more team relationship conflict (H1a) and less task conflict (H1b). As
 predicted, including emotion recognition on Level 1—while controlling for
 team membership on Level 2—yielded a positive main effect of emotion
 recognition on perceiving relationship conflict, $b = .22$, $t = 3.12$, $p < .01$.
 405 Also as expected, there was a negative main effect of emotion recognition on
 perceiving task conflict, $b = -.20$, $t = -2.65$, $p = .01$. Thus, both Hypothesis
 1a and 1b were supported.

410 Hypothesis 2 predicted that individual emotion recognition interacts with
 team level agreeableness such that emotion recognition is positively related
 to perceiving relationship conflict and negatively related to perceiving task
 conflict when team level agreeableness is low. Results are displayed in
 the upper part of Table 2: Both emotion recognition and team level
 agreeableness predicted individual team members' perception of relationship
 conflict. Whereas this relationship was positive for emotion recognition, it
 was negative for team-level agreeableness, suggesting that team members in
 415 general perceived more relationship conflict when team-level agreeableness
 was low. Additionally, as shown in Figure 1, team-level agreeableness

420 **TABLE 1**
 Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of variables (individual level)

		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
1	Emotion recognition	15.42	2.79				
3	Agreeableness	3.82	0.45	.01			
4	Extraversion	3.53	0.62	-.05	-.23		
5	Relationship conflict ¹	2.13	1.41	.15	.11	.03	
6	Task conflict ¹	2.12	0.91	.15	.04	-.12	.38*

425 $N = 70$; $*p \leq .01$. ¹Average scores across weeks.

TABLE 2
Multilevel regression analyses of relationship conflict on individual emotion recognition
and team-level agreeableness/team-level extraversion

	<i>Relationship conflict</i>			
	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Model 1: Agreeableness				
Emotion recognition (ER)	0.27	0.04	6.88	< .001
Team agreeableness (A)	-0.15	0.02	7.45	< .001
ER × Team A	-0.01	0.01	-2.35	.03
Model 2: Extraversion				
Emotion recognition	0.29	0.04	7.08	< .001
Team extraversion (E)	-0.16	0.02	-8.54	< .001
ER × Team E	-0.02	0.01	-2.45	.02

$N = 70$.

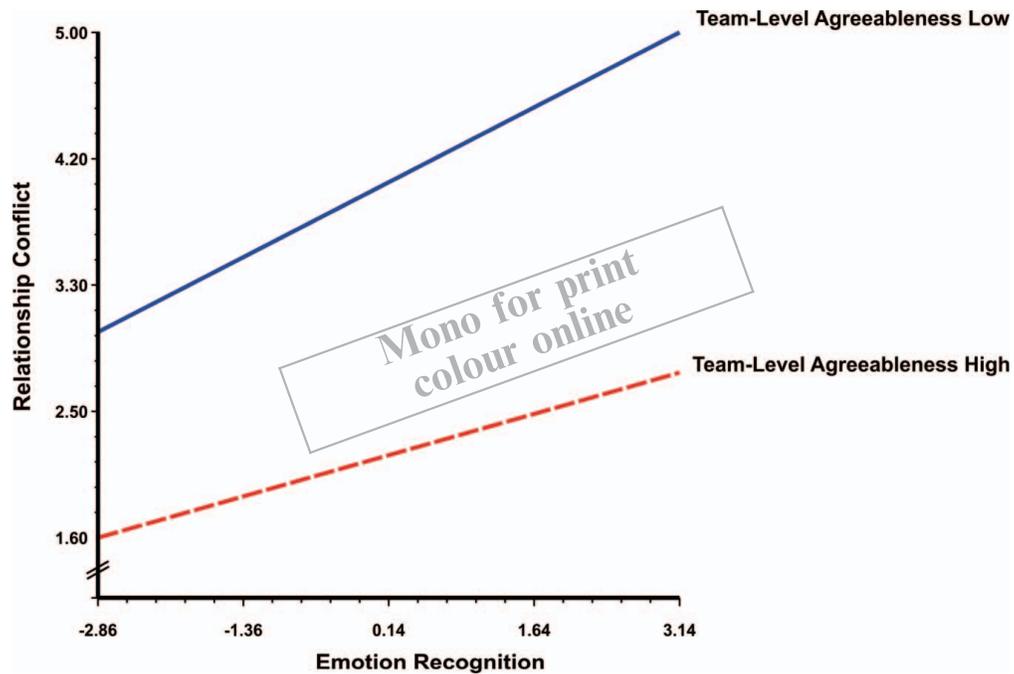


Figure 1. Cross-level interaction of team agreeableness and individual emotion recognition (z -standardized) on perceptions of relationship conflict. Low/high team-level agreeableness = 25th/75th percentile.

moderated the effect of individual emotion recognition: Team members with high emotion recognition reported more relationship conflict when there was little agreeableness within teams. As expected, simple slope analyses showed a positive relationship between emotion recognition and perceiving

relationship conflict when team-level of agreeableness was low, $b = .34$, $t = 6.69$, $p < .01$. When team level of agreeableness was high, this relationship was less steep but still positive, $b = .20$, $t = 3.63$, $p < .01$.

475 Regarding task conflict, there was no main effect for team-level agreeableness; however, as displayed in the upper part of Table 3, team-level agreeableness moderated the negative effect of individual emotion recognition. As shown in Figure 2, team members with high emotion recognition perceived less task conflict when team-level agreeableness was low, $b = -.43$, $t = -5.97$, $p < .01$. When team-level agreeableness was high, this relationship was less steep, but still negative, $b = -.15$, $t = -3.03$, $p < .01$. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

485 Analysing the effects of team-level extraversion yielded similar effects. As shown in the lower part of Table 2, team-level extraversion predicted less relationship conflict. Also, team-level extraversion moderated the effect of individual emotion recognition: Team members with high emotion recognition perceived more relationship conflict when extraversion within their teams was low, $b = .42$, $t = 6.24$, $p < .01$. When team-level extraversion was high, this relationship was less steep, but still positive, $b = .16$, $t = 2.89$, $p < .01$. Regarding task conflict, results are shown in the lower part of
490 Table 3. There was again a negative main effect of individual emotion recognition, whereas team-level extraversion did not affect the amount of task conflict perceived by individuals. As expected, however, team-level extraversion moderated the effect of individual emotion recognition: Team members with high emotion recognition reported less task conflict when
495 team-level extraversion was high, $b = -.18$, $t = -3.42$, $p < .01$. In line with expectations, however, this relationship was more strongly negative when

500 **TABLE 3**
Multilevel regression analyses of task conflict on individual emotion recognition and team-level agreeableness/team-level extraversion

	<i>Task conflict</i>			
	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Model 1: Agreeableness				
Emotion recognition (ER)	-.29	0.05	-5.67	<.001
Team agreeableness (A)	-.03	0.02	-1.54	.14
ER × Team A	.02	0.01	3.79	.001
Model 2: Extraversion				
Emotion recognition	-.31	0.05	-6.03	<.001
Team extraversion (E)	-.04	0.02	-1.66	.11
ER × Team E	.02	<0.01	3.68	<.001

$N = 70$.

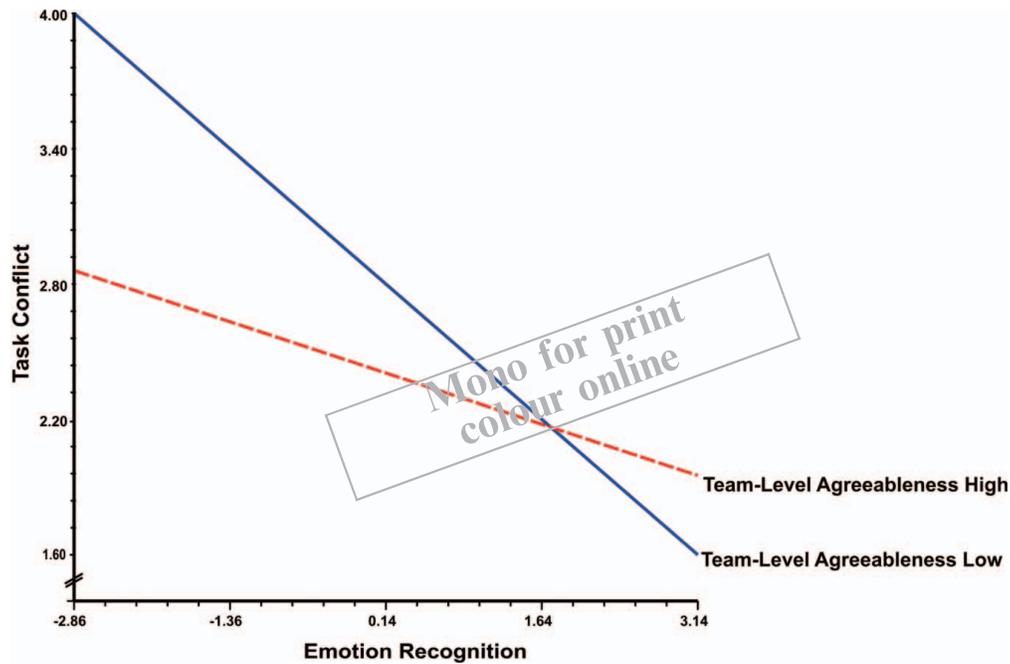


Figure 2. Cross-level interaction of team agreeableness and individual emotion recognition (*z*-standardized) on perceptions of task conflict. Low/high team-level agreeableness = 25th/75th percentile.

team-level extraversion was low, $b = -.44$, $t = -5.42$, $p < .01$. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported.²

DISCUSSION

Recognizing others' emotions is the first step for effective communication because identifying their emotions may help to understand others' underlying motivations and aspirations. Thus, emotion recognition generally assists in analysing social interactions. The present article provides evidence

²We repeated the analyses with neuroticism as a control variable. Given that neuroticism relates to perceiving more conflict in general (Bono et al., 2002) and higher alertness to emotional signals of interaction partners, individuals with high neuroticism might be more skilled in emotion recognition. Accordingly, we analysed to what extent emotion recognition explained additional variance in conflict appraisal while controlling the effects of neuroticism on Level 1. Neuroticism was measured with eight adjectives of Saucier's (1994) Mini Markers (e.g., emotional, worrying; $\alpha = .61$) We set up a two-level model that on Level 1 included both neuroticism and emotion recognition as independent variables and conflict appraisal as a dependent variable. Neuroticism did not significantly relate to relationship conflict, $b = .30$, $t = 1.30$, $p = .10$, or task conflict, $b = .20$, $t = 1.01$, $p = .34$. Thus, the results remained unchanged.

able to speak to the question of to what extent emotion recognition impacts not only the perception but also their appraisal of team conflict. Our results show that individuals with high emotion recognition attribute conflict more strongly to personal incompatibilities as compared to task-related issues. In the remainder of this article, we will elaborate on these findings and discuss their theoretical and practical implications.

The nature of conflict in practice is such that affective relational and task components are interwoven into the fabric of the dispute. Indeed, research has yet to reveal a situation where a dispute is purely affective or task focused. Thus, a conflict can be judged as more relational or task oriented depending on the individual perceiver. Accordingly, it is more or less in the eye of the beholder if a conflict is about task or relationship issues: Previous research has shown that when perceiving conflict, individuals vary as to whether they concentrate on the content-related versus social-emotional aspects of the disagreement (Bono et al., 2002). Our study extends this knowledge by showing that team members with high emotion recognition are more likely to focus on the personal issues in conflict. Notably, emotion recognition was not related to inflated conflict perceptions in general, as the positive association of emotion recognition with perceiving relationship conflict concurred with fewer perceptions of task conflict.

Our findings suggest that this tendency to more relationship-oriented conflict appraisal may adequately reflect what is going on in teams: In line with our expectations, team levels of agreeableness and extraversion moderated the impact of individual emotion recognition on conflict attributions. Team members with high emotion recognition perceived more relationship conflict the lower the level of agreeableness among team members. These findings lend support to the validity of our data, as they fit well into extant knowledge about the interpersonal effects of agreeableness. Moreover, they support the assumption that conflict appraisal of individuals with high emotion recognition is based on the realistic evaluation of team processes. Given that agreeable individuals prioritize good rapport with others, teams with highly agreeable team members should indeed have less emotional tension to deal with. A similar reasoning applies to the findings regarding extraversion: Individuals with high emotion recognition perceived less relationship conflict in teams with high levels of extraversion. Highly extraverted team members may occasionally increase friction by being dominant and assertive, but in our newly formed teams these negative effects apparently did not outweigh the positive aspects of extraversion like sociability and general interest in other people. Still, it might be that the effects of extraversion on team processes vary over time: Whereas teams in their forming phase may benefit from high levels of extraversion because it results in good rapport among team members, over time extraverted individuals' dominance might

cause friction among team members. This question is warranting future research. 600

Nevertheless, the main effects of emotion recognition also suggest that conflict appraisal of individuals with high emotion recognition emanate from a dispositional basis, which is independent from contextual parameters: In general, individuals with high emotion recognition are more likely to focus on the socioemotional aspects of conflict. This assumption is further supported by the finding that emotion recognition was still positively related to relationship-oriented conflict appraisal when team-level of agreeableness was high. This is surprising given that team members with high agreeableness are unlikely to cause harsh emotional disputes. 605
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Theoretical implications

Taking into account that there is no clear and objective answer as to the nature of conflict (de Dreu & Weingart, 2003), the question is if relationship-oriented conflict appraisal is beneficial in terms of team-related outcomes. Research has shown that relationship conflict relates to team member dissatisfaction. Although this is also true for task conflict, the effects are significantly stronger for relationship conflict (de Dreu & Weingart, 2003). Second, relationship conflict provokes dominating conflict management behaviour, which aims at defeating the other party rather than resolving the disagreement (de Dreu et al., 1999). As relationship conflict originates from disagreements regarding values, attitudes, or preferences (de Dreu & van Vianen, 2001), there are no objectively right conflict solutions. Consequently, in relationship conflicts, individuals are more likely to maintain their positions, are less motivated to reach a compromise, to reconcile differences by integrating perspectives, or yield to the other party. Rather, they aim at asserting their views and interests even at the expense of the other party (de Dreu et al., 1999). Such dominating behaviour creates negative spirals of interaction and increases the likelihood for conflict escalation (Tjosvold, 1998). Therefore relationship conflict is more likely than task conflict to disrupt rapport between parties. Furthermore, both team members' dissatisfaction and conflict escalation threaten team viability (Hackman & Morris, 1975): To ensure their existence in the future, teams not only have to meet the demands of those who receive their work, they also have to meet the emotional and social needs of their members and effectuate appropriate group processes including conflict management strategies to preserve intragroup collaboration. Given this, teams need to have a concern for both their tasks and for integrating team members' interests. Relationship conflict is disruptive to both. Thus, finding that emotion recognition makes individuals prone to appraising social disagreements as relationship conflicts contradicts the 615
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image of emotion recognition as an unequivocal facilitator of social interactions.

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Limitations

As already mentioned, our study focused on conflict appraisal, and we did not examine how emotion recognition translates into conflict management. Future research should analyse to what extent people's choice of specific conflict management strategies is affected by their ability to recognize emotions. Another potential limitation is that our sample consisted of student teams that interacted over the course of a semester, but ceased to exist after the conclusion of their project. Whether our results generalize to other populations (e.g., work teams in organizations) and to other time frames (teams working together for an even longer, or, in contrast, shorter period of time) is, of course, an empirical question. However, it is important to mention that participants in our study worked intensively within their teams over a prolonged period, and were committed to the team outcomes and accountable for them. Thus, in this sense, we believe our sample to be comparable to many other contexts in which people interact in teams. However, an important question that we were not able to examine is whether emotion recognition endangers team viability—both by impairing team members' satisfaction and finally team performance. After conclusion of their project, the teams in our sample stopped collaborating but in many organizations, there is not such a natural endpoint for teams. Examining effects of emotion recognition on team viability could increase understanding of its effects within a longer timeframe.

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Finally, reliability of our independent measures was partly very low as compared to recommended standards (Lance, Butts, & Michels, 2006). However, there are several arguments that speak for our results notwithstanding these low reliabilities. First, finding effects in the hypothesized direction may alleviate at least some of the related concerns. Second, we combined the individual-level data of agreeableness and extraversion to group-level measures. Group-level measures are more reliable than individual-level data because they discard variance between individuals. As to emotion recognition, this is, to our best of knowledge, the first study to analyse the associations between a performance-based test of emotion recognition and conflict appraisal. Given this, applying instruments with suboptimal reliabilities may be more defensible (Nunnally, 1978). Still, future research needs to replicate these findings with more reliable measures.

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These limitations aside, the findings show several strengths: The longitudinal design across 10 weeks increases confidence regarding the causal direction of the effects. Although we cannot make clear causal inferences, the longitudinal design enables us to rule out reverse effects of

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conflict attributions on emotion recognition. Furthermore, we avoid monomethod bias by combining peer reports, self-reports, and performance-based measures of emotion recognition.

Practical implications

Team members with high emotion recognition are more likely to focus on the relationship-oriented aspects of conflict rather than the content-related components. Recognizing others' emotions is a prerequisite for effective communication, but it puts high demands on individuals. Given that relationship conflict, as compared to task conflict, poses higher risks in terms of team viability (de Dreu & Weingart, 2003), individuals with high emotion recognition need to be aware of potential pitfalls of their conflict appraisal. Moreover, they need to develop their skills at relationship conflict management to benefit from their perceptual abilities. Thus, when staffing teams, it is not sufficient to choose highly perceptive people to ensure smooth team interactions. Instead, organizations should raise team members' awareness of the relationship between conflict appraisal and conflict behaviour. Furthermore, they need to train their staffs on how to manage relationship conflict. If not, emotion recognition might turn into a gift that takes its toll—and team viability might be especially poor when team members are especially able.

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