

# Minority dissent, social acceptance and conflict transformation in multiparty systems

Multiparty  
systems

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This study aims to investigate the role of minority dissent (MD) as an antecedent for task (TC) and relationship conflict (RC) in groups engaged in multiparty collaboration. The authors hypothesized that MD triggers both TC and RC and that the association between MD and RC is mediated by TC. Moreover, the authors hypothesized that the positive association between MD and RC is attenuated by social acceptance, while the positive association between TC and RC is attenuated by trust.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The authors have tested the hypotheses in 36 groups comprising in total 145 professionals that attended a two-day workshop on working across organizational boundaries and who filled in three surveys during a multiparty simulation. The authors used multilevel mediation analyses to test the hypotheses.

**Findings** – The results generally supported the role of MD as an antecedent for both TC and RC as well as the mediating role of TC in the relationship between MD and RC. The attenuating role of social acceptance in the relationship between MD and RC was fully supported, while the attenuating role of trust in the relationship between TC and RC was not supported.

**Research limitations/implications** – This study is based on a rather small sample and used a cross-lagged data collection design, and no causal claims can be derived from the findings. Behavioral multiparty simulations create a realistic context in which the authors investigate the dynamics of conflict transformation and explore the interplay of MD, TC and RC.

**Social implications** – As nowadays, multiparty systems are engaged in dealing with important societal challenges and because RC is detrimental for collaborative effectiveness, the results have important implications for facilitating effective collaboration in such complex systems.

**Originality/value** – This study makes an important contribution to the literature on conflict in multiparty systems by showing that as an antecedent of intragroup conflict, MD can have both a beneficial as well as a detrimental impact on the conflict dynamics of multiparty systems. It points out the importance of social acceptance as a buffer against the detrimental role of MD.

**Keywords** Multiparty systems, Task conflict, Relationship conflict, Trust, Social acceptance

**Paper type** Research paper



Literature on intragroup conflict distinguishes between task related and relationship conflict as two forms of disagreements that can emerge during group interactions (Jehn, 1994). The two forms of conflict received considerable attention in the literature so far. Task conflict is expected to be beneficial for group outcomes (due to the better knowledge exploration and integration associated with disagreements related to the task), while relationship conflict is

detrimental for group outcomes because it generates a negative emotional climate in groups, and it distracts group members from performing their task (Curşeu *et al.*, 2012a, Telecan *et al.*, 2022; van den Berg *et al.*, 2014; Loughry and Amason, 2014). Empirical evidence shows that task and relationship conflict are positively correlated (De Wit *et al.*, 2012; De Dreu and Weingart, 2003; O'Neill *et al.*, 2013; Poitras, 2012; Kozusznik *et al.*, 2020), and various models of conflict transformation have attempted to explore the interplay between task and relationship conflict in groups. Most research on conflict transformation conceptualized task conflict as an antecedent for relationship conflict (Loughry and Amason, 2014), and longitudinal research supports a positive association between initial task conflict and emergent relationship conflict at later stages (Curşeu and Schruijer, 2010). Comprehensive meta-analyses (De Wit *et al.*) and conceptual papers (Korsgaard *et al.*, 2008) on intragroup conflict called for more multi-level and process oriented studies on conflict transformation, and we answer this call by exploring the multilevel interplay between task and relationship conflict in multiparty systems.

Conflict transformation was also explored in more complex systems composed of multiple teams (van den Berg *et al.*, 2014) as well as in multiparty systems (Curşeu and Schruijer, 2017; Fleştea *et al.*, 2017; Brummans *et al.*, 2008). Multiparty systems are complex environments in which legally independent stakeholders interact to explore their interdependencies and jointly develop a common goal that also serves their own goals (Vansina *et al.*, 1998; Brummans *et al.*, 2008; Gray, 2011; Schruijer, 2015; Trif *et al.*, 2020). Multiparty systems are complex settings in which stakeholders engage in within as well as between group interactions; therefore, they offer a suitable context for the multilevel and process-oriented exploration of diversity and conflict. In an integrative review of the literature on multiparty systems engaged in sustainability decisions, Curşeu and Schruijer (2017) pointed toward the joint interplay between task and relationship conflict as antecedents of collaborative effectiveness and decision comprehensiveness in multiparty systems. In their integrative model, stakeholder diversity triggers task related disagreements, a necessary condition for constructive collaborative relations; yet these task disagreements can evolve in relationship conflict that ultimately decrease collaboration effectiveness in multiparty systems. A key tenet of this model is that stakeholder diversity, when expressed, triggers task conflict and indirectly may lead to relational frictions. In this paper, we set out to directly test this claim by exploring the interplay between minority dissent, as a form of manifested diversity of viewpoints in multiparty systems, and task and relationship conflict. Meta-analytic evidence shows that informational diversity in groups has a positive and significant association with task and not relationship conflict (Poitras, 2012).

Our study makes several contributions to the literature on conflict. First, we explore one of the key antecedents of task conflict namely minority dissent, and we extend the view on group diversity as a compositional antecedent of conflict (Vodosek, 2007; Lee *et al.*, 2022; Todorova *et al.*, 2020; Seong and Hong, 2020; Curşeu and Schruijer, 2010) to a functional view of diversity as openly expressed minority dissent. Second, we extend the exploration of intragroup conflict to the context of multiparty systems, a context marked by intragroup as well as intergroup interactions, and we show that task conflict, a necessary condition for collaboration (Curşeu and Schruijer, 2017), may trigger relational frictions with detrimental consequences for multiparty system effectiveness (Curşeu and Schruijer, 2020). Third, we answer the call for more multilevel studies on the dynamics of conflict (De Wit *et al.*, 2012) by exploring and disentangling the within and between group patterns of conflict transformation in multiparty systems. Fourth, we build on the Team Conflict Dynamics Model (O'Neill *et al.*, 2017; O'Neill and McLarnon, 2018), by conceptualizing social

acceptance as a proxy for idiosyncrasy credit (Hollander, 1958) and by exploring social acceptance as a moderator of the relationship between minority dissent and relationship conflict. Finally, we extend the contingency models of intragroup conflict transformation (Simons and Peterson, 2000; Ullah, 2021; Huang, 2010) by attempting to replicate the moderating role of trust in the association between task and relationship conflict.

### Theory and hypotheses

Task and relationship conflict are central constructs in the literature on group and intergroup interactions (De Wit *et al.*, 2012; O'Neill *et al.*, 2013; van den Berg *et al.*, 2014; Telecan *et al.*, 2022). Both types of conflict are subsumed under a general conflict factor that described frictions and disagreements emerging in interpersonal interactions (Poitras, 2012). Depending on the nature of these disagreements, the conflict literature defines task conflict as interpersonal disagreements related to group goals, the nature and task and ways of performing it, while interpersonal frictions and personality clashes define relationship conflict (Jehn, 1994; Greer *et al.*, 2008). To date, meta-analytic studies reported significant and positive correlations between the two forms of conflict, and rather inconclusive evidence considering the differential effect of the two types of conflict on group outcomes (De Wit *et al.*, 2012; De Dreu and Weingart, 2003; O'Neill *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, traditionally group composition, and diversity in particular, was considered as the key antecedent for conflict emergence (Vodosek, 2007; Lee *et al.*, 2022; Todorova *et al.*, 2020; Seong and Hong, 2020). Meta-analytical studies called for more attention to other antecedents of intragroup conflict and conflict transformation (Poitras, 2012; De Wit *et al.*, 2012). We extend the compositional view on group diversity to a functional view of group diversity and set out to directly test the extent to which manifested diversity of viewpoint triggers intragroup conflict. Recent empirical evidence shows that when group members openly express their ideas during group meetings, groups experience more task conflict and less relationship conflict (Brykman and O'Neill, 2021). Our study extends these insights into expressed or manifested diversity and tests the impact of minority influence as a process in which one group member or a minority within a group openly expresses ideas that are different from the ideas expressed or supported by the majority (Curşeu *et al.*, 2012b). The open expression of disagreements is a key communication process through which diversity becomes manifest in group discussions (Brykman and O'Neill, 2021); therefore, minority dissent reflects expressed or manifested diversity (Curşeu *et al.*, 2022). In an experimental study using a hidden profile task reported in De Wit *et al.* (2013), task conflict was induced by asking a confederate to openly express divergent opinions than the ones preferred by the other naïve participants, and this manipulation was effective. Although not labeled as minority dissent, the confederate expressing a divergent set of ideas than the rest of the group is similar with the way in which minority dissent was manipulated in previous research. Another study that manipulated minority dissent in groups showed that it triggered both task related as well as relational conflict (Curşeu *et al.*, 2012b), yet studies to date did not fully explore the interplay of minority dissent with the two forms of conflict in multiparty settings. As minority dissent reflects the open expression of divergent ideas in groups, we expect that it first triggers conflicts in the task domain, which in turn can evolve in relationship frictions.

Multiparty collaboration requires the stakeholders to engage in complex analyses of the situation at hand. The expression of different viewpoints is an important prerequisite for collaborative effectiveness (Curşeu and Schruijer, 2017; Gray, 2011; Vangen and Huxham, 2003; Trif *et al.*, 2020). Open expression of diverse ideas in multiparty systems is a clear manifestation of the requisite variety these complex systems need to collaborate effectively. In complex systems composed of multiple interacting groups, task related disagreements

tend to generate relationship frictions, especially when the emotional regulation capabilities of the groups is reduced (van den Berg *et al.*, 2014). Conflict transformation, namely, that task-related disagreements often generate relational conflict, is a frequent process in multiparty systems (Curşeu and Schrujjer, 2017). In a study on multi-team systems, in which, similar to multiparty systems, members engage in within as well as between group interactions, van den Berg *et al.* (2014) showed that task conflict evolves in relationship conflict especially if the emotion regulation capacity of the members is low rather than high. In line with the claim that minority dissent is expressed or manifested diversity and with the likelihood of conflict transformation in multiparty systems, we argue that minority dissent triggers task disagreements, that in turn are associated with relational frictions in groups engaged in multiparty collaboration. Therefore, the hypotheses are:

- H1. In multiparty collaboration, minority dissent is positively associated with both task and relationship conflict.
- H2. In multiparty collaboration, the association between minority dissent and relationship conflict is mediated by task conflict.

When minority dissent is expressed in a socially accepting group climate, it fosters the emergence of complex, group-level cognitive structures (Curşeu *et al.*, 2017), and it has a positive impact on the creativity of group outcomes (Curşeu *et al.*, 2022). Multiparty collaboration requires that stakeholders balance the need for preserving their individuality (stick to and protect their own group's interest and views) and striving for the collective good and being of value to other stakeholders. Such a tension between individual and collective interests often generates distrust and a suspicious intergroup climate (Curşeu and Schrujjer, 2021). Social acceptance describes an egalitarian group climate in which in line with the collective goals, individual contributions are welcomed and group members perceive each other as socially desirable interacting partners (Chen and Hamilton, 2015; Curşeu *et al.*, 2017). In line with the idiosyncrasy credit postulated by a social exchange perspective (Hollander, 1958), social acceptance reflects a group climate in which members have many degrees of freedom for sharing their own views and opinions, while groups in which social acceptance is low do not "award" their members idiosyncrasy credit, or the freedom to behave in line with their own views rather than in line with ways prescribed by the norms shared by the majority (Curşeu *et al.*, 2017; Estrada *et al.*, 1995). To summarize, the lack of idiosyncrasy credit in groups with a less socially accepting group climate implies that members are more likely to be sanctioned when they express views that are not aligned with the ones supported by the majority, and these interpersonal sanctions can occur in the form of relationship conflict. In contrast, abundant idiosyncrasy credit in groups with a socially accepting climate allow members to express divergent views without being penalized or suffering negative relational consequences.

We expect that when divergent ideas are generated in a group climate lacking social acceptance, they will be more conducive for relationship frictions as compared to more accepting social contexts. If, however, the stakeholders manage to build a relational context in which the open expression of differences is accepted, minority dissent is less likely to trigger relational frictions. Thus, to fully capitalize on the benefits of diversity, organizations need to build a socially accepting climate (Estrada *et al.*, 1995). In line with the Team Conflict Dynamics Model (TCDM; O'Neill *et al.*, 2017; O'Neill and McLarnon, 2018) in a group climate that is not threatening to group members diversity is less likely to trigger dysfunctional relationship conflict. Much like psychological safety and the constructive controversy variables listed in the TCDM (O'Neill *et al.*, 2017; O'Neill and McLarnon, 2018)

we argue that social acceptance reflects a group climate in which members feel safe to share a divergent perspective without feeling or being threatened or being threatening to the other members. We build on empirical results regarding the interplay between minority dissent and social acceptance derived from the idiosyncrasy credit model (Hollander, 1958) as well as from the TCDM (O'Neill *et al.*, 2017; O'Neill and McLarnon, 2018) and argue that social acceptance is a buffer for the relationship between minority dissent and relationship conflict. Our third hypothesis is:

*H3.* In multiparty collaboration, social acceptance attenuates the positive association between minority dissent and relationship conflict.

The final aim of our paper is to replicate previous results showing that trust attenuates the association between task and relationship conflict (Simons and Peterson, 2000; Curşeu and Schruijer, 2010; Tidd *et al.*, 2004; Peterson and Behfar, 2003). Trust is often conceptualized as a relational catalyzer, reflecting positive interpersonal expectations (De Jong and Elfring, 2010) that are ultimately conducive for collaborative effectiveness (Vangen and Huxham, 2003). Literature to date has presented trust as one of the key contingencies that blocks the transformation of task conflict into relationship conflict (Loughry and Amason, 2014), and we aim to test this moderating role in multiparty systems. If task conflict emerges in groups with low trust, members may feel attacked by the divergent views expressed and as such interpret task disagreements as relational affronts. In contrast, if group members trust each other, they can engage in “healthy” task debates without risking perceptions of interpersonal offences that ultimately lead to relationship conflict. Therefore we hypothesize that:

*H4.* In multiparty collaboration, trust attenuates the positive association between task and relationship conflict.

## Methods

### *Sample*

We have tested our hypotheses in 36 groups engaging in an existing multiparty simulation in which seven parties interact to address a complex regional development issue (Schruijer and Vansina, 2008; Vansina and Taillieu, 1997; Vansina *et al.*, 1998). The simulation describes a complex situation in which seven parties (one bank, investors, three yacht clubs, public authorities and a shipyard) are involved in dealing with economic, environmental and social issues in the region of Saint Petersburg involving the island of Kotlin. In a harsh economic context, the shipyard faces a reorganization, the three yacht clubs aim at increasing their client base and develop tourism in the region, the investors aim to increase their profits, while the public authorities have a complex role in which they have to switch between assuming a facilitating role and following their own interest. No assignment is given by the facilitators. It is up to the participants how they want to spend their time in the simulation.

The simulation is guided by minimal ground rules:

- Participants are asked to read carefully the information provided for their interest party and to identify as much as possible with the stakeholder they represent.
- Participants can interact freely within their own stakeholder group and can visit the other parties as they wish, yet no more than three parties are allowed to be simultaneously present in the same room.

- Plenary sessions are planned throughout the day, and stakeholders can delegate one representative to join these meetings, while the constituencies can sit behind their representatives and send notes.
- Interactions occur in real time (a minute is a minute).

The facilitators do not intervene in the dynamics; they only observe. Each simulation lasted for two days; the first day and the morning of the second day were devoted to playing the simulation, while the remainder of the second day was devoted to a joint reflection of the dynamics in the simulation.

At the onset of the simulation, participants were informed about the general setting of the simulation, the parties were shortly introduced and then participants were asked to express their preferences for the parties. Groups of three to four members were formed based on these preferences. Participants were 145 managers and consultants (54 women) enrolled in an Executive Masters in Management at a European Business School. Participants were asked to fill in a survey at three moments in time, at the onset of the simulation concerning their expectations, during the simulation and at the end of the simulation. Data on all variables were collected at all moments in time, and all data were included in the multilevel analyses.

#### *Measures*

*Minority dissent* was evaluated with four items to evaluate the extent to which one member engages in dissent with the other members of the group (Curşeu *et al.*, 2017; Curşeu and ten Brink, 2016) (item example: “One of the party members often expresses ideas completely different than those of the other members”). Answers were recorded on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was 0.85, [0.82-0.85] indicating a good reliability of the scale.

*Social acceptance* was evaluated with items focused on the accepting group climate (item example: “My ideas are fully accepted by the other party members”) with answers recorded on a five-points Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) (Curşeu *et al.*, 2017). Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was 0.73 [0.66-0.76], indicating an acceptable reliability of the scale.

*Task and relationship conflict* were evaluated with the eight items scale (four for task and four for relationship conflict) presented in Jehn (1994). Example of items for task conflict “To what extent are the disagreements in your interest party related to the task” (1 = not at all to 5 = to a great extent), while for relationship conflict “How much are personality conflicts evident in your interest party?” (1 = never to 5 = very often). Cronbach’s alpha for the task conflict items was 0.86 [0.82-0.86], while for relationship conflict, it was 0.83 [0.81-0.86], indicating a good reliability for the two conflict scales. To alleviate common method concerns, especially due to the high positive correlation between task and relationship conflict (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003; Poitras, 2012), in the analyses, we have used the score of relationship conflict as reported by each individual participant (focal person), yet we computed an additional score for task conflict in which we have used the scores reported by the teammates of the focal person (computed as the task conflict reported in each group minus the score of the focal person). This procedure was used in previous studies to reduce concerns related to the common method bias (Glomb and Liao, 2003; Kristof-Brown *et al.*, 2005; Pluut and Curşeu, 2013).

*Trust* was evaluated with five items presented in Lewis (2003) “I am confident relying on the information that other party members bring to the discussion” (1 = strongly disagree to

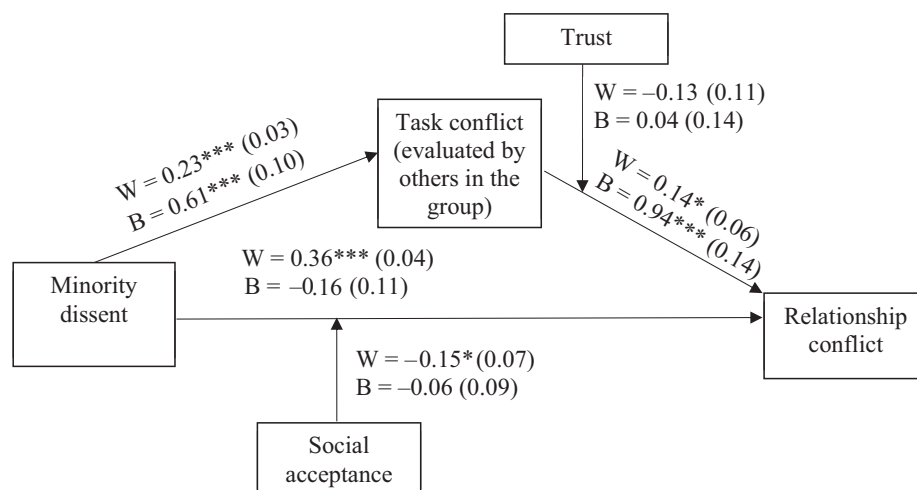


5 = strongly agree). Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.73 [0.71-0.78], indicating an acceptable reliability for this scale.

**Results**

Because our participants were nested in groups engaged in intergroup interactions, and because perceptions of conflict are sometimes asymmetrical in groups (Jehn *et al.*, 2010; Wang, 2021), we have used multilevel mediation analyses to test our hypotheses (Rockwood and Hayes, 2022; Hayes and Rockwood, 2020). To test our moderated mediation multilevel model, we have used the MLmed macro (Beta 2 version) developed for SPSS by Rockwood (2017). In the context of the multiparty simulation, this procedure allows us to disentangle the within group from the between group effects. The estimation of within group effects tests the hypothetical relationships between variables within each stakeholder group, while the between group effects test the hypothesized relations for the aggregated group level scores. The multiparty simulation is an adequate context to explore such effects, as participants interact within groups as well as with members of other stakeholder groups. Because the data were collected from the same source, for the mediating variable, we have used the task conflict scores reported by the other group members and not the focal person. The results of the analyses are presented in Figure 1.

As illustrated in Figure 1, minority dissent has a positive association with task conflict as well as with relationship conflict; therefore, *H1* was supported by the data. Moreover, task conflict mediates the indirect association between minority dissent and relationship conflict, as both the within groups effect (indirect effect 0.03, SE = 0.01, 95%CI [0.004; 0.06]) as well as the between groups indirect effect (indirect effect 0.57, SE = 0.12, 95%CI [0.35;0.83]) are positive and significant. The remaining within group direct association between minority dissent and relationship conflict was positive and significant (effect 0.36, SE = 0.04, 95% CI [0.27; 0.44]), while the remaining between group direct association was not significant (effect



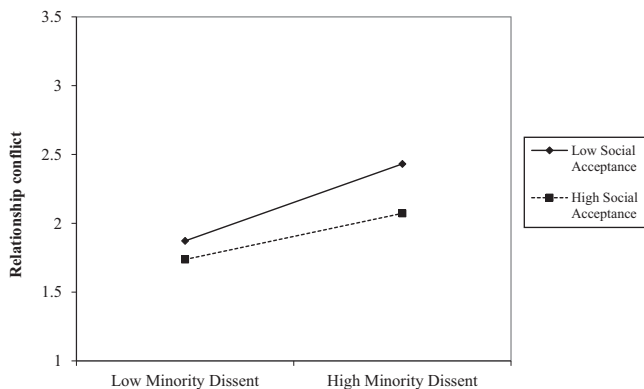
**Notes:** W = within effect, B = between effect; unstandardized coefficients are presented in the table with SE in parentheses. †*p* < 0.10; \**p* < 0.05; \*\**p* < 0.01; \*\*\**p* < 0.001

**Figure 1.** Multilevel mediation results for relationship conflict

-0.16, SE = 0.11, 95%CI [-0.39; 0.07]. We can therefore conclude that *H2* is supported by the data such that within groups task conflict partially mediates the association between minority dissent and relationship conflict, while between groups, task conflict fully mediates the association between minority dissent and relationship conflict. Our results also reveal a significant within group interaction effect between social acceptance and minority dissent (-0.15, SE = 0.07, 95%CI [-0.28; -0.02]). The interaction effect is depicted in [Figure 2](#), and it supports our expectation (stated in *H3*), that within groups for members that experience a socially accepting group climate the perceptions of minority dissent are less strongly associated with the perceptions or relationship conflict than for members that experience less social acceptance. The between groups moderation effect was not significant; thus, *H3* was only supported for the within subjects effect. Finally, the interaction effect between task conflict and trust was not significant, thus not supporting the last hypothesis.

### Discussion

Our study explored conflict transformation in groups interacting in a multiparty setting. The multiparty simulations offer a naturalistic context in which participants experience the complexity of multiparty relations ([Schrujfer and Vansina, 2008](#); [Vansina and Taillieu, 1997](#); [Vansina et al., 1998](#)), and as such, our study extends research on conflict antecedents and conflict transformation to a complex system in which relations are emergent and less influenced by formal rules or normative frameworks. Our results support the fact that minority dissent is a key antecedent for both task and relationship conflict and show that between groups task conflict fully explains the association between minority dissent and relationship conflict. This means that task conflict is the group level mechanism that translates the open manifestation of diverse ideas into relationship conflict. Multiparty systems offer a complex setting in which the multilevel exploration of conflict dynamics is possible. Our study supports the mediation claims for between as well as within group effects. In other words, minority dissent, as an expression of informational diversity, first triggers task conflict, which then evolves into relationship frictions. Within groups, the mediating role of task conflict is only partial; therefore, there are other mechanisms (likely tied to social perceptions) that explain the positive association between minority dissent and relationship conflict. Conflict transformation was extensively studied by aggregating scores at the group level of analyses (as we show in our replication of the between group effects), yet literature to date did not extensively explore the conflict dynamics within groups. Our results answer the call for more multilevel studies on conflict dynamics in complex social



**Figure 2.**  
Interaction effect  
between minority  
dissent and social  
acceptance on  
relationship conflict



systems (De Wit *et al.*, 2012) and open new venues for the exploration of conflict dynamics in multiparty systems. Future studies could also explore the extent to which task conflict that emerges from minority dissent also increases decision comprehensiveness in multiparty systems and which is the role of relationship conflict in this relation.

An important contribution of our paper pertains to the moderating role of social acceptance in the relationship between minority dissent and relationship conflict. For group members that perceive an accepting interpersonal climate, the association between minority dissent and relationship conflict is less strong as compared to group members that perceive less social acceptance. This result points toward an important contingency for harmonious interpersonal relations in multiparty systems, namely, social acceptance. As multiparty collaboration involves interactions within parties as well as between parties, future research could explore conflict and social acceptance as multilayered constructs. It is important to understand the cross-level relational dynamics in multiparty systems; differences in social acceptance (within versus between parties) could shed more light on conflict transformation in such complex systems. In our study, we conceptualized social acceptance as a proxy for idiosyncrasy credit (Hollander, 1958) as our measure of social acceptance is aligned with the way in which Estrada *et al.* (1995) evaluated idiosyncrasy credit (two of their four items measure of idiosyncrasy credit relate to the acceptance of ideas proposed by members during group interactions). This conceptualization is fully supported by the significant within group moderation effect showing that within group differences in perceptions of social acceptance impact the strength of the positive association between minority dissent and relationship conflict. Social acceptance reflects therefore a group climate in which group members perceive they can disagree and freely express their own views and opinions without damaging interpersonal relations. The open expression of views divergent from the ones shared or supported by the majority is taxing on dissenters' idiosyncrasy credit (Curşeu, 2022), and a socially accepting group climate buffers this relational cost that the dissenters pay during group interactions. In line with these arguments, we believe that social acceptance is a key ingredient of "healthy conflict profiles" as postulated in the TCDM (O'Neill *et al.*, 2017; O'Neill and McLarnon, 2018). Future research could partial out the evaluation of social acceptance within as well as between groups in multiparty settings. We believe that different perceptions of social acceptance may emerge in the within group as compared to between groups interactions in multiparty systems. Although we acknowledge the cross-level systemic influences in multiparty systems (Curşeu and Schruijer, 2018), we believe that social acceptance should be evaluated at both levels. Such a distinction allows for a much clearer separation of how idiosyncrasy credit works in multiparty settings. Moreover as idiosyncrasy credit was related to power and status in previous research (Estrada *et al.*, 1995), future research could also explore the interplay of power and conflictuality in multiparty systems, to further understand the dynamics and implications of idiosyncrasy credit in such complex systems.

Our study did not replicate the moderating role of trust in the relationship between task and relationship conflict reported in previous studies (Simons and Peterson, 2000; Curşeu and Schruijer, 2010; Tidd *et al.*, 2004). One possible explanation is that trust emergence in multiparty systems is a very complex phenomenon. Unlike groups that operate in organizational contexts in which members have a relational history (thus likely they rely on existing trust ties), trust needs to be built in multiparty systems as parties start without a relational history. At the onset of multiparty interactions, the expectations are marked by distrust rather than trust (Schruijer and Curşeu, 2021), as members do not have a clear representation of each other's views, interests and aspirations. A particularly relevant direction for future research consists of investigating

the moderating role of both distrust as well as trust as contingencies of conflict transformation in multiparty systems. We believe that trust and distrust can be investigated as two conceptually distinct constructs (although we do expect they are related), that can have distinct influences on the interplay between task and relationship conflict in multiparty systems. Another fruitful research direction is to further explore the interplay of trust and social acceptance in relation to the idiosyncrasy credit in multiparty systems. Both trust and social acceptance are constructs that are likely to describe “healthy conflict” profiles as described in TCDM (O’Neill *et al.*, 2017; O’Neill and McLarnon, 2018). Finally, another plausible explanation for the lack of support for *H4* is that in our study, we have used different sources for the evaluation of task and relationship conflict, while the previous studies that reported a significant moderating role of trust on conflict transformation used data collected from the same source.

### Limitations

Next to its contributions, our study has several limitations as well. First, our results are based on a rather small sample, yet given the two-day duration of the simulation and the complex nature of the task, we believe that the behavioral simulation we have used in the study resembles the complexity experienced in real-life multiparty systems. Although the behavioral simulation is based on a complex task, our results cannot be fully extrapolated to other multiparty settings and tasks. Future studies could replicate our results in other settings, in multiparty systems performing different tasks in which data collection can be more extensive. Second, our data for all variables included in the model were collected from the same source; therefore, the results can be influenced by the common method bias (CMB). We have tried to alleviate these CMB concerns by using the evaluations of task conflict expressed by the other group members rather than by the focal person; nevertheless, this approach cannot fully alleviate all CMB concerns. Third, given the intensive nature of data collection tied to the use of behavioral simulation, our study is based on a rather small sample size, with only 36 entities at the group level of analysis, and this sample size is lower than the recommended 50 groups required at the second level (Maas and Hox, 2005). More recent simulation studies show that although the standard errors might be underestimated for samples smaller than 50 groups (level 2 data points), the point estimates are unbiased (Paccagnella, 2011). Given that our multilevel analyses converged, we consider that the estimate reports in our study are accurate, although the standard errors might be underestimated, and we call for future studies that try to replicate our results and test the model in larger samples. Finally, although causal claims cannot be made based on our research design, previous studies that directly manipulated minority dissent showed that it does trigger task conflict (Curşeu *et al.*, 2012b). Therefore, we can be confident that the theoretical relations specified in our model are sound.

### Practical implications

Our results have important practical implications for professionals engaged in multiparty collaboration and for facilitators of multiparty systems. In such complex systems, task-related disagreements are necessary conditions for successful collaboration (Curşeu and Schruijer, 2017). Minority dissent and task conflict have to be nourished and stimulated. Full participation in debates and discussions is paramount (Curşeu and Schruijer, 2020, Gray, 2011; Vansina *et al.*, 1998) yet it requires trust. According to our results, a climate of social acceptance attenuates the positive association between minority dissent and relationship conflict. These results point to the need to build an accepting emotional climate before actual progress regarding content

can be made. Involving external facilitators may be imperative to make this happen, especially when stakeholders engaged in multiparty interactions have a history of conflict. Social acceptance is a climate in which stakeholders feel free to participate and contribute; therefore, such a climate can create “self-fueling upward spirals” (Estrada *et al.*, 1995, p. 74) that could increase decision comprehensiveness in multiparty systems and ultimately foster collaborative effectiveness.

## Conclusions

Our study tests a multilevel model, deploying a multiparty simulation, in which expressed stakeholder diversity in the form of minority dissent triggers task conflict, which in turn evolves in relationship frictions. The mediation role of task conflict is supported for the within as well as for the between group effects. Moreover, our results show that social acceptance buffers the positive association between minority dissent and relationship conflict, such that for participants that perceive a socially accepting climate in their group, the positive association between minority dissent and relationship conflict is weaker than for those participants that perceive a low social acceptance in their group. Our results did not replicate the moderating role of trust in the relationship between task and relationship conflict.

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