The mediating effects of emotions on the relationship between conflict and trust

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ABSTRACT

Trust is important for effective group and organizational processes. However, researchers suggest that trust building may be challenging in the face of conflict. In this paper, we propose that the impact of conflict on trust may be partly dependent on the conflict-induced emotions in a conflict event. Using affective events and attribution theories as a framework, we tested the mediating effects of emotions (positive and self-conscious) in the relationship between conflict and trust. Data were collected from 325 student-workers enrolled in a large business school. Results indicated that task and relationship conflict were associated with positive and self-conscious emotions while self-conscious emotions mediated the link between conflict and trust. We discuss the implications for theory and practice.

Keywords: Conflict, emotions and trust

Workplace trust is critical for group and organizational innovation, creativity and conflict management (Kramer & Tyler, 1996; Prusak, 2001). Trust is also imperative for establishing and maintaining cooperative and productive work-related behaviours (Davis, Schoorman, Mayer and Tan, 2000). Given the above, a steady stream of trust research has focused on the influence of trust on group processes of conflict (Peterson and Behfar, 2003; Tidd, McIntyre and Friedman, 2004). However, a new stream of research is emerging which suggests that conflict is important in building trust. For example, Ronson and Peterson (2007) theorise that conflict is essential to the development of trust in groups while Ayoko and Pekerti (2008) empirically show that prolonged conflict duration is linked with trust. Furthermore, research on conflict suggests that conflict is emotionally laden (Bodtker and Jameson, 2001). While previous research acknowledges that conflict might be related to positive emotions, literature is silent on the specific positive emotions that might be connected with conflict. Similarly, prior research studies show that conflict is related to negative emotions such as anger (Nair, 2007). However, research that empirically investigates the relationship between different types of conflict and self-conscious emotions (Tangney, Stuewig and Mashek, 2007) of shame and guilt is scarce. Yet, there is evidence that these emotions are connected with interpersonal relationship (Leith and Baumeister, 1998). In the current research, we contribute to the debate on the reverse proposition that conflict is antecedent to trust (Ayoko and Pekerti, 2008; Korsgaard, Brodt and Whitener, 2002) and extend the boundary of research that examines the connection between emotions and conflict.

Theoretical framework and hypotheses development

According to Affective Events Theory (AET, Weiss and Cropanzano (1996), workplace events are proximal causes of an individual’s affective reactions that have direct influences on their attitudes and behaviours. Specifically, affective events theory explains how conflict events may influence individual’s positive or
negative emotional states that are fundamental to attitudes and behaviours in organizations (Ashkanasy and Daus, 2002). In this regard, empirical evidence shows that conflict is connected with emotions (Bodtker and Jameson, 2001), and these emotions define an individual’s interpretation and reaction to the conflict situation (Jehn, 1997). Therefore, the current research assumes AET in arguing that conflict leads to an affective reaction which, in turn, drives an individual’s perception of trust.

Additionally, Attribution Theory (AT, Heider, 1958; Ross and Fletcher, 1985) explores how individuals attribute causes to events, and how they spontaneously explain failures or conflicts. For example, people who engage in the reflective process of attribution during a conflict event make a decision on who is responsible for causing that conflict (Holtzworth-Munroe and Jacobson, 1985) determine whether that person should be held accountable for his/her actions (Scott, 2008). Moreover, given AT, individual’s beliefs about the cause of events drive his/her emotional reactions to and evaluations of given events. We argue that such evaluations, in turn, evoke distinct emotions, attitudes and behaviours (Weiner, 1985; Weiner, 1995) upon which trust decisions are based. Overall, we use both AET and AT to explain why conflict can elicit both positive and negative emotional reactions (Ashkanasy and Daus, 2002; Obeidi, Hipel and Kilgour, 2005; Youssef and Luthans, 2007) and how these reactions are critical in driving employee trust behaviours.

**Conflict, conflict types and outcomes**

Conflict is central to workgroup research (Jehn, 1995; 1997). Conflict researchers distinguish between two major conflicts: relationship (Jehn 1995, 1997) and task conflict (Jehn, 1995, 1997). Consequently, we focus on these types of conflict (task and relationship) in the current research.

**Task conflict**

Task conflict exists when team members have differing ideas and opinions about issues specific to duties under discussion such as strategic decisions or information to be included in a report (Jehn, 1995). Task conflict is positively associated with performance (Jehn and Chatman, 2000) and satisfaction (De Church and Marks, 2001). Likewise, it has the potential to provoke intense and heated discussions that are crucial for deeper and deliberate information processing, increased constructive criticism and a careful evaluation of alternatives (Jehn, 1997). These are relevant for quality decisions and strategic planning (Simons and Peterson, 2000). However, task conflict is detrimental to consensus building, causing antagonism and unhappiness (Jehn et al., 2008). Furthermore, previous studies show a persistent correlation between task conflict and relationship
conflict (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003; Tidd et al., 2004). Altogether, literature documents complex outcomes for task conflict and a complicated connection with relationship conflict.

**Task conflict and positive emotions**

Caused by inevitable natural cognitive outcomes resulting from the interpersonal nature of daily workplace life (Bryant and Cox, 2006), emotions are subjective feeling state that are results of employees’ interpretation of a situation (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995). These emotions subsequently determine the workers’ attitudes and behaviours (Nair, 2007). Positive emotions reflects the extent to which a person feels enthusiastic, active and alert (Watson, Clark and Tellegen, 1988), and contain feelings of enthusiasm, interest, excitement among others (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996). These emotions lead to higher job satisfaction, cooperation (Barsade, 2002), pro-social behaviours and performance (Ashkanasy, Hartel and Daus, 2002).

While literature is replete of the effects of positive emotions on workgroup outcomes (Barsade, 2002; Youssef and Luthans, 2007), the link between conflict and positive emotions is not clear (Steinel, Van Kleef and Harinck, 2008). De Dreu (2006) proposes that individuals who engage in complex jobs will experience task conflict and enthusiasm to propose new perspectives and engage in deep processing of information while Jehn and Mannix (2001) suggest that task conflict can include animated discussions that may lead to personal excitement. Although consistently theorised and suspected (Amason, 1996), few studies have actually empirically tested the connection between conflict and these emotions. Thus, we examine the connection between conflict and positive emotions of enthusiasm and excitement and hypothesise:

**Hypothesis 1a**: Task conflict relates positively to positive emotions (enthusiasm/excitement).

**Relationship Conflict**

Relationship conflict exists when there is friction or clashes over personal values and mannerisms between individuals (Yang and Mossholder, 2004). These interpersonal incompatibilities are repercussions of personal issues or personality differences, including differing opinions or preferences regarding trivial or non-task issues such as religion, politics or fashion (Jehn, Greer, Levine and Szulanski, 2008). Such disagreements culminate in tension, animosity and annoyance (Jehn and Mannix, 2001) in groups.

**Relationship conflict, enthusiasm and excitement**
Research on relationship conflict generally shows that it correlates with negative and counterproductive outcomes (Ayoko et al., 2003; De Dreu and Weingart, 2003). More specifically, relationship conflict relates to negative emotions such as anger and frustration (Van Kleef and Cote, 2007). However, given that relationship conflict involves a show of power and politics (Jehn, 1997) and opportunity to assert oneself, we predict that the show of power and assertion for example, will motivate a sense of enthusiasm and excitement, as these interactions are largely competitive in nature. Therefore:

Hypothesis 1b: \textit{Relationship conflict relates positively to positive emotions (enthusiasm/excitement).}

\textbf{Conflict and negative emotions of guilt and shame}

Consistent with affective events theory, conflict is laden with negative emotions (Obeidi et al., 2005) and may strongly affect the conflicting partners (Steinel et al., 2008). Although researchers have examined the interplay between conflict and negative emotions such as anger and frustration, little research has examined the connection between specific types of conflict and specific self-conscious emotions (Madera and Smith, 2009) of guilt and shame. For example, is there a possibility that conflicting parties feel guilty and ashamed after a conflict event? In this study therefore, we focus on guilt and shame because they are self-reflective and self-evaluative emotions (Tangney et al., 2007) and are two common emotions that most people experience at difficult times (Tangney, Miller, Flicker and Barlow, 1996). Additionally, these emotions have the potential to drive conflict resolution (Van Kleef, De Dreu and Manstead, 2006).

Smith, Webster, Parrott and Eyre (2002) describe guilt as a feeling of self-reproach resulting from a belief that one has transgressed (Niedenthal, Tangney and Gavanski, 1994) while shame concerns the more painful emotion of condemning oneself (Tangney et al., 2007). Moreover, shame involves a feeling of loss of respect of others because of improper behaviour or incompetence (Smith et al., 2002). Also given attribution theory, guilt occurs when one feels personally responsible about controllable causes. In the case of conflict, we argue that an employee can either feel guilty about initiating a conflict, or ashamed about his/her behaviours during a conflict episode. Thus:

\textit{Hypothesis 1c: Task conflict relates positively to self-conscious emotions (guilt/shame).}

\textbf{Relationship conflict and self conscious emotions of shame and guilt}

We have already established that relationship conflict involves clashes over personal issues between individuals (Yang and Mossholder, 2004). Relationship conflict also encourages people to make antagonistic attributions.
for others’ behaviours (Baron, 1991) while Harder, Cutler and Rockart (1992) propose that hostility evokes defensive reactions and feelings of guilt. We argue that hostility is prevalent in relationship conflict. Moreover, research shows that disagreements in family relationships elicit emotions of guilt within an offender, especially if the disagreement causes someone to feel bad (Baumeister, Stillwell and Heatherton, 1994). Similarly, the work of Jordan, Ashkanasy and Hartel (2002) indicates that individuals who experience negative emotions withdraw into self-blame and characterized by self-blame, shame motivates concealment or escape, and typically causes people to feel inferior to others (Tangney et al., 1996). Given the above, we argue that people who engage in relationship conflict will also report shame for two reasons. First, Simons and Peterson (2000) state that relationship conflict limits group members’ cognitive functioning by increasing their anxiety levels. Anxiety, in turn, triggers shame because shame anticipates losses of interpersonal connection (Harder et al., 1992). Secondly, relationship conflict involves personal attacks, hostility and aggression that will most likely reduce one’s self-esteem, self-concept and self-confidence (Jehn et al., 2008) and may trigger self-blame that is a core to shame. For instance, when conflicting partners publicly embarrass or insult each other in a relationship conflict, the victim might be anxious about how others now perceive him/her, while the offender might feel remorse and guilty for causing pain for the other conflict partner. Thus,

Hypothesis 1d: Relationship conflict relates positively to self-conscious emotions (guilt and shame).

Trust

Lewicki, McAllister and Bies (1998) define trust as one’s confident and positive expectation regarding another’s conduct. We focus on the perception of trust rather than the actual trust. Although trust in workgroups is a multi-dimensional construct (Kiffin-Peterson, 2004), in the current research, our spotlight is on integrity based trust (Kim et al., 2004). This is because integrity-based trust concerns the degree to which one expects another to adhere to a set of principles that are acceptable (Kim, Dirks, Cooper and Ferrin, 2006). Also, research suggests that integrity-based trust is fundamental in driving interpersonal relationship (Kim, et al., 2004).

The effects of emotions on trust dimensions

Based on AET, we argue that workplace events such as conflict will influence emotions which will, subsequently influence trust perceptions (Ashkanasy and Ashton-James, 2005). In fact, McAllister (1995) argue that trust judgements are both complex and affective in nature while Jones and George (1998) argue that
emotions are important elements for trust because they determine one’s experience of trust; opinions and judgments about the trustworthiness of others. Harker and Keltner (2001) also show that individuals who experience positive emotions are likely to initiate conversation with other individuals. This is critical for integrity-based trust. Thus:

**Hypothesis 2a: Enthusiasm positively relates to integrity-based trust.**

**Hypothesis 2b: Excitement positively relates to integrity-based trust.**

Although negative emotions are inversely related to trust (Dunn and Schweitzer, 2005), studies examining the relationship between self-conscious emotions of guilt and shame and conflict are scarce. Based on one’s personal convictions (Kugler and Jones, 1992), guilt motivates the desire to repair, confess, apologize or make amends (Tangey et al., 1992). Baumeister and colleagues (1994) also show that guilt strengthens social bonds by eliciting symbolic affirmation of caring and commitment that are important for trust. In sum, guilt initiates relationship-enhancing patterns of behaviour encouraging individuals to express positive feelings towards another (Baumeister et al., 1994). These caring behaviours should promote integrity-based trust such that a guilty individual (conflict offender) will seek to lower his/her guilt by showing the other employee increased trust. Thus:

**Hypothesis 2c: Guilt positively relates to trust integrity-based trust.**

In contrast, shame does not seek repair (Tangey et al., 1992). Rather, shame is a response that stems from a concern that one has not lived up to the expectations of others (Bagozzi, Verbeke and Gavino, 2003). Additionally, shame gives rise to withdrawal and motivational inhibition (Weiner, 1985). Therefore, we argue that shame will constrain trust perceptions because individuals that are publicly humiliated or shamed (e.g. due to conflict) may want to hide and escape from the situation (Niedenthal et al., 2004), leading to decreased communication. Decreased communication may negatively affect perceptions of integrity-based trust. Therefore:

**Hypothesis 2d: Shame negatively relates to integrity-based trust**

**Emotions as mediators in the link between conflict and trust**

Attribution theory suggests that individuals who experience work events (e.g. conflict) make different attributions regarding the event. Such attributions underlie varying evaluations and reactions to the conflict event and may stimulate distinct types of emotions (Weiner, 1985). Similarly, Felstiner, Abel and Sarat (1981)
show that the manner in which an individual reacts to an event is a critical predictor of the consequences of that event. Given the above discussion and the fact that emotions are intense especially when conflict-driven, we argue that both negative and positive emotions will mediate the impact of the differing conflict types on integrity-based trust. Therefore, we hypothesise a set of hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 3a:** Positive emotions (enthusiasm and excitement) will mediate the link between task conflict and integrity-based trust.

**Hypothesis 3b:** Positive emotions (enthusiasm and excitement) will mediate the link between relationship conflict and integrity-based trust.

**Hypothesis 3c:** Self-conscious emotions (guilt and shame) will mediate the link between task conflict and integrity-based trust.

**Hypothesis 3d:** Self-conscious emotions (guilt and shame) will mediate the link between relationship conflict and integrity-based trust.

**Methodology**

**Sample and procedure**

The use of student data in management research is not new (see Choi, 2004; Kim, Bateman, Gilbreath and Anderson, 2009). We conducted a pilot study on 20 participants who work full or part-time in business organizations as professionals while pursuing their higher degrees. Feedback from the pilot study assisted in improving the survey’s length, validity as well as the layout and the wordings. For the main study, we surveyed four hundred and nineteen student-professionals enrolled across five post-graduate courses in one of the large Business Schools in Australia. Three hundred and thirty nine participants returned the survey representing a response rate of 81%. We discarded fourteen surveys because they were incomplete. Overall, we use 325 surveys for data analysis.

**Measures**

To test the hypothesized links in the model, we employed pre-existing reliable scales. We measured conflict using Jehn et al.’s (2008) eight-item scale measuring task and relationship conflict. We measured positive emotions with scales from Izard, Libero, Putnam and Haynes’s (1993) and measured guilt and shame with Smith et al.’s (2002) scales. Integrity-based trust was measured with a six-item scale adapted from McAllister.
(1995). All scales were Likert scale (seven-point) with 1-7 anchors where 1 is strongly disagree and 7 is strongly agree (See Table 1 for the details).

**Preliminary Analysis**

**Demographics**

Majority (78%) of participants were between 18-30 years of age and 62% were females. Although we used existing scales, we employed exploratory factor analysis because we adapted some of the scales while scales such as with self-conscious emotions were new to organisational behaviour studies. The guilt and shame scales yielded interesting results. Contrary to expectations, the original scales for both guilt and shame broke to two consistent factors respectively. A further search on literature revealed that theoretically, guilt and shame have both cognitive and behavioural properties (Smith et al., 2002). Additionally, Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, bivariate correlations and alpha scores of all recomputed variables after the exploratory factor analyses. Initial data screening did not show any systematic errors or violations.

**Direct effects of conflict on emotions**

Tables 3-5 present the regression results for the study. The regression model testing the effects of task conflict on enthusiasm was significant (F (1, 323) = 6.74, p < .01; $\beta = .14$, $p < .01$), explaining 2% of the variance while the model testing the effects of task conflict on excitement was also significant (F (1, 323) = 7.04, p < .01; $\beta = .15$, $p < .01$), explaining 2% of the variance. These results indicate a positive association between task conflict and positive emotions of enthusiasm and excitement. Therefore, we accept hypothesis 1a.

Similarly, the regression model testing the effects of relationship conflict on enthusiasm was significant (F (1, 323) = 19.90, p < .001; $\beta = .24$, $p < .001$), explaining 6% of the variance. In addition, the regression model testing the effects of relationship conflict on excitement was also significant (F (1, 323) = 28.28, p < .001; $\beta = .28$, $p < .001$), explaining 8% of the variance. These results indicate a positive association between relationship conflict, enthusiasm and excitement. Therefore, we accept hypothesis 1b.

Hypotheses 1c predicted that task and relationship conflict would be positively related with guilt and shame respectively. Because the factor analyses showed two underlying structures emerging from both guilt and shame constructs, the effects of conflict on each of these four factors were tested. Specifically, the regression model testing the effects of task conflict on behavioural guilt was significant (F (1, 323) = 19.91, p < .001; $\beta = .24$, $p < .001$), explaining 6% of the variance. In addition, the regression model testing the effects of task
conflict on behavioural shame was significant ($F (1, 323) = 9.26, p < .001; \beta = .17, p < .001$), explaining 3% of the variance. These results indicate a positive association between task conflict and behavioural guilt/shame as predicted in hypothesis 1c. However, the associations between task conflict and cognitive guilt and cognitive shame were non-significant. Therefore, we accepted hypothesis 1c for behavioural guilt and shame.

The regression model testing the effects of relationship conflict on cognitive guilt (hypothesis 1d) was significant ($F (1, 323) = 18.83, p < .001; \beta = .24, p < .001$), explaining 6% of the variance while the model testing the effects of relationship conflict on cognitive shame was significant ($F (1, 323) = 47.41, p < .001; \beta = .36, p < .001$), explaining 13% of the variance. Additionally, the regression model testing the effects of relationship conflict on behavioural shame was also significant ($F (1, 323) = 49.83, p < .001; \beta = .37, p < .001$), explaining 13% of the variance. Similarly, the regression model testing the effects of relationship conflict on behavioural guilt was significant ($F (1, 323) = 8.38, p < .001; \beta = .16, p < .001$), explaining 3% of the variance. The results suggest that individuals that reported higher levels of relationship conflict also reported increased cognitive as well as behavioural guilt and shame. Therefore, we accepted Hypothesis 1d.

**The direct effects of emotions on trust**

The regression model testing the effects of enthusiasm on integrity-based trust (H2a) was significant ($F (1, 323) = 4.44, p < .04; \beta = .116, p < .04$) indicating a positive association between enthusiasm and integrity-based trust. Therefore, we accept hypothesis 2a. Similarly, the model testing the effects of excitement on integrity-based trust (H2b) was also significant ($F (1, 323) = 5.61, p < .02; \beta = .13, p < .02$) indicating a positive association between excitement and integrity-based trust. Therefore, we accepted hypothesis 2b.

We predicted that guilt would associate positively with integrity-based trust (H2c) and that shame would be linked negatively with integrity-based trust (H2d). Because two factors emerged for both guilt and shame, we tested the effects of these new constructs on the different trust dimensions. The regression model testing the effects of cognitive guilt on integrity-based trust was significant ($F (1, 323) = 4.19, p < .04; \beta = .113, p < .04$), indicating that individuals that experience cognitive guilt also reported increased perceptions of integrity-based trust. Furthermore, results for the test of the link between behavioural guilt and integrity-based trust ($F (1, 323) = 26.01, p < .001; \beta = .27, p < .001$), showing a positive association between both cognitive guilt and behavioural guilt with integrity-based trust. Therefore, we accept hypothesis 2c. There was no support for hypothesis 2d.
Mediation effects

We followed the standard advice in testing the mediation effects (Bennett, 2000, Baron and Kenny, 1986)

Enthusiasm as a mediator of the link between conflict and trust

There was no support for Hypothesis 3a. But excitement fully mediated the links between relationship conflict and integrity-based trust (H3b) (Sobel test $z = 2.16, p < .03$). Thus, we accept Hypothesis 3b.

Guilt as a mediator of the link between conflict and trust

Hypothesis 3d predicted that guilt and shame will mediate the link between task conflict and integrity-based trust. Only behavioural guilt fully mediated the link between task conflict and integrity-based trust (Sobel test $z = 3.36, p < .00$), so hypothesis 3c was accepted for behavioural guilt. Additionally, hypothesis 3d predicted that negative emotions (guilt and shame) would mediate the link between relationship conflicts. Sobel tests revealed that only behavioural guilt mediated the connection between relationship conflict and integrity-based trust (Sobel test $z = 2.52, p < .01$). Therefore, we accept hypothesis 3d for behavioural guilt.

DISCUSSION

The current research examined workplace conflict, its resulting emotions, and the subsequent effect on perceptions of trust. Confirming hypotheses 1a and 1b, both task conflict and relationship conflict had a positive relationship with both enthusiasm and excitement respectively. These results are consistent with previous research (e.g. Garcia-Prieto et al., 2003) and underscore the role of task conflict in eliciting emotions of enthusiasm and excitement that may stimulate motivation, open discussions and encourage the sharing of innovative ideas between employees.

Our result that relationship conflict is positively associated with both excitement and enthusiasm is surprising and it is a departure from previous findings (e.g Jehn 1997; Jehn et al., 2008). Our results may be explained by the work of Simons and Peterson (2000), De Dreu and Weingart (2003), as well as Pelled (1996). These studies demonstrated the interconnectedness between task and relationship conflict and showed that the confrontational interaction fostered during task conflict can cultivate relationship conflict. Such interaction may explain why both relationship and task conflict are related to enthusiasm and excitement.

It is also interesting that task conflict was positively associated with both behavioural guilt and shame (H1c). These results are in line with Weiner (1985), who indicated that the inability to meet the expectations of a task can lead to an individual to feel ashamed. Similarly, our result that relationship conflict is related to both
behavioural guilt and behavioural shame (H1d) is also aligned with those from Harder et al. (1992). Harder and colleagues also showed that hostility and anxiety can lead to guilt and shame respectively. In this case, hostility and anxiety from relationship conflict may be responsible for its connection with guilt and shame. Additionally, literature on relationship conflict showed that it is related to personal attacks that can be public (Jehn, 1997). The public nature of personal attacks in relationship conflict might explain why relationship conflict is associated with behavioural guilt and shame in this study. Altogether, our results deepen our understanding of the interplay between dimensions of conflict and emotions and should open a new pathway to the study of conflict, shame and guilt in OB research.

Both enthusiasm and excitement are positively related to integrity-based trust and this result contribute to a better understanding of the nexus between emotions and trust. The results also agree with Frederickson and Branigan’s (2005) findings that positive emotions (e.g. enthusiasm) bring out a more attractive attitude of a person’s personality, all of which are connected with integrity-based trust. Also, we know that enthusiasm and excitement can cultivate interest between employees, motivating increased levels of interaction and social activities for integrity-based trust (Harker and Keltner, 2001). Our results show that these emotions are specifically connected with integrity-based trust.

There was no support for the connection between shame and trust. A possible explanation for this is that shame is inward looking and focused on one’s self (Tangney et al., 2007) and may not be important for trust or distrust. However, both behavioural and cognitive guilt were associated with integrity-based trust. These interesting results contribute to the debate on the interplay between reflective emotions (guilt and shame) and trust (Dunn and Schweitzer, 2005). Although our results departed from those of Dunn and Schweitzer who reported that negative emotions decrease trust, they are consistent with the suggestions that guilt is a reparative emotion and can initiate relationship-enhancing behaviour and motivate the expression of positive feelings (e.g. trust) towards another (Baumeister et al., 1994). Thus, conflict parties who experience guilt will most likely engage in reparative behaviours to increase perceptions of integrity-based trust.

Emotions have largely been tested as moderators in relationships between conflict and performance (e.g. Jordan et al., 2006). The conclusion that emotion variables in the current study mediated the link between conflict and trust is a significant contribution to literature. These results are interesting and strengthen the proposition that conflict may be antecedent to trust.
Implications for theory

Our study makes three major contributions to theory. First, we examined the link between conflict and positive emotions, and showed that conflict can indeed evoke positive emotions. Second, our study support theoretical propositions that guilt and shame as separate constructs (e.g. Harder and Zalma, 1990; Rusch et al., 2007). While studies have largely focused on distinguishing between guilt and shame (e.g. Tangney, 1996; Tracy and Robins, 2006); few have empirically tested the different dimensions of guilt and shame. This research demonstrates that both guilt and shame have cognitive and behavioural functions with differing effects on conflict and trust. As far as we are aware, our study is one of the first few studies to investigate the effects of conflict on emotions of guilt and shame. Thirdly, we extend emotions literature by demonstrating that emotions mediate the link between conflict and trust while confirming that AET and AT are useful in explaining how conflict-induced emotions can affect individuals’ perceptions of trust.

Practical Implications

Our results demonstrate that managers who would like to gain the benefits of trust such as cooperation, commitment and performance (Kim et al., 2004) in the presence of conflict should stimulate task conflict to arouse enthusiasm and excitement as these discrete emotions are important for building integrity based trust. Additionally, by managing conflict emotions (e.g. guilt) effectively, managers may improve perceived trust.

Limitations and directions for future research

We did not control for participants demographics in this study and caution should be taken in interpreting the results. Also, our data came from a single sample of students. Further, the study was cross-sectional using survey method while we suspect that the low variance in this study may be due to small sample size. Future research should collect data from large organisational samples to strengthen generalizability while the same phenomena should now be investigated using multi-method approach across multiple cultures.

CONCLUSION

By developing and testing the hypothesised links on our model, we have contributed to the development of the constructs of workplace trust, conflict and emotions. Specifically, we found that conflict is associated with positive and self-conscious emotions and trust while self-conscious emotions mediated the relationship between dimensions of conflict and integrity based trust. Future research should now build on these results to facilitate a better understanding of the relationship between conflict, emotions and trust.
References


### Table 3: Regression results for the link between conflict and emotions

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<tr>
<th>Dependent variables</th>
<th>Enthusiasm</th>
<th>Excitement</th>
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<td><strong>Predictors</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Task conflict</td>
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<td>Relationship conflict</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variables</th>
<th>Cognitive guilt</th>
<th>Behavioral guilt</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Predictors</strong></td>
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<td>$\Delta R^2$</td>
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<tr>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variables</th>
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<th>Behavioral shame</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Predictors</strong></td>
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</tr>
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<td>Task conflict</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship conflict</td>
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<td>0.13</td>
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</table>

Note: $R^2$ = r-square scores; $\Delta R^2$ = change in r-square scores; $F$ = F-ratio; $b$ = beta weights; Sig = level of significance (significant at 5% for this research) *. Scores are significant ($p < .05$)

### Table 4: Regression results predicting the link between positive emotions on trust

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Excitement</td>
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Note: $R^2$ = r-square scores; $\Delta R^2$ = change in r-square scores; $F$ = F-ratio; $b$ = beta weights; Sig = level of significance (significant at 5% for this research) *. Scores are significant ($p < .05$)
Table 5: Regression results predicting the link between negative emotions and trust

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>$r^2$</th>
<th>$\Delta r^2$</th>
<th>$F_{(1,323)}$</th>
<th>$\gamma$</th>
<th>Sig</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cognitive guilt</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>1.113</td>
<td>0.113*</td>
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<td>0.07</td>
<td>26.01</td>
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<td>0.00*</td>
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<td>Cognitive shame</td>
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</table>

Note: $R^2 = r$-square scores; $\Delta R^2 = change in r$-square scores; $F = F$-ratio; $b = beta weights$; $Sig = level of significance (significant at 5% for this research)$. Scores are significant ($p < .05$).
Table 2: Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations

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<th>Variables</th>
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**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)