
THE DYNAMICS OF WORKPLACE CONFLICTS

The unfolding of task conflicts and
possibilities to counteract their negative
effects

Dr. Heidi Mauersberger

06.03.2024

- **Workplace conflicts** – most frequent **stressors** in the workplace (Keenan & Newton, 1985; Narayanan, Menon, & Spector, 1999; De Wit, Greer, & Jehn, 2012)
 - conflicts impair employee *well-being* and *health* and eventually performance (e.g., Dijkstra, van Dierendonck, & Evers, 2005)

Reduced efficiency

presenteeism

(see Riaz & Junaid, 2011)

Reduced presence

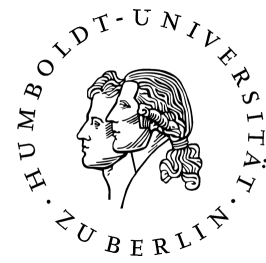
absenteeism

(see Riaz & Junaid, 2011)



- Conclusion: conflicts = **“bad”** – but always true?

RELEVANCE OF THE TOPIC: WORKPLACE CONFLICTS



TYPES OF CONFLICTS (E.G., JEHN & BENDERSKY, 2003; JEHN, 1995)

- **Task conflicts:**
 - incompatibilities in opinions about task-related issues
 - disagreements about the task itself (goal component) or about the best way to accomplish the

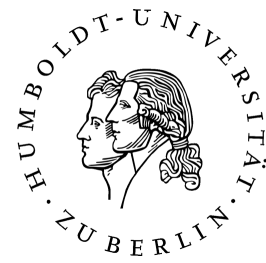


The question is: Do both conflicts have the same impact on **well-being** and **performance**?

- **Relationship conflicts:**
 - personal animosity and dislike among team members
 - interpersonal hostility



RELEVANCE OF THE TOPIC: WORKPLACE CONFLICTS



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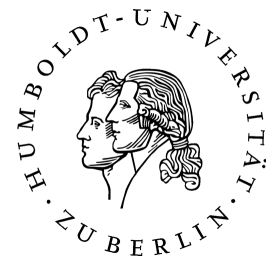
- **Task conflicts:**
 - **incompatibilities in opinions** about task-related issues
 - **disagreements** about the task itself (goal component) or about the best way to accomplish the task (process component)

- **Relationship conflicts:**
 - **personal animosity and dislike** among team members
 - interpersonal hostility



— Positive Effect
..... Negative Effect

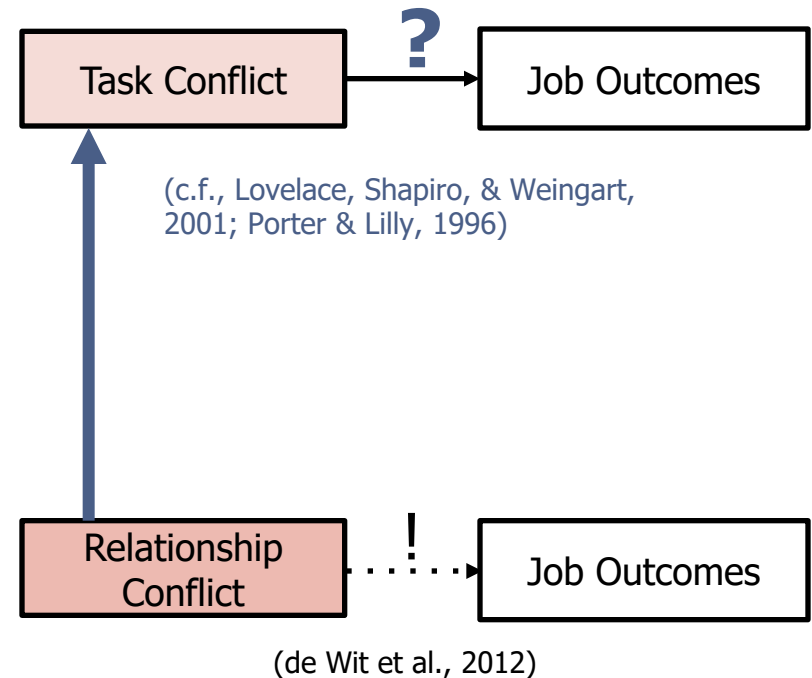
RELEVANCE OF THE TOPIC: WORKPLACE CONFLICTS



TYPES OF CONFLICTS (E.G., JEHN & BENDERSKY, 2003; JEHN, 1995)

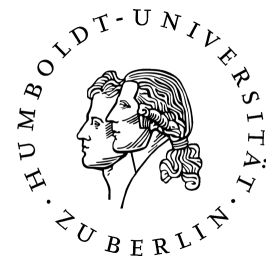
Constructive conflicts ?

(e.g., Amason, 1996; Jehn & Mannix, 2001; Jehn & Chatman, 2000)

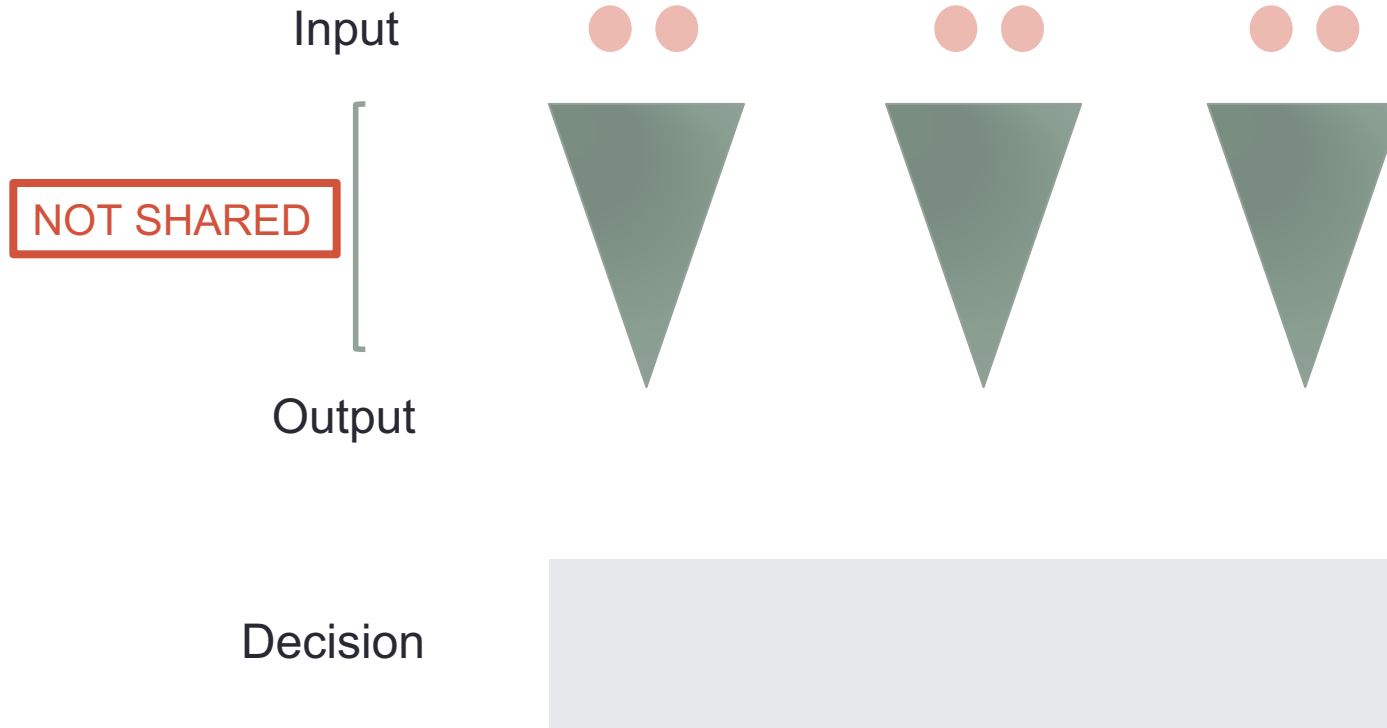


— Positive Effect
- - - - Negative Effect

EXCURSUS: NO CONFLICT

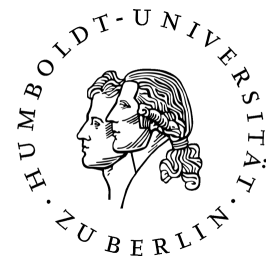


(de Wit, Jehn, & Scheepers, 2013)

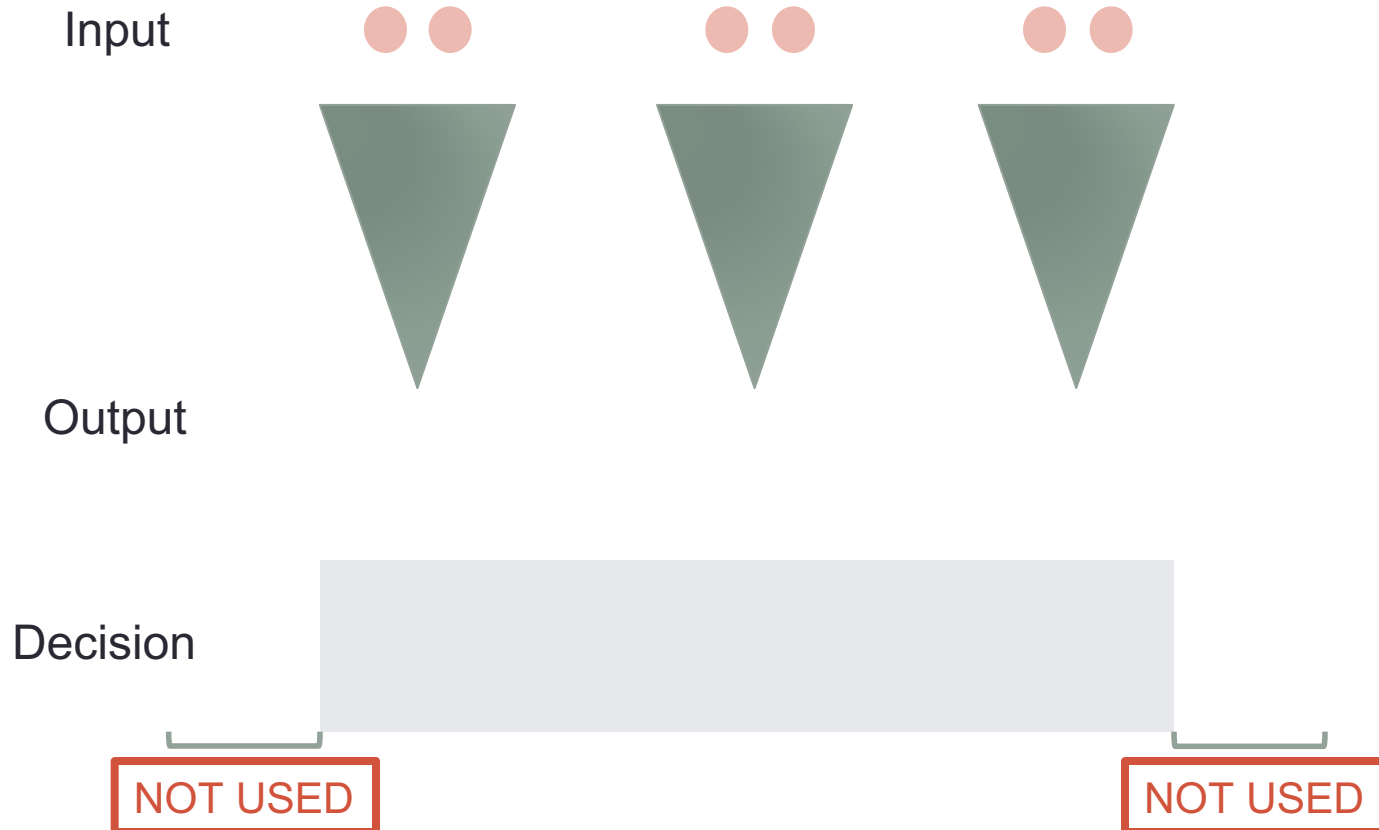


...and performance

EXCURSUS: TASK CONFLICT WITH RELATIONSHIP CONFLICT



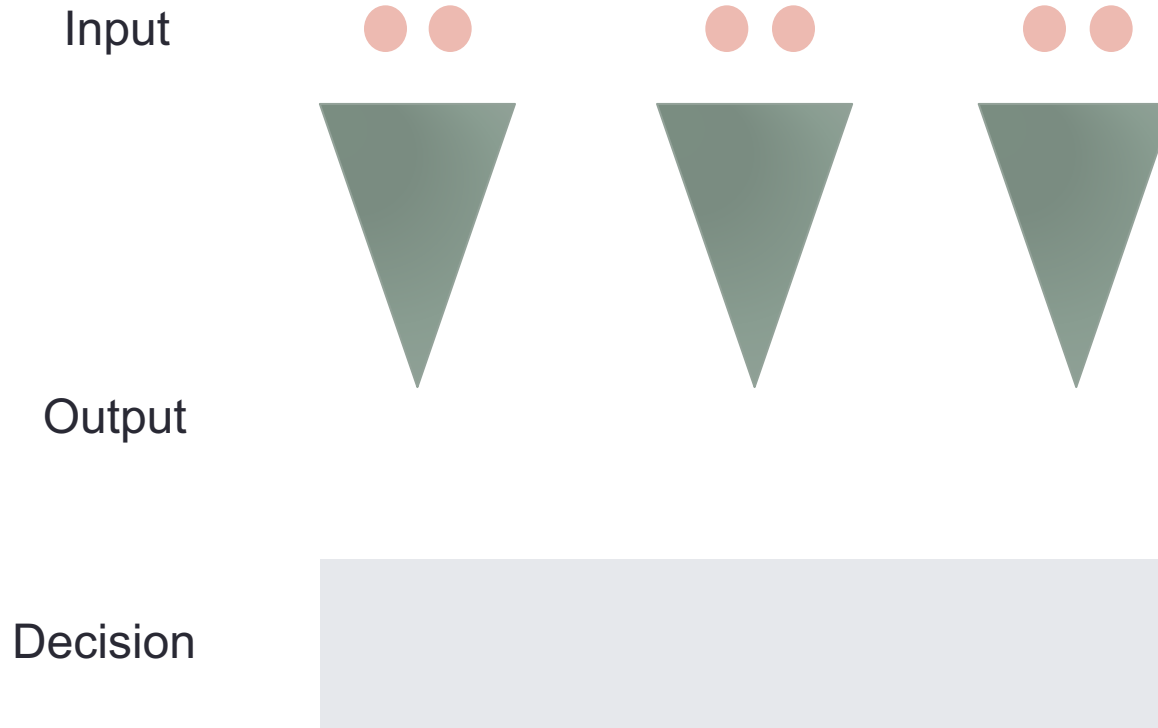
(de Wit, Jehn, & Scheepers, 2013)



...and performance

EXCURSUS: TASK CONFLICT W/O RELATIONSHIP CONFLICT

(de Wit, Jehn, & Scheepers, 2013)

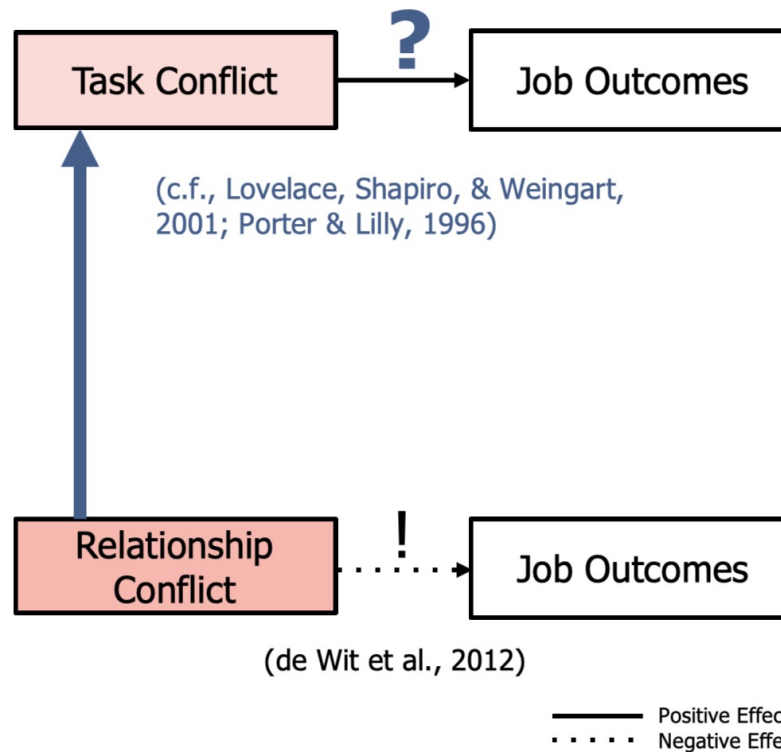


...and performance

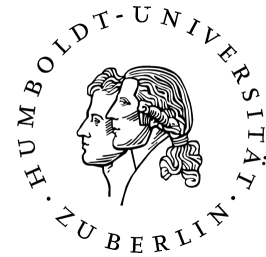
TYPES OF CONFLICTS (E.G., JEHN & BENDERSKY, 2003; JEHN, 1995)

Constructive conflicts ?

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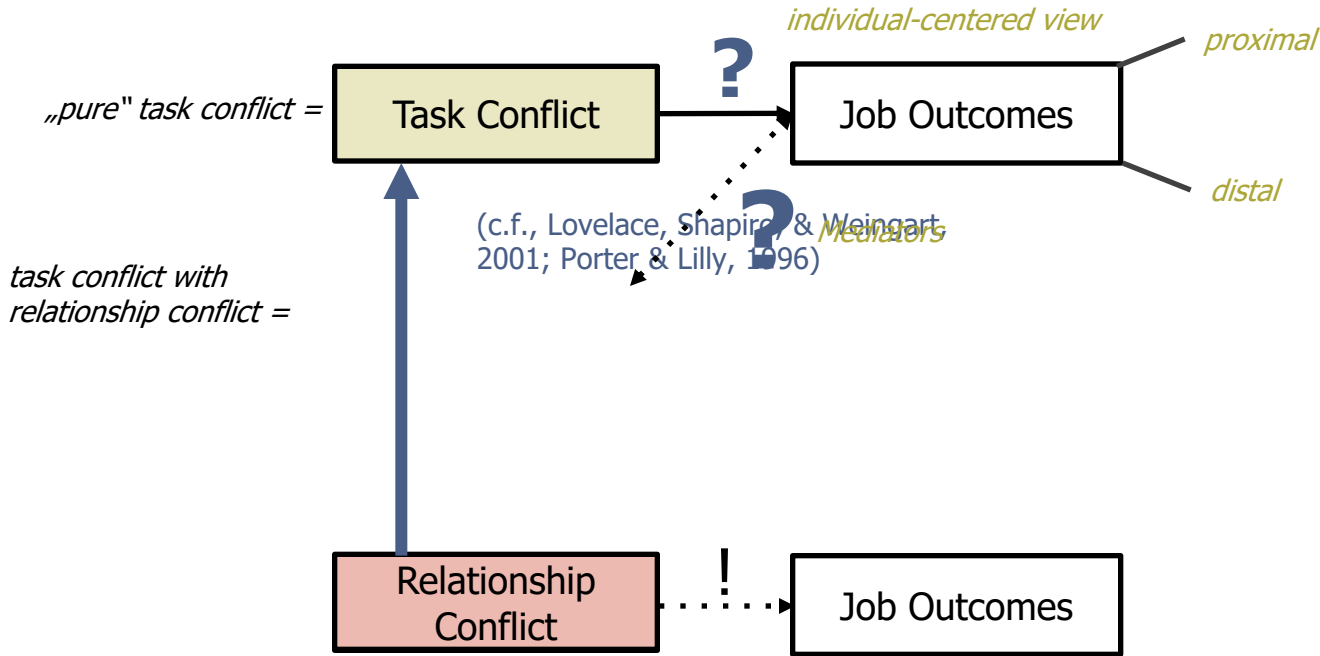
RELEVANCE OF THE TOPIC: WORKPLACE CONFLICTS



TYPES OF CONFLICTS (E.G., JEHN & BENDERSKY, 2003; JEHN, 1995)

Constructive vs. destructive conflicts?

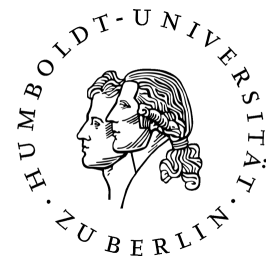
(e.g., Amason, 1996; Jehn & Mannix, 2001; Jehn & Chatman, 2000)



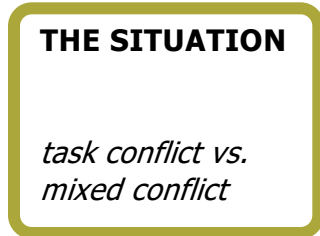
(de Wit et al., 2012)

— Positive Effect
 Negative Effect

THE CONFLICT EPISODE MODEL



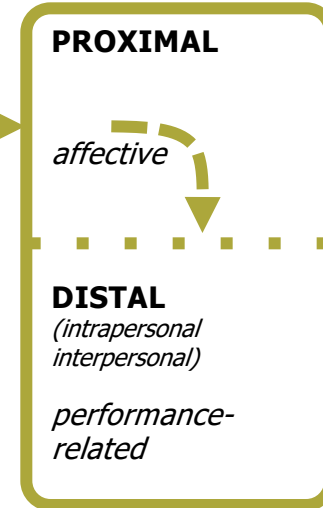
CONFLICT PROCESSING



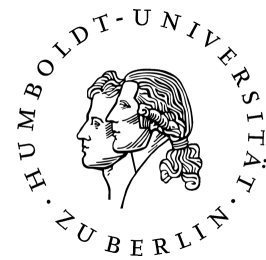
CONFLICT EVALUATION



JOB OUTCOMES



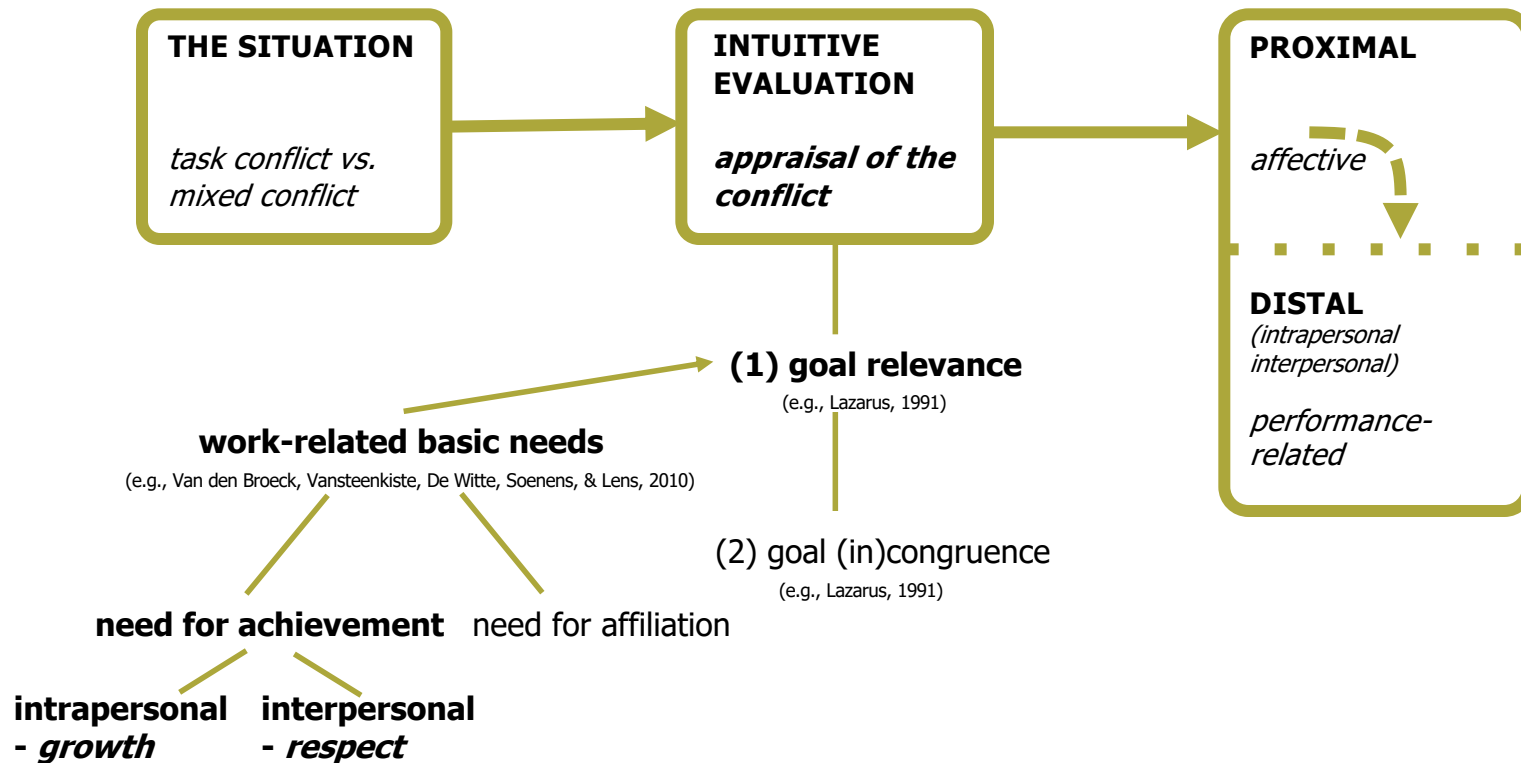
THE CONFLICT EPISODE MODEL



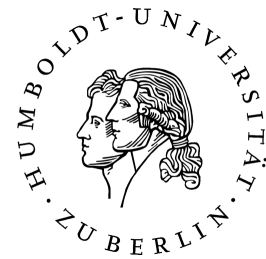
CONFLICT PROCESSING

CONFLICT EVALUATION

JOB OUTCOMES



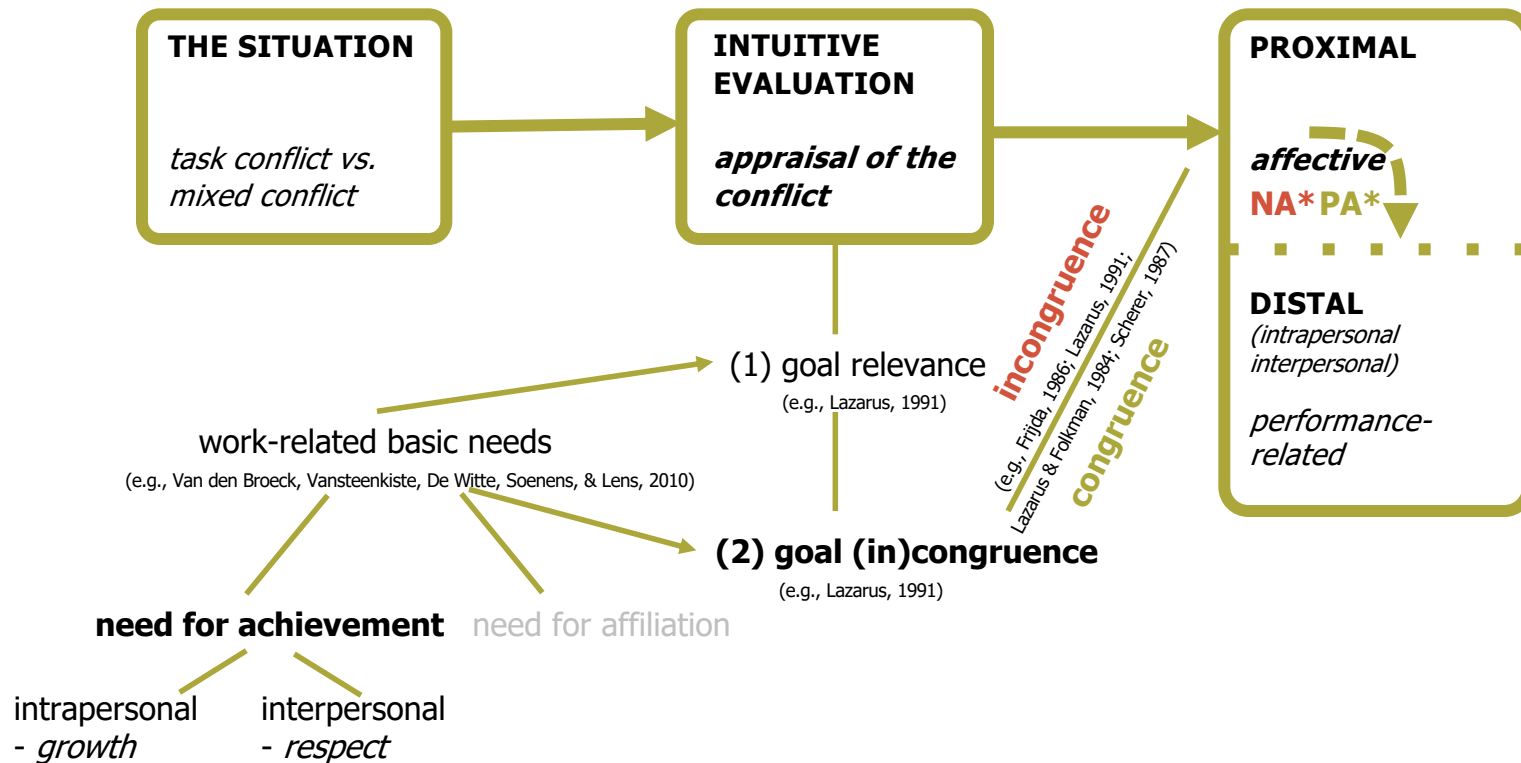
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CONFLICT PROCESSING

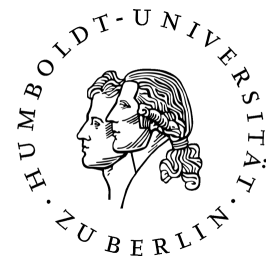
CONFLICT EVALUATION

JOB OUTCOMES

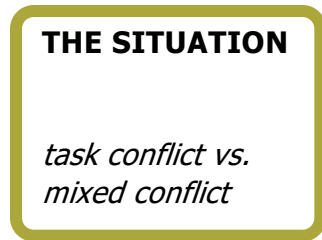


*PA= positive affect
*NA = negative affect

THE CONFLICT EPISODE MODEL: PROXIMAL JOB OUTCOMES



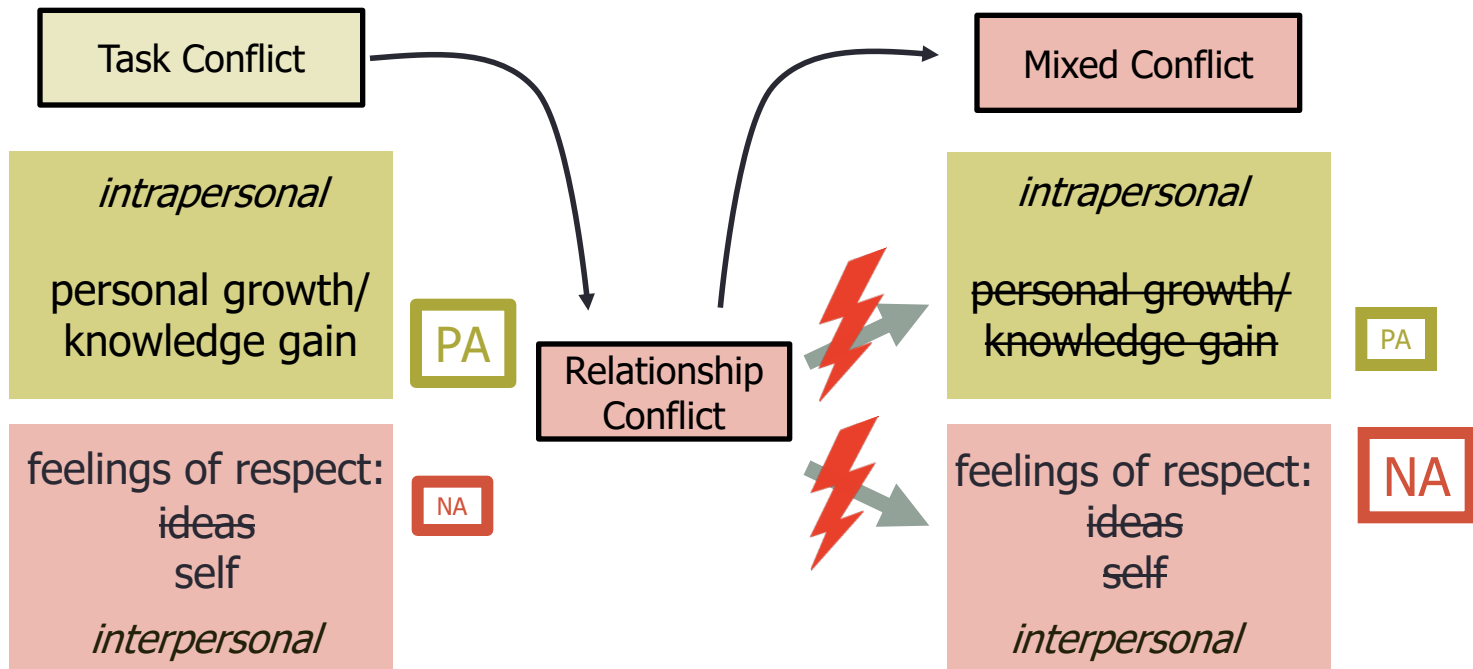
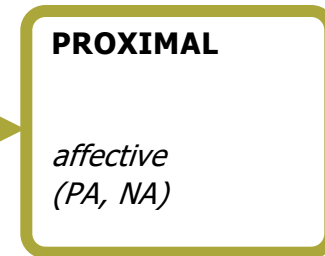
CONFLICT PROCESSING



CONFLICT EVALUATION



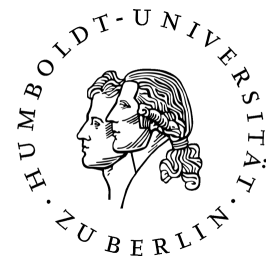
JOB OUTCOMES



(Searle & Auton, 2015;
Todorova, Bear, & Weingart,
2014)

(Blincoe & Harris, 2011)

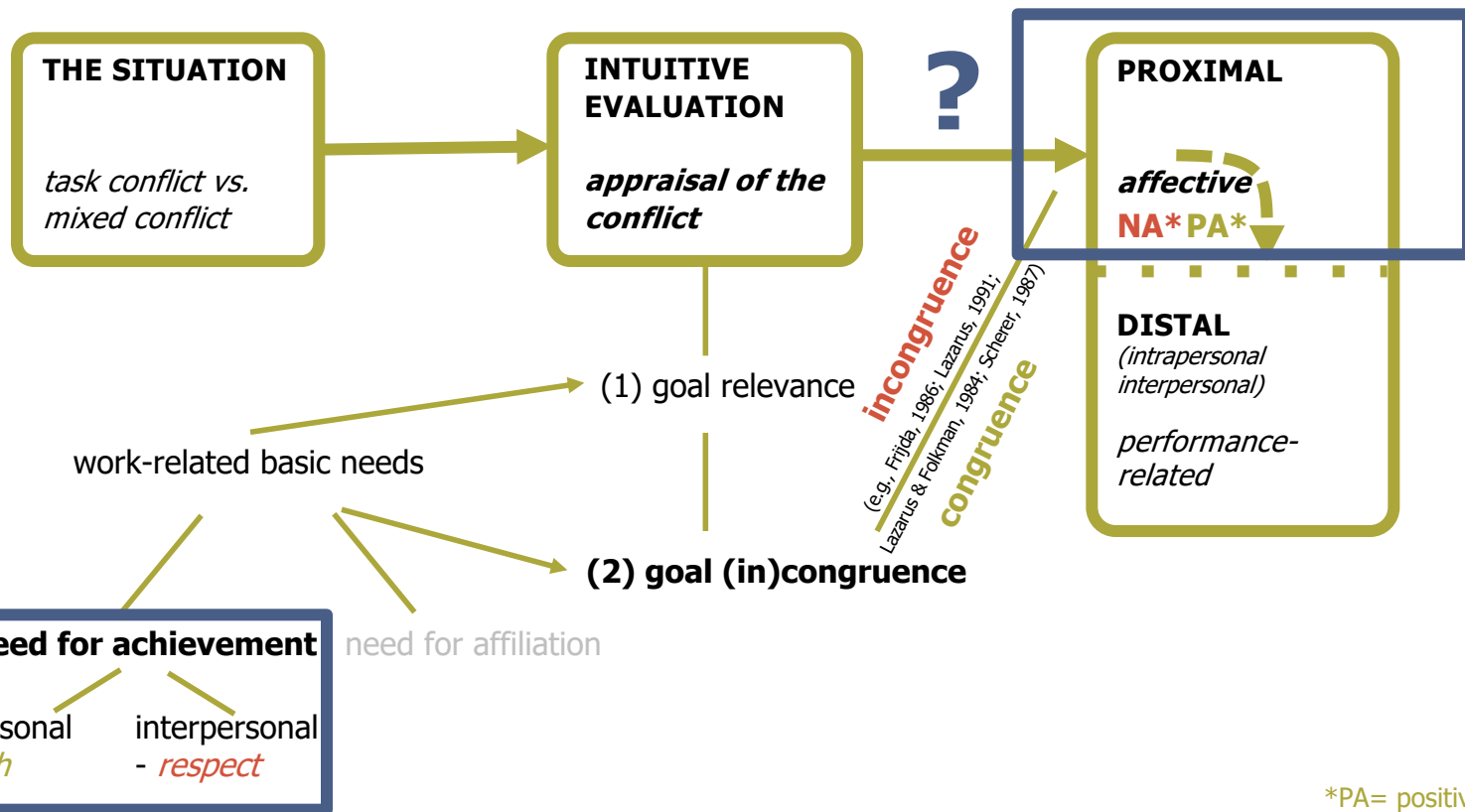
THE CONFLICT EPISODE MODEL: PROXIMAL JOB OUTCOMES



CONFLICT PROCESSING

CONFLICT EVALUATION

JOB OUTCOMES



*PA= positive affect
*NA = negative affect

Study 1 – Event sampling during five working days

($N = 168$, $M_{age} = 35.1$ years,
 $SD_{age} = 9.76$ years)

Study 2 – Experimental induction of task and mixed conflicts

($N = 142$, $M_{age} = 40.2$ years,
 $SD_{age} = 11.9$ years)

Journal of Business and Psychology
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-019-09640-z>

ORIGINAL RESEARCH



Measuring task conflicts as they occur: a real-time assessment of task conflicts and their immediate affective, cognitive and social consequences

Heidi Mauersberger¹ · Ursula Hess¹ · Annekatriin Hoppe¹

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Abstract

When two or more individuals with different values, interests, and experiences work together, interpersonal conflicts are inevitable. Conflicts, in turn, can hinder or delay successful task completion. However, certain types of conflicts may also have beneficial effects. The literature differentiates between task conflicts (TCs) and relationship conflicts (RCs). Whether TCs are detrimental or beneficial for performance largely depends on the simultaneous occurrence of RCs. However, the reasons for the differential effects of TCs *with* and *without* RCs remain largely unknown. Therefore, we explored the underlying fine-grained mechanisms of the conflict-performance relationship in two studies. We used event-sampling methodology to track employees' conflicts in the field (study 1) and we examined conflicts in a controlled laboratory setting (study 2). We found that RCs during TCs made participants feel disrespected and thereby increased negative affect. Further, RCs during TCs impaired knowledge gain, which decreased positive affect. In turn, low positive affect explained why TCs with RCs led to poorer performance than TCs without RCs. However, neither of the two studies supported the assumption that high negative affect from RCs during TCs—by itself—had adverse effects on performance. Our results confirm previous findings of the destructive character of RCs during TCs and additionally provide new insights into the nature and complexity of workplace conflicts by introducing positive affect as a missing piece of the puzzle.

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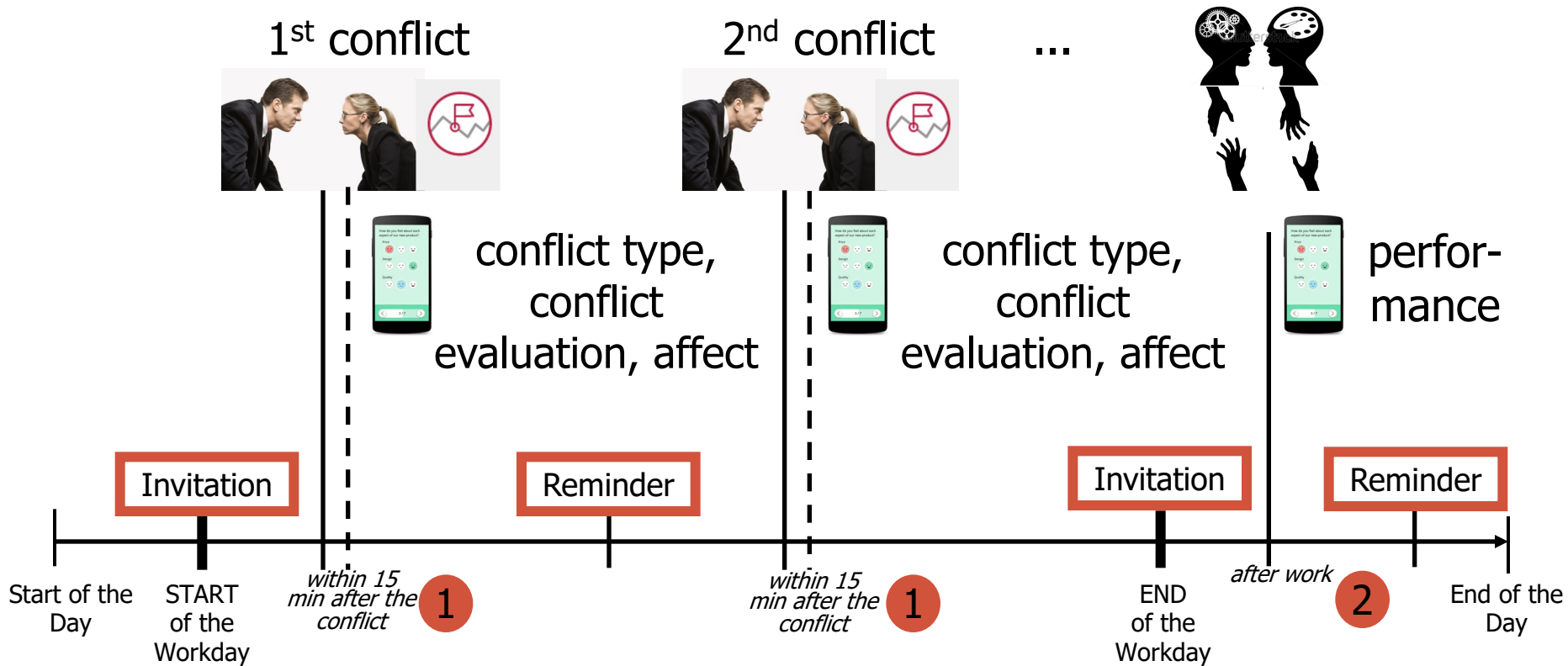
EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE: PROXIMAL JOB OUTCOMES



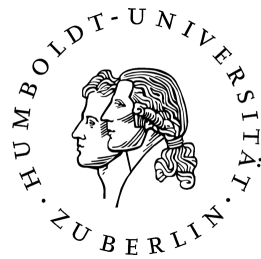
Study 1 – Event sampling during five working days

($N = 168$, $M_{age} = 35.1$ years,
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Experience of a conflict

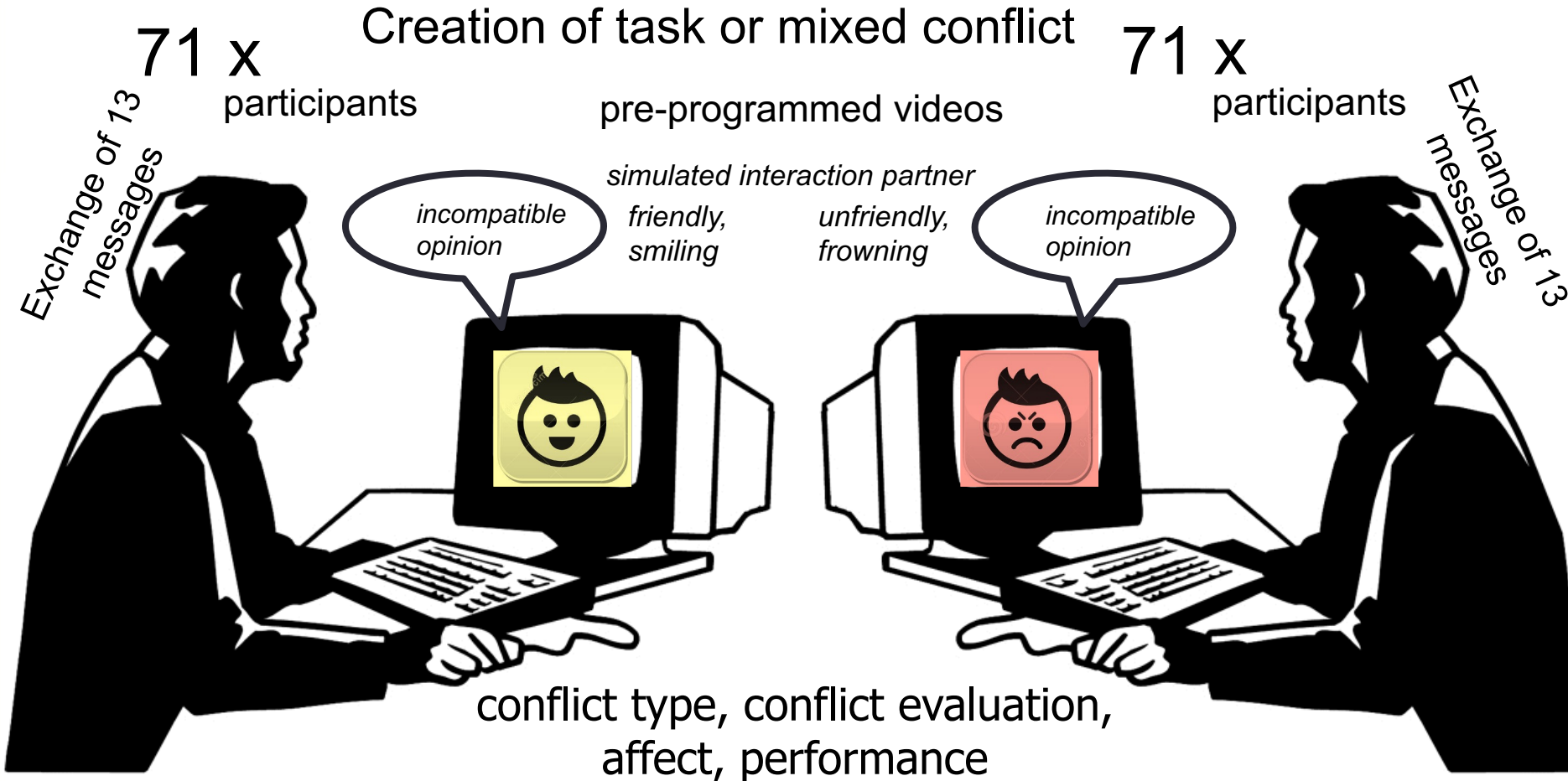


EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE: PROXIMAL JOB OUTCOMES



Study 2 – Experimental induction of task and mixed conflicts

($N = 142$, $M_{age} = 40.2$ years,
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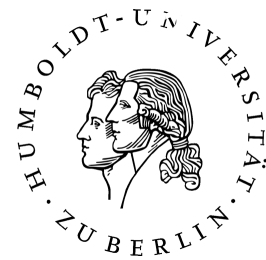
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($N = 142$, $M_{age} = 40.2$ years,
 $SD_{age} = 11.9$ years)

- Participants experienced significantly more **relationship conflict** during **mixed** conflicts than during **task conflicts**
 - $M_{diff} = 63\%$, $t(70) = 11.0$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.85$

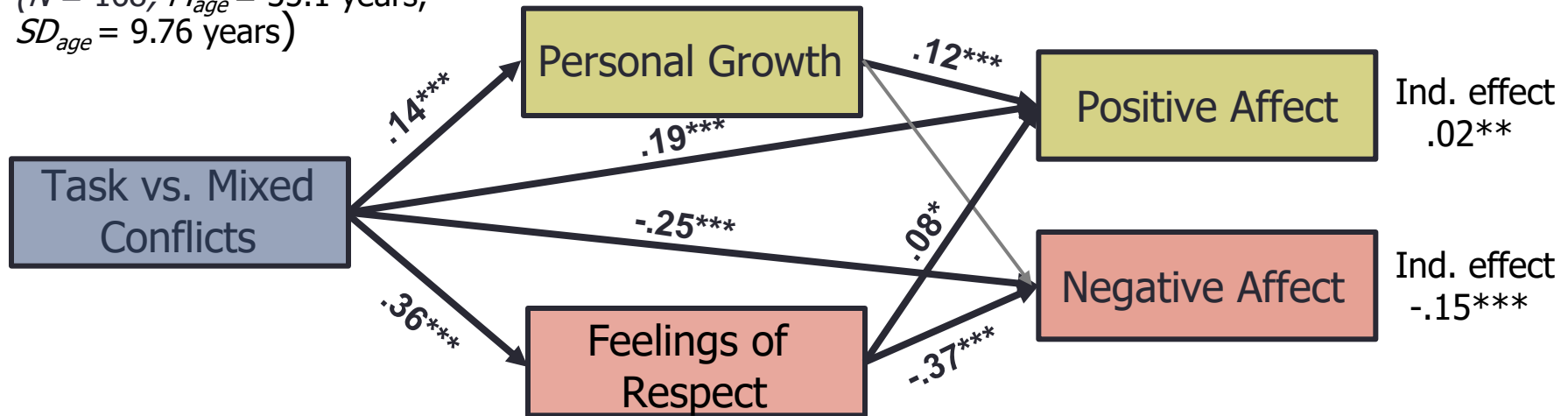


EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE: PROXIMAL JOB OUTCOMES



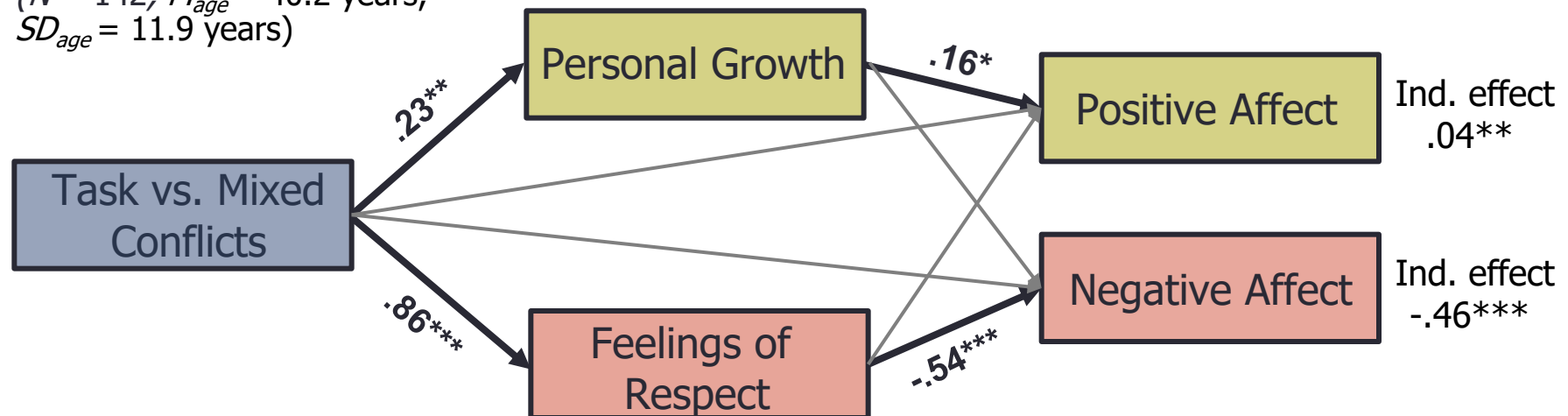
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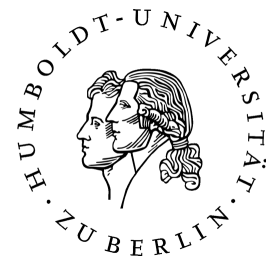


Study 2 – Experimental induction of task and mixed conflicts

($N = 142$, $M_{age} = 40.2$ years,
 $SD_{age} = 11.9$ years)



THE CONFLICT EPISODE MODEL



CONFLICT PROCESSING

THE SITUATION
task conflict vs. mixed conflict

CONFLICT EVALUATION

INTUITIVE EVALUATION
appraisal of the conflict

JOB OUTCOMES

PROXIMAL
affective
NA*PA*

DISTAL
(intrapersonal interpersonal)
performance-related

work-related basic needs → (1) goal relevance

(2) goal (in)congruence

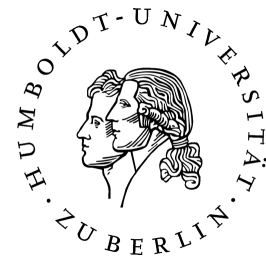
incongruence
congruence

need for achievement
intrapersonal - *growth*
interpersonal - *respect*

need for affiliation

*PA= positive affect
*NA = negative affect

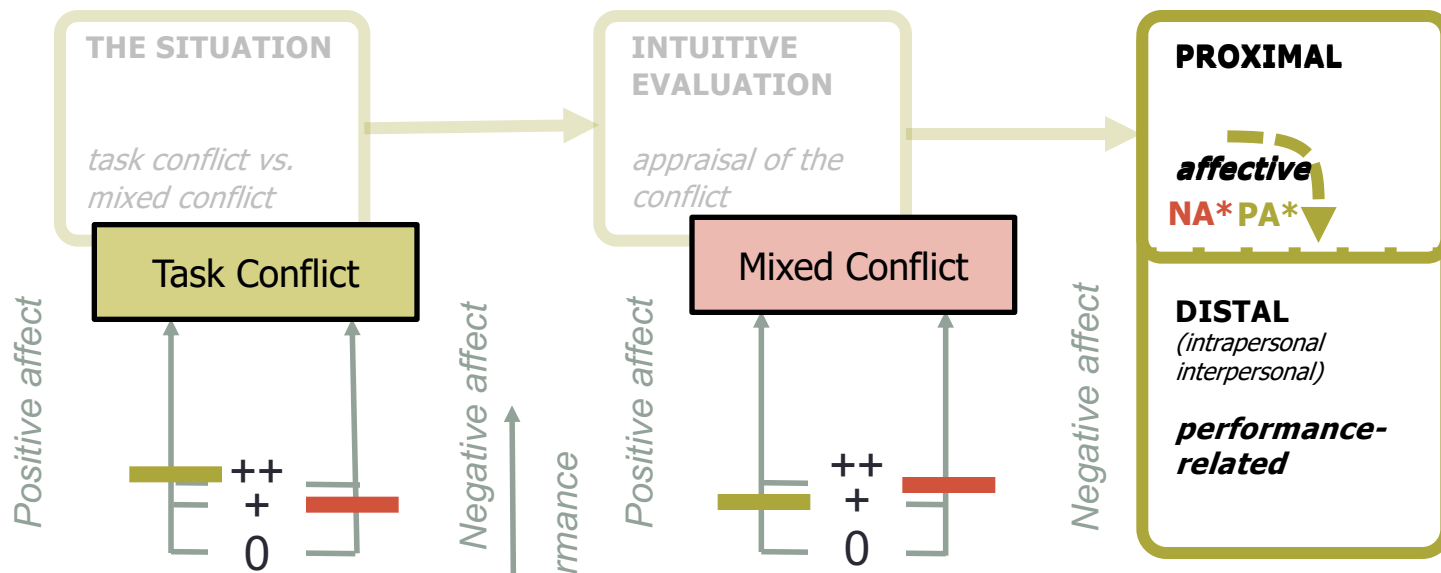
THE CONFLICT EPISODE MODEL: DISTAL JOB OUTCOMES



CONFLICT PROCESSING

CONFLICT EVALUATION

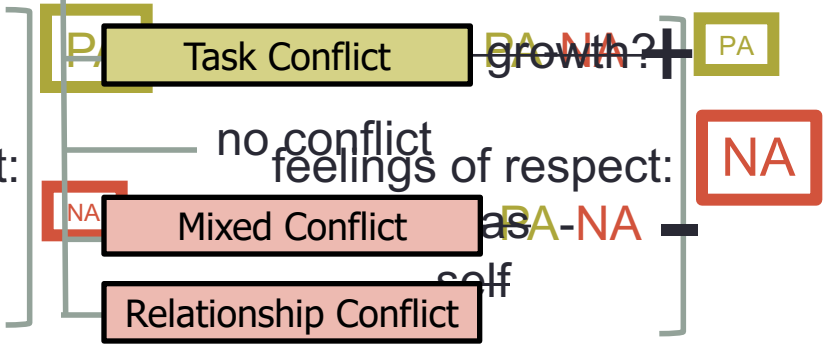
JOB OUTCOMES



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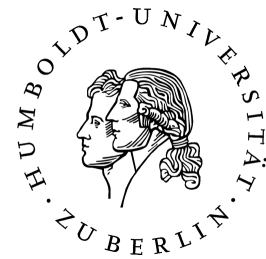
(Rich, LePine, & Crawford, 2010)

personal growth
feelings of respect:
ideas
self

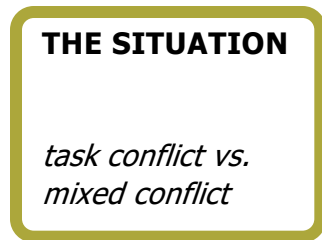


(Harris & Menzies, 1999;
Smith et al., 2001)

THE CONFLICT EPISODE MODEL



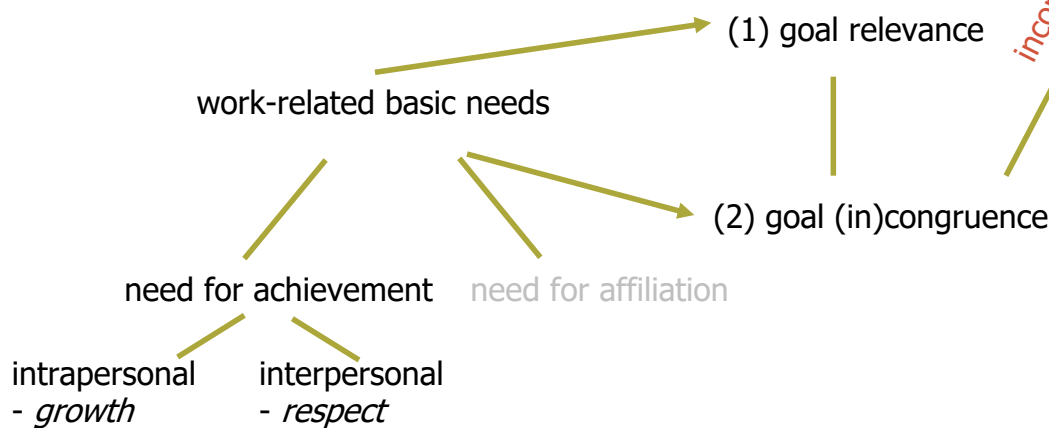
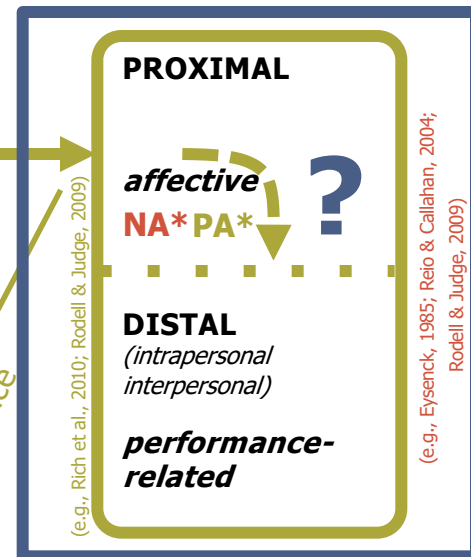
CONFLICT PROCESSING



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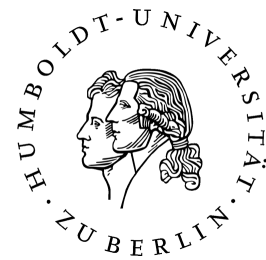


JOB OUTCOMES



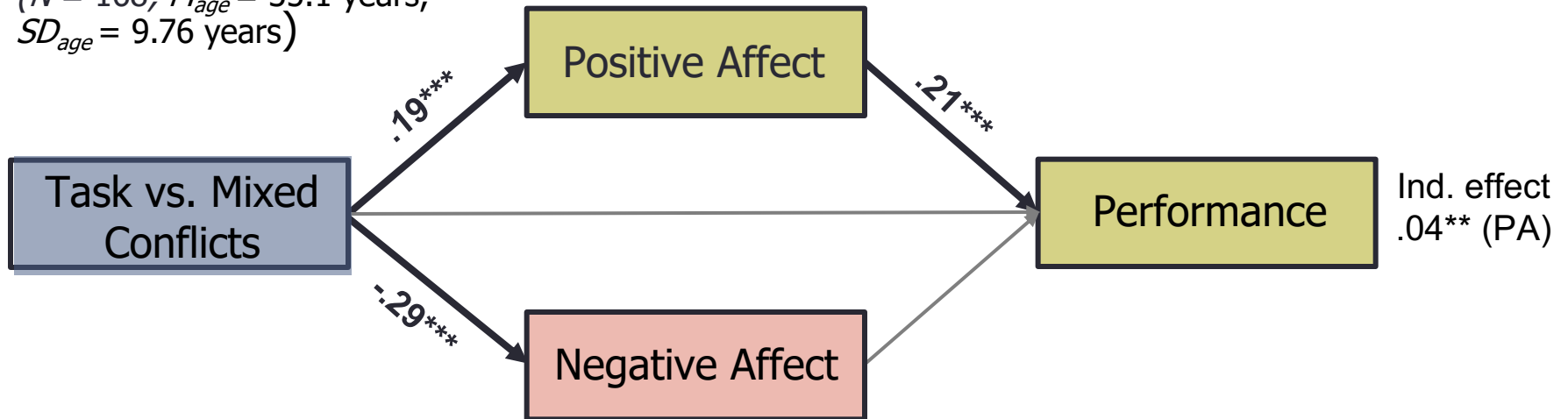
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EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE: DISTAL JOB OUTCOMES



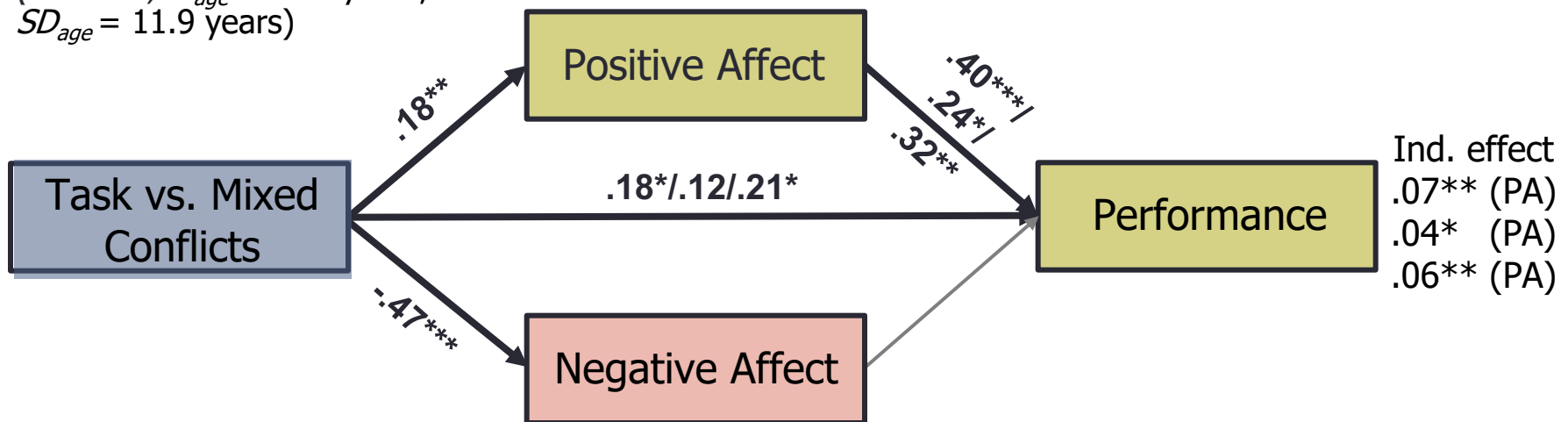
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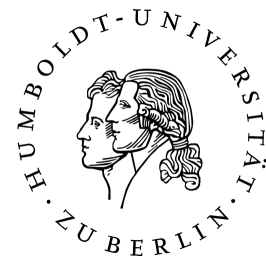


Study 2 – Experimental induction of task and mixed conflicts

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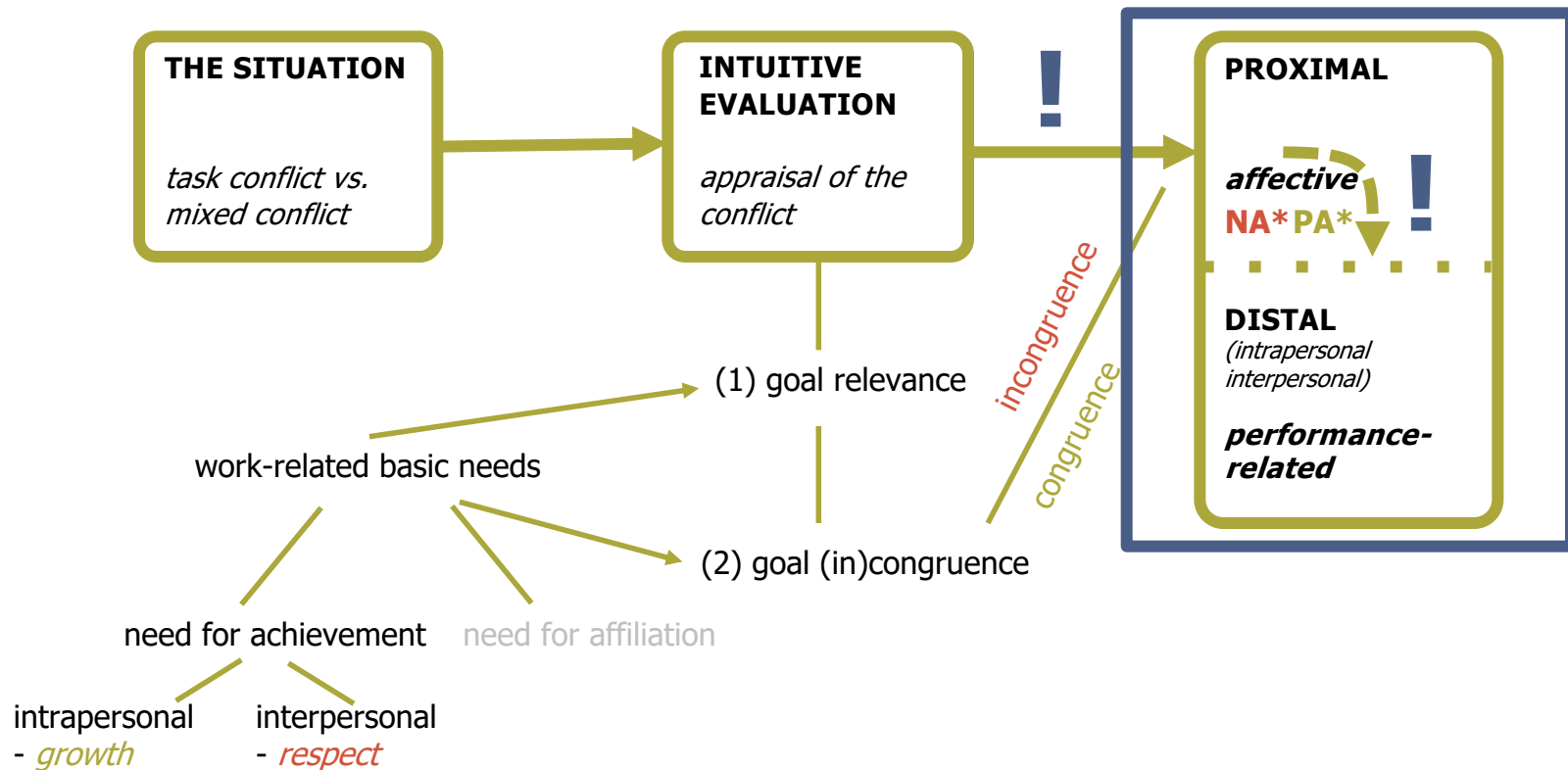
THE CONFLICT EPISODE MODEL



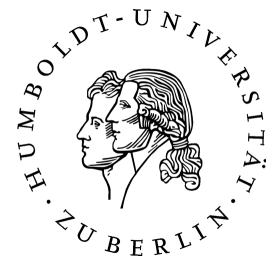
CONFLICT PROCESSING

CONFLICT EVALUATION

JOB OUTCOMES



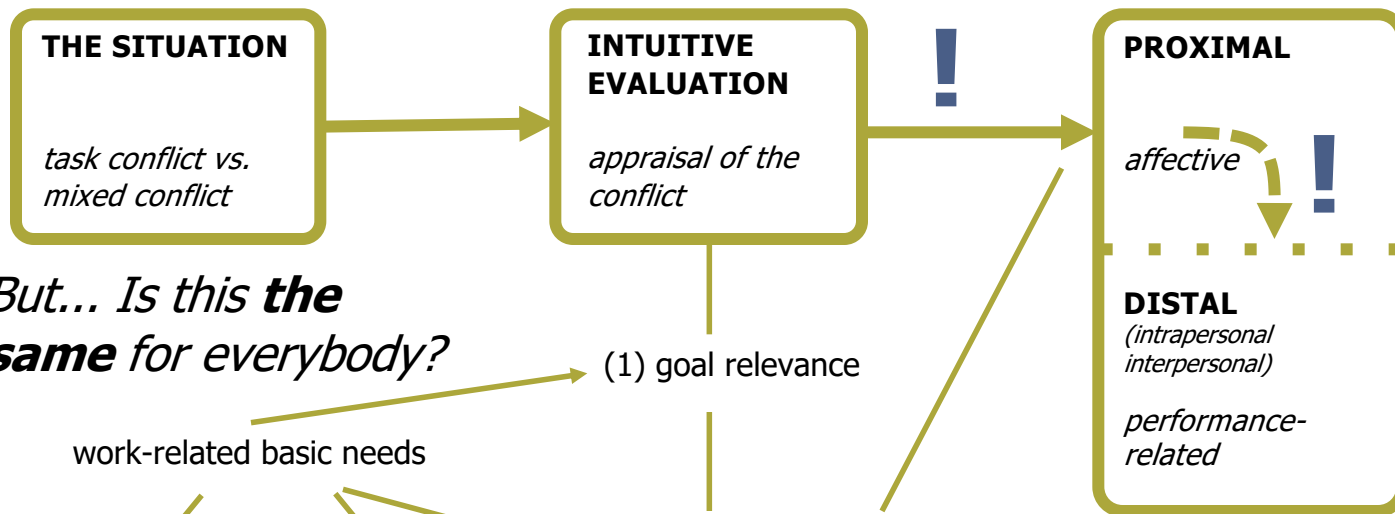
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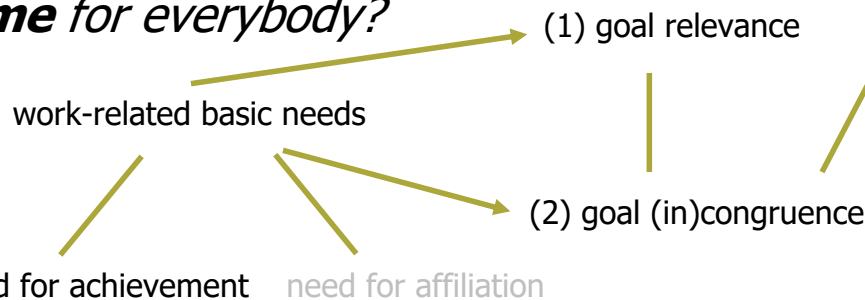
CONFLICT PROCESSING

CONFLICT EVALUATION

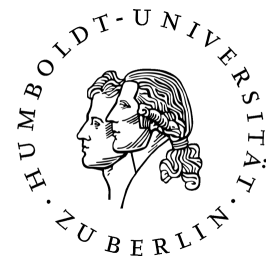
JOB OUTCOMES



*But... Is this **the same** for everybody?*



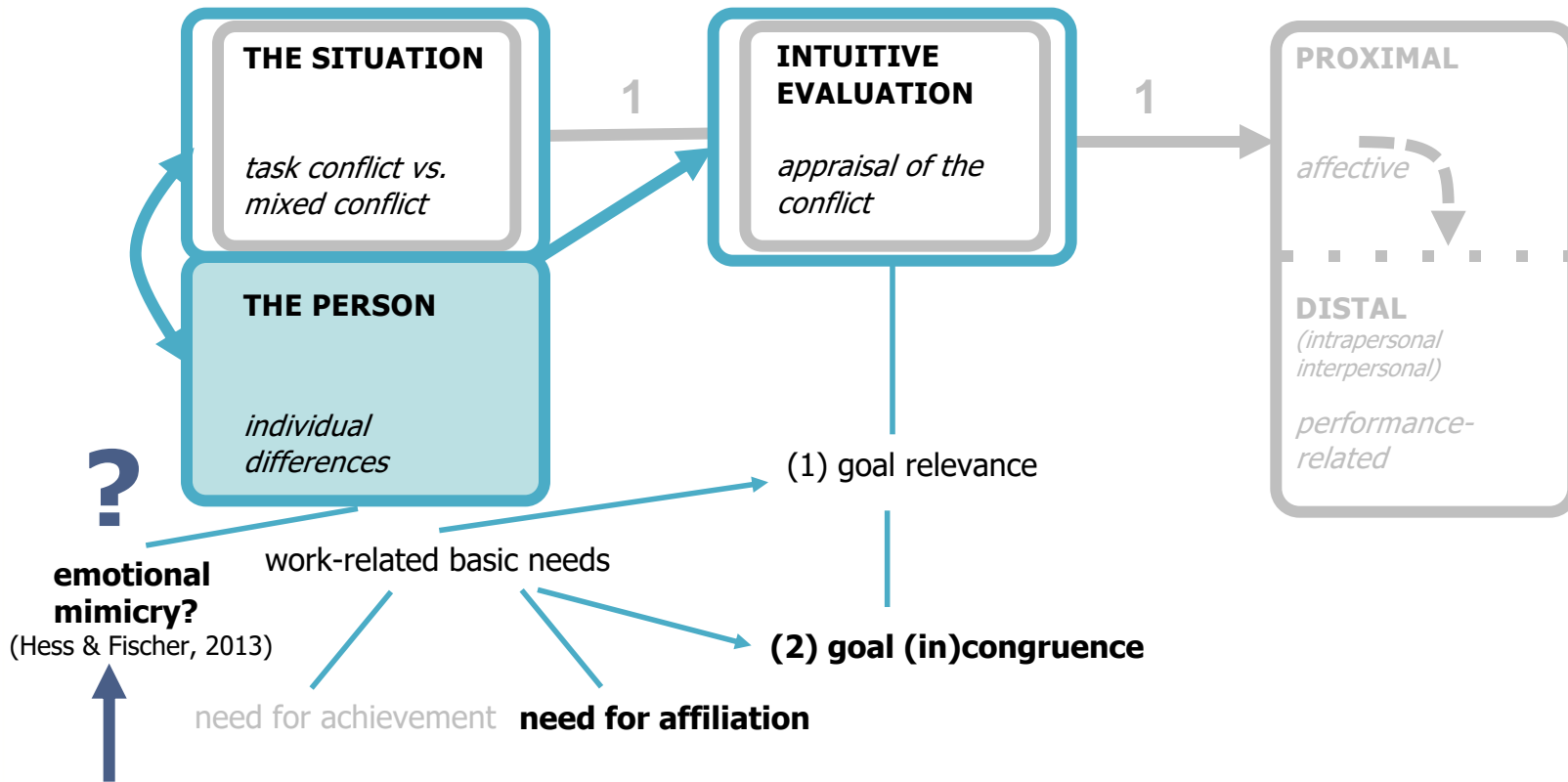
THE CONFLICT EPISODE MODEL: 1ST EXTENSION



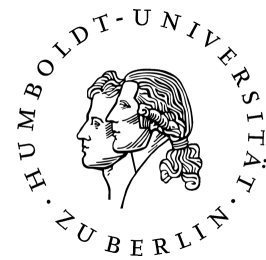
CONFLICT PROCESSING

CONFLICT EVALUATION

JOB OUTCOMES

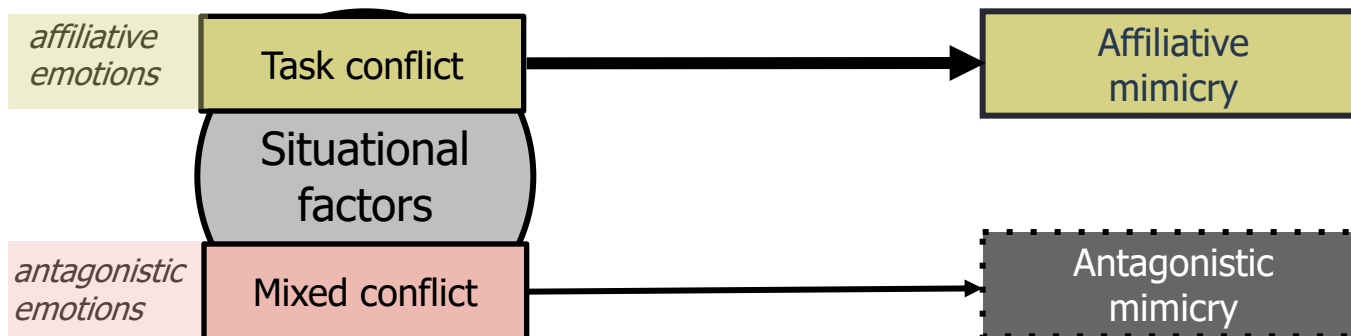
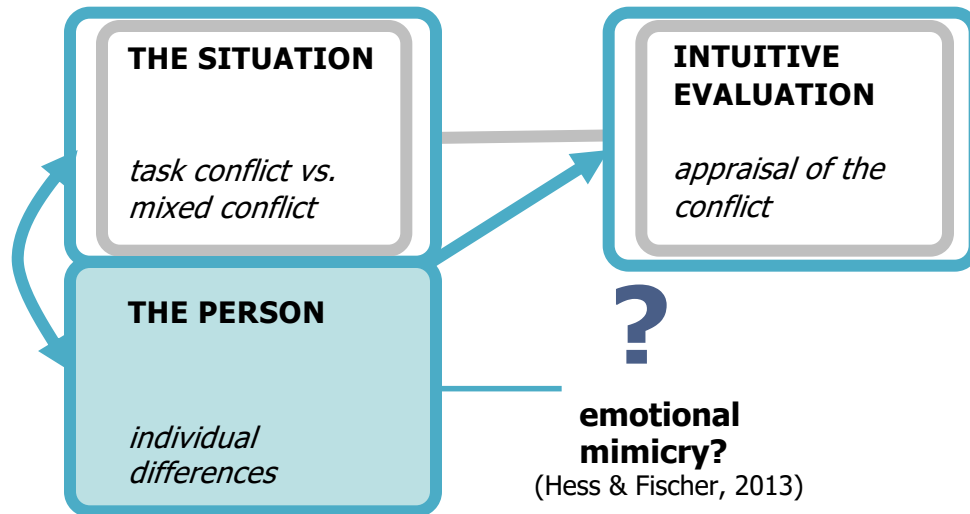


THE CONFLICT EPISODE MODEL: 1ST EXTENSION



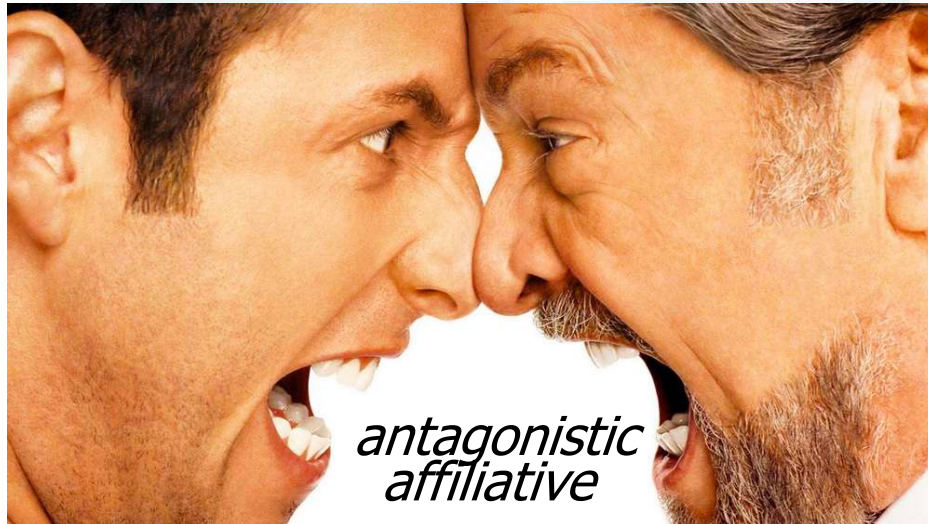
CONFLICT PROCESSING

CONFLICT EVALUATION



emotional mimicry = imitation of the emotional expressions of others (Dimberg, 1982; Hess & Fischer, 2013)

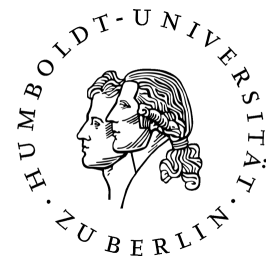
1 sends nonverbal signals



copies nonverbal signals 2

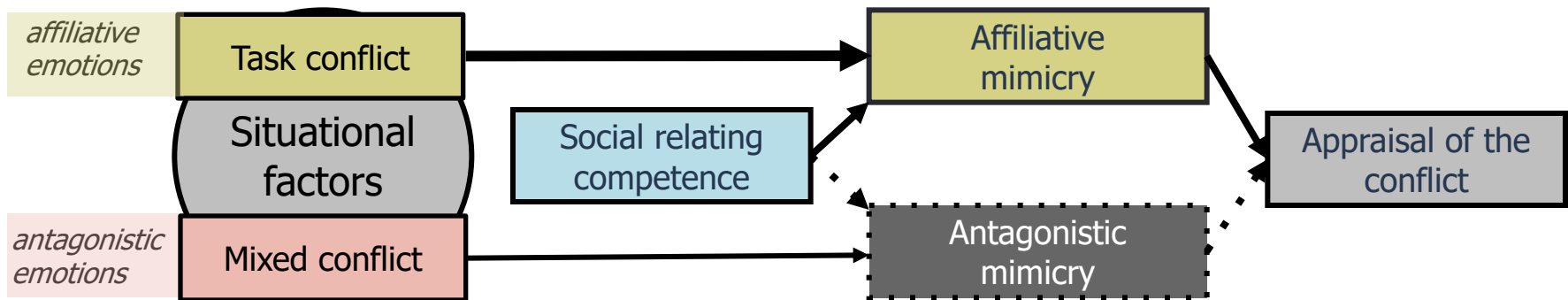
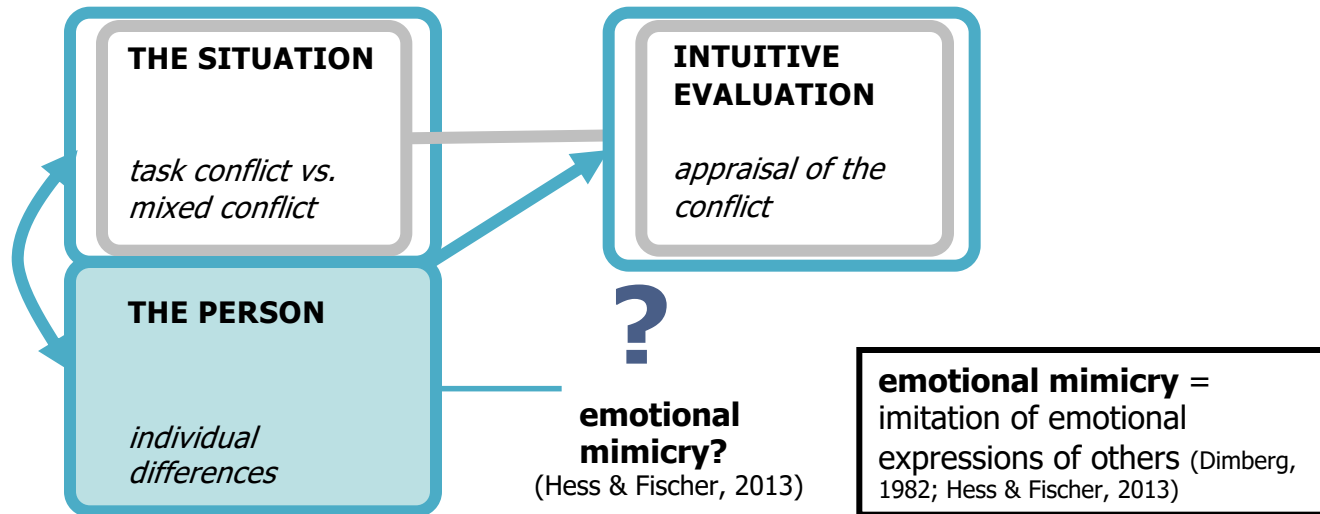
~~mutual liking, affiliation~~

THE CONFLICT EPISODE MODEL: 1ST EXTENSION



CONFLICT PROCESSING

CONFLICT EVALUATION



Study 3 – Experimental induction of task and mixed conflicts

($N = 131$, $M_{age} = 40.2$ years,
 $SD_{age} = 11.9$ years)

Motivation and Emotion
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-018-9743-x>

ORIGINAL PAPER



When smiling back helps and scowling back hurts: individual differences in emotional mimicry are associated with self-reported interaction quality during conflict interactions

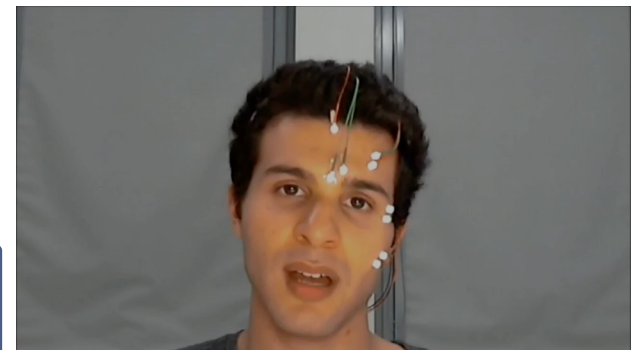
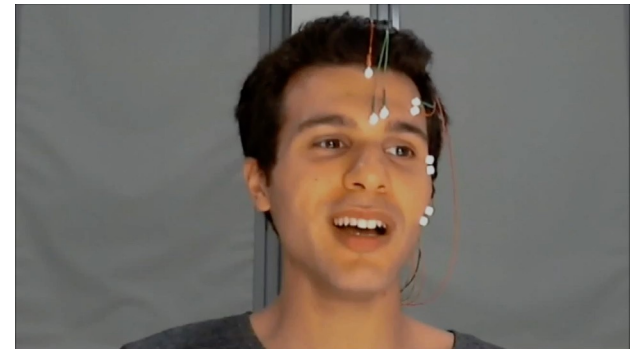
Heidi Mauersberger¹  · Ursula Hess¹

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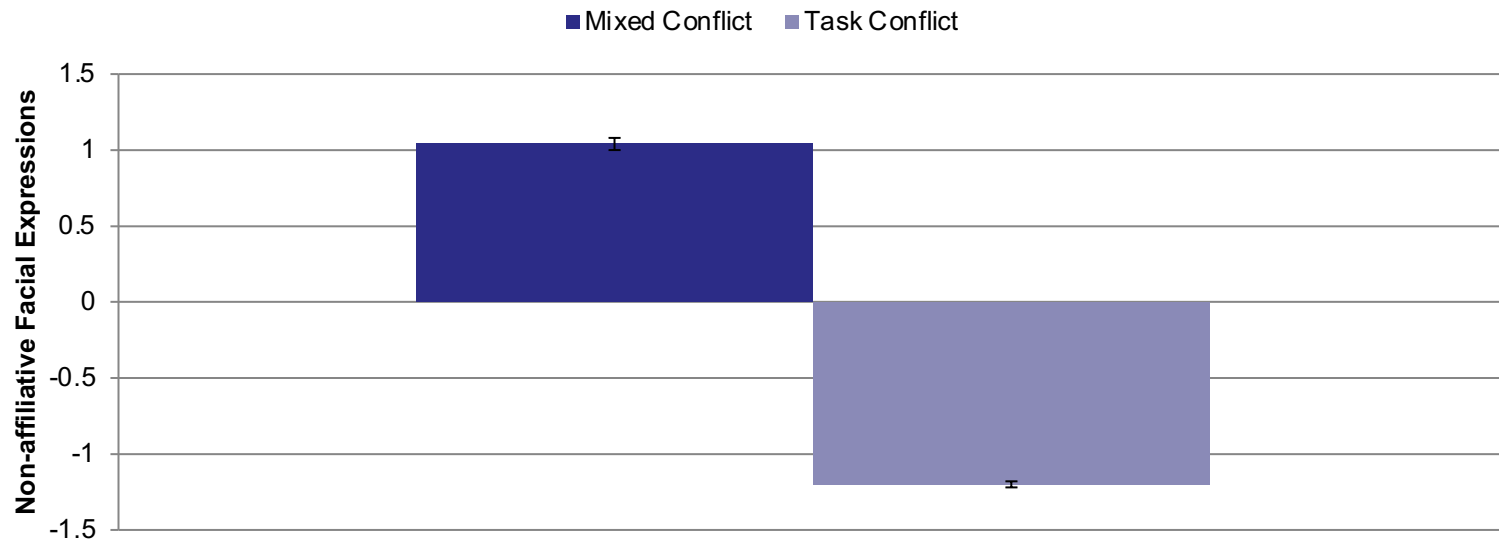
Abstract

Conflicts or disagreements during which negative, antagonistic emotions are expressed are perceived as uncomfortable. By contrast, disagreements accompanied by positive, affiliative emotions are less detrimental to interaction quality. We assessed whether individual differences in emotional mimicry have differential effects on interaction quality during disagreements with negative emotions compared to disagreements with positive emotions. For this, participants talked with someone who disagreed with them in a controlled laboratory setting, while emotional mimicry was assessed via facial EMG. The interaction partner showed either an antagonistic or an affiliative demeanor during the interaction. Following the interaction, participants reported on perceived interaction quality. In line with the Emotional Mimicry in Context view (Hess and Fischer in Pers

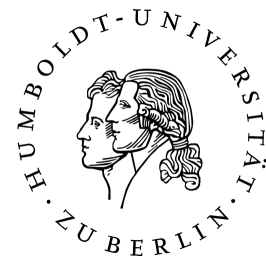
Social Psychol Rev 17:142–157, 2013), emotional mimicry decreased interaction quality when the person who disagreed showed an antagonistic demeanor but increased interaction quality when the person who disagreed showed an affiliative demeanor. Furthermore, implicit affiliation motivation predicted emotional mimicry regardless the context.



- Simulated interaction partners showed significantly more non-affiliative emotions during **mixed** conflicts than during **task conflicts**
 - $M_{diff} = 2.24$, $t(117) = 61.7$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 10.8$.

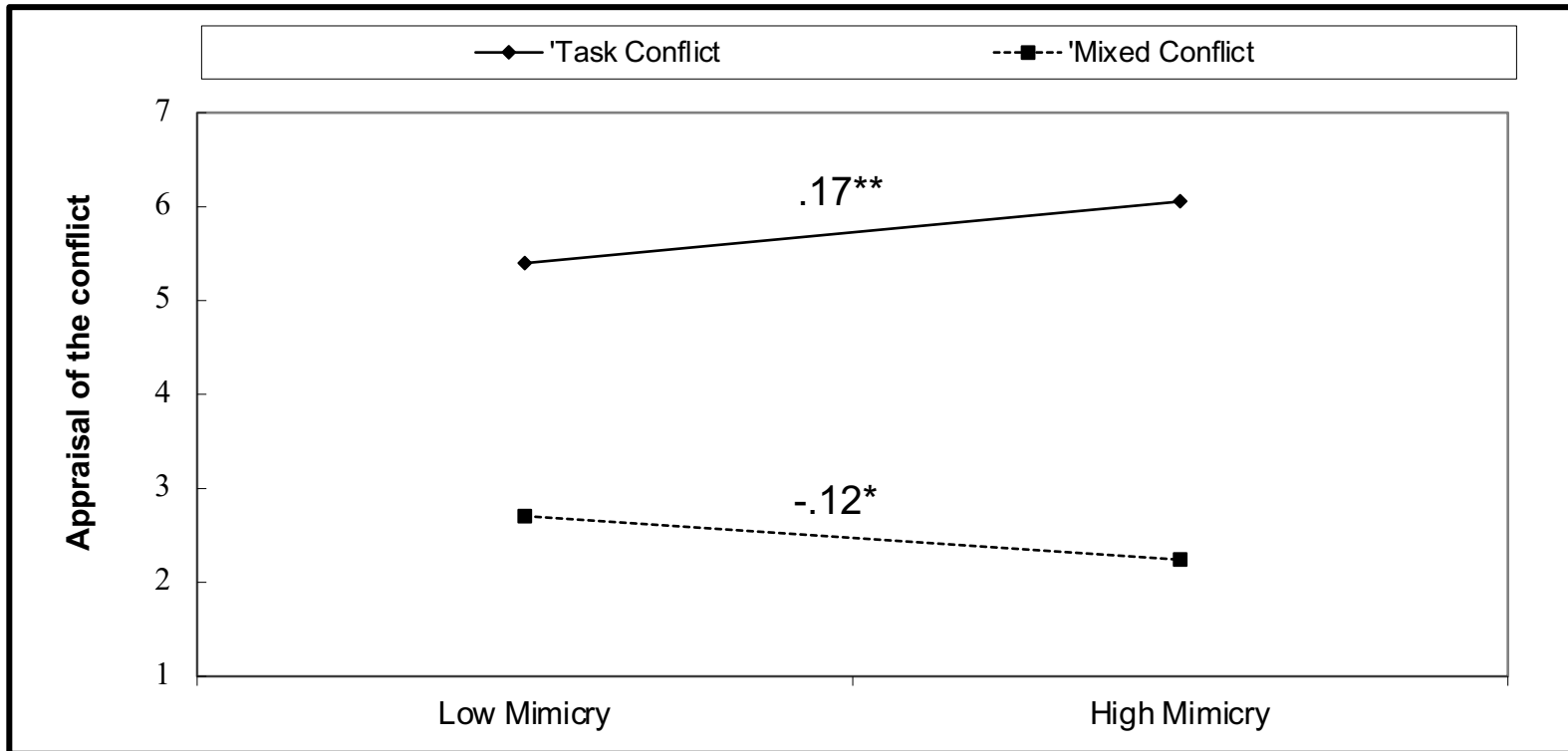
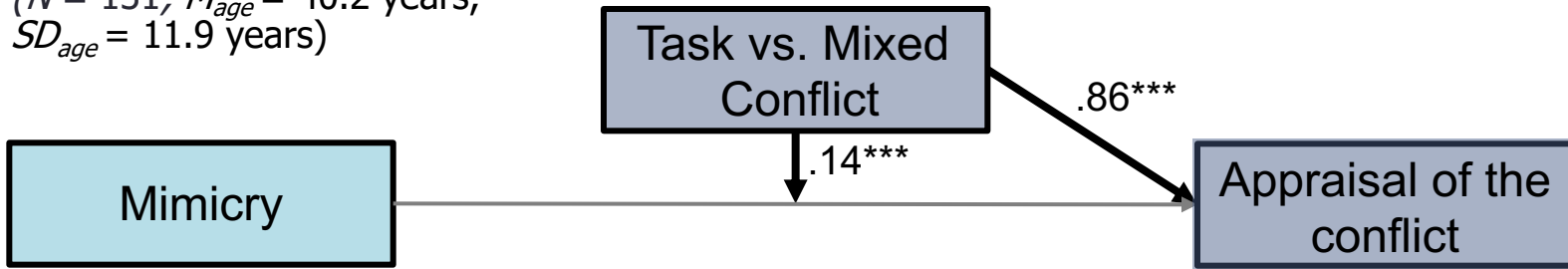


EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE: INTUITIVE EVALUATION



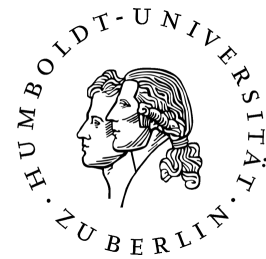
Study 3 – Experimental induction of task and mixed conflicts

($N = 131$, $M_{age} = 40.2$ years,
 $SD_{age} = 11.9$ years)



* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

THE "ELABORATED" CONFLICT EPISODE MODEL



CONFLICT PROCESSING

THE SITUATION

task conflict vs. mixed conflict

THE PERSON

individual differences

emotional mimicry!

CONFLICT EVALUATION

INTUITIVE EVALUATION

appraisal of the conflict

JOB OUTCOMES

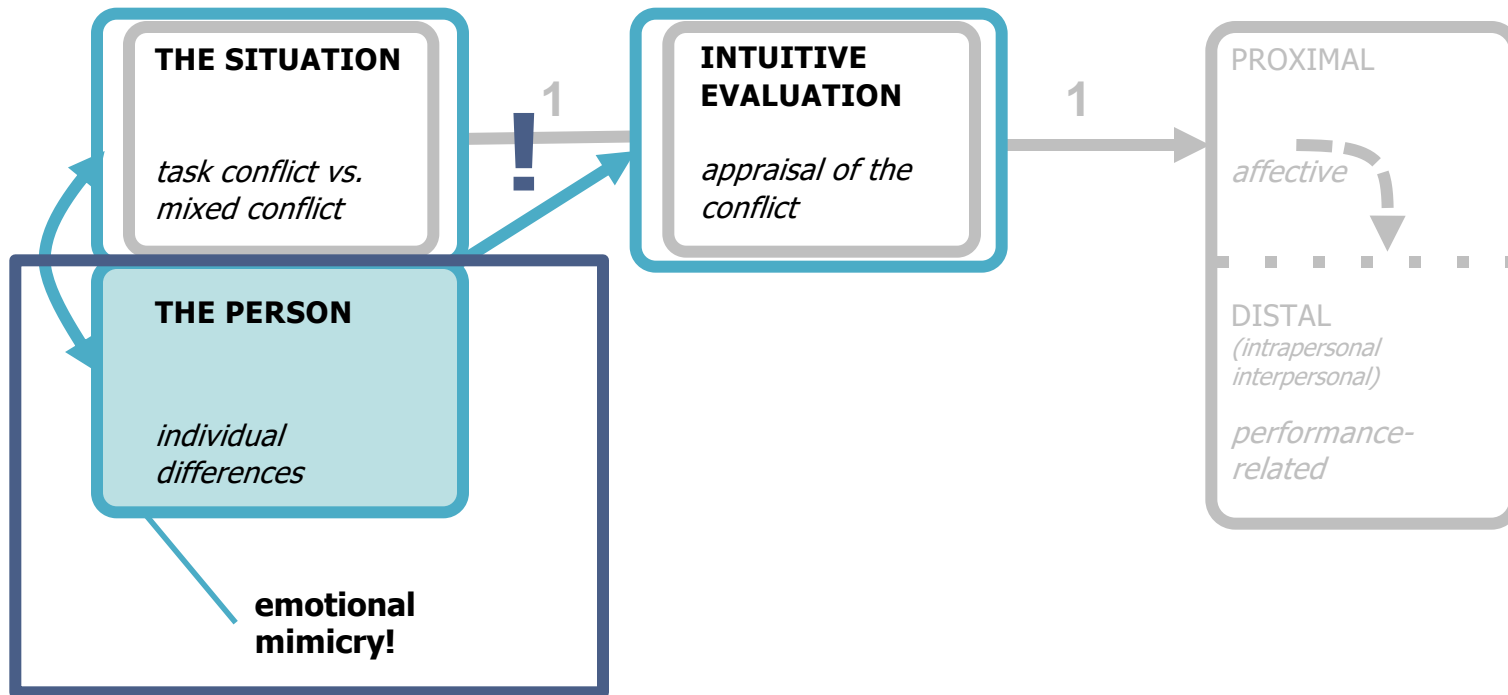
PROXIMAL

affective

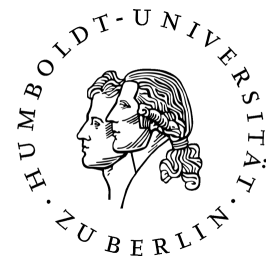
DISTAL

(intrapersonal interpersonal)

performance-related



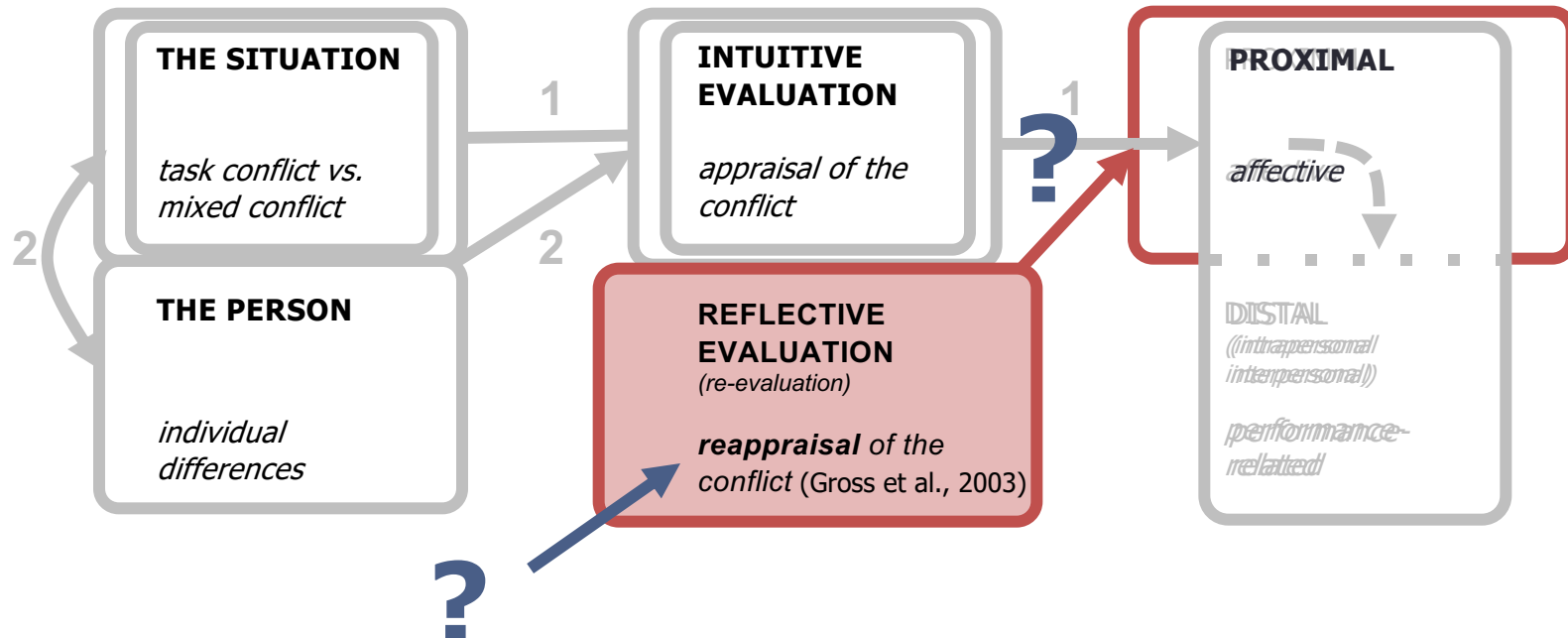
THE CONFLICT EPISODE MODEL: 2ND EXTENSION



CONFLICT PROCESSING

CONFLICT EVALUATION

JOB OUTCOMES

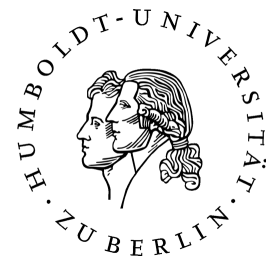


- **Reappraisal** = *reevaluating* a situation's meaning to *alter* the emotional experience (Gross & John, 2003)
- Instructed reappraisal – effective strategy! (see meta-analysis by Webb, Miles, & Sheeran, 2012)
 - BUT: passive picture viewing ≠ **social stress task**



- demanding (!!!), especially for those *unfamiliar* with the use of reappraisal

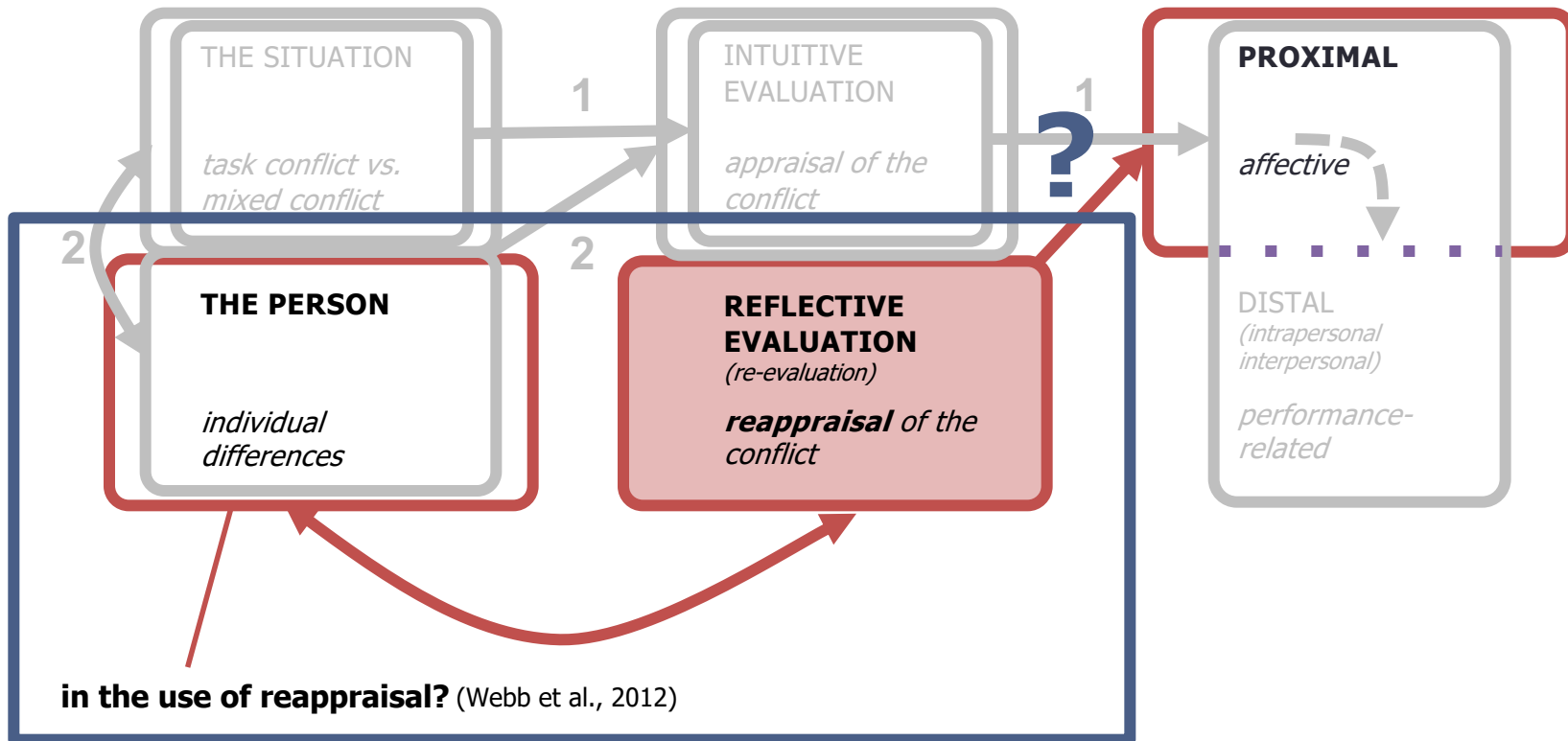
THE CONFLICT EPISODE MODEL: 2ND EXTENSION



CONFLICT PROCESSING

CONFLICT EVALUATION

JOB OUTCOMES



Study 4 – Emotion regulation instructions (*conditions: reappraisal, other; see Butler et al., 2003*) prior to the experimental induction of **mixed** conflicts ($N = 145$, $M_{age} = 32.2$ years, $SD_{age} = 12.2$ years)

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

WILEY | **PSYCHOPHYSIOLOGY** 

Only reappraisers profit from reappraisal instructions: Effects of instructed and habitual reappraisal on stress responses during interpersonal conflicts

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Abstract

Conflicts are an undesirable yet common aspect of daily interactions with wide-ranging negative consequences. The present research aimed to examine the buffering effect of experimentally instructed reappraisal on self-reported, physiological and behavioral stress indices during interpersonal conflicts, taking into account habitual emotion regulation strategies. For this, 145 participants experienced a standardized laboratory conflict with the instruction to either reappraise ($n = 48$), to suppress ($n = 50$), or with no instruction ($n = 47$) while cardiovascular and neuroendocrine measures were taken. Participants were allowed to eat sweet and salty snacks during

the conflict situation. Prior to as well as after the conflict, participants reported on their subjective stress level. Reappraisal instructions were only effective for high habitual reappraisers who exhibited lower cardiovascular and cortisol reactivity and demonstrated fewer snack-eating behaviors under reappraisal instructions than under suppression or no instructions. The opposite pattern emerged for low habitual reappraisers. Neither experimentally instructed nor habitual reappraisal by itself reduced the negative effects of conflicts. Our findings complement the literature on the diverging effects of instructed reappraisal in tense social interactions.

Study 4 – Emotion regulation instructions (*conditions: reappraisal, other; see Butler et al., 2003*) prior to the experimental induction of **mixed** conflicts ($N = 145$, $M_{age} = 32.2$ years, $SD_{age} = 12.2$ years)

Measures:

- at least 24 hrs prior to the laboratory session: German version of the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Gross & John, 2003) by Abler & Kessler (2009)
 - assessment of different indices for **negative affect (NA)** (subjective, physiological, behavioral)
- self-reported NA reactivity
 - heart period change



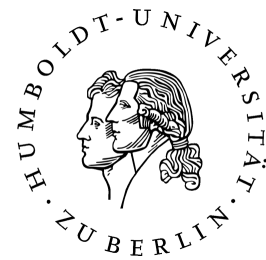
- cortisol reactivity



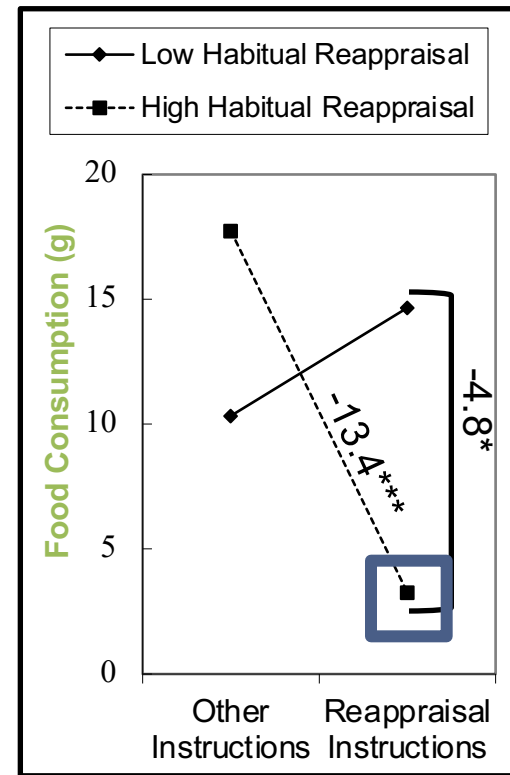
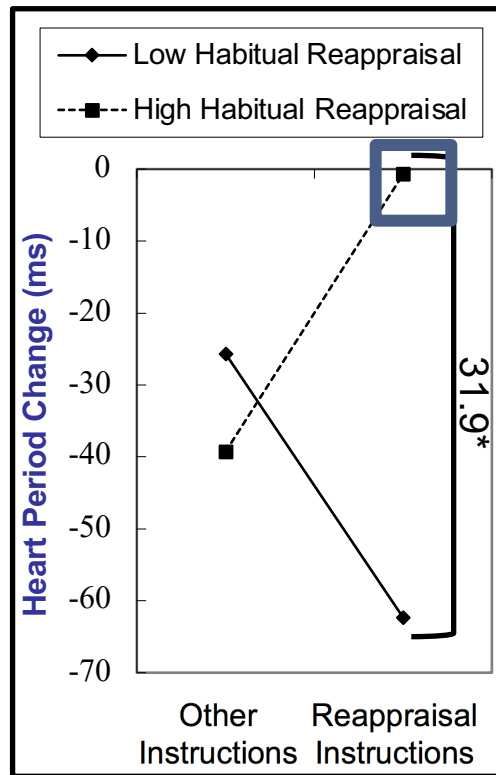
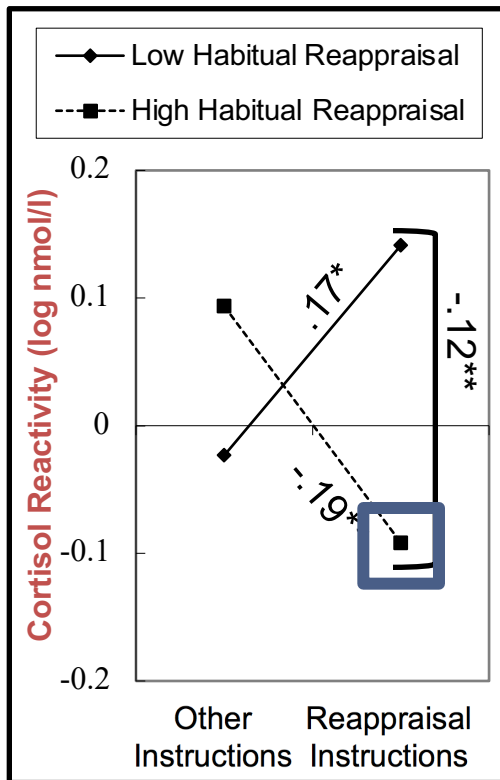
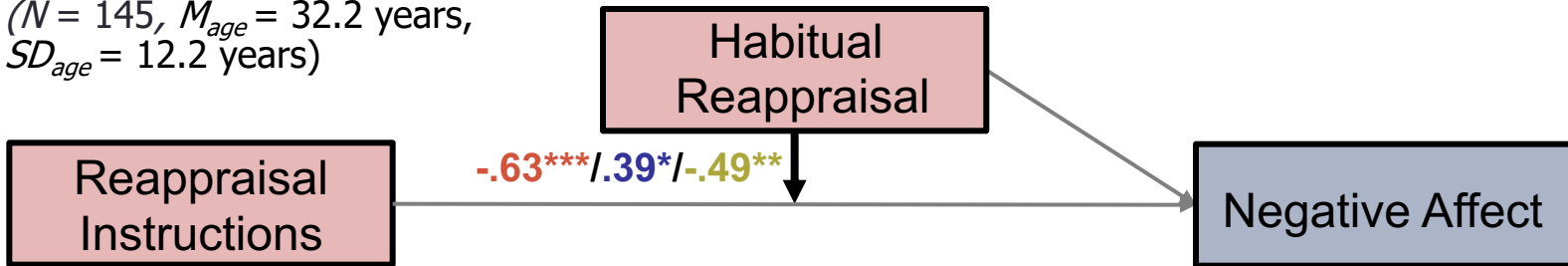
- snack food consumption



EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE: PROXIMAL JOB OUTCOMES

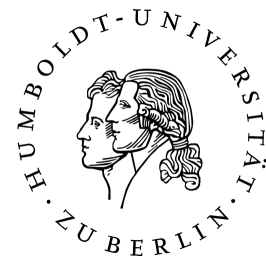


Study 4 – Emotion regulation instructions (*conditions: reappraisal, other;* see Butler et al., 2003) prior to the experimental induction of **mixed** conflicts ($N = 145$, $M_{age} = 32.2$ years, $SD_{age} = 12.2$ years)



* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

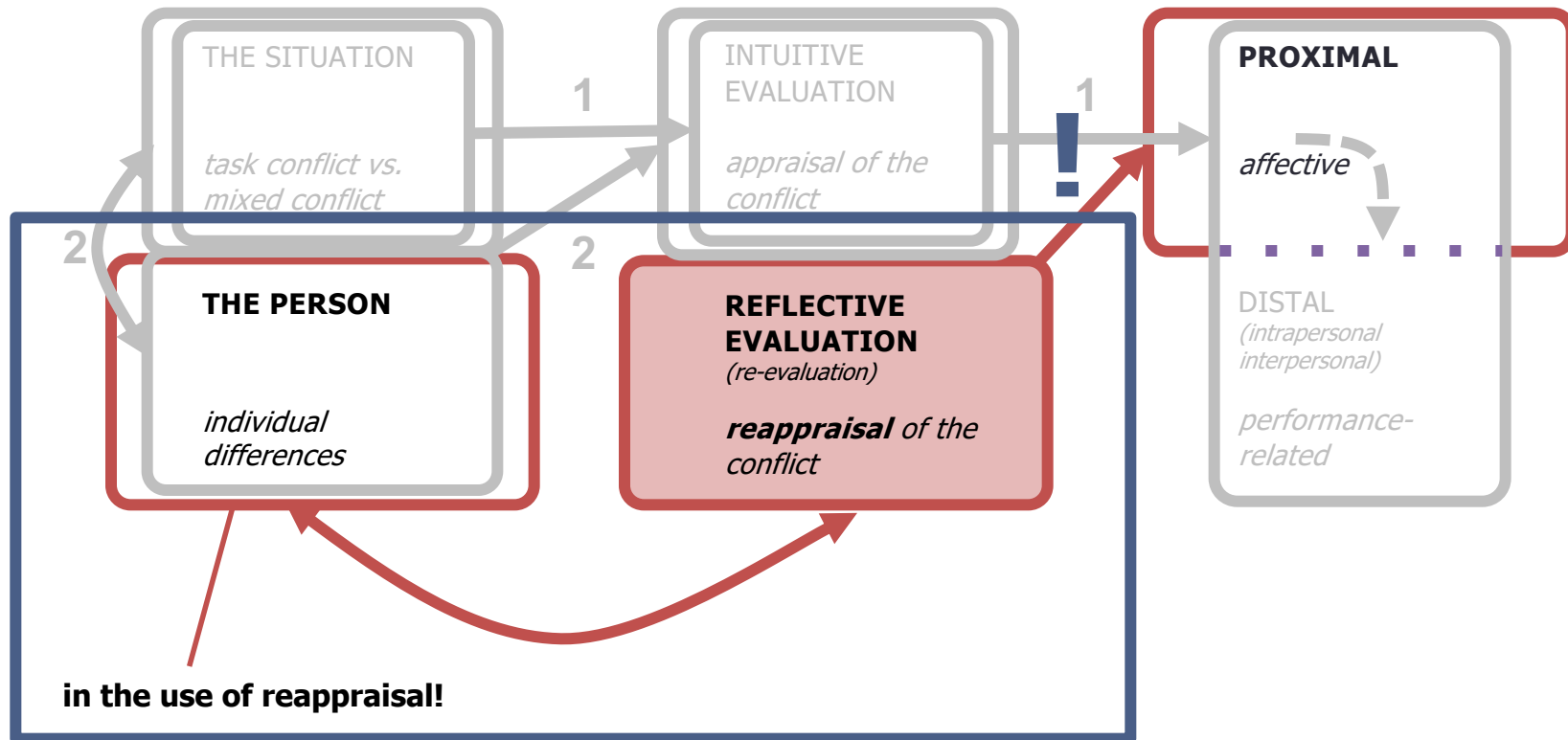
THE CONFLICT EPISODE MODEL: 2ND EXTENSION



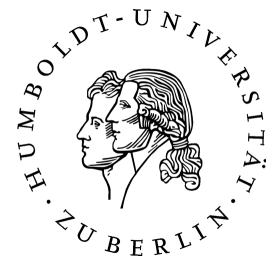
CONFLICT PROCESSING

CONFLICT EVALUATION

JOB OUTCOMES



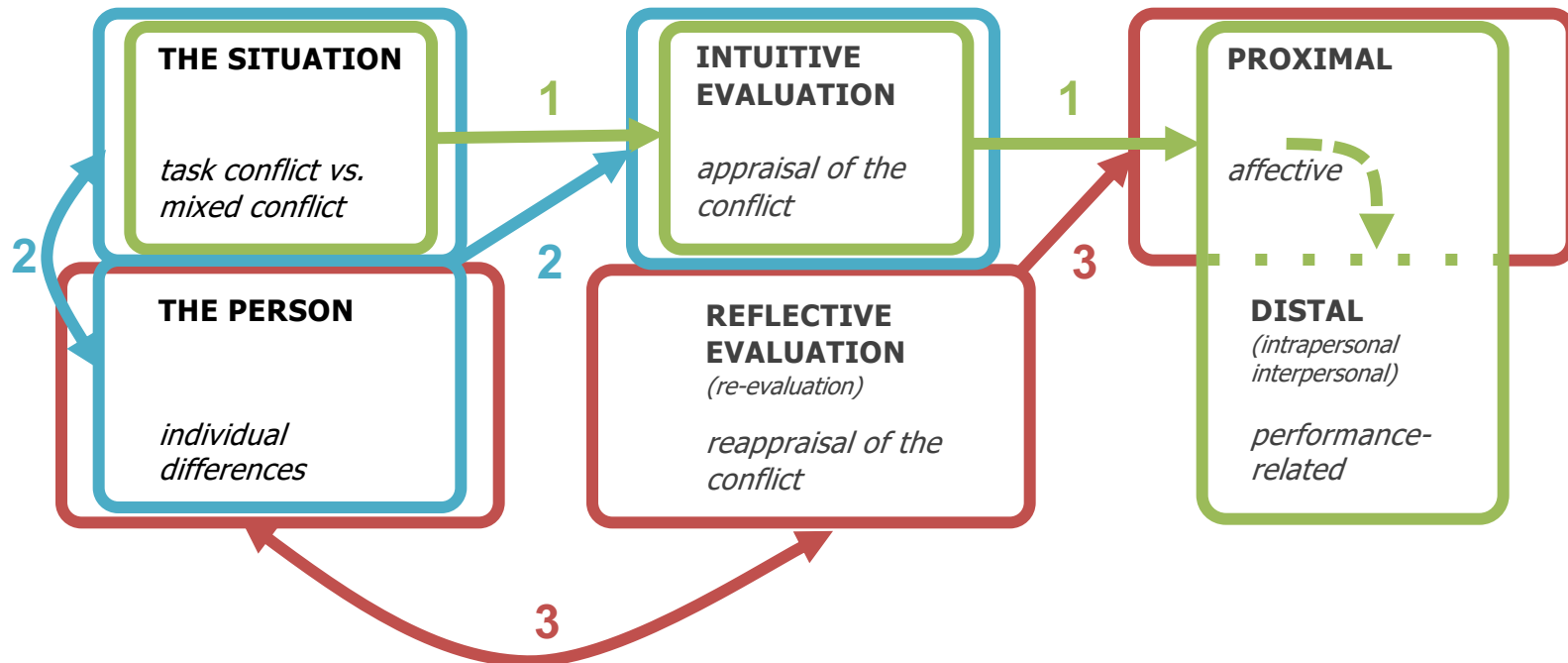
SUMMARY: THE "ADVANCED" CONFLICT EPISODE MODEL



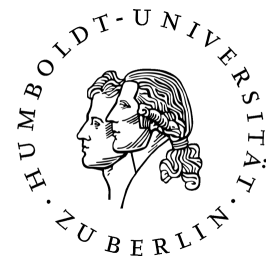
CONFLICT PROCESSING

CONFLICT EVALUATION

JOB OUTCOMES



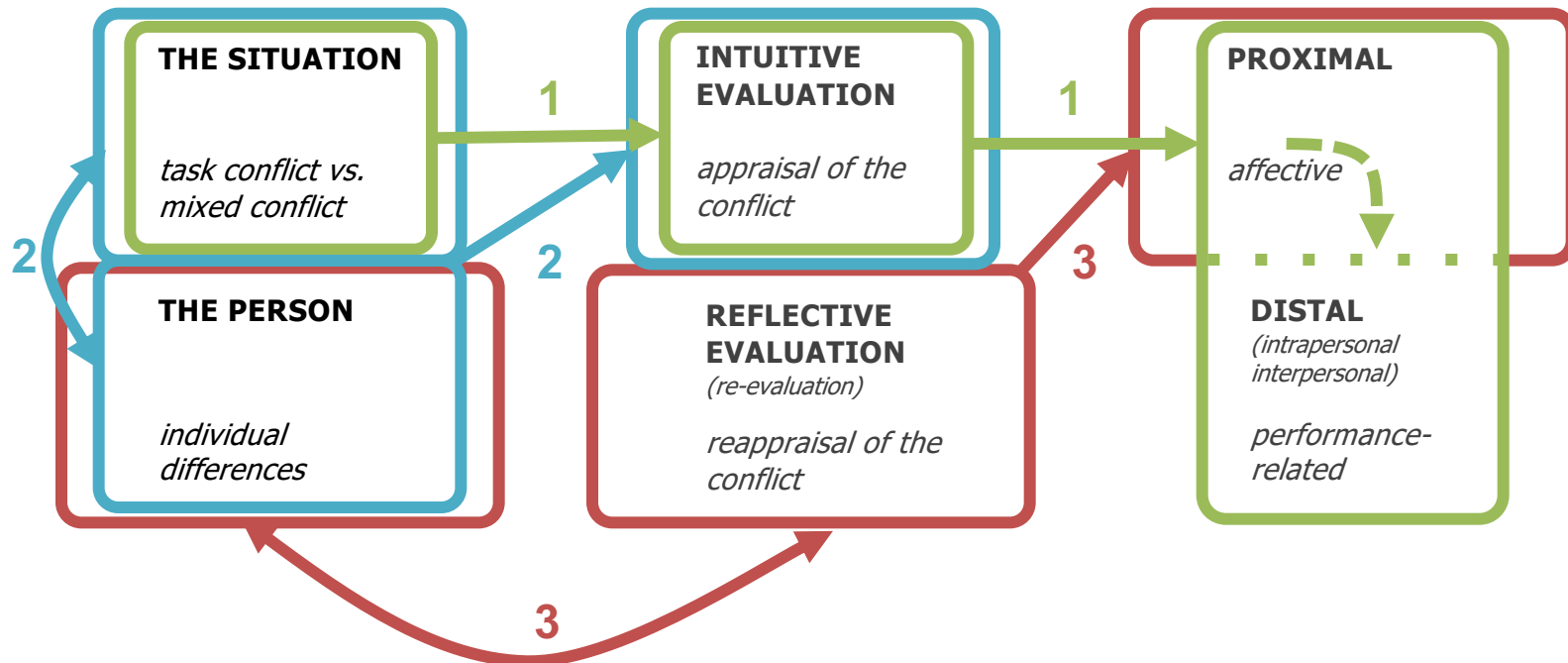
SUMMARY: THE "ADVANCED" CONFLICT EPISODE MODEL

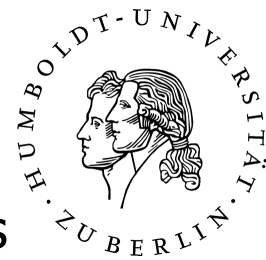


CONFLICT PROCESSING

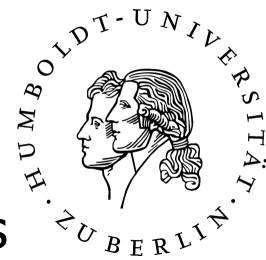
CONFLICT EVALUATION

JOB OUTCOMES





- **Negative affect (NA)** did not predict **performance** declines
 - NA = *heterogeneous* construct that entails avoidance-motivated emotions (anxiety) as well as approach-motivated emotions (anger) -> focus shift from the global NA score to a more differentiated view on discrete emotions?
- The **idiosyncratic reality** (*evaluation of the conflict*) may play a more important role than the objective reality (type of conflict) for the prediction of the conflict consequences
- **Differentiation** between **task** and **mixed conflicts** is essential
 - how reasonable is it to ask for the experience and consequences of conflicts with retrospective self-reports?

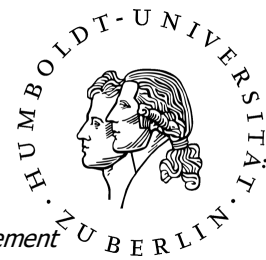


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The negative effects of **task conflicts** depend on the extent to which they escalate into **mixed conflicts**.

Hence, **relationship conflicts** arising from task conflicts should be *prevented* or at least *mitigated* to ensure a **constructive** and **fruitful task-related discussion** with positive affective, cognitive, and social consequences.

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