

**THE INFLUENCE OF ORGANISATIONAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT ON  
INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS AND PERFORMANCE**

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## ABSTRACT

Studies of organisational conflicts have predominantly conceptualised conflict and conflict management as static and one-dimensional, and attributed benefits for decision-making, creativity and/or learning to certain conflict types (e.g., Jehn, 1995, 1997; Rahim, 2002; Simons & Peterson, 2000). This research, by contrast, ascertains that counterproductive conflict behaviour has adverse consequences for involved individuals and organisations and explores what challenges organisations face in manifest conflict scenarios (in line with, e.g., De Dreu & Beersma, 2005; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Dijkstra et al., 2011; Giebels & Janssen, 2005; Knippen & Green, 1999; Lewis et al., 2006; Spector & Jex, 1998). This research further shows how conflicts are dealt with in organisations and investigates how the selection of respective conflict management methods influences the outcome of the conflict at affected organisational levels. Rather than relying on single static properties of conflict to explain the outcome of conflict, this research demonstrates how the interplay of conflict management approaches and multiple conflict properties determines the conflict outcome (considering research from, e.g., Cronin & Bezrukova, 2019; Galtung, 1996; Glasl, 2013; Humphrey et al., 2017; Korsgaard et al., 2008; Rahim, 2011; Rubin et al., 1994; Shah et al., 2020; Thomas, 1992a; Van de Vliert, 1997; Wall Jr. & Callister, 1995). Thereby, this research provides insight into conflict-related challenges, and adds a dynamic, processual understanding to existing conceptualisations of conflict and conflict management.

In comparison to most organisational conflict studies, this research follows a qualitative research approach: Using the critical incident technique and caricatures during semi-structured interviews assists to gather an in-depth understanding of organisational conflicts and their management through the perception of interviewees. Twelve interviewees from different German private sector organisations participated in this study, relating conflict experiences of diverse escalation levels, utilised conflict management approaches and conflict outcomes. The findings reveal that beside conflict, conflict management consists of several phases, with conflict parties tending towards cooperative or individual-centred behaviours and involves third parties to different extents. Whereas a cooperative conflict management in the last stage of conflict management facilitates improved interpersonal relations and performance, individual-centred conflict management fosters and sustains strained interpersonal

relations and affected performance post-conflict. With the dynamics exemplified in a model framework for handling conflicts, the findings suggest tackling incompatible conflict issues as they arise and seeking a cooperative solution to conflicts.

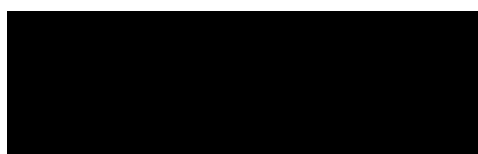
**Keywords:** organisational conflict, conflict management, interpersonal relations, performance

## DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed



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## 1. Introduction

Conflicts pose challenges to affected individuals, teams and the organisation as a whole due to the consequences of counterproductive conflict behaviour for relations and performance (e.g., De Dreu & Beersma, 2005; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Dijkstra et al., 2011; Giebels & Janssen, 2005). Whilst many low-level interpersonal conflicts are not as visible and more difficult to identify and measure until they escalate to a disciplinary issue or an employment tribunal application (Saundry et al., 2016; Saundry & Unwin, 2021), they have the potential for wide ranging impacts. Apart from having impacts on teams in which the affected individuals are involved, undermine individuals' productivity, wellbeing and workplace engagement (Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development, 2020; Saundry & Unwin, 2021), conflict management can take up substantial management time and incur costs of absence, resignation and formal processes (Saundry et al., 2016; Saundry & Unwin, 2021). Despite these challenges, conflict management does not take up strategic importance in organisations. Associated with budget cuts, competency gaps and marginalization of employment relations, responses to organisational conflicts are predominantly reactive than proactive (Roche et al., 2016; Saundry et al., 2016). This, in turn, fosters a reliance on formal processes and procedures for managing conflicts in organisations and contributes to the entrenchment of positions and escalation of conflicts which may have been handled informally (Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development, 2020; Saundry et al., 2019). Despite policy changes with regard to organisational conflict management – new tribunal procedure rules and emphasis on resolving conflicts at an early stage – an over-reliance on formal approaches to conflict management on the side of employers does not provide the environment for having difficult conversations and the space for employees to express discontent at work (Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development, 2015, 2020).

This research sheds light on how conflicts are being handled in organisations, without focusing on the employer-employee relationship. The emphasis is rather on the interpersonal relations of two individuals that are in conflict with each other and what challenges this conflict has on their relationship, performance and the work context they are embedded in. The organisational context and third parties, such as their common supervisor and/or other colleagues, provide constraints and

opportunities for resolving the conflict and are assessed where relevant for the interpersonal conflict. Whilst conflict studies assume that conflicts - especially relationship conflicts - affect the productivity of teams, the effects for interpersonal relations and involved individuals have been less examined. In addressing this shortcoming, this research explores *conflict-related challenges* with regard to work-related and relationship aspects and assesses whether these challenges are of a temporary or permanent nature.

Apart from conflict-related challenges, this research assesses *conceptualisations of conflict and conflict management*. Conflict studies predominantly view conflicts as static phenomena and mainly focus on the conflict type to explain its effects on conflict outcome variables such as performance (e.g., Behfar et al., 2011; Bendersky & Hays, 2012; Jehn, 1995, 1997). In drawing on perspectives from international conflict studies, and social and organisational psychology (Ajzen, 2001; Callister & Wall Jr., 2001; Chun & Choi, 2014; Deutsch, 2006a; Fazio, 2007; Galtung, 1996, 2009; Gelfand et al., 2008; Glasl, 2013; Rubin et al., 1994; Tekleab et al., 2009), this research conceptualises *conflict as dynamic and multi-dimensional* and discusses perspectives on conflict management that differ with regard to dynamism and included conflict management approaches. As conflicts, firstly, involve a negative disposition towards the other party and negatively perceived interference and behaviour of the other party due to their multidimensional nature, and, secondly, follow a negative course with adverse consequences for the ongoing relationship and performance of all affected parties, this thesis, furthermore, *does not consider conflicts as having positive, productive qualities*. This stands in contrast to conflict studies that emphasise the positive consequences of task conflicts for innovation, creativity and decision-making (e.g., Deutsch, 2006a; Jehn, 1997; Rahim, 2002; Tjosvold, 1998, 2008). This difference amounts, in line with Glasl (1999a, 2013), to defining mere differences on the cognitive level as conflicts. The conceptualisation of conflict as dynamic and multi-dimensional, therefore, also contributes to the debate of whether conflicts have positive and/or negative consequences for involved individuals. Whereas the multidimensionality of conflict involves situational factors, disputants' characteristics and relations, and conflict expression, different subcomponents of the three dimensions might be affected during conflict, depending on the particular conflict circumstances. For example, a power disparity between conflict parties might provide the basis for a struggle over power and active attempts to change the status quo.



Although power and/or status' disparity might, therefore, be a sufficient cause for conflict, it is not a necessary condition for all conflicts. The same applies to other subcomponents such as personality characteristics and interdependence in terms of necessity.

In comparison to studies that draw on the conflict type or conflict-exogenous moderators to explain the conflict outcome variable (e.g., Elbanna, 2009; Giebels & Janssen, 2005; Guenter et al., 2016; Rispens, 2012; Xie & Luan, 2014), this study explores *how the implementation of conflict management impacts interpersonal relations and performance*. It aims to uncover the state of interpersonal relations and performance prior, during and after conflict, which conflict management approaches are utilised in a given conflict situation, whether third parties get involved in settling the conflict issues, and which conflict management approaches tend to lead to improved or affected interpersonal relations and performance.

This chapter presents the aim and objectives of this research and relates the research's contribution to theory and management. It further provides an overview of the research methodology and concludes with an outline of the thesis structure.

## **1.1 Rationale for research**

Having worked in different business sectors, positions and levels, I have observed and experienced organisational conflicts of various kinds and how individuals and business operations get affected during conflicts. Whilst some organisations actively engage in conflict management through workshops, mediation and direct talks, other organisations leave their employees to settle their differences among themselves and do not adequately respond to employees' grievances. However, it is not all about the organisation: Individuals interact with each other, and their respective behaviour and attitudes determine whether a settlement is possible or not. Notwithstanding the context, according to my personal experience, interpersonal conflicts impact the relations and performance of employees and influence their turnover intentions.

With a background in peace and conflict studies, and a therewith connected long-standing interest in conflicts, the observance of organisational conflicts and its dynamics led to the interest in conflict-related challenges and how they are being handled. A review of organisational conflict studies revealed a predominant focus on the benefits of some conflicts and a static understanding of conflict and conflict

management. This stands in contrast to international conflict studies' identification of conflict-related challenges and a dynamic perspective on conflict and conflict management. Coupled with personal experiences, this set the premise for working interdisciplinarily, drawing from international conflict studies, social and organisational psychology to establish the dynamics of organisational conflict and conflict management and consequently develop a conflict management framework model. The next section further outlines the research aim, objectives and research questions.

## **1.2 Aim, research questions and objectives**

The overall aim of this research is, firstly, to establish the *influence of organisational conflict management on interpersonal relations and performance* and, secondly, to *develop a framework model for handling conflicts*.

The following research questions were derived to achieve the overall research aim:

1. What are the challenges enterprises face in manifest conflict scenarios (**RQ1**)?
2. How are conflicts dealt with in selected organisations (**RQ2**)?
3. How does the implementation of conflict management methods to internal organisational conflicts affect interpersonal relations and performance (**RQ3**)?

The three research questions informed the formulation of the following research objectives:

1. Identify major and current challenges to organisations facing internal conflicts at interpersonal, intra-group and intergroup levels (**RQ1-oriented**).
2. Explore proposed and/or employed conflict management methods, conflict handling styles, strategies and techniques (**RQ2-oriented**).
3. Ascertain how the implementation of respective conflict management methods, conflict handling styles, strategies and techniques affect interpersonal relations and performance in selected organisations (**RQ3-oriented**).
4. Create an extended, interdisciplinary conflict management model that covers all aspects of organisational conflict as a contribution to organisational conflict studies (**synthesis of RQ1-RQ3**).

The thesis and its structure are guided by the research questions and objectives, dedicating a separate chapter to each RQ's findings (**Chapters 4, 5 and 6**) that are

integrated and discussed in **Chapter 7**. It culminates in a conflict management framework model (**Figure 66**, p. 291) that embodies the dynamic, processual character of conflict and conflict management and demonstrates the consequences conflict management has on interpersonal relations and performance.

### **1.3 Research methodology**

*Organisational conflict* is, in this research, understood as *a product of social interaction* and only carries meaning through the interaction of affected individuals and their perceptions of the situation at hand (see also **Chapter 3** for research methodology). As the emphasis is on individual conflict experiences as descriptions of social reality, this research follows a qualitative research approach to enable a more in-depth understanding of human behaviour and conflict processes. The use of semi-structured interviews enabled the capture of the interviewee's understanding of a conflict situation and is developed through a detailed description in his/her words and personal reflection on the experience, whilst at the same time using an interview guideline that took account of my research questions and aspects to be covered in the interview (see **Appendix 1** for the interview guideline, p. 345). During the semi-structured interviews, the researcher asked the participants to describe a conflict incident that had occurred between them and another staff member within the same organisation. They were further asked to choose among two sets of caricatures that best depicted the conflict they had experienced. The use of the caricatures helped the interviewees to express emotions, reflect on past events and thereby provide more in-depth information about the conflict incidents. Twelve interviewees from different German private sector organisations participated in this study who predominantly worked in large organisations and were from diverse sectors such as business administration, IT consultancy, teaching, sales and business consultancy. The interviewees related conflict experiences of diverse escalation levels, utilised conflict management approaches and conflict outcomes (see **Chapters 4, 5 and 6** for the research findings). Collected data was analysed using qualitative content analysis to identify essential themes in related events and was presented via graphic illustrations and direct quotations of the interviewees throughout the findings' chapters. **Chapter 7** integrated the findings of **Chapters 4, 5 and 6** and culminated in the development of a conflict management framework model.

## **1.4 Contribution to theory and management**

This research makes a contribution to previous research on organisational conflict, provides insight into how conflicts are being managed and what effect conflict management has on interpersonal relations and performance. Regarding its *implications for theory*, this research adds to existing knowledge on the challenges conflicts pose to organisations and extends the conceptualisation of conflict to include multi-dimensionality and a dynamic, processual character of conflict. This research further establishes a processual understanding of conflict management and demonstrates the significance of cooperative conflict management over individual-centred approaches for interpersonal relations and performance. It additionally extends insight into third-party involvement in conflicts, differentiating between third-party assistance and decision making.

This research also has *implications for methods* in portraying a more comprehensive account of conflict experiences and conflict management by following a qualitative approach to collect and analyse the data, in particular utilising the critical incident technique and caricatures for data collection, and content analysis and graphic illustrations during data analysis.

In demonstrating that all conflicts pose challenges for interpersonal relations and task/project accomplishment, this research also has *implications for management* and the practice of emphasising the beneficial effects of some conflict types. It moreover provides a model framework for handling conflicts that embodies a dynamic understanding of conflict and conflict management and demonstrates the consequences conflict management approaches have on interpersonal relations and performance.

## **1.5 Thesis overview**

The thesis is organised into eight chapters which are as follows:

*Chapter 1* introduces the research topic and presents the objectives and rationale for this research. It further provides an overview of the research design and presents its contribution to theory and management.

*Chapter 2* reviews studies of conflict and conflict management in assessing definitions and concepts from diverse disciplines and discussing their similarities and differences. It further identifies the concepts that are of significance to addressing my research objectives.

*Chapter 3* provides the philosophical assumptions and paradigms guiding my research and presents the methodology, chosen research design and methods that were applied to gather and analyse qualitative data.

*Chapter 4* presents the research findings with regard to what the challenges are that companies face in manifest conflict scenarios and establishes the effects conflicts have on the interpersonal level and the organisation as a whole.

*Chapter 5* focuses on the research findings that provide answers to how conflicts develop/escalate, and which conflict management approaches are utilised in the assessed conflict situations.

*Chapter 6* presents the research findings with regard to the effects of conflict management on interpersonal relations and performance and establishes which conflict management implementations facilitated improved, neutral or affected interpersonal relations and performance.

*Chapter 7* integrates the research findings of Chapters 4, 5 and 6 and sets them into context with previous research. This leads to the proposition of a conflict management framework model.

*Chapter 8* summarises the main findings, presents the implications and limitations of this research and provides an outlook on potential future research.

## **1.6 Summary**

This chapter has provided a brief introduction to the research and highlighted the need to reconceptualise conflict and conflict management in order to, firstly, reveal the challenges conflicts pose for affected individuals, teams and organisations and secondly, uncover how conflicts are being dealt with, and thirdly, show the effects diverse conflict management approaches have on the conflict outcome and in

particular interpersonal relations and performance. It has put this research into context in providing some of the shortcomings of other conflict studies and highlighted the contributions of this research to theory and management. The next chapter – **Chapter 2** – provides a more in-depth review and discussion of relevant literature on conflict, conflict management, interpersonal relations, performance and conflict-related challenges.

## 2. Conflict Management in Organisations: Definitions, Concepts and Context

### 2.1 Introduction

Complex organisational structures with internal and external networks, relations and interdependencies are constantly prone to conflict as they are determined by numerous differing interests, preferences, evaluations and perspectives. With perspectives emanating from social and organisational psychology, political science and economics, literature on conflict studies focuses on various aspects of conflict and conflict management, including the causes of conflict, conflict as process or state, conflict outcomes, conflict handling styles, conflict management methods, conflict intensity, and conflict types (e.g., Barki & Hartwick, 2001, 2004; De Dreu & Beersma, 2005; Galtung, 1996; Glasl, 2013; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003; Kolb & Putnam, 2014; Rahim, 2011). Cited researchers, among others, come from diverse disciplines and thus emphasise different aspects of organisational conflict and its management (cf. Lewicki et al., 2014). However, there exists a gap in conflict studies that adequately encompasses these different approaches, whilst considering the different levels these approaches operate on and how they affect the overall organisation and its constituent parts.

The objective of **Chapter 2** is to *review studies of conflict and conflict management from diverse disciplines*. As a first step, the concept 'conflict' is assessed with regard to its definition, differentiation from other concepts, and essential dimensions such as contradiction, disputants' relations and characteristics, and expression. Considering social, behavioural and economic sciences, it is ascertained what challenges conflicts pose for organisations, and which conflict management methods are employed in dealing with conflict. The research identifies the differences and similarities of the different approaches, including the levels they operate on, and how their implementation affects interpersonal relations and performance. The literature review includes classic sources such as Deutsch (2006a), Galtung (1996), Glasl (2013), Jehn (1995, 1997) and Pondy (1967) and their significance for subsequent conflict studies, as well as newer studies such as Bendersky et al. (2014), Chun and Choi (2014), Cronin and Bezrukova (2019), Loughry and Amason (2014), Shah et al. (2021), and Weingart et al. (2015) that go beyond the conflict issue,

understand conflict as a process and/or incorporate conflict management in their conflict outcome assessments. The main concepts established through the review – *conflict as state vs. process, conflict type vs. multi-dimensionality of conflict, single vs. complex conflict management approach; conflict-related challenges for interpersonal relations and performance* - are used to inform the design of the methodology towards the development of the proposed conflict management framework model.

## **2.2 Conflict**

### **2.2.1 Definition of conflict**

#### 2.2.1.1 General differentiation between conflict definitions

A diversity of conflict definitions exist which can be attributed to the different foci and reference points various disciplines take in the understanding of conflict (Fink, 1968; Imbusch & Zoll, 2010), the various aspects included, scope and specificity of the respective definitions (Forum ZFD Akademie, n.d.; Glasl, 2013) and the contexts in which conflicts are embedded (Bonacker & Imbusch, 2004). In common understanding, the term 'conflict' is usually understood to be a phenomenon that threatens harmony and order with dysfunctional effects for individuals and society (Imbusch & Zoll, 2010). Conflict is seen as damaging and not productive as it does not allow 'normal' social relations and has violent consequences. This understanding has, according to Imbusch and Zoll (2010), predominantly persisted due its legitimation in particular theory traditions and the mixing of the conflict term with its context.

##### *2.2.1.1.1 Conflict as state versus process*

In order to free the term 'conflict' from its causes, context, possible contents, forms of expression, functions and assessments, Imbusch and Zoll (2010) refer to the etymological meaning of the conflict term in referring to its Latin origin 'confligere'. As a transitive verb, it can mean '*collide*' and '*beat up*', thus referring to an action. On the other hand, as an intransitive verb, it refers to a state or structure – '*clash*' and '*be in dispute*' (Imbusch & Zoll, 2010). In staying close to its etymological meaning, Imbusch and Zoll (2006) define *conflicts as social facts, involving at least two parties, which are based on differences in social conditions and/or differences in the constellation of*



*interests of the conflict parties* (p. 69). On the one hand, it may be useful to limit the conflict definition to its basic meaning in order to allow a broad, more generic definition, applicable to a diverse range of disciplines and contexts. On the other hand, Imbusch and Zoll (2006) cannot account for the process character of conflict in line with the transitive meaning of conflict: (1) the social conditions and interests of affected parties may change in the course of conflict, (2) emotions and cognitions of parties may be responsible for this change in (1), and (3) the behavioural dimension of conflict is not accounted for.

In following a process understanding of conflict, Pondy (1967) noted that early definitions differed in whether they focused on antecedent conditions, affect, cognition or behaviour (Thomas, 1992b). Instead of focusing on one episode over the others, he argued for a broad definition encompassing all stages of a conflict and investigation of relationships between episodes. In understanding conflict as a “*dynamic process underlying a variety of organisational behaviors*” (Pondy, 1967, p. 319), Pondy introduced the process character of conflict into defining conflict. Nevertheless, his definition is too broad in leaving out the presence of a difference or dispute, the contested issue, and interaction of affected parties.

Thomas (1992b) defined conflict as “*the process that begins when one party perceives that the other has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect, something that he or she cares about*” (p. 653). The advantage of Thomas’ definition is that it is able to capture various conflict issues, in comparison to other definitions that restrict the contested issue to goals or interests (cf. Thomas, 1992b). On the other hand, regarding ‘is about to negatively affect’, it is questionable how an interference can be perceived to happen before it actually occurs. Either a conflictual behaviour or action in the form of interference occurs or it does not.

Rahim (2011) defined conflict as an “*interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social identities (i.e., individual, group, organisation, etc.)*” (p. 16). Therefore, Rahim's (2011) definition refers to an interaction occurring between the parties. This is in line with Rubin et al.'s (1994) elaboration on action and counter-action: The contentious behaviour of one party provokes a contentious reaction from the opposing party. It is a give and take, explaining how a conflict can change from a low to high intensity in a cycle of action-reaction. Furthermore, an interaction is a prerequisite for conflict to take place, focusing on the manifest, behavioural level of conflict.

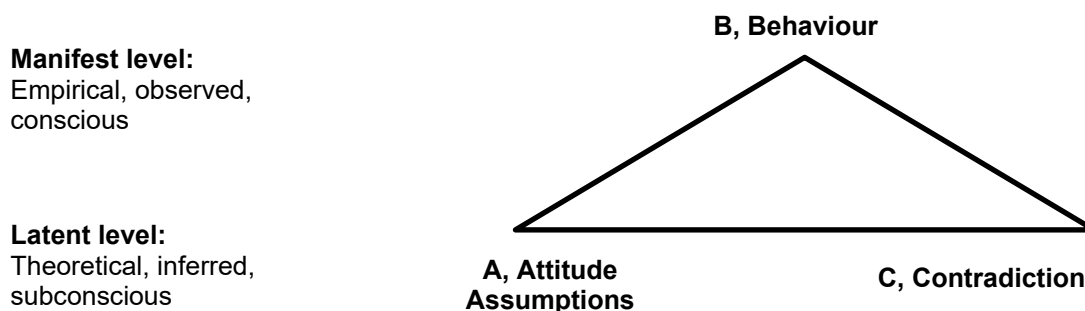
### 2.2.1.1.2 Latent versus manifest conflict

Bendersky et al. (2014) note the importance of distinguishing between conflict perceptions that have not yet arisen and manifest conflict behaviour that has already transpired. This follows Pondy's (1967) understanding that conflict has to be perceived first before its manifestation (cf. Weingart et al., 2015). Pondy (1967) differentiates *five stages in a conflict episode* - latent conflict (conditions), perceived conflict (cognition), felt conflict (affect), manifest conflict (behaviour), and conflict aftermath (conditions). Starting with latent conflict conditions in the form of competition for scarce resources, autonomy aspirations or goal divergence, the conflict episode passes through the stages of perceiving and feeling conflict to manifest conflictful behaviour. *Manifest conflictful behaviour* is given when one actor consciously, but not necessarily deliberately, frustrates the goal attainment of another actor. Thus, unconscious blocking of another actor's goals does not constitute conflictful behaviour. According to Pondy (1967), it is not necessary for a conflict episode to pass through all stages: A conflict may not be perceived or be resolved before conflict behaviour occurs. The outcome of the conflict episode then forms the latent condition for a subsequent conflict. This model acknowledges, therefore, that conflict is inevitable, and conditions of previous conflicts have an effect on future conflicts. Past conflicts and their management raise the complexity of current conflicts: firstly, not-resolved conflict conditions and issues may add to newly arising issues and, secondly, the relationships of affected parties are pre-determined by how cordially previous conflicts were resolved as feelings of bitterness and hatred affect future dealings between the parties.

While Pondy's conflict-stages model is helpful due to its inclusion and assessment of the different elements of conflict (conditions, affect, cognition, and behaviour), it is arguable whether these conflict elements should rather be placed in a cyclical model where the various elements influence each other during conflict. Furthermore, in understanding the conflict process as having different stages, a sole differentiation into latent and manifest levels of conflict in line with Galtung (1996) and moving perceiving conflict to the manifest stage (cf. Weingart et al., 2015) may be more helpful.

Galtung (1996) assumes that conflict has a manifest and a latent side, with *manifest conflict* being associated with "overt, explicit, observed, conscious", whilst *latent conflict* is at the "[t]heoretical, inferred, subconscious" level (pp. 72-73). Galtung

understands conflict to consist of three components (see **Figure 1**, p. 13): attitudes/assumptions (cognitive ideas and emotions; enemy versus friend images), behaviour (overt verbal or physical behaviour with potential for violent actions), and contradiction (incompatible goals, values and interests between parties or within one person) (Galtung, 1996; Galtung & Fischer, 2013). Manifest conflict is identified with *behaviour B* and the latent side with *attitude/assumptions A* and *contradiction C* (Galtung, 1996). The three components form a *conflict triangle*, which is synonymous with 'complete', fully articulated conflict. For example, a contradiction in the form of goal frustration leads to aggressiveness as an attitude and to aggression as behaviour. A conflict process, according to Galtung (1996), can also start at one of the other triangle corners. When a party has, for example, accumulated negative attitudes (A) or a negative behavioural predisposition (B), possibly as a result of accumulated past conflict experiences, and then a contradiction (C) occurs, either A or B may be activated and added to the new conflict.



**Fig. 1: The Conflict Triangle.** Adapted from "Peace by peaceful means: peace and conflict, development and civilization," by Johan Galtung, 1996, p. 72.

Additionally, a conflict can solely occur at the latent level but not solely at the manifest level. Galtung (1996) calls solely contradictory behaviour 'tension' and not conflict: alongside resentment, an identifiable contradiction between the parties has to exist for conflict to qualify as such. At the latent level, parties can be unaware of contradictions and assumptions/attitudes. When they become conscious of what 'is' (cognition), what s/he 'wants' (volition), how s/he 'feels' (emotion) in relation to 'what ought to be', and what goal-states are incompatible, the conflict becomes transformed as the conflict parties develop images (real or false) of the conflict they are involved in and act upon them. Galtung, thus, conceptualises conflict to have multiple elements, which on their

own cannot be 'complete conflict' (Galtung, 1996). One element or property, thus, does not constitute conflict on its own. Furthermore, a conflict can only be called as such when incompatibilities on the levels of disposition and substantive issues go along with behavioural contradictions (see also Baros, 2004; Galtung, 1996; Glasl, 2013; Pondy, 1967).

#### 2.2.1.1.3 Conflict cognition

With regard to 'real' or 'false' images of conflicts, an incompatibility can actually exist or be subjectively perceived as such (cf. Lewicki et al., 2014). Tensions between individuals can, according to De Dreu and Weingart (2003), result from "*real or perceived differences*" (p. 741). A goal interference can be based upon "miscommunication or inaccurate perceptions of another person's intentions" (McCorkle & Reese, 2010, p. 12). Thus, whether incompatibility objectively exists or not, when the parties perceive it as such, then the "conditions are ripe for conflict" (Folger et al., 2005, p. 5, as cited in McCorkle & Reese, 2010, p. 12). It can be argued whether such a misperceived conflict can be defined as conflict due to the lack of objective basis or content. However, from the view of the concerned individual(s), a conflict can be perceived as rational, grounded on substantive criteria, whilst to a different individual, this behavioural expression in reaction to a perceived difference is seen as non-rational (Fink, 1968). Perception is, thus, subjective. McCorkle and Reese (2010) note that interaction between individuals cannot be void of subjective interpretations and attributions. The receiver subjectively perceives and interprets the messages and actions of the sender. As the actual intention and meaning of the sender is not obvious and directly communicated to the receiver, it can lead to misunderstandings and conflict when the intended meaning is not received and interpreted as such. In the same vein, Rubin et al. (1994) argued that human behaviour is generally guided by how a situation is cognitively recognised, assessed and processed than by the characteristics of the actual situation.

Furthermore, conflict does not have to be perceived as such by all affected parties in order to qualify as conflict. Glasl (1999b, 2013) defines *conflict to be an interaction between actors, whereby at least one actor is experiencing differences in thinking, ideas, perception, emotion and/or will with the other actor (or actors) in a way that the realisation of his ideas/wishes is restricted*. According to Glasl (2013), social

conflict, thus, occurs when conflict is perceived by at least one of the conflict parties and subjectively acts upon it. In the same vein as De Dreu and Weingart (2003), and McCorkle and Reese (2010), Glasl (2013) argued that it cannot be objectively determined whether the perception of an incompatibility is real or not. It is more essential, according to Glasl, that one of the parties experiences the interaction in such a way that the reasons for the non-realisation of its thinking, feeling and/or intentions are assigned to the other party. It is thereby not important whether the other party does this consciously or unconsciously, intentionally or unintentionally. This stands in contrast to Galtung's (1996) assertion that either both parties are conscious or unconscious of the conflict. Furthermore, it can be argued whether a conflict can be called such when the perceived contentious behaviour was not committed deliberately or consciously. However, in line with Glasl's (2013) assumptions, a social conflict only exists when there is an awareness and experience of conflict as well as a counteraction on the part of the perceiving party in the effort of cancelling the impairment by the other actor, which then causes further actions and counteractions from both actors. This further leads to a change in how both actors perceive and feel about each other, what they want from each other, and what they do to each other in words and/or actions (Glasl, 1999a). Thus, whether the initially perceived interference was intended or not, it leads to unintended conflictual behaviour and changes in the parties' relationship. From considerations of what conflict is, the next passage is concerned with what is not conflict and how the term 'conflict' can be differentiated from other terms.

#### 2.2.1.2 Differentiation of the term 'conflict' from other concepts

The terms '*competition*' and 'conflict' have been confounded and/or placed at different hierarchical positions. Boulding (1962, as cited in Rahim, 2011) conceptualised conflict as a subset of competition. While all incompatible situations lead to competition, conflict arises when there is an awareness of the incompatibility on the side of the parties, and they have the intention to interfere with the other's goal attainments. In comparison, Rahim (2011) notes that conflicts can be placed on a continuum of cooperative to competitive, thus competition being a subset of conflict. The latter understanding of conflict and competition goes back to Deutsch. Deutsch (2006a) argued that the probability of one's goal attainment is linked to the probability of the

other's goal attainment (*interdependence*). If the connection is positive, each person attains his or her goals (positive interdependence). Negative interdependence means that a person can only attain his/her goals when the other person cannot reach his/her goals (win-lose outcome). Deutsch, furthermore, believed that conflict can be productive so "[a]quiring the skills necessary to compete effectively can be of considerable value" (Deutsch, 2000, p. 28, as cited in McCorkle & Reese, 2010, p. 21). Deutsch does here, however, converge the concepts of conflict and competition. Rather, organisational members engage in competitive behaviour in dealing with conflicts, thus contributing to conflict avoidance and escalation (cf. Tjosvold, 2008). Additionally, competition can only be one aspect of conflictful behaviour as, in reality, conflicts can have both cooperative and competitive elements (mixed-motive conflicts) (Rahim, 2011). Mack and Snyder (1957) provide a third understanding of conflict and competition: competition is "not regarded as conflict or a form of conflict, though it may be an important source of the latter" (p. 217). The main objective is to attain a scarce object in accordance with established rules and procedures, which excludes intended injury or destruction of the other party. When the parties to a conflict deviate from established rules in attainment of the contested object, conflict can then occur.

In this dissertation, competition is viewed as separate from conflict, in line with Mack and Snyder's (1957) differentiation. Conflict is neither a subset of competition, nor is competition a form of conflict. Furthermore, there can be further distinctions than seeing conflict on a continuum of competition and cooperation (for example, compromise; cf. Rahim, 2011), and conflict is considered as more complex than viewing it from a purely game theory orientation (win-win vs. win-lose). Multiple potential factors and properties of conflict have to be considered in the understanding of conflict as well as diverse conflict management methods can thus be employed depending on the respective situation at hand (see **Section 2.3** on conflict management, p. 66ff.).

Apart from the confounding of competition and conflict, Mack and Snyder (1957) criticised that conflict is used as "a rubber concept, being stretched and molded for the purposes at hand [... covering] everything from war to choices between ice-cream sodas or sundaes" (pp. 212). Furthermore, the *distinctions between conflict and other terms* are not or not adequately made (Mack & Snyder, 1957). The words 'dispute', 'controversy', 'fight', 'opposition' and 'contradiction', according to Mehlich (1994, as cited in Imbusch & Zoll, 2006), are often substituted by the term conflict. Language is

thereby simplified and understanding of conflict blurred. Other terms that are treated as synonyms of conflict may be rather underlying sources of conflict or intensify conflicts, such as 'antagonistic interests', 'misunderstandings', 'hostile sentiments' and others (Mack & Snyder, 1957). Moreover, these factors are not sufficient in giving rise to conflict or influencing its course. Thus, Mack and Snyder emphasise that antecedent conditions, causes and characteristics of conflict should be assessed in order to determine which factors have to be included in the classification of conflict.

Other terms are, furthermore, not on the same level as conflict due to a lack of emotional investment: interpersonal conflicts are, according to McCorkle and Reese (2010), characterised by a "feeling of struggle", which is not present in mere "casual disagreements, mild differences or intellectual argument" (p. 7). By a feeling of struggle, McCorkle and Reese (2010) mean that conflict parties need to have emotional or relational investment in the conflict outcome in the form of goal aspirations for differences to qualify as conflict. Interpersonal conflict, further, requires some perceived interdependence: If the affected persons do not need each other in attaining a goal, there is no reason for engaging in conflict. However, McCorkle and Reese (2010) qualify the last point in asserting that the full expression of a conflict depends on whether the conflict parties place more importance on their relationship than the goal interference. Similarly, Fisher et al. (2011) note that many opponents see it as more important to maintain an ongoing relationship than pursue the outcome of a particular negotiation.

McCorkle and Reese (2010), thus, raise an important point in adding the emotional investment in a conflict to its definition: The parties have a goal or interest that is, from their subjective view, worth pursuing. The conflict engagement is, however, a matter of choice. The individuals can decide to opt for an avoidance of conflict expression in order to preserve the relationship with the other party. This is especially essential in ongoing relationships such as in the organisational context. The parties have to continue working together due to, for example, their mutual interdependence with regard to tasks, processes and/or resources.

Glasl (1999b, 2013, 2020) takes a similar stance to McCorkle and Reese (2010) in focusing on the criteria conflict and what other terms embody: Situations of social interaction that do not fulfil all the definition criteria do not qualify as conflict (see **Table 1**, p. 18). For example, a purely cognitive incompatibility exists when two persons define terms or perceive an event differently, with full awareness of the differing

perception; however, this difference does not lead to an experience of restriction. He calls them 'logical contradiction', 'difference of opinion', 'misunderstanding', 'error in perception' or 'semantic differences' (Forum ZFD Akademie, n.d., Trans.). These do not have to lead to conflict but are rather preconditions for creativity and birth of new ideas. When incompatibilities at the emotional and cognitive levels occur together with an awareness of these contradictions, the situation can be termed 'tension'. Additionally, an interfering behaviour can occur, for example, by accidentally stepping on someone's foot. Only when this behaviour is accompanied by the corresponding intentions, emotions or concepts, the phenomenon can be called 'conflict' (Forum ZFD Akademie, n.d.; Glasl, 2020). Glasl (1999b, 2013) emphasises that a tension, difference of opinion or antagonism can, however, escalate into a full-fledged conflict, if the situation is not recognised early enough and counter measures are applied to stop the dynamics of escalation play out.

	Incompatibilities experienced in						
	Thought		Emotions		Intentions		Action/ Behaviour
Logical contradiction	X						
Difference of opinion	X						
Misunderstanding	X						
Error in perception	X						
Semantic differences	X						
Opposing feelings			x				
Ambivalence			x				
Antagonism					x		
Incident							x
Tension	X		x				
Crisis	X		x		x		→
Conflict	X	and/or	x	and/or	x	AND	x

**Table 1: Conflicts and Non-Conflicts.** Adapted from "Konfliktmanagement: Ein Handbuch für Führungskräfte, Beraterinnen und Berater," by Friedrich Glasl, 2004 (as cited in Forum ZFD Akademie, n.d., Trans., p. 4).

Glasl's (1999b, 2013, 2020) conflict definition, thus, provides concrete criteria for the *separation of conflicts from other social phenomena in interpersonal interactions* such as tensions and emotional antagonisms (Baros, 2004). In comparison to other



differentiations, Glasl (1999b, 2013, 2020) gives a more detailed account of what qualifies as conflict in assigning cognition, emotion, intention and behaviour as elements of conflict. Phenomena without behavioural expression (including latent conflicts) are, therefore, not conflicts: Conflicts are always manifest or they don't exist (Baros, 2004). Otherwise, every interaction would be by definition conflict as individuals perceive, think, feel and want differently from others (Glasl, 2013, 2020). In following the latent-manifest understanding of Galtung, it is, however, useful to differentiate stages of conflict as differences in content and negative dispositions are preconditions for any expression of conflictual behaviour and exist at the latent level before their awareness and manifestation (see **Section 2.3** on conflict stages, p. 66 ff.). In this research, I consider both levels but focus on the manifest level in assessing the consequences of conflict on interpersonal relations, performance and the organisational context.

In accordance with Glasl (1999b, 2013, 2020), mere differences on the cognitive level may be productive in furthering innovation and creativity and are not to be removed but to be dealt with constructively in order to increase their potential benefit for interpersonal relations, brainstorming and decision-making. Thus, whilst considering non-conflicts on the cognition area (by definition of Glasl) as potentially productive for work processes, this thesis does not consider conflicts as productive (in contrast to other authors; e.g., Deutsch, 2006a; Jehn, 1997; Rahim, 2002; Tjosvold, 1998, 2008). Conflicts are, firstly, based upon negative dispositions of the parties towards each other and negatively perceived interference of goal attainment and/or other concerns via the other party; secondly, follow a negative course in the form of escalation; and thirdly, have negative consequences for the ongoing relationship between the parties and the overall organisational context.

### 2.2.1.3 Summary of conflict understanding and essential definitional properties

Different approaches and aspects inherent in them, thus, can, according to this thesis' perspective, be treated as complementary in order to adequately explain a conflict phenomenon. This aligns with Galtung's (1996) three-fold conflict triangle, incorporating various properties which are necessary for 'complete' conflict. Taking

outlined definitions into account, the *following properties of interpersonal conflict are considered essential to my conflict approach*:

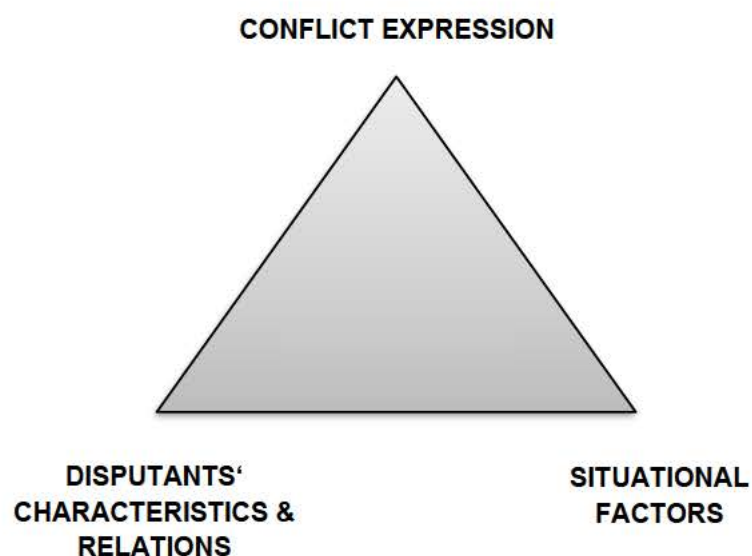
- (1) *Conflict is a process and not a state* (Pondy, 1967; Rahim, 2011; Thomas, 1992a, 1992b).
- (2) *It involves a minimum of two parties* (Imbusch & Zoll, 2006).
- (3) *There exists an incompatibility/difference in interests/goals/values (contradiction with regard to the content)* (Imbusch & Zoll, 2006; Rahim, 2011).
- (4) *It involves conflict-related dispositions of the conflict parties (assumptions/attitudes): their cognitions, volitions and emotions* (Galtung, 1996; Glasl, 2013, 2020).
- (5) *There has to be an awareness/perception of incompatibility* (Bendersky et al., 2014; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Glasl, 2013, 2020; Lewicki et al., 2014).
- (6) *For conflict to be complete and manifest, it has to be expressed through conflictual behaviour* (Galtung, 1996; Glasl, 2013, 2020).

### **2.2.2 Dimensions of conflict**

Several conflict dimensions have been investigated in conflict studies such as personality characteristics, interpersonal relationship and situational factors. Investigating conflicts at different unit levels, Wall Jr. and Callister (1995) noted that conflicts may be attributed to three dimensions - personal characteristics, interpersonal characteristics and issues. In the same vein, Jameson (1999) distinguished between relational dimensions, content dimensions and situational dimensions, which all have to be considered for assessing conflicts and selecting appropriate conflict management strategies for a given conflict. Whilst being more specific in their respective models and leaving out conflict management-related factors, Barki and Hartwick (2004), and Galtung (1996) also assumed certain conflict dimensions to be part of the conflict construct. Barki and Hartwick (2004) understood disagreement, interference, and negative emotion as properties of conflict and the conflict issue as the target of conflict. Galtung (1996) also assumed a three-property construct of conflict, including attitudes/assumptions, contradiction and behaviour (see **Section 2.2.1** for the in-depth discussion of Galtung's conflict triangle, p. 10 ff.). Hence, the above studies focus to

different extents on the dimensions context, conflict management, dispute, interpersonal and disputants' characteristics. However, they have in common that a variety of conditions or factors prevail for conflict to exist or become more likely (cf. Almost et al., 2010).

As I am interested in the contingency of conflict, the effect of conflict on the outcome variables interpersonal relations and performance depends on the particular conflict characteristics of the to-be-assessed conflict. The conflict characteristics are determined by the concrete form of the three tentative dimensions *situational factors*, *(inter)personal factors* and *conflict expression*. The three conflict dimensions were chosen as a means of reflecting on the above categorisations, constructs and definitions and are visualised in **Figure 2**. Depending on the combined conflict dimensions, a conflict management effort then may be more or less effective in mediating the effects of conflict on performance and interpersonal relations. In regarding conflict as a process, the evolution of conflict and conflict management at different points within the same conflict can provide an essential understanding of challenges conflicts pose at different stages. These challenges consequentially pose challenges for dyads, teams and the overall organisation in affecting interpersonal relations and performance. Thus, investigating a change in conflict in the three components (and its subcomponents such as attitudes and contradiction), can provide an understanding of how to deal with conflicts at different stages and what challenges conflicts of various escalation levels pose for the conflict outcome - mediated through conflict management approaches.



**Fig. 2: Dimensions of Conflict** (Own Figure)

### 2.2.2.1 Situational factors

*Situational factors* provide the stimuli for the activation of cognitive, affective and behavioural responses on the part of the conflict parties and/or regulate what is an acceptable response within a particular organisational context. The strategy selection, according to Jameson (1999), may be contingent upon what options are available to choose from, given time constraints, the importance of the conflict for the organisation and the stage the conflict has reached at a particular point in time. The options are further constrained or enabled through the presence of organisational norms for handling conflict (Jameson, 1999). Organisational conflict norms, however, may differ depending on the particular conflict that is being handled (Jehn, 1995, 1997) and the established conflict culture of a social unit or organisation (De Dreu et al., 2004; Gelfand et al., 2008). Therefore, norms guide behaviour in groups and may differ contingent on the specific conflict that arises. A further factor considered as important for conflict is the interdependence of parties in executing tasks, although studies differ in whether to regard interdependence as an integral part of conflict, a situational or context factor, or as a moderator between conflict and outcome variables (Barki & Hartwick, 2001; Deutsch, 1973; Janssen et al., 1999; Jehn, 1995, 1997; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003; Wall Jr. & Callister, 1995). However, they have the assumption in common that the presence of interdependence and the therewith-connected increased communication between parties increases the probability of conflicts (e.g., Jehn & Bendersky, 2003).

Nonetheless, the main situational factor highlighted in the majority of conflict studies is the incompatibility about an issue as a fundamental, necessary characteristic of conflict (Galtung, 1996; Jameson, 1999; Jehn, 1997; Rahim, 2011; Thomas, 1992b). Conflicts involve work-related and/or interpersonal differences, which lead to respective varying effects on behavioural expression, interpersonal relations and performance (de Wit et al., 2012; Jehn, 1997; Jehn et al., 2014; O'Neill et al., 2013; J. Yang & Mossholder, 2004). Aside the nature of the conflict issue, conflicts are the more complex the more parties and issues they involve. Conflicts can either involve several issues and parties from the onset or transform into multi-party conflicts and larger issues in the course of conflict (Galtung, 1996; Glasl, 2013). As multi-party conflicts involve more perspectives, positions and interests that have to be reconciled, the stakes are higher for settling such a conflict and might require a different management

approach than dyadic conflicts (Jameson, 1999; Thomas, 1992b). These situational factors are further elaborated upon in this chapter, describing how each factor separately moulds the characteristics of conflict.

#### *2.2.2.1.1 Contradiction*

The most frequently included element in conflict definitions is the *conflict issue*: with relation to the particular incompatibility the conflict is about and/or is perceived to be about. The focus is at first on the differentiation between objective and subjective conflict before assessing work versus people-oriented conflict typologies in more detail.

##### *2.2.2.1.1.1 Objective versus subjective conflict*

The literature on organisational conflict has frequently highlighted the *difference between objective and subjective conflicts* (for example, Bonacker & Imbusch, 2010; Deutsch, 1969; R. J. Fisher & Keashly, 1991; Lewicki et al., 2014; B. D. Smith, 2011). R. J. Fisher and Keashly (1991) emphasised the objective versus subjective issues' categorisation and attributed the elements' origins to different perspectives on conflict depending on the assumptions of the underlying theory (see also B. D. Smith, 2011). Realistic conflict theory suggests for objective conflicts to be caused by "real differences in interests" (R. J. Fisher & Keashly, 1991, p. 32) such as the distribution of scarce goods and values (income, status, power, rule) (Bonacker & Imbusch, 2010).

In comparison, the social-psychological approach sees conflict as a subjective social process that, in contrast to objective conflict, is focused on the behavioural dimension (R. J. Fisher & Keashly, 1991; B. D. Smith, 2011). Based on this, Pruitt and Carnevale (1993, as cited in B. D. Smith, 2011) found that perception might be greater than the substance underlying the conflict. This may be due to the fact that, according to Rubin et al. (1994), human behaviour is generally guided by how a situation is cognitively recognised, assessed and processed rather than by the characteristics of the actual situation (cf. Baros, 2004). Once a conflict is initiated, the perceptions, attitudes and interaction of the parties become crucial elements in determining its further course (R. J. Fisher & Keashly, 1991). In the same vein, Myers (2013) characterised conflict to contain "a small core of truly incompatible goals, surrounded

by a thick layer of misperceptions of the adversary's motives and goals" (p. 495). These are often grounded on mirror images: Whilst the parties see themselves as peace-loving, the respective opponent is perceived as hostile. As a consequence, the parties act in a way and manner that leads to a confirmation of expected behaviours. R. J. Fisher (1998) supported the argument that subjective factors exacerbate realistic conflicts that are based on actually existing differences; by comparison, unrealistic conflicts that are solely founded on misperception are rare.

The researchers following the social psychology perspective, thus, emphasise the perception of a situation and its effect on social interactions (Baros, 2004). Despite the perception of the factual contradiction, the other conflict party's disposition and intentions, and the overall conflict plays an important role in the course of a conflict. They also acknowledge that conflict involves some kind of factual contradiction. As above debate suggests, both factual, objective differences and subjectively perceived perceptions and interpretations need to be considered in the understanding and analysis of conflicts. Whilst misperceptions often aggravate conflicts, in digging deeper one will find an actual issue at its core.

#### *2.2.2.1.1.2 Work versus people-oriented conflicts*

Researchers have, with regard to the conflict issue, predominantly distinguished between two types: first, conflicts based on the content of a work-related task, labelled *substantive or cognitive conflict*; and, secondly, conflicts based on the interpersonal relations between parties, called *emotional, affective or relationship-focused conflict* (Amason & Schweiger, 1994; Cosier & Rose, 1977; Fink, 1968; Guetzkow & Gyr, 1954; Pinkley, 1990; Rahim, 1983). Whilst most past conflict conceptualisations, according to Fink (1968), primarily focused on object-centred considerations for the attainment of contentious interests or goals, some writers included opponent-centred conflict motivations based on initial hostility, threats and fear of the other (Fink, 1968). Guetzkow and Gyr (1954) suggested that both types of conflict have different causes but are similar in their manifestations. Substantive conflict arises in task-oriented groups striving for the attainment of goals. In comparison, affective conflict occurs due to interests in satisfying personal needs such as dominance and status. Nonetheless, both have disruptive effects on the group the conflict parties are members of. Whilst above definitions of task or cognitive conflict are similar in their focus on the substance

of work-related tasks, affective or relationship-oriented conflict relates to either satisfying personal needs (rational interest) or affective behaviour (non-rational based on feelings and emotions).

Pondy (1967, 1992) attributed conflict to inherent differences in perceptions and goals of individuals within an organisation. He provided three types of conflicts with regard to their sources: competition for scarce resources, threats to autonomy needs, and problems of coordination. Pondy, thus, solely focused on the material, work-related aspects as the contradiction between the conflict parties.

In comparison to Pondy (1967, 1992), Thomas (1992b) does not only focus on 'objective' goals but also includes types with relation to perception and evaluation of the other's behaviour. Thomas (1992b) identified three different concerns the parties care about and are contested in a conflict: goals, judgements, and normative standards. Goal conflicts are about incompatible ends the parties try to achieve. The attainment of goals in the form of needs, objectives, responsibilities, or scarce resources is obstructed by another party's goal pursuit. Judgement conflicts "involve differences over empirical or factual issues" (Thomas, 1992b, p. 659). Different conclusions on what is perceived as true and correct have to be reconciled in order to arrive at a more or less accurate picture of reality. Normative conflicts focus on the conformity of the opponent's behaviour to certain standards. The perceived violation of behavioural standards triggers emotional reactions and sanctions from the other party.

Renwick (1975, as cited in Weider-Hatfield & Hatfield, 1995) identified the following conflict attributions in organisational studies: "differences in knowledge, beliefs, or basic values; competition for a position, for power, or for recognition; a need to release tension; drive for autonomy; personal dislike; and differing perceptions or attitudes generated by the structure of the organisation" (p. 688). Renwick, thus, additionally mentioned types mirroring the feelings of the conflict parties in the release of negative emotions harboured against the opponent due to personal dislike or other reason.

Pinkley proposed three dimensions of conflict to represent people's cognitive interpretations of conflict: relationship versus task, emotional versus intellectual, and win versus compromise (Pinkley, 1990; Pinkley & Northcraft, 1994). The first dimension focuses on how concerned the parties are about the ongoing relationship. Relationship conflict focuses on interpersonal concerns regarding maintaining the

relationship, and behaviour and attitudes of the opposing party. In contrast, task conflict involves material aspects such as money, job descriptions and others. The second dimension addresses the attention given to emotions. Emotional conflict emphasises the feelings involved, such as anger and frustration, evidenced in, for example, distrust and suspicion, whilst intellectual conflict focuses on the actually occurring interactions and behaviours. The final dimension concentrates on who is held responsible for the conflict and the attributions' effect on the type of conflict resolution approach pursued. Parties in a compromise frame attribute conflict to both parties and pursue a compromise solution to the conflict, whilst in the win frame the parties blame the opponent for the conflict and focus on maximising their own gain. These dimensions explain, according to Pinkley, different perceptions, interpretations and behaviours of involved people in the same conflict (Pinkley, 1990; Pinkley & Northcraft, 1994). In contrast to previously cited typologies, Pinkley introduces the relationship element to conflict: the concern for self and/or others. This then affects the approach taken in a conflict, determining whether a cordial ongoing relationship and integrative solution to the conflict is sought or self-interest is the basis of all decision-making towards the conflict. Pinkley, furthermore, contrasts affect with behaviour as opposing types. It is, however, questionable how behaviour and evidenced emotions can be separated from each other as displayed emotions are actually a component of behaviour. The only difference in a conflict may be the extent of displayed emotions on the part of respective parties but not their belonging to behavioural expression. Thus, the differentiation between task and relationship conflicts is more helpful in contrasting personal and factual contradictions.

According to Rahim (2002, 2011), interpersonal conflict occurs under the conditions of incompatible behavioural preferences, scarcity of mutually desirable resources, and incompatible attitudes, values, skills and goals which are pertinent in directing the behaviour of affected individuals. In line with previously cited researchers, Rahim, thus, attributed conflict to the exclusive nature of aspirations or objectives and followed Pinkley in differentiating between behavioural preferences, without, however, detailing the opposing orientations the parties pursue (concern for relationship maintenance versus self-interest).

In his review of literature, Rahim (2011) identified *other conflict types* to the ones he had cited in his 2002 article: substantive conflict, affective conflict, transforming conflict, masquerading conflict, process conflict, goal conflict, conflict of interest,



conflict of values, structural or institutionalised conflict, realistic vs. non-realistic conflict, retributive conflict, misattributed conflict, and displaced conflict. Generally, the differentiation is between, firstly, rational content such as tasks, goals, values and means, secondly, personal differences evidenced by hostility, distrust and anger, and, thirdly, misplaced or transformed conflicts. The first and second categories are straightforward in denoting static contradictions, which is characteristic of most conflict typologies. In contrast, the third category depicts the process character of conflict. It is a mixed combination as conflicts that transform from, for example, substantive issues to a focus on predominantly relationship issues can also include misplaced tensions, interest in punishing the opponent and wrong attribution of conflict causes (the three-fold categorisation is my own).

	Static Character of Conflict	Process Character of Conflict
<b>Rational issues</b>	Substantive conflict, process conflict, goal conflict, conflict of interest, conflict of values, structural or institutionalized conflict, realistic conflict	
<b>Personal differences</b>	Affective conflict, non-realistic conflict	
<b>Combination of issues</b>		Transforming conflict, masquerading conflict, retributive conflict, misattributed conflict, displaced conflict

**Table 2: Categorisation of Rahim's (2011) Conflict Typologies** (Own Table)

Jehn (1994, 1995, 1997) took up the differentiation between task and relationship-oriented conflicts of previous organisational conflict studies. She defined task conflict as “disagreements among group members about the content of the tasks being performed” (Jehn, 1995, p. 258). Contentious issues in task conflicts, therefore, directly relate to projects group members are working on and involve different viewpoints and opinions with regard to, for example, decision making (cf. Jehn, 1997). In comparison, relationship conflict, according to Jehn (1995, 1997), does not relate to work-related issues but is based upon interpersonal incompatibilities. Jehn's (1997) study found that relationship conflict arose among group members due to problems with other

members' dispositions and involved tension and animosity in its expression. Jehn, thus, relates relationship conflict to its behavioural expression in the form of negative affect, whilst, in contrast to previously mentioned researchers (e.g., Guetzkow & Gyr, 1954), leaving out the specific substance of this type of conflict such as, for example, frustration of personal needs. Additionally, a third type of conflict emerged in Jehn's (1997) qualitative data: observation of planning sessions revealed differences over duties' assignment and resource allocation, which were distinct from task-related discussions.

*Process conflict* is separate from task conflict by its focus on the means of performance and task accomplishment rather than conflict over ends. Jehn (1997) suggested this third type as members of a group may share the same goals but still find themselves in conflict over work-related matters. In the same vein, Kabanoff (1985) previously argued that people may agree on goals on superordinate, group and organisational levels yet find themselves unable to work together effectively. He thus attributed this type of conflict to cooperation or coordination attempts. Similarly, Korsgaard et al. (1995) noted that people concern themselves not only with the outcome of decisions but also the procedures in reaching decisions. Based on equity theory, they perceive procedures as fair or unfair which in consequence guides their behaviour towards other members, without considering fairness interpretations of actual decisions. In comparison, most authors do not distinguish between different work-related conflict types along means-end lines. They include, to differing degrees, distribution and allocation of scarce resources, conflicts about procedures and policies, incompatible goals or values, and different interpretations of facts under the umbrella term 'task conflict' (De Dreu & Van Vianen, 2001; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Janssen et al., 1999).

According to Jehn (1997), her task-relationship distinction provided support for previous models of organisational conflict that separated work from person-oriented conflicts, such as Guetzkow and Gyr (1954), and Pinkley (1990). Jehn's study further sought to identify the associations and interplay between the types of conflict and other conflict attributes and their diverse effects on overall group performance. The observed common-goal groups experienced conflicts of all three types, perceived as distinct and distinguishable by group members. Additionally, the three types had different effects on performance. The highest performing groups had moderately high levels of task conflict and little or no process conflict. Process and relationship conflict were

detrimental to satisfaction and performance, while moderate to high levels of task conflict were positively related to group performance (Jehn, 1997). Jehn's (1997) findings thus are in accordance with previous empirical research results. Whilst conflicts in interpersonal relations are associated with lower productivity and satisfaction in groups as it derails the focus on completing tasks, task conflicts can improve decision-making outcomes and productivity through stimulation of constructive discussions on how performance can be improved (Amason, 1996; Cosier & Rose, 1977; Guetzkow & Gyr, 1954; Jehn, 1994, 1995; Schweiger et al., 1986). Furthermore, unresolved task conflicts may induce relationship conflicts, and relationship conflicts may mask as task conflicts through interference with task issues, hiding animosity as the underlying source of conflict (Jehn, 1997).

Although the differentiation in work and person-oriented conflicts is not new, Jehn's (1994, 1995, 1997) research triggered numerous studies investigating these conflict types and their respective effects on organisations. Initial studies supported Jehn's assumptions with regard to classification of conflict types, and separate consequences of task, relationship and process conflicts for teams, that is for decision making and performance. Recent researchers, however, suggested *limitations of this conceptualisation*. Firstly, the definitions of conflict types contain static descriptions as well as behavioural expressions (e.g., Bendersky et al., 2014; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). Secondly, findings are inconsistent with regard to effects of conflict types on performance (e.g., De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; de Wit et al., 2012; Farh et al., 2010; O'Neill et al., 2013). Thirdly, the three types highly covary and in some cases transform into each other (e.g., Rahim, 2011; Simons & Peterson, 2000; Yang & Mossholder, 2004). Fourth, further conflict types may account for discrepancies in data (Bendersky & Hays, 2012; Hjertø & Kuvaas, 2009). Finally, the predominance on the conflict issue neglects other factors such as behavioural expression, interaction between conflict parties, and conflict management, and their mediating effect on the conflict outcome (e.g., DeChurch et al., 2013; Janssen et al., 1999; Korsgaard et al., 2008; Weingart et al., 2015). These criticisms are laid out in more detail in the following paragraphs.

In line with Glasl (1999a), and McCorkle and Reese (2010), Jehn's (1995, 1997) 'difference of opinion' classification of task conflicts can include non-conflicts that merely involve the cognitive dimension, *lacking the personal investment, intent and behavioural expression of conflicts*. In other words, any argumentation or debate without a conflictful basis thus may be subsumed under 'difference of opinion'. De Dreu

and Weingart's (2003) definition, for example, goes further than Jehn's understanding of task conflict. Allocation of resources and procedures, as well as evaluations and application of facts serve as examples of task conflict; thus, encompassing process conflict components in describing task conflict. Additionally, their definition implicitly alludes to different kinds of stages where task differences may occur - during discussion, decision-making and implementation phases in a project lifecycle. Similarly, Bendersky et al. (2014) distinguished between divergent and convergent processes in group decision making, which relates to brainstorming and decision selection stages respectively. Depending on at what stage a task conflict is expressed and whether it is expressed in a deliberative or personal advocacy manner, task conflict may have different effects on groups and their outputs. For example, task conflicts may be beneficial at early decision-making stages in yielding divergent options, whilst disruptions at later stages may negatively affect the reaching of decisions (Bendersky et al., 2014; Farh et al., 2010).

Furthermore, in line with Glasl (2013), and De Dreu and Weingart (2003), a *sole distinction between factual and personal issues* may be more beneficial in highlighting the different foci of respective conflicts. For example, a further differentiation of factual conflict may not be able to account for the different effects such conflicts have on team outcomes; rather other dimensions such as intensity and complexity of conflict, and moderators such as conflict management mediate between conflict type and the conflict outcome. Attempts at finding further distinctions, moreover, may confuse what are personal and what are factual issues. An example is Behfar et al.'s (2011) study specifying sub-dimensions of process conflict: conflicts about coordinating the task and conflict about coordinating the people. Whilst task-coordination conflict involves factual issues such as discussions of roles and responsibilities and resource allocation, people-coordination conflicts involve tensions arising from truancy, disrespect and uncompleted tasks from individual team members. This distinction makes it more difficult to separate factual from personal issues.

Bendersky et al. (2014) noted that *relationship conflict is highly underspecified* both with regard to its definition and measurement. In line with previous authors (cf. Coser, 1956), Jehn (1995, 1997) related relationship conflict to interpersonal incompatibility without providing details of what the substance is behind these differences. This may be due to the fact that this type of conflict is viewed as lacking of substance: its basis are personal frustrations and animosity evidenced by tensions and

personal attacks towards the other party (cf. Coser, 1956; Jehn, 1995, 1997). The relation to negative emotions and feelings points to another critical aspect: The description of the conflict type includes its behavioural expression and the parties' disposition towards each other. Moreover, it is pre-evaluated in associating it with negative affect expressed during the parties' interaction. Furthermore, relationship conflict leads members to uphold suspicions and resentments towards each other (Jehn, 1997). Apart from negative emotions being understood as an essential component of relationship conflict and leading to hostile behaviour, the elements tension, frustration, anger, friction, and hostility have also been used to assess this conflict type (Barki & Hartwick, 2004). Equating relationship conflict with emotions, however, can be problematic for measurement purposes as, according to Bendersky et al. (2014), the underlying contradiction is confounded with resulting emotions, for example, by including anger as a measurement item of relationship conflict. Therefore, emotions are used to define and measure relationship conflict, instead of treating them as a separate element in a conflict process (Bendersky et al., 2014).

Due to relationship conflict being associated with increased emotionality and animosity in teams and distraction of members from tasks (Greer et al., 2008; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003; Simons & Peterson, 2000), it may have contributed to relationship conflict being considered as synonymous with negative emotionality and dysfunctionality. However, *both relationship and task conflicts can have emotional components* (Bendersky et al., 2014; Jehn et al., 2008; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). Furthermore, relationship conflicts do not necessarily involve strong emotions and emotional debates. Jehn and Bendersky (2003), therefore, refined the relationship conflict definition in separating emotion from the conflict type and additionally, added more substance to this conflict type. Other authors have also contributed to an extension and refinement of relationship conflict in attributing it to incompatibilities with regard to personal taste, habits, political preferences, personality traits, values, interpersonal and/or working styles, and exercise of power (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; DeChurch et al., 2013; Glasl, 2013; Glasl & Ballreich, 2011). They have in common that they explain conflict out of the nature of the conflict parties: the mindset, disposition and behavioural expression of individuals, and relations between individuals based on these dispositions (cf. Glasl, 2013). Therefore, when the conflict is located on the subject sphere, conflict management has to focus on personal and interpersonal aspects of conflict parties and only in a second step on changing structures,

procedures and functions predominant in object sphere conflicts (Glasl, 2013). In summing up, the relationship conflict definition benefits, on the one hand, from extending its substance and, on the other hand, by decoupling the underlying contradiction from the expression of emotions and feelings. Relationship conflict, thus, is not merely an uncontrolled expression of animosity but is based on 'substantive' interpersonal-oriented differences in the form of, for example, personality traits, habits or values.

#### *2.2.2.1.1.3 Association between conflict types*

Recent meta-analyses accounted for *high correlations between the three conflict types* – task, relationship and process (de Wit et al., 2012; Loughry & Amason, 2014); that is, implicitly questioning the possibility of clearly distinguishing between conflict types. As conflict in common understanding is perceived as bad, Loughry and Amason (2014) noted in their review of current conflict literature that team members may be conscious of the presence of task conflicts within their teams but may not report it as it is seen as a sign of failure. Others may not even perceive task conflict in the case of cordial relationships between team members and team effectiveness. In contrast, teams with poor relationships may more easily perceive conflicts as such. This could, according to Loughry and Amason (2014), account for the high correlations between the three conflict types in recent studies. It implies that different conflict issues may be present simultaneously in a given conflict; however, due to the way interpersonal relations within a team and conflicts are perceived and acted upon, some conflict types can be more obviously recognised as such than others. Additionally, other factors may attribute to the non-recognition of certain conflicts. Firstly, a conflict may not have reached an escalation stage where emotions and tensions are high. Secondly, when factual differences go along with personal differences, the conflict has reached a higher conflict level and thus is more obvious to both parties and their environment (cf. Glasl, 1999a). Thirdly, it is actually a non-conflict, involving a mere debate over task issues.

Relating to previous research (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; de Wit et al., 2012), Behfar et al. (2015) also noted that groups often *simultaneously experience different kinds of conflicts*, which has consequences for conflict management. They contended that the appropriate management of one conflict type depends on what other conflict types simultaneously arise. In other words, the co-occurrence of different conflict types

dictates which strategy should be applied in a given context. However, not only the underlying conflict issues determine appropriate conflict management strategies but also how these conflict issues are expressed. Furthermore, their model does not provide for the instance that different conflict issues do not necessarily occur simultaneously at the initial stage of conflict but are added in the course of conflict. This view is supported by Galtung's (1996) complexity postulation that more issues and parties might be added to a conflict, increasing the conflict's complexity, which then has consequences for its conflict management.

As a result, *a neat distinction between types may at times be difficult* within the context of a particular conflict. For example, when relationship conflict arises within a work context, it cannot, according to Bendersky et al. (2014), be completely separated from tasks to be accomplished, which is evidenced by high correlations of task and relationship conflicts (e.g., De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). Furthermore, relationship conflicts often result out of inadequately managed previous task conflicts (DeChurch & Marks, 2001; Janssen et al., 1999). Therefore, Bendersky et al. (2014) questioned how personality-related clashes may be clearly distinguished from work-related tasks. In a similar vein, distinctions between conflict types may become blurry or obsolete in cases where conflicts transform, masquerade as a different type and/or involve multiple contested issues (e.g., unresolved issues of a previous conflict and newly added contradictions). Rahim (2011) suggested that it should be looked beyond the classification of conflicts into task and emotional conflicts and investigate other potential dimensions. He proposed the type cognitive-affective conflict as a combination of task and emotional conflicts: emotional conflict masquerading as task conflict and task conflict turning emotional. Transforming conflict starts with task-related issues but degenerates to personality clashes and attacks as the conflict intensifies. In comparison, masquerading conflict is based upon relationship issues but is disguised as task conflict in criticising work-related ideas.

The former type – *transforming conflict* – is also assessed in other studies, although not classified as a separate type (Jehn, 1997; Simons & Peterson, 2000; J. Yang & Mossholder, 2004). In accordance with theoretical and empirical support of other studies, Yang and Mossholder (2004) noted that relationship conflict likely follows task conflict than in the reverse order. Under certain conditions, misattribution of intentions and incorrect assignment of underlying conflict issues might lead to a transformation of task conflict to relationship conflict (Rahim, 2011; Simons &

Peterson, 2000; Xie & Luan, 2014). Research has indicated that the moderators' role ambiguity, trust within teams, team membership and negative emotionality may increase a likely transformation from task to relationship conflict (Rispen, 2012; Simons & Peterson, 2000; Xie & Luan, 2014; J. Yang & Mossholder, 2004). For example, Yang and Mossholder (2004), investigated the role of emotionality in the intertwining of task and relationship conflicts. As disagreements are often not solely factual but involve parties' perceptions and personal views of the facts and procedures to be followed, interpersonal exchanges may become emotionally charged when individuals defend their own views against those of their opponents (J. Yang & Mossholder, 2004). Decoupling task conflict from relationship conflict may, according to Yang and Mossholder (2004) decrease the likelihood of task conflict leading to negative outcomes. Relationship conflict, therefore, should be eliminated whilst maintaining nominal levels of task conflict (with the view of task conflicts having positive outcomes in following a cooperative approach to conflict). Some authors have, thus, attributed the transformation of conflict types to moderators - in particular from task to relationship conflicts. Other studies have found that inadequately managed previous process or task conflicts stimulate or result in relationship conflict (cf. Bendersky et al., 2014; DeChurch et al., 2007; Peterson & Behfar, 2003). Therefore, as Pondy (1967) already noted that the aftermath of a conflict episode is the precondition of another conflict episode, the way a conflict is managed and its outcome has effects on the ongoing relationship between the parties and introduces further issues and grievances that were not present before.

#### *2.2.2.1.1.4 Both factual and personal issues as essentials of conflict*

Whilst acknowledging the presence of different types of issues in a given conflict, Glasl (1999a) does not distinguish between different conflict types; rather *both factual and personal issues are essential parts of conflict* in general and affect and enforce each other the more a conflict escalates. In the same vein, Janssen et al. (1999) proposed that both task and person-oriented issues feature in conflicts during decision-making processes and influence each other's impact on team effectiveness. This understanding, according to the authors, is able to capture why the beneficial effects of task conflict do not materialise as they may be impeded by the simultaneous occurrence of person conflicts. Janssen et al. (1999), however, do not go as far as



Glasl (1999a) in maintaining the distinction between conflict types and limiting their impact assessment on team effectiveness. Glasl (1999a) applied his assumptions to any potential conflict and investigated the effects of conflict on the conflict parties, their relationship and behaviour to each other, and the general organisational context they are embedded in. Several mechanisms operate simultaneously in conflict situations, which lead to an increased distortion of perceptions, fixation on negative and hostile attitudes, and destructive behaviour of the conflict parties (Glasl, 2013). The conflict parties add more and more issues to the conflict so that the issues increase in number, scope and complexity. Issues on the subjective and objective spheres become increasingly mixed and entangled with each other, as the opposing parties assume more extreme stances (Glasl, 2013; Glasl & Ballreich, 2011). Clear cause-effect-relations cannot be made out: Each side interprets the differences on the factual and interpersonal levels differently. As the reasons for conflict are interpreted differently, the parties seek to resolve the situation in different ways, which is rejected by the respective opponent. This in turn affects the factual issues and interpersonal relationships, constituting a cycle of mutual causality (Glasl, 1999b, 2013).

Burton (1969, as cited in Glasl, 2013) noted that the *voiced conflict issues may even not always be the actual sources of conflict*. The parties may often not be fully conscious of the underlying source or formulate them in a misleading manner. Additionally, the parties generally only know their own issues and only have assumptions over the issues of the other party (Glasl, 2013). As their perceptions of each other get more and more selective and distorted, the parties come to have very different issue catalogues that are, consciously as well as unconsciously, constantly adjusted and extended during conflict. In time, the parties live, regarding the conflict issues, in totally different worlds. Consequently, the parties cannot help frustrating each other's expectations, interpret situations and mutual intentions wrongly. Therefore, it is important to find out which issues are of central importance to the respective parties to increase understanding and help establish where consensus can be easily reached (Boulding, 1964, as cited in Glasl, 2013).

The distinction into conflict issue types, thus, is not as essential as determining which conflict issues are of importance to the conflict parties in a given situation, because conflicts evolve, and issues may be more or less predominant at a certain stage of conflict. Only the deciphering of actual conflict issues can bring forth understanding in removing misperceptions on conflict issues and subsequently

enabling constructive conflict resolution in locating commonalities that were previously not obvious. High correlations between conflict types found in other studies, furthermore, can be attributed to the fact that conflicts are more complex than to assign a single conflict issue to it and denote it as one type or the other. As conflicts occur between humans with feelings, thoughts, emotions and actions, it is, moreover, arguable how personal issues can be totally separated from any conflict. Therefore, I acknowledge that both factual and personal issues are part of any conflict, and, taking account of the dynamic nature of conflict, their relative predominance, degree and expression depend on the point in time at which a conflict is assessed.

Additionally, there has to be a *contradiction at the core of the conflict*. In other words, it cannot be based on purely personal dislike or animosity, that is negative emotion or feelings towards the other person. Relationship conflict, thus, may be based on interpersonal differences in values, needs, motivation, preferences, styles, habits and/or interests. These differences then reflect in negative attitudes and behaviour towards each other. Incompatibilities may specifically arise due to, for example, firstly, a different approach or motivation to timeliness, speed, efficiency, effectiveness and/or dedication to work tasks and work in general (cf. Behfar et al., 2011); secondly, needs with regard to security, status, power, achievement, recognition and/or likeability colliding with someone else's respective needs (cf. Coleman et al., 2013; Duffy & Lilly, 2013; Kaur, 2014; Schneider & Alderfer, 1973; Sirota et al., 2006); and thirdly, divergent values, norms and preferences based on upbringing, class and/or religion, which reflect in one's choice of lifestyle, relations to others, views, general attitudes and behaviour. These interpersonal differences affect the relationship between the parties on the personal and work levels. An individual's attitude and behaviour that is based on certain values, needs or motivations may be regarded as non-conforming social behaviour from another individual's perspective. This assessment, therefore, is highly subjective as it depends on the cognitive and affective orientations of the person perceiving other's behaviour. Nonetheless, despite contradictions, a relationship may still be cordial due to a high concern for others; without at the same time neglecting or annihilating one's own concern (cf. Pinkley, 1990). It implies that despite interpersonal value or needs differences, there can be cooperation, communication, respect, trust and even friendship. It depends on what is more important: compromising certain values or needs for the sake of maintaining a (cordial) personal and/or work relationship or pursuing one's personal concerns without regard for the other person.

However, individuals, to varying degrees, may pursue both concerns. It is contingent on context, relationship and issues concerned. The context, therefore, determines the course taken by the persons involved. Furthermore, concern is fundamentally two-sided: When one party has a concern for the other and pursues a cooperative course of action, it does not automatically mean that the other side is pursuing the same course.

#### *2.2.2.1.1.5 Beyond the focus on conflict issue*

Apart from refinements and extensions of conflict issue types, *other conflict components and the way they impact the conflict process and outcome have received less attention than conflict types' effects on performance*. Instead of the conflict issue explaining the content of the conflict and its outcome, *conflict behaviour* as a reaction to contradictions mediates between conflict issue and conflict outcome (Janssen et al., 1999). Similarly, DeChurch et al. (2013) criticised conflict research neglecting the behaviours of individuals serving as a response to their issue differences. Considering both issues and behavioural responses, they distinguished between emergent states (disagreements over tasks or relationships) and behavioural processes (conflict management) and investigated their respective effects on team effectiveness. Emergent states are products of team interactions and serve as inputs for subsequent behavioural processes and outcomes. To change emergent states, a change in team interaction patterns has to be introduced so that interactions no longer correspond to perceptions. As a result, team members revise their perceptions of conflict, enabling a disruption of conflict spirals. Loughry and Amason (2014) implied from DeChurch et al.'s (2013) findings that perceptions of disagreement are not as essential to performance as is the behaviour of involved individuals. This has consequences for conflict management as managers cannot easily change employees' attitudes towards each other or perceptions of conflict issues; rather through training and incentives, they can change team members' behaviour (Loughry & Amason, 2014). Whilst it may be easier to impact behaviour than peoples' attitudes and perceptions of contradictions, behaviour reflects these internal states, and without a change in internal states the conflict may erupt again as the underlying factors were not considered in its management. Therefore, in addressing the underlying conflict issues and attitudes in

conflict management, a reoccurrence of conflict based on the same differences that were previously not resolved is avoided in the long run.

Apart from impacting on the conflict outcome, the way a conflict is expressed also has effects on the course of the conflict and the conflict parties through *influencing perceptions and reactions* (Weingart et al., 2015). Conflict expressions, defined as “verbal and nonverbal communication of opposition between people” (Weingart et al., 2015, p. 235), vary in directness and oppositional intensity, which directly affects how individuals experience and react to conflicts. The intensity of emotions and behaviour can assist in delineating escalation and de-escalation processes in conflicts. Whereas low oppositional intensity, low-directness conflict expressions can trigger inactivity and avoidance, high oppositional intensity, low-directness conflict expressions involve high tensions and subversive behaviours, thus impeding information exchange. In comparison, low oppositional intensity, high-directness conflict expressions result in high performance due to individuals being more open to integration and information exchange. The way a conflict is expressed, furthermore, influences the conflict management approach to be selected. More direct and less oppositionally intense conflicts may be more likely resolved through collaborative or problem-solving approaches, whilst competing or avoiding approaches may be used in resolving less direct and more oppositionally intense conflicts. The reason is that, in an atmosphere of less subversion and entrenchment in the former scenario, direct communication can establish the trust and willingness for mutually beneficial solutions. In contrast, in the latter case, a perceived power balance and high emotions can lead to reciprocal actions or avoidance from those believing to be in an inferior power position. Weingart et al.'s (2015) study thus contributes to organisational conflict research in investigating conflict expressions and corresponding conflict management approaches. Their study thus focuses more on the dynamic process character of conflict and includes the behavioural level of conflict than merely focusing on the latent level of conflict, that is the conflict issue. Hence, more recent studies incorporate the behavioural level in their theoretical models instead of limiting their research to the conflict contradiction.

As an attempt to conceptualise conflict as a construct embodying multiple dimensions and properties, Barki and Hartwick (2004) extended the sole conflict issue-centric typology (task versus relationship orientation) to include a second dimension *incorporating affective, cognitive and behavioural components of conflict*: negative emotionality, disagreement and interference (see **Table 3** for Barki and Hartwick's

typology, p. 40). In their literature review the authors ascertained that in some studies only single properties (e.g., disagreement over the content of a task) were attributed to conflict, whilst other studies incorporated multiple properties to conflict (e.g., disagreement over personal values and negative emotionality assigned to relationship conflict). In using the two-dimensional framework, different constructs of conflict can be more easily compared in terms of how conflict is understood and operationalized. Moreover, mapping the specific properties and targets to a conflict being examined enables a more precise description of what the conflict is about (Barki & Hartwick, 2004).

Barki and Hartwick's (2004) conflict properties' distinction can be compared to Galtung's (1996) three-fold conflict model (see **Section 2.2.1.1.2** for Galtung's model, p. 11 ff.): on the one hand, affect, cognition and behaviour relate to Galtung's attitudes, contradiction and behaviour; on the other hand, whilst Barki and Hartwick added the particular conflict focus in the form of task or relationship orientation, they do not differentiate between latent and manifest levels of conflict. The latter point is especially essential in delineating the conflict parties' disposition and contradictions from the actual occurrence of conflict through its behavioural expression.

Interpersonal Conflict's Focus			
Interpersonal Conflict's Properties		<b>Task Content or Task Process</b>	<b>Interpersonal Relationship</b>
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
	<b>Cognition/ Disagreement</b>	Disagreement with the other about what should be done in a task or how a task should be done	Disagreement with the other's personal values, views or preferences
		<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
	<b>Behaviour/ Interference</b>	Preventing the other from doing what they think should be done in a task or how a task should be done	Preventing the other from doing things unrelated to a task
		<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Affect/Negative Emotion</b>	Anger and frustration directed to the other about what should be done in a task or how a task should be done	Anger and frustration directed to the other as a person	

**Table 3: A Typology for Conceptualising and Assessing Interpersonal Conflict in Organisations.** Adapted from "Conceptualizing the construct of interpersonal conflict," by Henri Barki & Jon Hartwick, 2004, p. 236.

Taking account of Barki and Hartwick's (2004) extended conflict framework, Korsgaard et al. (2008) proposed a *conflict episode model* in an attempt to depict how conflicts develop. Korsgaard et al. (2008) criticised the predominant investigation of conflict types in explaining conflict as, firstly, conflict is thereby confounded with its causes and, secondly, the underlying causes and processes leading to conflict cannot adequately be portrayed. In their conflict episode model, the authors took resource, social and substantive issues as inputs of conflict, which, mediated through conflict-provoking behaviour and sense-making processes (naming and blaming), result in affective, cognitive and behavioural manifestations of conflict. Whilst incorporating Barki and Hartwick's (2004) conflict properties as manifestations, Korsgaard et al.'s (2008) conflict episode model differs substantially in considering the dynamic and process character of conflict: describing how a conflict develops from its origination to its manifestation. Nonetheless, the three components affect, cognition and behaviour are all part of any given conflict; therefore, they cannot be singled out as separate manifestations.

In line with above debate, I contend that *the sole focus on the conflict issue only provides a limited view of conflict*. Other conflict components such as the attitudes, assumptions and behaviour of parties have to be added in order to portray a complete picture of conflict. The conflict issue cannot on its own explain what individuals feel or think of each other and how they consequentially behave towards each other based on the cognitions, feelings and perceived incompatible differences. The parties have a certain image of the other party (whether negative or positive). When differences in the form of task, goal, interests or other concerns arise, it affects the other elements and fundamentally the relationship between the parties. The attitudes and assumptions, that is the image of the other party, then may change regarding the opponent and become evident and observable in expressed behaviour. Furthermore, the different components may change during conflict with regard to their degree, complexity and perception. They, therefore, enforce each other during conflict, requiring a different conflict management approach than at an earlier point in time and stage. Instead of assuming direct effects of conflict issue types on performance, a conflict construct encompassing contradiction, attitudes and behaviour coupled with conflict management may more adequately explain the effect of conflict on performance and interpersonal relations.

#### *2.2.2.1.2 Interdependence*

In his theory of cooperation and competition, Deutsch (1973, 2006a) focuses on the type of *interdependence* of people's goals and what effect the respective association has on the chosen conflict management approach and the outcome of the conflict (see also **Section 2.2.1.2** on interdependence and goal attainment, p. 15 ff.). He distinguishes between three different interdependence types. *Positive interdependence* relates to the higher probability of a person attaining his/her goal when positively linked to another person. In contrast, *negative interdependence* involves a person attaining his/her goal when the other does not achieve his/her goal. Finally, the state of *independence* is present when the activities of persons do not affect each other. In comparison to the theoretical distinction between types, in real-life situations persons can be positively interdependent with regard to one goal and competitively linked towards another. Therefore, situations can embody both cooperative and competitive elements, with the relative importance and degree of

linkage of goals influencing the interaction between parties and the overall conflict process (Deutsch, 2006a). Whether embodying positive and/or negative characteristics, according to Deutsch (1973, 2006a), conflict only occurs under the condition of interdependence. When the parties are completely independent, there will consequently be no conflict. Thus, interdependence seems to be a necessary but not sufficient precondition for the occurrence of conflicts as not all parties in an interdependent relationship experience conflicts (Barki & Hartwick, 2001).

In contrast, Jehn and Bendersky (2003), and Jehn (1995) understood *task interdependence* as a moderating factor between conflict and performance, which, however, confounds social interdependence theory's interaction patterns with the structural conditions of interdependence (see D. W. Johnson & Johnson, 2005 for an overview model). Moreover, in comparison to Deutsch's (2006a) general definition of interdependence, task interdependence refers to people depending on each other to execute certain tasks (Jehn, 1995; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). A higher interdependence comes with increased interaction and debates, which simultaneously increases the likelihood of conflicts arising between the respective parties and affects their capability of performing well. However, not all conflict types have the same relation with interdependence. In Jehn and Bendersky's (2003), and Jehn's (1995) study, task conflict was positively associated with interdependence due to the increased collaboration and debates accompanying interdependence, which then also positively impacted the performance of group members. Conversely, relationship and process conflicts had amplified negative effects under the condition of high interdependence for the same reason of high interaction. With regard to task conflict, Lam and Chin (2004) similarly found a positive association with an integrating conflict-handling style: Task interdependence furthered mutual understanding, and the focus was on maintaining a long-term relationship with the other person. Depending on the conflict type, high interdependence, therefore, results in different outcomes with regard to performance.

However, Jehn and Bendersky (2003) only assessed positive characteristics of interdependence, which, apart from increased communication, could encompass less obstructiveness, considering others' needs, values and ideas, and mutual problem-solving through collaboration (Deutsch, 2006a). When individuals are positively linked, they prefer the other to engage in effective actions, allow someone else's actions to substitute for their own, develop positive attitudes towards the other and be open-



mindful to someone else's ideas and wants (Deutsch, 2006a; Janssen et al., 1999; Tjosvold, 1991). Conversely, individuals in a negative interdependence relationship want to do better than the other and prefer for the other to be less effective and make mistakes (Deutsch, 2006a). Negative interdependence, furthermore, is associated with obstruction of other's behaviour, aspirations and goals (Wall Jr. & Callister, 1995), impaired communication, power struggle and use of coercive tactics (Deutsch, 2006a).

The negative impact of interdependence on relationship conflict and its effects on performance in Jehn and Bendersky's (2003), and Jehn's (1995) studies can be related to the presence of the characteristics of negative interdependence. In other words, relationship conflict may be more related to negative interdependence and its associated characteristics than positive interdependence. Nonetheless, conflicts, as well as interdependence, may not exist as pure types in reality. Janssen et al. (1999) assessed a three-way relationship between task conflict, relationship conflict and positive interdependence. Under the condition of both high task and high relationship conflicts, team members require positive interdependence in order to avert the negative effects of relationship conflict and manage conflicts effectively. In cases where only one conflict type or no conflict is present, positive interdependence does not have a beneficial role for team decision making. For example, task conflict on its own encourages discussions of various opinions and does not require perceptions of positive interdependence in order to lead to effective decision making (Janssen et al., 1999). The authors, however, did not assess the relations between negative interdependence, conflict types and decision-making effectiveness. Therefore, it restricts the assessment of conflicts to solely collaborative conflict management, and some dynamics that are generally assigned to relationship conflict might not be explainable in only assessing positive interdependence. Although positive interdependence is, according to Deutsch (2006a) and Tjosvold (1991), preferable for managing conflicts, the conditions have to be further explored under which certain types of interdependence are beneficial or suboptimal in conflict processes (cf. Janssen et al., 1999; D. W. Johnson, 2003; D. W. Johnson & Johnson, 2005).

Additionally, people's goals do not solely have to be linked to the necessity of having to execute tasks together, share resources or depend on each other's services in the work context. Positive interdependence can also be a result of liking each other or identifying with someone due to shared group identity or cultural orientation (Deutsch, 2006a), with the reverse being true for negative interdependence such as,

for example, disliking each other. Interdependence, thus, can also be described in terms of relations between the parties, especially when the relations are expected to continue into the future (Jameson, 1999). Hence, task interdependence is only one aspect of interdependence.

In summing up, *interdependence as a structural precondition of conflict* determines how people interact to achieve their goals, with the resulting interaction patterns then shaping conflict outcomes (Deutsch, 2006a; Johnson, 2003; Johnson & Johnson, 2005). Depending on the type of interdependence and its subjective perception by individuals involved, individuals take different approaches to managing interpersonal conflicts: cooperation or competition. Cooperation is aligned with collaborative approaches in the relations with others and managing of differences, whilst competition seeks to obstruct others from attaining their goals. Interaction based on collaborative principles, particularly open discussion of differences, seems to be beneficial for managing task conflicts and leading to favourable outcomes, whilst the reverse holds for relationship conflicts. However, interdependence is not only about increased communication, and further characteristics and conditions would have to be assessed to determine the effect of interdependence on diverse conflict scenarios, that is respective conflict type(s) and existing relations between parties. Furthermore, processes and effects brought forth by a type of interdependence in turn elicit that particular type of interdependence, the same way as, for example, competition induces and is induced by negative characteristics (Johnson & Johnson, 2005). Therefore, the relations and actions of individuals matter in determining their present as well as future relations and states. Past dealings affect how parties engage with each other and manage conflicts that arise between them: A cycle of cooperation, thus, endorses the same cooperation in the future yet to come, whereas competition leads to further obstruction and animosity, suggesting that culture and norms of behaviour are crucial in setting the scene, so these are discussed below.

#### *2.2.2.1.3 Social norms and conflict culture*

*Norms are informal standards that inform and regulate the attitudes and behaviours of people in groups and situations* (Hogg & Reid, 2006). Even when group members are not in the group situation that produced certain norms, individuals henceforth perceive and evaluate behaviours and situations in accordance with these norms (Sherif &

Sherif, 1973). Compliance with social norms, however, also depends on the degree to which these norms have been internalised and the relationship with other group members: Individuals are more motivated to act in line with others' behaviour under the condition of group cohesion and interest in the needs of other parties and the larger social system (Thomas, 1992b). Nonetheless, social influence in the form of others' judgements generally impact individuals' perceptions and judgements, likely causing a re-evaluation of held opinions and adaptation to the situation in order to conform to others' positions (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). Even in the event that others are being misguided, Deutsch and Gerard (1955) found that the behaviour of others serves as an influence on individual evaluations. Similarly, Cialdini et al. (1991) found that individuals' actions are more likely to be in accordance with the norm that is the most salient in a given situation, even when other present norms point towards contrary actions. Fundamentally, behaviour depends on whether individuals focus more on personal or social standards and which norm has more predominance for them at a particular time and context. A further issue is whether, on the one hand, such behaviour is enacted as a response to temporary social pressure and is a one-off measure, or whether, on the other hand, norms have been internalised as general standards to follow due to a genuine personal conviction that this is the right path to follow and guide future behaviour (cf. McDonald & Crandall, 2015).

*Norms determine how individuals perceive conflict*, the extent to which attitudes and emotions towards others evolve and are expressed during conflicts, and the way conflict parties interact and manage arising conflicts between them (Jehn, 1995; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003; Troth, 2009; J. Yang & Mossholder, 2004). Conflict norms evolve over time through interactions between group members and are expected to be followed in future conflict situations (Troth, 2009; J. Yang & Mossholder, 2004). Norms determining the conflict-handling approach are, according to Troth (2009), more robust and productive when a team is able to manage arising emotions in conflict. Emotion-regulating norms direct conflict behaviour in encouraging positive interaction behaviours and constraining the expression of anger and hostility towards others (J. Yang & Mossholder, 2004). These can either serve to prevent negative emotions from arising or help to normalise behaviours during conflictful interactions. Restricting negative emotionality is essential for preventing task conflicts from transforming into relationship conflicts, and beneficial for the promotion of team viability and effective decision making (Troth, 2009; J. Yang & Mossholder, 2004). Groups also differ to the

extent to which they encourage the expression of conflicts: Groups may accept a constructive discussion of task-related issues, whilst being unaccepting of heated disagreements involving interpersonal issues (Jehn, 1997). The highest-performing groups in Jehn's (1997) study pursued acceptability norms with regard to task conflict and discouraged relationship conflicts, and low performers faced high relationship conflicts and an open discussion of them. Therefore, norms do not only affect the acceptance of conflicts and individuals' conduct in conflicts but also amplify the effects of conflict on conflict outcomes (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003).

*Norms further determine how conflicts are handled* at the interpersonal and group levels. Over time, groups develop particular ways of managing conflicts. Members' particular skills, personalities and ties, as well as situational factors contribute to the formation of normative group behaviour or conflict cultures (Gelfand et al., 2008; Kuhn & Poole, 2000). The sole interplay of individuals' behaviour, therefore, may not be sufficient in understanding conflict management choices of group members as the unique features of the affected actors, their relation and the situation also play a role (cf. Kuhn & Poole, 2000). The enactment of group conflict management styles further strengthens these norms (Kuhn & Poole, 2000) and influences future behaviour of group members in conflicts and other situations. Kuhn and Poole discovered that 9 out of 11 assessed teams via long-term observations displayed consistent conflict management behaviour, with some teams leaning towards integrative styles and others pursuing distributive styles. The consistency in behaviour aligns with Cialdini et al.'s (1991) assumption that people tend to approve of and enact what is considered as the salient norm. In following normative group behaviour, individuals also have a more limited range of conflict management styles to choose from (Gelfand et al., 2008). As work contexts remain relatively stable - in the sense of the same unit members interacting with each other, engaging in the same work processes and experiencing potentially recurring work-related problems -, certain conflict management strategies become adopted as standards in work units, and individuals come to perceive conflicts in the same light as either positive or negative (De Dreu et al., 2004). Such conflict cultures develop at the organisational level or subunit level, guiding members' attitudes and behaviours with regard to management of conflict (Gelfand et al., 2008). Gelfand et al. (2008) suggested norms in conflict cultures differ with regard to whether conflict is managed cooperatively or competitively, and conflict management is handled in an active or passive manner.

Four conflict cultures can be distinguished according to these dimensions: dominating, collaborative, avoidant and passive-aggressive conflict cultures. Instead of organisations or units embodying a pure version of one of the conflict culture types, they may have different conflict cultures at different times, which likely are types highly affine to each other such as, for example, dominating and passive-aggressive conflict cultures (Gelfand et al., 2008).

Individuals are attracted to and stay in organisations whose *conflict culture* closely relates to their own personalities and in turn assist in co-creating and reinforcing the salient conflict culture (Gelfand et al., 2008). An organisation's conflict culture, therefore, depends on the persons that make up the organisation in shaping and influencing processes and relations. Although cited works relate to group conflict norms and this thesis focuses on interpersonal conflicts, individuals are embedded into a certain social context dominated by norms that individuals are more or less expected to conform to. Therefore, interpersonal conflicts and their management likely are influenced by norms at a higher level (social unit; organisation) and also retroact on these, providing opportunity for the reinforcement or change of salient norms through bottom-up processes. An organisation's ability to point employees towards certain normative behaviour and conflict management strategies could be crucial for settling conflicts at an early escalation stage and retaining functionality of teams and organisational processes. In comparison to macro-level approaches, the contingency of the situation such as the particular conflict issue and constellation of parties, however, also has to be considered in the recommendation of appropriate conflict management strategies. Therefore, macro as well as micro-level approaches may serve to provide guidance for conflict management.

#### 2.2.2.2 Disputants' characteristics and relations

The dimension *disputants' characteristics and relations* is a multi-component category, which includes all (inter)person factors considered as significant in various disciplines with regard to conflict, including works in social psychology, organisational behaviour and war studies. Persons act as they do out of various reasons: their own dispositions or the relations they hold with other people. Parties' relations and power distribution do not only prominently feature in war studies (e.g., Bercovitch & Houston, 1996; Kleiboer, 1996; Rubin et al., 1994) but also in organisational conflict studies (Chun & Choi, 2014;

Labianca et al., 1998; Rispens et al., 2011; Rognes & Schei, 2010; P. K. Smith & Magee, 2015). Bercovitch and Houston (1996) found that successful mediation is more likely when there is little power disparity between the parties. In comparison, Deutsch (1973) argued that parties recognising each other's relative power position and legitimacy is more essential for conflict management than power parity. In the situation of a significant, clear power asymmetry, the weaker party is expected to concede, making conflict escalation less likely. In the same vein, power and status differences in organisations regulate how persons relate with each other and how conflicts are expressed among them. For example, a weaker party is more likely to desist from emotional expressions in conflicts with higher-status persons, enabling a de-escalation of conflict (Callister & Wall Jr., 2001; Morris & Keltner, 2000).

In comparison to short-term relations, parties in ongoing relationships have a greater interest in preserving the relationship and approach conflicts more cooperatively when they had previous friendly encounters with each other (Deutsch, 1973; Rubin et al., 1994), contributing to a successful mediation of international conflicts (Bercovitch & Houston, 1996; Kleiboer, 1996). Similarly, a history of close relations and high concern for the other party tend to be beneficial for integrative conflict management and the maintenance of the relationship in organisational conflicts (Rispens et al., 2011; Rognes & Schei, 2010). Apart from interpersonal factors, the behaviour of individuals in conflicts may also be determined by, firstly, the attitudes they hold in general and towards a particular attitude object (Deutsch, 2006a; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, 2007; Galtung, 1996), and, secondly, the personality characteristics that define who a person is and what he/she strives for (Chun & Choi, 2014; Graziano et al., 1996; Weingart et al., 2015). Thus, the dispositional and relational factors further elaborated upon in this chapter are attitudes, personality characteristics, and power/status differences.

#### 2.2.2.2.1 Attitudes

*Attitudes* can be directed towards objects on an abstract level or towards specific entities (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Hence, in the case of conflicts, attitudes can relate to the other conflict party and/or towards the conflict (Galtung, 2009). Apart from attitudes involving reference to a particular object, attitudes refer, according to Eagly and Chaiken (1993), to *a person's inner state or tendency, and evaluate attitude*

*objects through overt or covert expression, which may involve cognitive, affective and/or behavioural aspects.* Eagly and Chaiken, thus, defined attitude as “a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor” (p. 1). A person’s encounter with an attitude object leaves a mental residue or tendency, which will make the person to likely react in the same manner (positive or negative) towards the same or similar objects in future encounters (Eagly & Chaiken, 2007). A person’s bias or behavioural disposition, therefore, may explain how and why persons react to conflict triggering events in a certain way: for example, when they have had positive or negative interactions with a particular person before, they are more likely to either act cooperatively or competitively in an emerging conflict situation with the same individual. Similarly, Fazio (2007) defined attitudes as *associations in memory between an object and its evaluation*, which may be based on cognitive, affective and/or behavioural information and can be of various strengths with respect to associations.

Whilst Fazio's (2007) definition takes account of the attitudinal elements object and evaluation, and potential basis on multiple components mentioned by Eagly and Chaiken (1993, 2007), it emphasises *prior experiences* as the basis on which current attitudes towards the same object and consequently their expressions rest – “evaluative knowledge” in Fazio's (2007, p. 609) words. Existence of such evaluative knowledge determines whether associations with regard to a particular object are available and how strong they are, implying that upon perceiving or mentioning the object the evaluative knowledge is automatically activated and influences processing of new information concerning the attitude object. In cases where no prior evaluative association is represented in memory, a new attitude towards the object has to be constructed (Fazio, 2007). These new attitudes may be inferred from already existing attitudes that evaluate similar or connected entities (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, 2007; Fazio, 2007) as attitudes are connected to other related attitudes and embedded in an ‘inter-attitudinal structure’ (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, 2007).

Although Fazio (2007), and Eagly and Chaiken (1993, 2007) support the view that all associations towards an object together form a summary evaluation or one evaluative mental residue, attitudes *may be based on many mental associations* (such as cognitive, affective and behavioural) *connected to the attitude object*. Whilst situational cues and respective disposition may activate certain mental associations over others in a particular instance, attitudes, however, are generally in accordance

with the overall evaluation of the attitude object. Nonetheless, the attitudinal characteristic of remaining relatively stable and enduring on average does not mean that attitudes cannot change: The salience of certain contextual and personal factors can lead to a change in attitudes (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, 2007), make some associations more accessible and possibly affect the (positive or negative) valence of the attitude (Ajzen, 2001). Therefore, conflict parties may potentially change their attitudes towards opponents during or through conflict under, for example, conditions leading to the deterioration or improvement of parties' relations. However, as attitudes are based on mental residues of past experiences, attitudes may not be easy to change in the short term, implying the importance of conflict management that encourages a change in how parties perceive, feel and behave towards each other.

In his tripartite conflict model, Galtung (1996) distinguished between assumptions (cognitions) and attitudes (emotions) and understood them to be (together with the contradiction of the conflict) the hidden, latent components of conflict (see **Section 2.2.1.1.2** for Galtung's model, p. 11 ff.). Despite the distinction, Galtung situated assumptions and attitudes at the same triangle corner, implying that a valence of one factor goes along with the same valence of the other factor: For example, aggressiveness embodies both hostile emotions and negative cognitions of others ('enemy concept'). In contrast, a positive conflict energy entails loving and accepting attitudes, and positive cognitions of both the other ('friend concept') and self (Galtung, 1996). The *valence of attitudes/assumptions* then fundamentally impacts the formation of conflict. This relates to research showing that negative information is generally better recalled than positive information, which has an impact on how events and stimuli are being evaluated and remembered (Ajzen, 2001). When a contradiction occurs, previously accumulated attitudes and behavioural inclinations may be activated and attached to the newly arisen conflict issue (Galtung, 1996). Therefore, previous relations, dispositions and attitudes towards other persons may significantly impact the occurrence of new conflicts, especially when the conflict parties have contentious past relations. This is especially important for the settlement of conflict as an increment in hatred and inclinations to behave violently need to be countered through empathy, nonviolent and creative approaches. However, in a deeply entrenched conflict, such a response to conflict is less likely (Galtung, 2000).

The *reason for either cooperative or competitive approaches*, as discussed in **Section 2.2.1.2** (p. 11 ff.), can be found in the respective attitudes of persons:



Individuals are attracted to and respond positively to stimuli, events and objects that are beneficial to them and avoid or react negatively to harmful ones (Deutsch, 2006a). This respective inner tendency then determines whether persons engage in cooperation or competition: Whilst cooperation is aligned to positive attitudes (being there for each other), competition entails negative attitudes (being in opposition to each other, with a potential intention to harm the other) (Deutsch, 2006a). The tendency of either reacting favourably or unfavourably to other objects (Deutsch, 2006a), thus, has an effect on the resulting behaviour towards the objects of interest in terms of conflict expression and inclination to either opt for an integrating or dividing approach to conflict management. Additionally, attitudes do not have to be negative: even in conflicts, they can be positive, neutral or negative (Galtung, 2009). They can either remain the same before, during and after conflict or increase in their respective valence.

In summing up, attitudes are generally based on mental associations with the attitude object, which could be of cognitive, affective and/or behavioural nature, and are of positive, neutral and/or negative valence. Attitudes can either be derived through automatic activation of evaluative knowledge in memory or construction in the case of new objects or weakly associated evaluative linkages. The activation of previously accumulated attitudes may play a role in conflict formation, especially when the conflict parties have had contentious relations before the current conflict. Whilst quoted researchers generally regard attitudes as relatively stable, authors supporting the (de-)escalation of conflicts hold the view that attitudes towards opponents likely change in the course of conflict due to an increasing 'enemy image' of the other (Galtung, 1996, 2009; Glasl, 2013). Furthermore, attitudes have an effect on how a conflict is expressed and which approach is taken in managing the conflict: The more favourable a person is inclined towards the attitude object, the less contentious will be the resulting behaviour and the more cooperative the conflict management approach (Deutsch, 2006a). Whilst the formation of attitudes is more predominant in research on attitudes (apart from Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, 2007), the role of attitudes for conflict expression and conflict management may be explored further for the enrichment of conflict theory.

#### *2.2.2.2.2 Personality characteristics*

*Personality* refers to *individuals' characteristic attitudinal and behavioural tendencies* (Chun & Choi, 2014), which, on the one hand, describe an individual person's unique

way of thinking and behaviour and, on the other hand, serve to differentiate individuals from each other (Allport, 1963; Association, n.d.; Byrne, 1981; McAdams, 1997). The two different aspects go back to different traditions in personality psychology. The idiographic view sees *the individual as a unique, whole person*, whose human nature cannot be described by separate dimensions. In contrast, the nomothetic view focuses on *interpersonal differences and comparability of persons in terms of dimensions or traits that are common to persons in general* (Byrne, 1981; McAdams, 1997; Sandy et al., 2006). Authors like Jensen-Campbell and Graziano, 2005, and McAdams, 2000 aim to *integrate individualistic and general characteristics as well as situational factors in defining personality*. This enables a more complex and dynamic understanding of personality and helps to trace why individuals behave the way they do under particular circumstances. Focusing on only one aspect, therefore, cannot give justice to the complexity of persons as persons are in some ways like other persons but essentially unique in what they desire, value, strive for or avoid given the context they find themselves in and the narrative they want to tell for their lives (McAdams, 2009; McAdams & Pals, 2006).

In comparison to McAdams and Pals' (2006) emphasis on a five-level approach for understanding the whole person, personality studies generally focus on particular aspects of personality in trying to explain, for example, the impact of interpersonal differences on job performance, team effectiveness or team satisfaction (Barrick & Mount, 2005; Mohammed & Angell, 2003; Peeters et al., 2006). The '*Big Five*' *trait taxonomy*, encompassing the five personality dimensions neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness (McCrae & Costa Jr., 1985), has been used to research associations between personality, conflict and team outcomes (Dijkstra et al., 2005; Ilies et al., 2011; Oosterhof et al., 2009; Tekleab & Quigley, 2014; Weingart et al., 2015). Individuals are assigned distinct characteristics based on these five dimensions that either serve to weaken or strengthen relations with others. According to the *similarity-attraction paradigm* (Byrne, 1971), people are attracted to similar others and respond favourable to those others that express and support similar attitudes, preferences and values as they serve to validate and reinforce their own ideals. Within the work context, similarity attraction becomes the more important the longer team members interact with each other over time (Mohammed & Angell, 2004; Tekleab & Quigley, 2014). Whilst persons fit well into some environments due to similarity to other people with similar characteristics, other

contexts call for a complementary fit where persons of diverse characteristics together make the environment whole and effective (Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987). Therefore, it may depend on the personality trait and the particular context whether persons interact well with each other and what impact conflict has on interpersonal relations and performance.

*Familiarity of the other's personality* may also influence the way conflicts are expressed. Having information on how the other person usually behaves in conflict scenarios helps the receiver of contentious messages to know how to interpret these and react accordingly (Weingart et al., 2015). Furthermore, *persons' characteristics* determine how they relate to others and whether they are more interested in maintaining relations than asserting their own positions in conflict situations. For example, persons with high agreeability evaluate others more positively and perceive less conflicts in interactions with others in comparison to low-agreeable persons, who incite more conflicts and tend to use more assertive tactics in dealing with conflict (Graziano et al., 1996). When high-agreeable persons are faced with conflicts, they experience heightened negative affect as their personality trait is not compatible with unpleasant situations (Ilies et al., 2011). In contrast, Dijkstra et al. (2005) found that agreeable persons were less affected in their individual well-being when experiencing conflicts at work. The authors attributed this to persons with high agreeability interpreting conflict situations differently as their main focus is on maintaining social relations than the conflict issue. Apart from agreeability, persons high in extraversion and emotional stability are better able to handle conflict situations through being positive minded in the former and being more relaxed and tolerant in the latter case than introverted and emotionally unstable individuals who experience reduced well-being in the event of conflict (Dijkstra et al., 2005).

Depending on the individual's personality traits, conflict, therefore, may be perceived and reacted differently to, which exemplifies that general assumptions on conflict behaviour may not be adequate in seeking deeper understanding of why a conflict occurred the way it did. Considering McAdams and Pals' (2006) extended understanding of personality, the question is, however, whether one individual trait can fully comprehend the character of a person to be able to provide a useful conflict analysis as human beings are more complex than reducing them to a single aspect. Additionally, as persons do not exist in a social vacuum, the way an individual's personality traits unfold depends on the social context and the interaction partners he

or she engages with in that instance (Graziano et al., 1996). This does not contradict the common assumption that traits remain generally stable in a person's adult years (McAdams, 1994). However, the reliability of persons to always act in a certain manner when faced with conflict situations (Weingart et al., 2015) do not only depend on the general traits they imbibe but also on the context.

Individuals' traits and concerns, further, determine the *preference for certain conflict management strategies over others* (Antonioni, 1998; Graziano et al., 1996; Moberg, 2001; Park & Antonioni, 2007). The adoption of a particular strategy depends on whether a person has a higher concern for self or the other, which in turn is determined by the person's traits (social value orientation, power motivation and need for affiliation) and situational factors (incentives, instructional primes, time pressures, level of aspiration and power preponderance) (De Dreu & Beersma, 2005). For example, group members with affiliation needs are more concerned about maintaining social relations than achieving their personal needs and in the process adjust their own beliefs and values for this superior goal. This is the reason why high-affiliation group members tend to experience less relationship conflict than low-affiliation group members (Chun & Choi, 2014). Therefore, individuals' behaviour is not only determined by inherent traits but by the compromises they have to find with regard to the respective concerns they have (Jensen-Campbell & Graziano, 2005).

However, conflict behaviour is more complex and dynamic than the involved persons' concern orientations being sufficient for explaining their respective reactions to conflict. Considering dynamic behaviour in conflicts, Van de Vliert (1997) asserted that when a person's concern changes, it will also cause the person to choose a different conflict management style, which can lead to either a more integrative or distributive solution to the conflict than previously envisaged. Furthermore, in line with the reciprocity norm, a person's choice in strategy may also be a response to the other's conflict strategy than guided by the individual's disposition (Park & Antonioni, 2007). When a person, for example, chooses a collaboration strategy, the other person will likewise respond in a collaborative way. In a conflict situation where the conflict strategy is easily discernible, persons, furthermore, act more in line with the reciprocity norm, whilst ambiguity in conflict strategy leads persons to behave more in line with their personalities (Park & Antonioni, 2007). Therefore, dispositional and situational factors are not sufficient on their own to explain conflict behaviour as only their

particular interaction can render the complexity involved in the selection of conflict management styles (Park & Antonioni, 2007).

In summing up, personality is more than stable traits that define who a person is but also involves what persons want and strive for, which might conflict with others' concerns and goals. Additionally, an individual's personality is not sufficient for assessing conflict behaviour. Personality traits, situational factors, their interaction and other situational dynamics together enable a thorough understanding of conflict and the preference for particular conflict management strategies and help to predict possible conflict outcomes on the basis of the chosen lines of action.

#### *2.2.2.2.3 Power and status*

The general *distinction between power and status* is that power focuses on the individual whereas status depends on the assignment of others (P. K. Smith & Magee, 2015). In this understanding, power is determined by the degree of power a person holds in contrast to another person. Whilst the more powerful party in a relationship holds control over valued resources, the less powerful party is dependent upon the decisions and actions of the powerful party. The reason is that status and power are zero-sum, finite social resources (Chun & Choi, 2014; Dahrendorf, 1957; Glasl, 2013). A party can only have power when the other party does not have power. As higher positions promise higher benefits, competition for these scarce positions flourishes, and persons of higher status try to maintain the status quo through use of contentious tactics. Low-status individuals may choose to either actively change a power difference through, for example, appealing to higher authorities or demanding procedural changes, or accepting the status quo as is (Coleman, 2006). In their investigation of status differences between managed care organisation representatives and providers, Callister and Wall Jr.'s (2001) study revealed that when a lower status person denied or blocked treatment decisions of a higher status person, it lead to particularly emotional interactions. The reason is that the higher status person perceives the denial as a threat to his status and, therefore, guards against it through the expression of anger. Nonetheless, emotional expressions of the weaker party are likely more constrained in intraorganisational conflicts due to the fear of negative consequences, strong ties between the parties and social norms regulating appropriate behaviour (C. Bell & Song, 2005; Callister & Wall Jr., 2001; Labianca et al., 1998). For example, low-

status persons tend to respond with deferential behaviour to expressions of anger by high-status persons, which then helps to soften further counter-responses and deescalates the conflict (Morris & Keltner, 2000).

The emergence and expression of power or status-related conflicts also depends on *the importance of power for involved individuals* (Bendersky & Hays, 2012; Chun & Choi, 2014). Groups that are composed of individuals with different degrees of power orientations tend to experience less clashes than groups with more similar needs for power (Chun & Choi, 2014). Similarly, Rubin et al. (1994) attributed higher competition to persons of about equal status, especially in a status inconsistency situation where two people differ in their respective levels of education and experience as determinants of status. Each person believes to be more qualified than the other, making conflict more likely. Failing to acknowledge another's status does not only present a potential for conflict but also contributes to a deterioration of relations and performance (Jehn et al., 2008). This also underlines the importance of clear delineations of responsibilities and roles (Behfar et al., 2015), and correct (self-)perception of individuals' status within groups (C. Anderson et al., 2006; Bodtker & Jameson, 2001) in order to prevent avoidable power and status-related problems. Hence, status and power can relate, on the one hand, to *differences in positions* within the hierarchy of an organisation and the particular challenges in such relations (such as face-saving attempts, (non-)expression of certain emotions), and, on the other hand, to disparate needs for power and dominance in teams and resulting tendency for power struggles and conflicts.

The reason for tensions between different power or status dyads, however, do not solely stem from needs for power and competition for social resources but are a consequence of *divergent social qualities*. A consequence of relational power differences is that high-power individuals socially distance themselves from low-power individuals due to asymmetric dependence relations between parties (P. K. Smith & Magee, 2015). They show condescending behaviour towards subordinates, are inattentive to the thoughts and feelings of others and misperceive others' intentions and actions as they lack the necessary insight and closeness to group members. In comparison, high-status individuals are concerned about how they are perceived, respected and esteemed by others and, therefore, show a high concern for the perspectives and concerns of lower-status individuals and act accordingly (P. K. Smith & Magee, 2015). A reason for such behaviour may be found in prosocial orientations.

Prosocial dispositions, among other personality traits, may also diminish the negative effects of power differences on relationships (P. K. Smith & Magee, 2015), reducing the social distance and encouraging empathy towards others.

In reality, *power and status are often connected and, understood as dynamic, contingent concepts, influence each other's extent in social encounters* (Fiske et al., 2016). Changes in power or perceptions therefore have consequences for social behaviour. On the one hand, elevated power enables individuals to act freely and is associated with increased rewards, positive affect, and automatic information processing. On the other hand, a reduction of power goes along with negative affect, perceived threats and social constraints, and controlled information processing (Keltner et al., 2003). Hence, individuals likely behave differently when they perceive their power position under threat and attempt to curb the efforts of others to challenge their power position. For example, the goal-seeking behaviour of a low-power individual may conflict with the interests, goals and resource-access of a high-power individual, leading to more dominant strategies on the side of the powerful party to maintain status quo power relations. In the same sense, status hierarchies can also be viewed as dynamic. Individuals' intragroup status levels are liable to change under certain mindsets of involved individuals and are not dependent upon effects of stable characteristics (Kilduff & Galinsky, 2013). Kilduff and Galinsky's experiments showed that individuals primed with either promotion focus, power or happiness were able to attain higher status and access to resources in the long term. Despite these results being experiment-based, it is, nonetheless, significant to note that status and power do not necessarily have to be perceived as fixed states but as highly flexible, contingent upon the situational conditions. Moreover, they may influence each other in terms of one phenomenon's increment affecting the extent of the other's state: Power being expressed through emotions, behaviours and physical appearance may simultaneously accord or confirm status and legitimation (Fiske et al., 2016).

Stark separation of status and power, and respective relational consequences can be softened or eliminated when power is *not perceived as solely competitive*. Coleman (2006) assumed that power encompasses both competitive and cooperative uses of power and defined power as "the ability to make things happen or to bring about desired outcomes" (p. 121). In contrast to competitive processes, cooperative processes tend to further common interests, mutual power and friendly relations (Deutsch, 1973, 2006a). Cooperative-minded persons perceive conflicts with like-

mindful individuals as mutual problems, which need to be resolved together, and may foster an increase of mutual power for the purpose of achieving common goals (Coleman, 2006; Deutsch, 2006a). Different uses of power, thus, can either encourage or inhibit the emergence of conflict.

The factors status and power may also determine, among other factors, *which conflict management approach best fulfils the purpose of maintaining or changing status/power positions as well as appears feasible and acceptable to the parties*. Rahim's (1986) findings revealed that a manager's selection of a conflict management style varied with the level of the other conflict party - superior, subordinate or peer: mostly obliging towards superiors, integrating with subordinates, and compromising with peers. Whilst subordinates similarly tended towards compromise over confrontation and forcing in Renwick's (1975) study, superiors, however, preferred confrontation to compromise and smoothing in conflicts with subordinates. Divergent findings in the selection of conflict management styles may be due to situational factors and personal characteristics. Superior-subordinate relations - generally characterised by authoritative attitudes of superiors versus timid behaviour of subordinates - may differ under conditions of competence, status and related high confidence on the side of subordinates (Tabak & Koprak, 2007). Other dyads might display other preferred approaches: Conflict management between same-status employees may hold a wider range of possibly acceptable strategies than settlement attempts of a superior-subordinate dyad. Different findings, thus, may be discovered when the power and status of conflict parties is considered when analysing conflict and its management. Nonetheless, the way power and status relations influence conflict management approaches may be mediated by case-specific situational and personal factors.

In summing up, it is important to understand power and status as dynamic, connected concepts. Dependent on the perception of individuals, interpersonal relations and situational factors, power and status can be understood as either positive or negative with different social qualities assigned to them. This has consequences for how individuals behave towards the target objects. Perceptions of others' intentions and consequential behaviour may contribute to the emergence of conflicts and their escalation. Status and power differences may particularly accentuate conflicts when the other's behaviour is perceived as a threat to the other in achieving their goals, interests and maintaining power/status relations. With regard to conflict management, individuals may prefer certain strategies in handling conflicts with persons of different



status/power, which differ from those pursued in conflicts with persons of same status/power. The selected strategies may be more or less effective in settling a particular conflict, depending on whether all affected individuals are satisfied with how the conflict is being handled and the treatment of the respective other party in terms of respect or threat. Finally, changed or deteriorated interpersonal relations, possibly through a shift in power/status relations during conflict, make the emergence of new conflicts between the conflict parties more likely. Hence, the factors power and status can affect different aspects of a conflict process, including its management and outcome.

### 2.2.2.3 Conflict expression

Whilst the previous two dimensions (disputants' characteristics and relations, and situational factors) include the individual level, *conflict expression* involves the interaction of at least two individuals. Furthermore, conflict expression is on the manifest level of conflict where the conflict becomes observable by the parties and others due to the expression of, for example, negative emotions verbally or non-verbally, and voicing of the issues the parties disagree about. In some studies, conflict behaviour is equated with conflict management (e.g., Van de Vliert, 1997). The reason might be that parties' interaction with others reflects how they want to approach the other and the settlement of the conflict. However, as conflict management attempts may occur after a conflictful interaction among parties or involve the mediation by a third party, I will present conflict expression and conflict management as separate sections, although they are highly related and influence each other (see **Section 2.3** for conflict management, p. 66 ff.). The terms 'conflict expression' and 'conflict behaviour' are used here interchangeably.

In conflict, changes in people's perception, feelings and will towards another party together affect what people say and do, so that behaviour, as a consequence, only partly reflects their intentions (Glasl, 1999b). Glasl (1999a) explains this through the *conflict-related distortion of people's behaviour*, which does not necessarily represent what the person thinks or intends to do. These unintentional side effects, aside the intended main effects, worsen the situation as they lead to aggravated counter-reactions by the other party and thereby escalate the conflict beyond what was originally intended. In contrast, Thomas (1992b) understood behaviour as an

individual's intentional action, based on strategic or tactical considerations. According to his understanding, behaviour, therefore, is not accidental: individuals plan how they are going to act towards others in conflicts. In line with Glasl's (1999a) unintentional side effects, Thomas (1992b), however, qualified the effects of actions: Behaviours do not always have the intended effects due to an individual's failure in realising what he/she intended. During interactions, the counter-response of the other party, furthermore, influences the respective other party's thoughts and feelings, which may cause a change in strategic intentions and, by extension, the further course of conflict (Thomas, 1992b). Knapp et al. (1988) went as far as arguing that, instead of individuals holding a stable preferred style for handling conflicts, conflict orientations depend on the interactions of individuals in a particular situation, with conflict orientations being situation-specific "views of goals, intentions, abilities, and social learning" (p. 417). Interaction in conflicts, thus, is more important than the respective individual's behavioural preference.

Additionally, *individuals may at times react impulsively*, following their feelings and non-rational responses to conflict instead of rational, premeditated tactics (Knapp et al., 1988; D. M. Kolb & Putnam, 2014). This is in line with the aggression theory of C. A. Anderson and Bushman (2002) that distinguishes between thoughtful and impulsive actions. Depending on the situation and the extent to which the situation is being appraised, a person may respond either more impulsively (in terms of aggressiveness) or take a more thoughtful action. The thoughtful action, however, does not mean that it is free from emotions as the person's present internal state (comprising cognition, affect and arousal) and past experiences feed into the appraisal process and consequential action (C. A. Anderson & Bushman, 2002). Normative and rational reasoning can even be affected by emotions to the extent that the venting of anger and other negative emotions dominate a person's behaviour, with a simultaneous simplification or overruling of thought processes (Thomas, 1992b). Emotional expression further acts as a cue to the other person in what the other person thinks or wants to do and influences attitudes and consequential behaviour (J. Yang & Mossholder, 2004). Due to adverse consequences of negative emotions on conflict processes and outcomes (Jehn, 1997; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003), teams need to have the emotional intelligence to perceive increases in emotional intensity and manage emotions to enable a constructive management of arising conflicts (Troth, 2009).

Glasl (2013) did not distinguish between thoughtful versus impulsive actions but suggested that several factors – a person’s perceptions, thoughts, feelings and will – together shape a person’s behaviour (see also **Section 2.2.1.2** for Glasl’s conflict definition, p. 15f.). The behaviour of a particular person depends on whether he/she generally displays a discrepancy between thoughts and actions, between feelings and expressions, and between willing and doing, which tends to increase in the course of conflict (Glasl, 2013). As a conflict progresses, parties, in addition, depict an ‘impoverishment in behaviour’; that is, from utilising a variety of different behaviours to a narrowing down to stereotypical and fixated behavioural patterns (Glasl, 2013). Therefore, a person’s behaviour cannot be exclusively denoted to either rational or impulsive origin. It is rather determined by a combination of factors and the ability of the person to maintain self-control of his/her actions in challenging situations such as conflicts. The more persons are able to self-control their actions, the more they tend to carefully weigh their actions and its consequences, and behave accordingly (DeWall et al., 2011). Nonetheless, as interpersonal conflict involves the interaction of at least two individuals, both individuals’ behaviour matters in the evolution of conflicts, with reaction and counter-reaction influencing each other and the further course of events.

From the initial stage onwards, conflict episodes acquire a dynamic character, with *parties adjusting and counter-reacting to each other’s behaviour* (Thomas, 1992b) and setting in motion a conflict spiral, that is the repeated reciprocation of contentious communications (Brett et al., 1998; Rubin et al., 1994). As conflicts escalate in terms of increasing in level or intensity as a whole (Rubin et al., 1994; Thomas, 1992b), transformations occur on both sides. The reason is that changes in tactics, perceptions and demands on one side usually find their mirror counterpart on the other side and thereby lead to an overall increase in conflict intensity (Rubin et al., 1994). Escalation is evidenced in, amongst other possible scenarios, decreased communication, lack of trust, increased hostility, launching of threats, increase in contested issues, and coalition building (Glasl, 1999b, 2013). In his conflict escalation model, Glasl (1999b, 2013) distinguished between nine escalation levels (see **Figure 5** in **Section 2.3.2** for Glasl’s conflict escalation model, p. 77). In moving down from one stage to another, parties cross a threshold into more intense conflict: Each marks a change in perceptions, attitudes, intentions and behaviours of the involved parties to a lower regression level (that is, displaying less mature behaviour, Glasl, 2013). Whilst incompatibilities with regard to substantive issues are handled rationally and

cooperatively in the first three levels, negative image-building of the other and threats dominate the evolving win-lose relations in levels four to six. In circumscribing the process from loss of total trust in the other to complete destruction of self and other, the last three levels, according to Glasl (1982, as cited in Thomas, 1992b), rarely occur in organisations. Similarly, Thomas (1992b) assumed that parties' initial conflict about substantive issues later turns to a predominant focus on interpersonal issues, which goes along with increased emotionality, distortion of reasoning and demonisation of the other. As conflicts escalate, the options for settling conflicts also become fewer and require more complex approaches. Whilst cooperation with regard to substantive issues makes constructive conflict management more likely, the deteriorating relationship between the parties in the further escalatory levels requires addressing these personal issues in settlement negotiations as well (Glasl, 2013). Furthermore, the parties may develop the view that the resolution of their differences is not possible, and a third party is needed to propose possible solutions to the parties (Glasl, 2013).

*The way parties communicate with each other* determines how the conflict develops and the impact conflict has on relations and team outcomes (Weingart et al., 2015). Conflict expression depends, according to Weingart et al. (2015), on how explicitly the parties state their respective positions and how intensely these oppositions are voiced. The easier a party is able to decipher the intentions of the verbal and/or non-verbal communication of the other and the less contentious the opposition is brought forth, the more likely is a cooperative resolution at an early stage of conflict. Ambiguity and contentious communication, on the other hand, facilitate an escalation of conflict. As Glasl (2013) showed in his conflict escalation model, at the lower levels of conflict verbal communication is sought to resolve incompatible issues cooperatively. When positions, however, become entrenched, actions, in terms of non-verbal behaviour, dominate interactions and replace the exchange of words. Weingart et al. (2015) did not attribute a higher conflict intensity to non-verbal behaviour; nonetheless, instead of mere words, the voicing of opposition can be more intensely expressed through emotions and actions that serve to attack or undermine the other's identity and objectives. Furthermore, communications always have to be assessed in the context and stage they occur as meaning of communication is continuously being recreated in conflicts (Knapp et al., 1988).

Persons also may send *mixed messages* where the true intention behind a certain behaviour may be deciphered in considering a person's wording, current and

past interactions (Knapp et al., 1988). Effective communication is important for developing an understanding of the other person's perspective and concerns, reducing tension between the parties and resolving misunderstandings (Hung & Lin, 2013). Not more communication but the quality of the communication (Hung & Lin, 2013) is essential for breaking out of a conflict spiral: For example, a non-contentious response to another person's contentious communication contributes to a de-escalation of conflict and paves the way for an integrative, instead of distributive settlement of conflict (Brett et al., 1998). Therefore, the way a conflict is expressed can have both escalatory or de-escalatory consequences, and behaviour has to be understood in context. That is, a certain behaviour can have different meanings and intentions behind it, which can, on the one hand, lead to misunderstandings and further tensions if there is no understanding between parties and, on the other hand, de-escalate conflicts if parties are able to decipher the good intentions (if present) of the other.

### **2.2.3 Summary**

The following table (**Table 4**) presents an overview of key concepts and authors in **Section 2.2**. Upon establishing what conflict is (*definition of conflict*), a presentation of *dimensions of conflicts* and its subdimensions - *situational factors, disputants' characteristics and relations, and conflict expression* - helped to establish that, firstly, conflict embodies a processual, dynamic character and, secondly, consists of several dimensions that influence each other during conflict.

The definition of conflict involved differentiating between conflict definitions that view conflict as state versus process (e.g., Imbusch & Zoll, 2010; Pondy, 1967; Rahim, 2011), depicting the latent and manifest levels of conflict (Galtung, 1996), and highlighting that conflicts can exist in reality or be merely perceived as such (Glasl, 2013; Rubin et al., 1994). Furthermore, conflict was differentiated from other concepts such as competition and mere differences in cognition. Classic sources such as Deutsch (2006a), Galtung (1996), Glasl (2013, 2020) and Pondy (1967) were especially useful for defining what a dynamic, manifest conflict entails and what sets it apart from other concepts: Conflict is not static and has multiple properties that have to be present for conflict to qualify as conflict. As a next step, I presented the dimensions of conflict. Some authors solely focus on the contradiction aspect of conflict and assess the difference between work vs. people-oriented conflicts (e.g., Guetzkow

& Gyr, 1954; Jehn, 1995, 1997; Pinkley, 1990). These classic works are of significance for subsequent works as they form the basis for refinements of types (e.g., Bendersky & Hays, 2012; Rahim, 2011; Simons & Peterson, 2000; J. Yang & Mossholder, 2004) and criticisms of solely focusing on the conflict issue (e.g., DeChurch et al., 2013; Korsgaard et al., 2008; Weingart et al., 2015). In line with the latter criticisms, this thesis' conflict understanding goes beyond the conflict issue and considers other situational factors, the disputants' characteristics and relations, and the conflict expression. Other reviewed situational factors were interdependence, and social norms and conflict culture. The type of interdependence determines how people interact to achieve their goals and how they consequently manage arising conflicts (Deutsch, 2006a; Johnson, 2003; Johnson & Johnson, 2005). Norms do not only inform and regulate the attitudes and behaviours of people in situations but also determine how individuals perceive and handle conflicts (e.g., Gelfand et al., 2008; Hogg & Reid, 2006; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003; Kuhn & Poole, 2000).

Conflicts are further determined by the disputants' characteristics and relations. Persons act as they do due to their dispositions or the relations they hold with others (e.g., Chun & Choi, 2014; Eagly & Chaiken, 2007; Galtung, 1996; Keltner et al., 2003). Attitudes do not only play a role in conflict formation, especially when the conflict parties have had previous contentious relations, but also have an effect on how a conflict is expressed and how it is being managed (e.g., Deutsch, 2006a; Galtung, 1996; Glasl, 2013). Personality characteristics, along situational factors, may also determine how persons relate to others and whether they are more interested in maintaining relations than asserting their own positions in conflicts (e.g., Graziano et al., 1996; Weingart et al., 2015). This in turn influences which conflict management approach they prefer to use to settle differences with others which is moderated by the interaction with others and others' concerns and goals (e.g., Chun & Choi, 2014; Park & Antonioni, 2007). Additionally, power and status differences may accentuate conflicts when the other's behaviour is perceived as a threat to the other in achieving goals and maintaining power/status relations and, depending on the respective power/status distribution, determine the choice of conflict management strategies (e.g., Fiske et al., 2016; Keltner et al., 2003).

Conflict topics	Key concepts & proponents
<b>Definition of conflict:</b>	
<i>General differentiation between conflict definitions</i>	Conflict as state (e.g., Imbusch & Zoll, 2006, 2010) versus process (e.g., Pondy, 1967; Rahim, 2011; Glasl, 2013, 2020)  Latent versus manifest conflict (e.g. Galtung, 1996)  Conflict cognition (e.g., Glasl, 2013; Rubin et al., 1994)
<i>Differentiation of the term 'conflict' from other concepts</i>	Competition, contradiction, opposition, difference of opinion, misunderstandings (e.g., Deutsch, 2006a; Glasl, 2013, 2020; Mack & Snyder, 1957)
<b>Dimensions of conflict:</b>	
<i>Situational factors</i>	Contradiction: objective vs. subjective conflict (e.g., Fisher & Keashly, 1991; Rubin et al., 1994); work vs. people-oriented conflicts (e.g., Guetzkow & Gyr, 1954; Jehn, 1995, 1997; Pinkley, 1990); combined or transforming conflicts (e.g., Rahim, 2011; Simons & Peter, 2000; Yang & Mossholder, 2004); further conflict types (e.g., Bendersky & Hays, 2012; Hjerto & Kuvaas, 2009); beyond the conflict issue (e.g., DeChurch et al., 2013; Janssen et al., 1999; Korsgaard et al., 2008; Weingart et al., 2015)  Interdependence (e.g., Barki & Hartwick, 2001; Deutsch, 1973, 2006a; Janssen et al., 1999; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003)  Social norms and conflict culture (e.g., Cialdini et al., 1991; Troth, 2009; Yang & Mossholder, 2004)
<i>Disputants' characteristics and relations</i>	Attitudes (e.g., Ajzen, 2001; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Fazio, 2007; Galtung, 1996)  Personality characteristics (e.g., Chun & Choi, 2014; Dijkstra et al., 2005; Park & Antonioni, 2007; Tekleab & Quigley, 2014)  Power and status (e.g., Fiske et al., 2016; Keltner et al., 2003; Smith & Magee, 2015; Walton & Dutton, 1969)
<i>Conflict expression</i>	e.g., Glasl, 1999, 2013; Thomas, 1992; Weingart et al., 2015

**Table 4: Overview of Key Conflict Concepts and Authors (Own Table).**

In comparison to the other two dimensions, conflict expression involves the interaction of the conflict parties and represents the manifest level of conflict. Through the

expression of negative emotions and voicing of incompatible issues, the conflict becomes observable to the conflict parties and others and evolves due to reactions and counter-reactions of involved parties (e.g., Glasl, 2013; Rubin et al., 1994; Thomas, 1992b). The consequential increase in conflict intensity is evidenced in decreased communication, lack of trust and increased hostility (Glasl, 2013).

The assessment of the concept conflict thus led to ascertaining conflict's multi-dimensional, dynamic and processual character. This sets the premise for the next section on conflict management as the dynamic of the conflict situation and the conflict management attempts together influence each other and determine the outcome of the conflict.

## **2.3 Conflict management**

### ***2.3.1 Definition of conflict management***

As the previous section detailed what conflict is, this section presents and discusses perspectives on conflict management as background information for addressing Research Questions 2 and 3.

Conflict studies often do not distinguish between the terms '*conflict resolution*' and '*conflict management*' or use them interchangeably (e.g., Behfar et al., 2008; Gounaris et al., 2016; Nischal & Bhalla, 2014; Prieto-Remón et al., 2015). However, they refer to different extents in handling conflicts. *Conflict management* refers to the handling and containing of an arising conflict in mitigating its negative effects and finding constructive ways of managing differences without necessarily resolving them (Berghof Foundation, 2012; Rahim, 2011). In comparison, *conflict resolution* involves addressing the underlying causes of conflict, understanding and reframing positions, and learning ways of settling conflicts for future interactions (Berghof Foundation, 2012). Conflict resolution, furthermore, has the aspiration of terminating conflict (Rahim, 2011), and leading to a change in attitudes, relationships and incompatible issues (Galtung, 1996; Ramsbotham et al., 2005). In general, conflict management, therefore, has a narrower scope in focusing on the behavioural aspects of conflict and how the following of a certain strategy impacts the conflict outcome. That is, assessing what strategies, styles or methods are used by conflict parties in addressing disputes (e.g., Rahim & Bonoma, 1979).



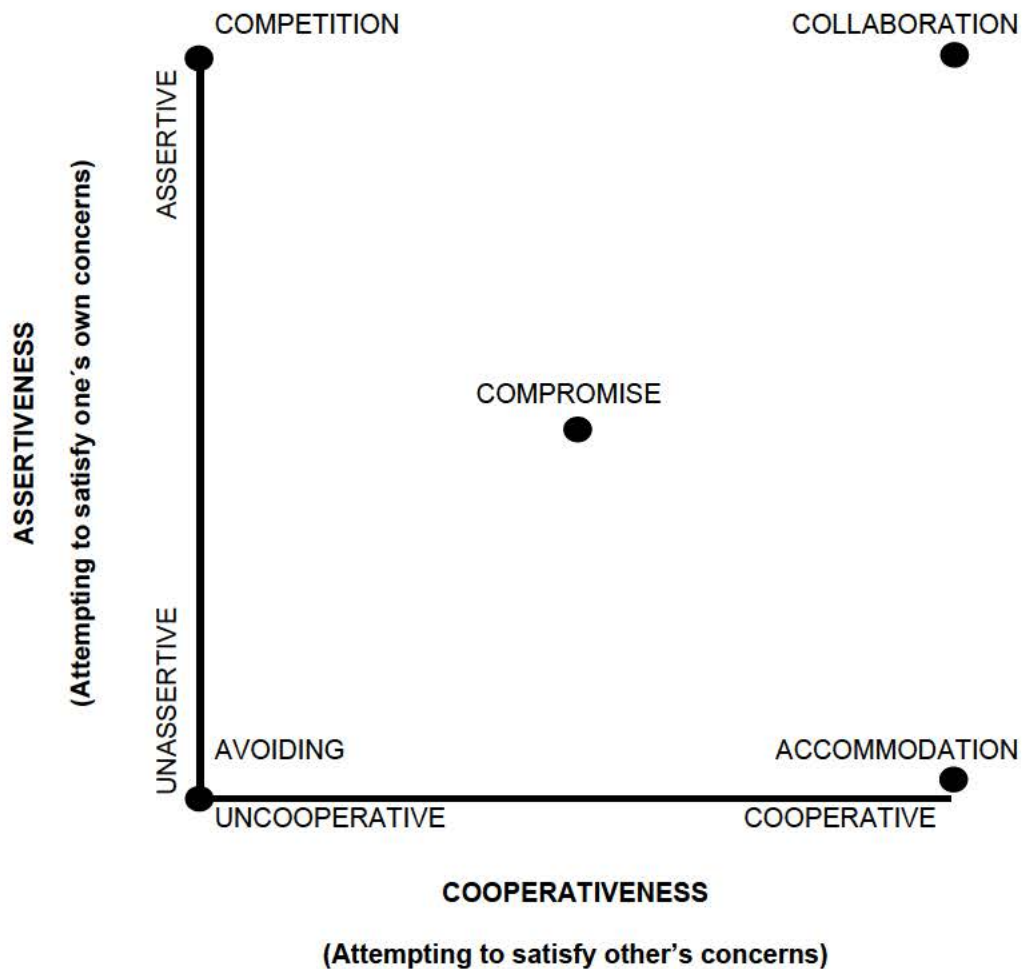
Additionally, conflict management enables the *assessment of different ways of handling conflicts*. Instead of focusing on cooperative ways of settling disputes, conflict management could mean avoiding conflict or following a one-sided decision over how to settle the dispute. To the acting person his/her behaviour may be regarded as constructive, whilst the other party or an observer may perceive it as a counterproductive action. Furthermore, dealing with a conflict (more or less) constructively does not mean that the roots of the conflict are necessarily eradicated which would be the case with conflict resolution. The removal of underlying causes is not to be excluded but not the main objective of conflict management. This may be compared to the specific, narrow concept of peace implementation: It refers to short-term efforts in carrying out peace agreement provisions that are more than negative peace (that is, the absence of war) in also encompassing elements of positive peace, including the overcoming of war consequences and the setting in of peace consolidating measures (Flowers, 2010; Galtung, 1967; Matthies, 1995; Stedman et al., 2002). Peace implementation, furthermore, is the precondition for mid- and long-term peace consolidating measures to be instituted (Flowers, 2010). In the same vein, organisational conflict management may pose as the prerequisite for wider-ranging measures of conflict resolution to be implemented.

*Effective conflict management* has the objective of enabling conflict parties to handle conflicts in ways that minimise negative effects on interpersonal relations and performance. The dynamic of the conflict situation and the conflict management attempts influence each other and determine in the end what kind of conflict outcome can be realistically achieved. Individuals experiencing conflicts in interactions with other persons potentially learn and adjust their current and future behaviour, which consequently has effects on how interpersonal differences will be managed in the future and on the viability of organisations (cf. Andrade et al., 2008; Berghof Foundation, 2012; Rahim, 2002). If conflicts are not managed adequately, they would not contribute to an organisation's growth and setting in of positive learning processes that would help to reframe attitudes and positions. Kurray (2008) went a step further in suggesting that the constructive dealing with conflicts entails creative conflict management, which can solve the conflict at hand, improve the working relationship as well as change the conflict culture of an organisation. In comparison, Rahim (2002) asserted that conflict management involves the reduction of relationship conflict, sustenance of a moderate level of task conflict and individuals' learning of different

conflict-handling styles that are to be utilised in diverse situations. The next section presents strategies, styles or methods that have been classified as conflict management and are of relevance to the development of my own conflict management model.

### **2.3.2 Conflict management models**

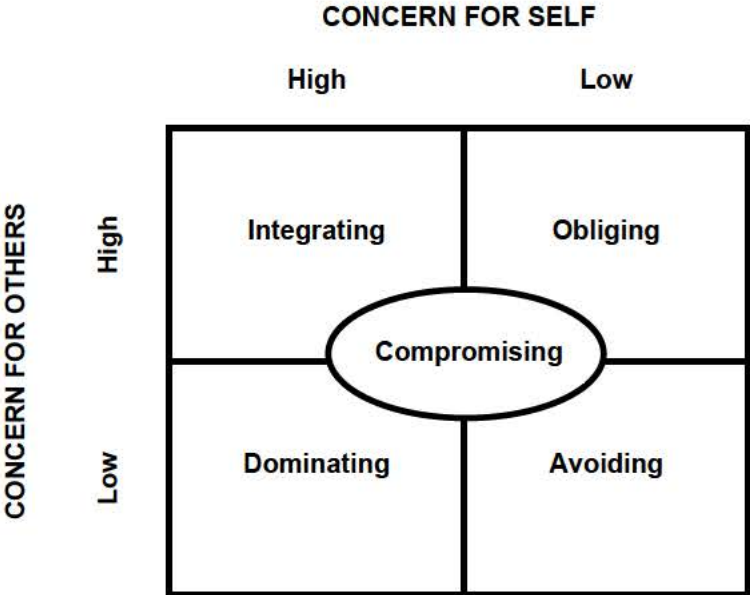
Blake and Mouton (1986) described in their Managerial Grid model *five modes of handling conflict – forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising, and problem solving* – in terms of whether a manager had a *higher concern for production or for people*, and recommended a 9,9 orientation (mutual cooperation) with high concern for both production and people for optimal, effective outcome. Thomas (1976, 1992a) generalised Blake and Mouton's (1986) managerial grid beyond the original focus on managerial styles and reworked it to a two-dimensional taxonomy of solely conflict handling modes. In Thomas' (1976, 1992a) model, the selection of the conflict-handling mode depends on the *levels of assertiveness and cooperativeness* of the respective party (see **Figure 3**, p. 69).



**Fig. 3: Two-dimensional Taxonomy of Conflict Handling Modes.** Adapted from “Conflict and conflict management: reflections and update,” by Kenneth W. Thomas, 1992, p. 266.

As a refinement of the previous models, Rahim and Bonoma (1979), and Rahim's (1983) two-dimensional model assesses *the extent to which a party wants to satisfy his/her own concerns and/or that of the other party*. The concrete value of the dimensions determines the selection of one of *five conflict-handling styles: integrating, dominating, obliging, avoiding and compromising* (see **Figure 4**, p. 70). Integrating is associated with information sharing, openness and cooperative behaviour in order to find a mutually acceptable solution to the conflict (Kuhn & Poole, 2000; Rahim, 2011, 2016; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). This style is especially useful in the face of complex situations and for improving organisational policies and structure (Rahim, 2002). Obliging involves putting another party's concerns over one's own, demonstrating obedience or generosity for the sake of saving the relationship or strategic considerations (Rahim, 2002, 2011, 2016; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). When one of the

parties is weaker in terms of skills, status and knowledge, he/she likely prefers the obliging style over other strategies (Rahim, 2002). Dominating is associated with forcing behaviour, trying to satisfy one’s own concerns and defending one’s position against others (Rahim, 2002, 2011, 2016; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). Whilst it is predominantly conceived as negative behaviour in neglecting others’ concerns for one’s own benefit, it can at times be effective in pushing through a difficult decision or taking fast actions where required (Rahim, 2002; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). Avoiding refers to withdrawing from reacting to a conflict situation, either because the involved individual does not regard the issues or other party as significant or decides to wait for a more convenient time to deal with a complex issue (Rahim, 2002, 2011, 2016; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). The avoiding style, however, is not ideal in situations where immediate decisions have to be made and the other party does not accept to sit out the conflict (Rahim, 2002). Compromising involves both parties conceding something or finding a middle-ground solution that is acceptable to all parties (Rahim, 2011, 2016; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). In comparison to the integrative style, it is not as in-depth in finding a mutually favourable settlement; however, it might provide an effective and faster solution where other attempts at settlement have been unsuccessful (Rahim, 2002, 2011).



**Fig. 4: Five Styles’ Dual Concern Model.** Adapted from “Managing conflict in organisations,” by M. Afzalur Rahim, 2011, p. 27.

Rahim (2011) argued that each of the five styles might be appropriate depending on the given situation, determined, for example, by the complexity and importance of the conflict issue, decision-making possibility and relationship concerns. Moreover, the more a conflict intensifies, the more likely is a win-lose orientation to settling the conflict, that is the powerful party pursuing a dominating style, matched by an avoiding style on the side of the weaker party. In the case that no settlement can be reached, a third party in terms of a mediator or arbitrator has to be invited to facilitate an agreement. Furthermore, behaviour is often mixed-style than attributable to only one style. Preference for a particular conflict management strategy can, according to Rahim and Katz (2019), also change over time and varies by gender. Rahim (2011) and Rahim and Katz (2019), hence, follow a contingency approach to conflict management, postulating that not one particular approach is the best for handling all conflict situations, but the given situation and involved individuals determine what style to use.

In comparison to a contingent approach to conflict management, Deutsch (1973, 2006a, 2014), Tjosvold (1991) and Tjosvold et al. (2014) emphasised a *cooperative management of conflict* because it leads to solutions that are mutually beneficial, creative and of high quality, and satisfy all involved parties and thereby not only improve performance but also strengthen work relationships. Competitive conflict management, by contrast, facilitates an escalation of conflict due to the sole pursuit of one's own concerns, and results in suboptimal outcomes and worsened relations between parties. The cooperative-competition continuum model is in line with game theory, which distinguished between win-win and zero-sum strategies that either have mutual benefits for both players or benefit only one player, respectively (Deutsch, 2006b, 2014; Rahim, 2011).

In accordance with game theory's mixed-motive situations, Deutsch (1973, 2006b, 2006a, 2014) recognised that in reality, mixed situations exist rather than pure cooperative or competitive ones, and the kind of mixture influences the evolution and outcome of conflict. However, there might be a tendency for more competitive-oriented persons to prefer a hardline approach in negotiations than choosing compromising or cooperation strategies that, according to their perspective, will lead to less favourable outcomes (cf. Kabanoff, 1989). Moreover, when a person with non-cooperative behaviour interacts with an integrative-oriented person, the non-cooperative approach tends to influence and dominate over the other's behaviour, which, however, can be

mitigated in persistently responding in an integrative manner and trying to find common interests behind the stated opposing positions (Brett et al., 1998; R. Fisher et al., 2011; Rognes & Schei, 2010). A cooperative or integrative conflict management approach, thus, may present certain advantages to the relationship of parties and work-related outcomes. However, it has to be seen in a particular situation whether cooperative conflict management is the most adequate in handling it or a different conflict management strategy is a viable short-term alternative for immediate results. Instead of collaboration, other strategic intentions might be more appropriate under conditions of, among others, time pressure, and lack of trust (Thomas, 1992a). Such short-term approaches focus on the contingent conditions of the particular conflict situation and the conflict management strategy best able to deal with the given conditions and conflict process. In comparison, long-term approaches have a visionary aspiration in changing existing structures beyond the immediate conflict situation and creating more optimal outcomes for the parties (Thomas, 1992a, 1992b). Long-term goals of bringing forth integrative settlements that acknowledge both parties' concerns, therefore, stand in contrast to the short-term need of reacting to immediate conflict situations. An exclusive use of non-collaborative strategies has the likely negative side effect of harming the relationship, decision quality and organisational culture in the long term. Thomas (1992a), therefore, argued for combining short-term strategies for handling difficult conflict situations with long-term strategies for improving structural conditions that will create a conducive atmosphere and system for future conflict management.

According to Van de Vliert (1997), conflict behaviour is too complex than to be neatly described by one conflict-handling style, basing his assertion on the 81 possible behavioural locations on Blake and Mouton's (1986) 'Managerial Grid'. Instead of relying on set styles for conflict management (such as Deutsch's (1973, 2006a, 2014) two-style continuum model, Thomas' (1976, 1992a), and Rahim and Bonoma's (1979) five conflict-handling styles), Van de Vliert (1997) emphasised *conglomerated conflict behaviour*. Conglomerated conflict behaviour means the "simultaneous or sequential aggregation of several behavioural components in varying degrees" (Van de Vliert, 1997, p. 103). In the same vein, Rubin et al. (1994) as well as Knapp et al. (1988) noted that conflict situations may involve *a combination of different strategies – either simultaneously or sequentially*. With the example of a "sarcastic compliment", Van de Vliert (1997) depicts how two diverse reactions can occur at the same time: paying a compliment but negating it in the same breath. The question, however, is whether this

can be regarded as two reactions as the person uttering it obviously wants to carry across a negative message or criticism. Despite this concern, it is important to note here Van de Vliert's example that individuals may openly follow a certain strategy, whilst covertly following a different strategy altogether, such as pushing one's own agenda through indirect attacks. Regarding sequential occurrence of strategies, persons may, for example, first use a hard-line strategy for the sake of saving face and setting the field before granting concessions to the other party (Van de Vliert, 1997). The conglomerated conflict behaviour concept, hence, takes account of the complexity of conflict, which further depends on and increases with the length of the conflict.

Similarly, Munduate et al. (1999) assumed that *individuals combine different conflict handling styles in conflicts* as individuals do not use single behaviours but change their approach in interpersonal interactions. Their findings reflect that the more styles are present in a certain conflict situation, the greater the effectiveness of that styles' pattern. The style patterns further revealed positive correlations between the integrating, compromising and dominating styles, with obliging and dominating styles having negative correlations. Therefore, certain styles were more frequently used in the same conflict situations, and effectiveness depended on a conglomerated approach than a single-style approach. Munduate et al., however, did not analyse why and at what stage particular conflict management styles were used, either in a conglomerated or sequential fashion. It can, therefore, not be determined how the conflict developed and consequently contributed to a certain conflict outcome. By contrast, Medina and Benitez (2011) assessed which conflict management styles were most effective when the conflict had escalated. Whilst one of the conflict parties attacked the opponent, responding with a problem-solving or accommodating behaviour helped to deescalate the conflict and preserve the parties' relationship. This underlines the notion that conflict parties are likely to behave differently in conflict, and that the escalation cycle can be broken by accommodating the other person's points which can assist in bringing about a mutually satisfactory solution to the conflict. Furthermore, Euwema et al. (2003) illustrated the importance of dyadic effectiveness with regard to the outcome of conflicts - overcoming substantive conflict issues as well as improving the mutual relationship of involved parties due to their work interdependence. The four studies' contribution – Euwema et al. (2003), Medina & Benitez (2011), Munduate et al. (1999) and Van de Vliert (1997) - lies in depicting the

adaptability in conflict parties' conflict handling behaviour, how different styles may combine in the conflict situations and what effect they have on the outcome.

Another departure from 'traditional' conflict management is Kolb and Putnam's (2014) article on the multiple faces of conflict. Kolb and Putnam presented *a dispute perspective of conflict management* that considers, on the one hand, the *public, formal and rational* and, on the other hand, the *private, informal and non-rational elements of conflict*. Whereas conflicts may contain several of these faces, the leaning towards either the former or latter aspects may determine how conflicts are managed and how they affect existing relationships and structures. Public conflicts are handled through overt approaches such as negotiation, collaboration and problem solving and involve set norms and procedures for settlement. Similarly, formal conflicts also involve official procedures and may call for the assigning of conflict management roles such as mediator or ombudsmen. Rational conflicts refer to intentional, preconceived behaviours that lead to conflict and also guide conflict management. In comparison, private conflicts refer to hidden conflicts handled through avoiding, accommodating or covert coalition building behaviours. Instead of involving appointed conflict management officials, the affected parties themselves manage arising conflicts through practices that are commonly used in such instances. Non-rational conflicts relate to unconscious or impulsive reactions to conflict, with conflict management being dominated by instinctive, emotional and situation-specific behaviours. Kolb and Putnam's perspective, thereby, contributes to a more diverse understanding and approach to conflict management, which goes beyond perceiving conflict management as an institutionalised form of dealing with conflicts. Instead, conflict management may involve non-conscious reactions, and covert behaviours such as private discussions, gossiping and coalition-building. Most interpersonal conflicts that arise in work contexts likely do not require a public, institutionalised form of conflict management but may be resolved through private communication among immediately affected parties. This, however, is dependent on, firstly, the escalation level of conflict, and secondly, the ability of the parties to resolve their differences themselves and in a way that does not affect their relationship and work processes and further avoids a resurgence of conflict due to underlying, unsettled issues.

Nonetheless, Kolb and Putnam (2014) acknowledged that both orientations to conflict management have relevance and may occur in mixed rather than pure forms. However, formal, public conflict management is no longer as prominent in



organisations than it was in the 1960s and has been replaced by more informal approaches to conflict handling (D. M. Kolb & Putnam, 2014). In contrast to their argument, mediation has received a major surge in the last years, with lawyers, consultants, trainers and therapists specialised in mediation springing up all over. Without a demand for and recognition of mediation, this phenomenon might not have occurred. Despite this qualification, the distinction between institutionalised and informal forms is important. Whilst most approaches above focused on individual responses to conflict that are rather informal and more or less rational in nature (Glasl, 2013; D. M. Kolb & Putnam, 2014), institutionalised or formal conflict management needs further elaboration.

*Negotiation* is the process through which parties exchange suggestions, in an attempt of coming to a mutual agreement on a conflict issue (Bercovitch & Jackson, 1997). When parties have reached a standstill in their negotiations, lack communication channels, have few overlapping interests, face a complex conflict structure and are willing to cooperate and communicate, they may invite a third party to mediate between them in order to peacefully settle their differences, without resorting to authoritative decision-making (Bercovitch & Jackson, 1997, 2001; Moore, 2003). Bercovitch (1992) referred to *mediation* as a continuation of negotiations with other means. Mediation is set apart from bilateral methods of conflict management through the involvement of a third party, which changes the bilateral dispute into a trilateral interaction with qualitative changes on the structural level and the creation of new conditions for a settlement such as the emphasis of previously unconsidered issues (Bercovitch, 1992). The extent to which mediators are engaged in a conflict management effort further depends on their expertise and resources, the characteristics of the conflict and the affected parties, and what role and authority the parties are willing to grant the mediator (Bercovitch, 1992). From good services to mediation up to arbitration on the vertical dimension of trilateral conflict management, the third party gains in authority and its role and strategies change from supporting to forcing (Langenscheid, 2000; Moore, 2003). Whilst mediation attempts leave the decision authority with the conflict parties, have a non-binding character and enable win-win solutions, arbitration and adjudication enforce binding verdicts and win-lose solutions to the conflict (Kleiboer, 1998).

*Third-party interventions may also be more or less adequate at different conflict stages* and have to be utilised in a coordinated manner due to the dynamic process

character of conflict: Discussions and consultations further communication between parties at earlier stages, whilst increased escalation and division can only be handled through mediation and arbitration (Keashly & Fisher, 1996).

In the same vein, Glasl (2013) argued that the nature and intensity of a conflict determine which strategy is the most effective for settling the conflict (see **Figure 5**, p. 77). With a focus on third-party conflict management, moderation and facilitation are the most fruitful at a lower escalation level. The parties are responsible for finding their own solution to the conflict, and the third party assists in pointing the parties to misperceptions, contentious attitudes and communications, and in clarifying tasks and procedures. A higher escalation level requires more involvement of the third party: from mediation to arbitration and power intervention. A mediator attempts to get the parties to find an acceptable compromise to their issues, whilst an arbitrator takes a decision himself on how the conflict is to be settled. Finally, a power intervention involves the enforcement of a decision against the will of the parties. Although there are overlaps of conflict management strategies in Glasl's (2013) model as two strategies might be appropriate at a certain level of conflict, he noted that mere facilitatory strategies will not be effective in high intensity situations when the problems are too complex to be dealt with by a third party with a limited role and influence. By contrast, a more engaged third party in terms of applying pressure and presenting solutions to incompatible issues is not necessary at low intensity levels. The parties might even perceive this as imposing a settlement upon them and would only help to solve the conflict on the surface. A facilitator that assists in improving relations between parties than imposing solutions, therefore, is more adequate at lower intensity levels (Glasl, 2013).

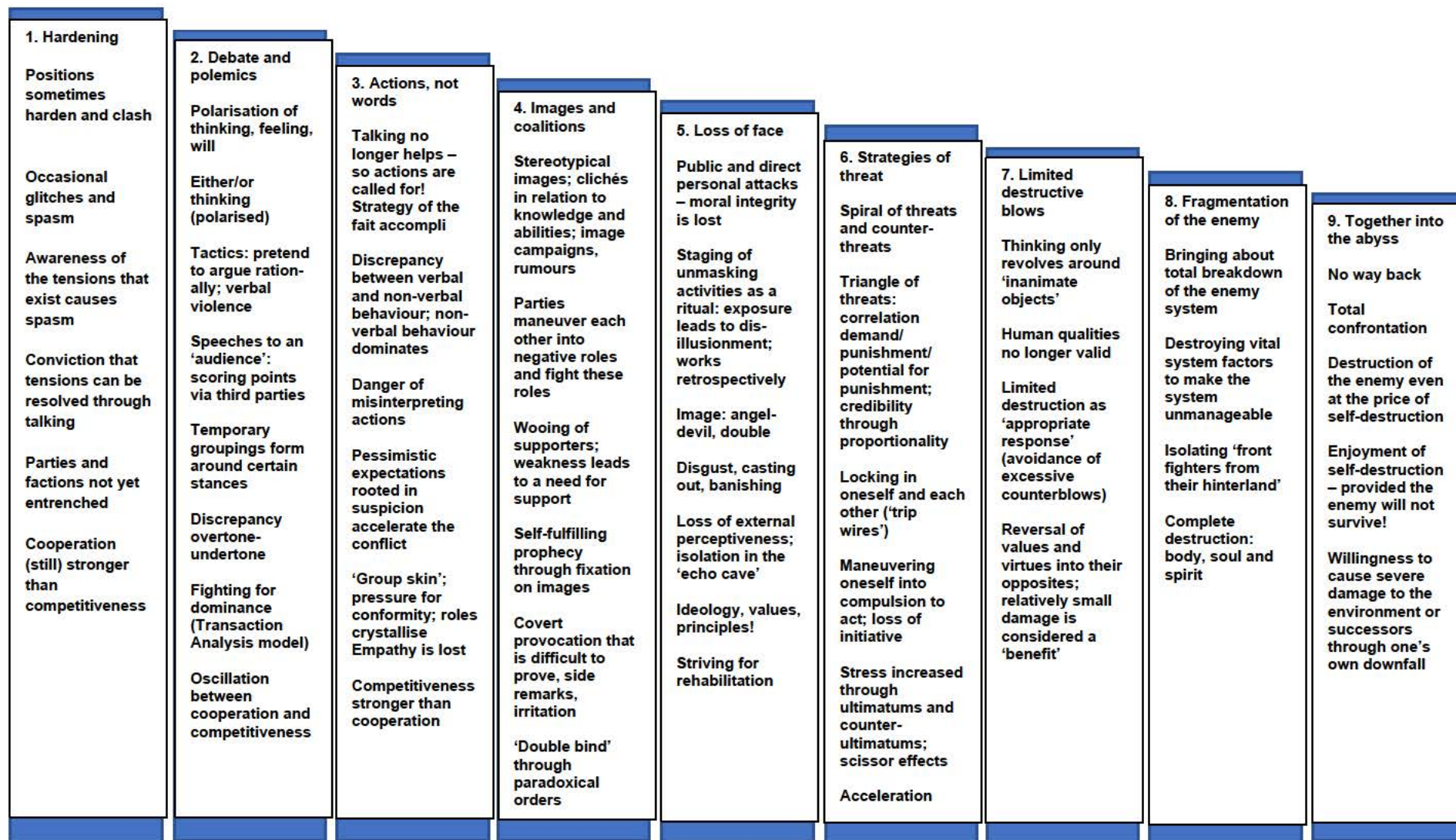
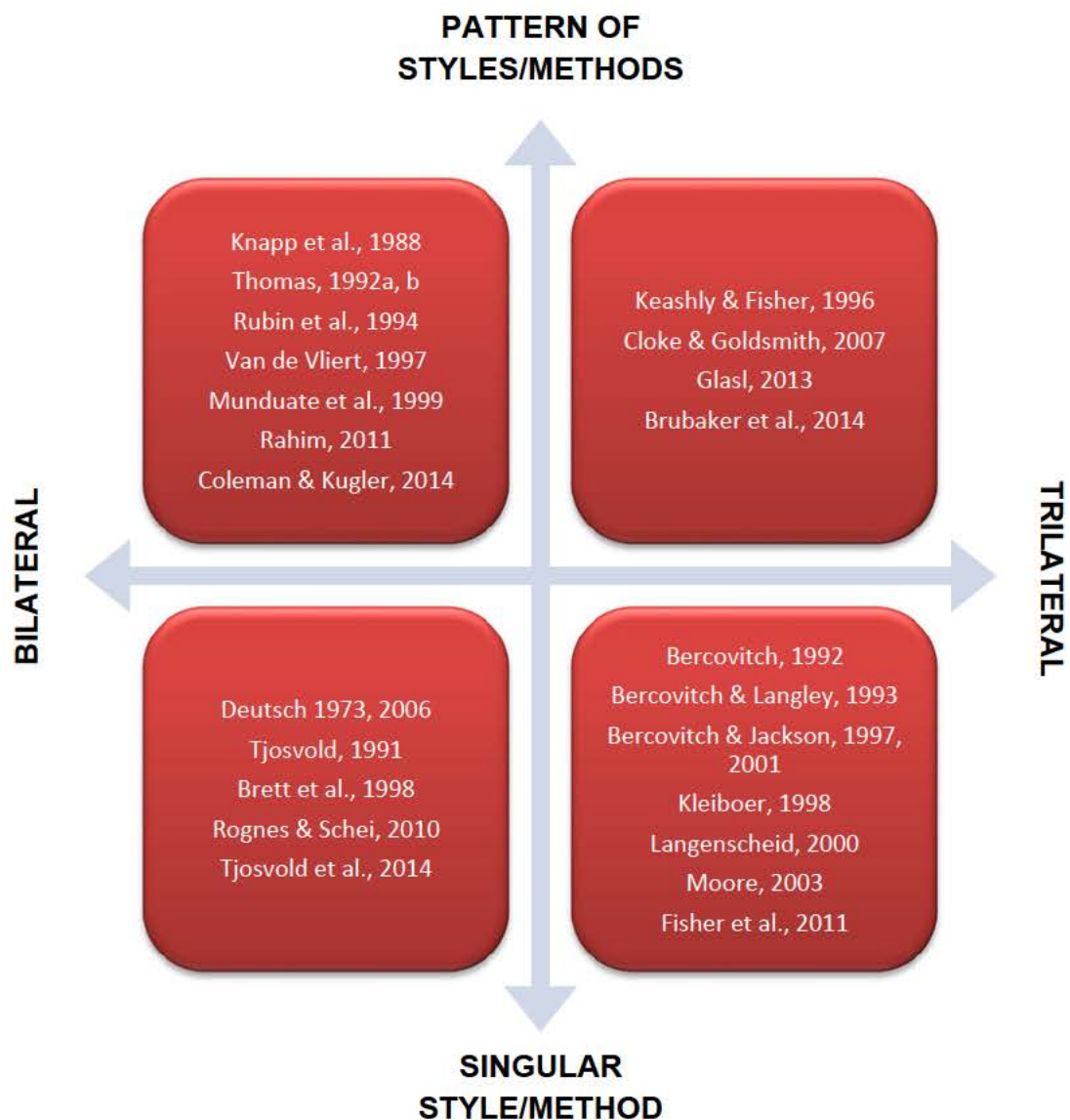


Fig. 5: Conflict Escalation Model. Adapted from "Confronting conflict: A first-aid kit for handling conflict," by Friedrich Glasl, 1999, pp. 104-105.

In relation to managers' conflict management approach, Coleman and Kugler (2014), similarly, found that individuals' conflict adaptivity is associated with more satisfaction regarding the conflict process and higher well-being at work. Individuals are adaptive when they react to a conflict in a way that is consistent with a situation's demands and are able to change their tactics or approach when circumstances change. Coleman and Kugler (2014) did not relate to third-party conflict management as did Glasl (2013), and Keashly and Fisher (1996); however, they also stressed that satisfaction with a conflict process can only be guaranteed when the most adequate strategy to the given situation is applied. Otherwise, it can affect the relationship between the parties and encourage future conflicts when the underlying issues were not adequately addressed. Selecting a certain conflict management approach by default thus may have diverse consequences for persons involved and the effectiveness of an organisation. For example, a (perceived) manager's neglecting or avoiding behaviour by default, for example, could amplify existing grievances and worsen the situation than help to settle a conflict (I. Yang, 2015).

Instead of an ad-hoc, singular approach to conflict management, organisations may offer several options for the prevention and management of arising conflicts between employees in the form of an *established conflict management system*. Such a system may encompass formal grievance procedures, ombudsmen, skill development, coaching, mediation, arbitration and leadership efforts for the purpose of encouraging constructive conflict management and creating a conflict culture that is conducive for effective problem solving (Brubaker et al., 2014; Cloke & Goldsmith, 2000; McCorkle & Reese, 2010). Whilst such a formal conflict management system presents advantages in being time-resource-effective and providing a framework for constructively handling conflicts, most organisations may rather employ informal, flexible conflict management practices.

**Figure 6** classifies the different conflict management models detailed in this chapter according to (1) whether they focus on third-party conflict management instead of the affected conflict parties settling the conflict among themselves (bilateral vs. trilateral), and (2) whether mentioned organisational conflict studies focus on a single conflict management style/method, or understand conflict management to involve simultaneous or sequential settlement attempts in a particular conflict (pattern of styles/methods vs. singular style/method).



**Fig. 6: Conflict Management Models** (Own Figure).

### **2.3.3 Summary**

Models assessing conflict management and associated comprehensions of conflict management are diverse, depending on which of the four classifications the respective approach falls. Due to my process understanding of conflict, several conflict management styles/methods are likely utilised at different conflict stages. This could mean, for example, that after avoiding a direct confrontation with the other party and ignoring party B's conflictful behaviour at a certain point in time, party A thereafter engages in obliging behaviour for the sake of satisfying the other party's concerns and

moving on to other tasks that are more important to party A than continuing the conflict. These two approaches could either occur sequentially or simultaneously at different levels, that is directly communicating an interest in satisfying party B's concern in the incompatible issue, whilst following a strategy of avoiding the confrontation. Therefore, there is a fine line between what is communicated on the outside and what is meant by a certain behaviour as it might not be possible to disentangle the two behaviours, even from the perspective of the party engaging in such behaviour. The reason is that conflict parties do not necessarily act intentionally in conflict but impulsively as a response to the other party's behaviour, which assumption is contrary to game theory and other rational approaches to conflict, and the particular conflict context. This falls into the informal, private, non-rational conflict management category in Kolb and Putnam's (2014) dispute perspective. Furthermore, although interpersonal conflicts in organisations might rarely involve trilateral methods such as arbitration and adjudication, third parties might be involved on an informal level to mediate between conflict parties and provide a platform and services for the reestablishment of constructive communication. Instead of a formal conflict management system, informally tried-and-tested practices and procedures may determine how arising conflicts within a certain team are handled.

Hence, this thesis focuses on the two upper classifications of the conflict management model of **Figure 6**, considering, firstly, bilateral as well as trilateral approaches and, secondly, understanding conflict management as a pattern of styles or methods in the course of a conflict. Depending on the characteristics and dynamics of a given conflict, conflict management may be located on the left upper corner, referring to solely bilateral attempts at conflict settlement, or involve a third party as a conflict develops to a certain intensity level. Organisational conflict studies either assess bilateral or trilateral approaches and thereby do not incorporate the development of conflict management in that respect. With a static understanding of conflict in mind, the occurrence and benefits of a single style or method over others, furthermore, are predominantly investigated, which, however, may not be decisive on its own as the interaction of both parties, their respective conflict behaviour choices and expressions, parties' relations, and the particular contradictory issue determine the impact of a certain conflict management selection on the conflict outcome. Therefore, this research aims to contribute to a better understanding of the linkages

between diverse approaches in acknowledging the process character of conflict as well as conflict management in organisations.

## **2.4 Interpersonal relations**

The effect of relations on conflict can be related to the general meaning of relationships: *People affect each other through personal interactions over an extended period of time* (Kelley, 1979). These personal interactions are characterised by the parties spending a lot of time with each other, undertaking things together and communicating their thoughts and feelings (cf. Kelley, 1979). The respective parties thus have an impact on each other via their frequent personal contact – either positive or negative. Kelley asserted that three elements govern interpersonal relations: a party's actions having consequences for another party's outcomes; the level of responsiveness to the other person's needs; attribution of the other party's actions to stable preferences and interests. In a conflict scenario, a person's actions negatively affect the other who in turn attributes this behaviour and not adequate consideration of his/her desires to traits and the general attitude towards her/him. These assumptions and perceptions may, however, be wrong and give rise to conflictful interactions and relationships that are based on misconceptions and misattributions.

*A wrong interpretation of the other person's intentions or motivations, or a failure to consider the other person's needs* cannot only spark a conflict situation but also help to escalate a disagreement into full-fledged conflict and, in the worst case, affect the nature of the relationship itself. When the conflict has affected how parties communicate with each other, assist and encourage each other in the resolution of problems or the performance of tasks, the relationship has undergone a change that may be difficult to reverse. If conflicts are not actively managed, it may even lead to a complete deterioration of the relationship and the voluntary or involuntary leaving of one of the affected parties. Similarly, Medina and Benitez (2011) found that the most effective behaviours to deescalate a conflict involved trying to understand the other person's concerns and ceding on some minor issues, which helped to improve interpersonal relations. By contrast, direct fighting behaviour negatively affected mutual trust, interpersonal relations and climate (Medina & Benitez, 2011). In accordance with Kelley's (1979) definition of relations and Rubin et al.'s (1994) dual concern theory, responsiveness to the other person's aspirations and concerns is,

therefore, fundamental to conflict de-escalation, management and the maintenance of relationships post-conflict.

As relationships are not isolated events in time, it is essential to look at how they develop over time and what characteristics they assume. The *history and nature of parties' relations* influence to which extent there are common or contentious interests. In contrast to short-term encounters, parties in an ongoing relationship have the motivation to cooperate towards conflict resolution because they have a vested interest in preserving the relationship (Rubin, 1981). Therefore, conflicts between parties that have divergent as well as common interests are more susceptible to successful settlement (Kleiboer, 1996). In an organisational context, an ongoing relationship between working colleagues is of necessity due to required workflow or supervisory interactions (Labianca et al., 1998). Work colleagues share imposed common subordinate goals on the work level as well as potential common goals, interests, objectives and/or values on a personal level that serve as a common bond between parties.

As *parties in an ongoing relationship* continue to interact in the present and future, it is especially essential to consider the nature of the relationship and the way conflicts are being handled. The nature of the relationship is determined, for example, by the level of closeness or contention between the parties, marked by previous interactions and attitudes. Rubin et al. (1994) argued that friendship, perceived similarity, kinship, common group identity and positive mood enhance a party's genuine concern in the other party's outcome and willingness to assist the other party. Furthermore, a high frequency of communication between group members fosters positive sentiments over time and lower perceived intergroup conflict (Labianca et al., 1998). In contrast, negative relationships and events impact attitudes, perceptions of conflict and behavioural responses in a way that makes the formation of friendships less likely and determines how interpersonal actions are being interpreted. Labianca et al.'s (1998) findings, in particular, confirmed that negative relationships significantly relate to high perceived intergroup conflict. Therefore, previous negative relationships of parties likely colour the perception and response to a newly emerging conflict episode.

Apart from affecting the degree of conflict perception, *relations between parties* can also determine what type of effect conflict has on the affected group. *Relational closeness*, according to Rispens et al. (2011), can buffer the detrimental effects of

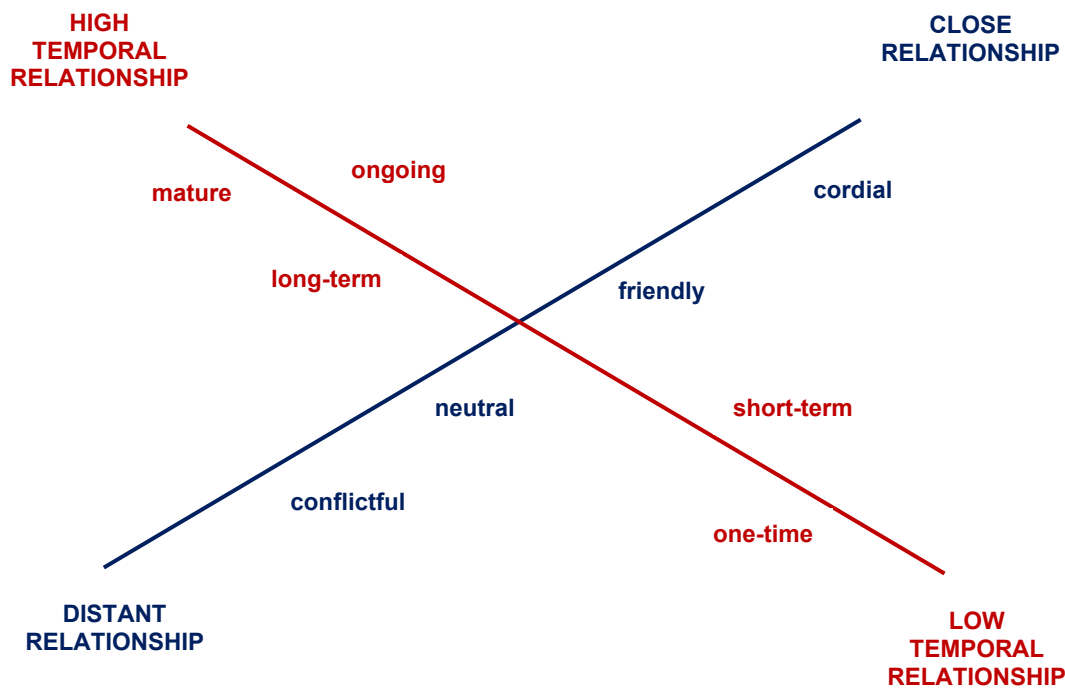


conflict on group functions. When the affected parties know each other well and feel close to each other, relationship conflict may not be harmful for group functioning. Moreover, relationship conflicts may serve the purpose of releasing frustrations with each other, which can help in understanding others' issues and thereby improve their relationship (Coser, 1956; Rispens et al., 2011). Individuals who closely relate to each other also have a higher interest in maintaining the relationship, and openly discuss issues that they have with each other. The interest in maintaining the relationship, therefore, will weigh more than the interest in fulfilling one's interest or goal (cf. R. Fisher et al., 2011). *Parties with a previous friendly history* (Deutsch, 1973), *strong social bonds and stable relations* (Rubin et al., 1994) will also manage emerging conflicts more cooperatively and have a higher motivation in reaching agreements, which makes mediation success more likely (Wall Jr. & Lynn, 1993). In this case, conflict management styles serve to mitigate the negative effects of conflict and avoid the escalation of conflicts. The reason is that the parties have a *higher concern for the other party* than in a bad relationship and are unwilling to hurt the relationship through destructive behaviour (Rognes & Schei, 2010).

In comparison, a relationship marked by a previous history of violence, high tensions and periodic confrontations, little interaction, economic competition, contentious responses and zero-sum attitudes, among other factors, makes it more likely that the same approach in handling conflict will also be pursued in new emerging disputes between the parties (Bercovitch & DeRouen Jr., 2011; Collier, 2003; Lund, 2001). Negative conceptions of each other, differentiation into "us" versus "them", and intractable conflicts can result out of contentious past experiences (Kriesberg, 2003). This makes the new occurrence of conflict also more likely as conflict is seen as a viable way of achieving own goals and disregarding possible compromise solutions, which would consider the concerns of the other party (Bercovitch & DeRouen Jr., 2011). Individuals in such *relationally distant relationships*, therefore, are less willing to invest in the relationship and harbour negative attributions and emotions against each other (Rispens et al., 2011). The pursuance of competitive, retaliatory and self-protective behaviours also hastens the escalation of conflict and the selection of distributive conflict management strategies because of a lesser concern for the other (Rispens et al., 2011; Rognes & Schei, 2010). The nature of the relationship then also *affects the success rate of conflict management attempts*. Bercovitch et al.'s (1991) study showed that previous friendly relations made it nearly twice as likely that

mediation was successful in resolving international disputes. In contrast, parties with more than one previous dispute underwent most mediation attempts; however, also had the least success rate. This exemplifies the above related assertion that conflicts between parties with friendly relations do not reach a high escalation rate and are resolved cooperatively.

In contrast to the above positive understanding of relational closeness or positive relations for conflict and its management, Rubin et al. (1994) argued that *a close relationship between parties can also have a negative effect for conflict*. When a close friend severely frustrates another's concerns, emotional reactions (such as expressions of anger and aggression) tend to be more intense than if the situation would have been with a stranger. The reason is that the expected preferential treatment of the friend did not occur, thus producing resentment and retaliatory behaviours (Rubin et al., 1994). Nonetheless, conflicts likely do not reach a high intensity level when there are close ties between parties because there is a mutual interest in maintaining and preserving the relationship. Conflicts may not be as intense, serious and emotional when the conflict parties are in a close relationship than when they are relationally distant. Furthermore, it may depend on how long the conflict parties have been working together in the past, whether their relationship is more mature and ongoing versus a short-term or one-time intense project cooperation (cf. Hollenbeck et al., 2012). **Figure 7** illustrates the temporal and closeness dimensions of relationships.



**Fig. 7: Interpersonal Relationship: Temporal and Closeness Dimensions** (Own Figure).<sup>1</sup>

*The more a conflict intensifies and escalates, the more it may affect relations between the parties* – whether they were positive or negative beforehand. Considering the previous relationship of the parties may explain why conflicts escalate to or beyond a certain level or not. Furthermore, the way conflicts are handled matters. When the conflict has affected how parties communicate with each other, assist and encourage each other in the resolution of problems or the performance of tasks, the relationship has undergone a change that may be difficult to reverse, if not actively managed. Therefore, conflict management matters for not only ironing out of current issues but also for the maintenance of positive relations between parties in the short- and long-term. If conflicts are not being handled, it may even lead to a complete deterioration of the relationship and the voluntary or involuntary leaving of one of the affected parties. In a working relationship, employees do not necessarily have to engage in personal conversations, but an effective working relationship needs to be maintained for a future of the relationship and the successful execution of work tasks. Conflicts influence not only the personal motivation and satisfaction in going to work but also the future of

<sup>1</sup> Temporal Dimension Adapted from “Beyond team types and taxonomies,” by Hollenbeck et al., 2012, p. 93.

present workgroups, in terms of people being willing to work with each other in the future.

The *maintenance of social relationships* is not only important for employee retention and attraction but also for reducing turnover, training and human costs (Jehn et al., 2014). The findings of Jehn et al.'s (2014) study showed that a continuation of task relationships was more likely under the condition of low relationship conflict, high member satisfaction and high performance. Managers may thus use past performance information to determine whether employees are willing to work again with each other in the future, which will also help them in the forming of teams and creation of conducive teamwork conditions (Jehn et al., 2014). Conflict, therefore, does not only affect the persons involved and their job motivation but also the teams they work in and the overall work context.

In a working relationship, individuals do not necessarily have to engage in personal conversations; however, *an effective working relationship needs to be maintained for a future of the relationship and the successful execution of work processes*. Conflict-induced friction and animosity between persons affect personal motivation, job satisfaction, performance and the willingness of individuals to work with each other in the future (Almost et al., 2010; Jehn, 1995; Jehn et al., 2014; Lau & Cobb, 2010). Apart from having consequences on the personal level, the maintenance of social relationships is also important for the group and organisational levels in retaining and attracting employees as well as reducing turnover, training and human costs (Jehn et al., 2014). By contrast, strong interpersonal ties do not only facilitate cooperative and trustworthy behaviour towards each other in conflicts but also make the breakup of relationships in the event of a conflict unlikely (Rispens et al., 2007, 2011; J. Yang & Mossholder, 2004). Even when strong emotions are expressed, the other party is able to decipher the underlying intention and not misconstrue it as a personal attack and therefore, desist from a retributive reaction (J. Yang & Mossholder, 2004). In general, low or reduced negative emotions provide favourable conditions for the growth and flourishing of positive social relationships and satisfaction with the work group (Jehn et al., 2014; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003; J. Yang & Mossholder, 2004). After all, connecting with other people and forming friendships is significantly important for individuals' motivation and attitude in the work context as well as their personal well-being (Jehn et al., 2014; Meier et al., 2014). Friendships or positive relationships are not free of conflicts of interest but involved parties tend to have a higher tendency to

consider the other's needs and not necessarily only push through their own preferences or interests (cf. Kelley, 1979). Moreover, work environments that are characterised by positive morale and interpersonal relationships do not only encourage respect and collaboration among work colleagues but also tend to experience less conflict (Almost et al., 2010).

In summary, close relations between conflict parties tend to have a positive effect on the way conflict is expressed and handled for the sake of maintaining the relationship. When parties have a generally good relationship with each other, a high concern for each other, an interest in the maintenance of the ongoing relationship and used cooperative conflict management styles previously, they are more likely to choose a conflict management approach that is integrative than distributive. There is also a tendency to focus on similarities such as common interests, values, objectives and goals than differences. In comparison, when the relationship has a history of negative interactions, it gradually leads to hard feelings, negative attributes and uncompromising behaviours towards each other and affects the way future conflicts will be managed. The more the relationship is hampered by past negative experiences, the more likely the present conflictful interaction will escalate and further affect the ongoing relations between parties. Therefore, previous interactions between the parties and generally the relations between disputants affect how the parties perceive a newly arisen conflict and subsequently react to it. The history of past interactions between parties, especially previous conflict episodes, then likely affects new conflict episodes.

Previous relations, thus, form a factor in determining the perception, affect and behaviour elements in conflict and how a newly emerging conflict will be managed. As social relationships and continuation of relationships at work are not only important for individuals but also for the functioning of work teams and processes, it is important to unravel the effect of conflict on relationships if dynamics at the workplace are to be understood. Distressed relationships may contribute to a lower performance of individuals and in worst cases lead to individuals leaving the team or the company. This thesis assesses interpersonal relationships in organisations: what previous relationships existed, if and how they were affected by arising conflicts, considering the respective chosen conflict management method and outcome of the conflict (see **Figure 8** for an outline).

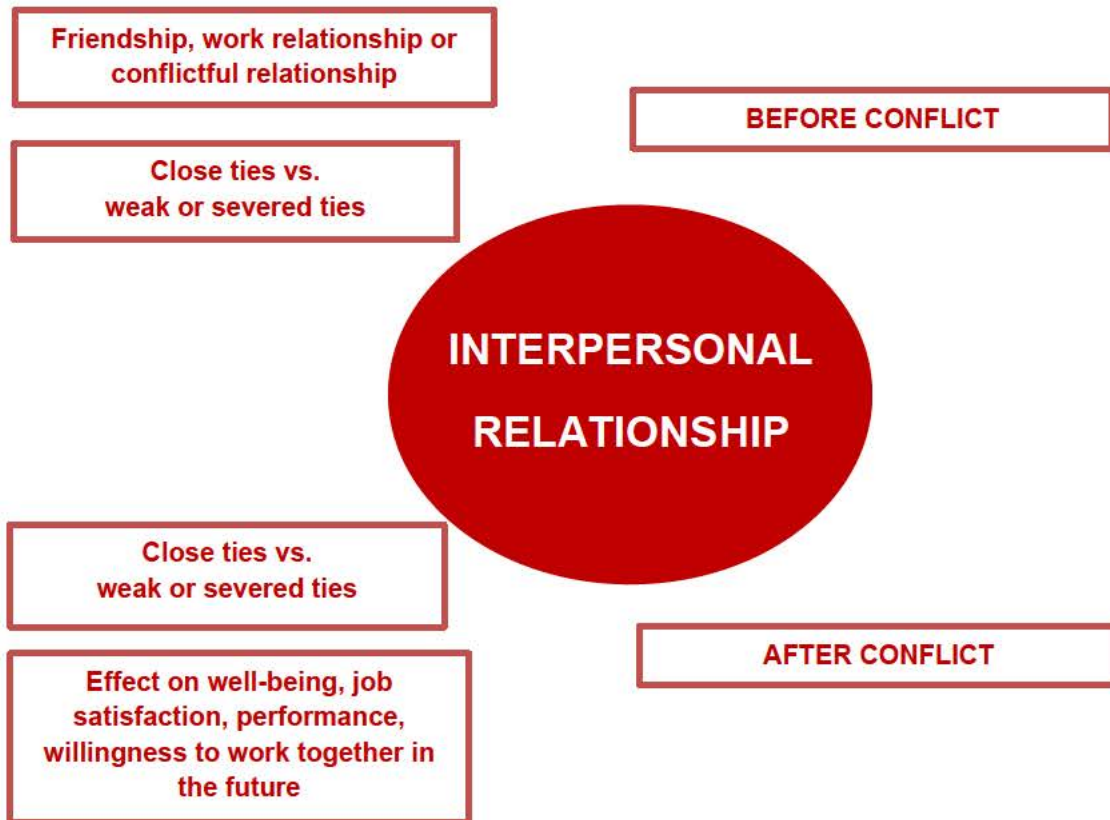


Fig. 8: Interpersonal Relationship Framework (Own Figure).

## 2.5 Performance

*Performance* generally refers to *what individuals do and particularly, those actions that are relevant and valuable for organisational goal accomplishment* (Campbell, 2012; Motowidlo, 2003). Whilst some authors focus on the *output dimension*, other authors focus on the *behavioural aspect of performance*. Armstrong (2000) understands performance to be solely about behaviour: that is, the process dimension of performance is more important than the concrete manifestation of its final output. The importance is in establishing how a job is being done than just that it is being done. When assessing performance, instead of indicating that performance is adequate or productive, aspects would have to be worked out in what is going well and what is not going well. The focus is, therefore, on how to improve future performance through assessing performance input and establishing potential areas for development and growth (Armstrong, 2006).

Performance is not a static but dynamic concept: Changes in the individual, motivational factors and situational conditions can lead to changes in an individual's performance over time (Campbell & Wiernik, 2015; Motowidlo, 2003). Furthermore, an individual's behavioural episodes include behaviours that help organisational goal accomplishment as well as those that hinder or negatively affect organisational goal accomplishment (Motowidlo, 2003). In a conflict situation, the changed work atmosphere and interaction dynamics between conflict parties affect the individuals' performance during that particular time and thus has an effect on organisational goal accomplishment.

Organisational conflict studies have predominantly focused on *how different conflict types have diverse outcomes and effects on team performance* (e.g., De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; de Wit et al., 2012; Jehn, 1997). Earlier research findings alleged that task conflict is beneficial whilst relationship conflict is dysfunctional for decision making and group performance (Amason, 1996; Amason & Sapienza, 1997; Jehn, 1994, 1995; Pelled et al., 1999). Task conflict was generally associated with better decision making within groups and greater affective acceptance of decisions due to better cognitive understanding of issues and opportunity to voice one's opinion in group discussions respectively (de Wit et al., 2014; Simons & Peterson, 2000). On the other hand, due to its focus on personal issues, related inducement of negative emotions (such as animosity and mistrust) and distraction from task accomplishment, relationship conflict was assumed to have solely negative effects on group members' performance, satisfaction and willingness to remain in the group (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; de Wit et al., 2014; Jehn, 1995; Jehn & Mannix, 2001).

Whilst the findings for relationship conflict have been consistently negative, recent studies reported more diverse results with regard to the effect of task conflict on team performance: the variance ranging from positive, minor to no positive association (Loughry & Amason, 2014). Some researchers attributed certain characteristics of task conflicts such as its intensity level or task type to this divergence in findings (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Farh et al., 2010; Jehn & Mannix, 2001), whilst others assessed moderators as mediators between conflict type and performance (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003; O'Neill et al., 2013). Jehn and Mannix (2001) suggested that the effects of conflict on performance depend on the project stage and type of conflict. Well-performing groups had low overall levels of process and relationship conflicts at initial stages with increments of both nearing project deadlines.

Moderate levels of task conflict occurred at the mid-phase of projects, contributing to constructive discussions over to-be-accomplished tasks. In contrast, low-performing groups saw a high increase of all three conflict types towards the end of projects, having negative effects on project implementation and thus performance. In the same vein, Jehn and Bendersky (2003) argued that low overall levels of relationship conflict, moderate process conflict at the initial stage, and moderate levels of task conflict during the mid-phase of a project are beneficial for the advancement of group performance and creativity. Both studies, therefore, proposed to investigate conflicts not as static phenomena but dynamic processes with regard to the conflict type and connected timing and intensity level of particular conflict types to higher group performance.

In contrast, De Dreu and Weingart (2003) found that whilst low conflict may have positive effects, these are defused as conflict intensifies, interfering with information processing capacity and thereby impeding team performance. It further implies that complex, non-routine tasks are more affected by conflict than simple, routine tasks. The reason is, according to De Dreu and Weingart, that conflict's interference with information-processing activity has a higher impact on the former as complex tasks require more cognitive resources for adequately processing information and making effective decisions. This counters Jehn's (1995) findings postulating a more beneficial effect of non-routine over routine task conflicts on performance. Although Farh et al.'s (2010) study also focused on the task type in explaining its effect on the team outcome, it rather related the occurrence of a certain task type to the project stage affected by the conflict (that is, generation of ideas versus decision-making stage) and its intensity level. They found that task conflict at moderate level had the highest effect on team creativity at an early team phase. Building on this, Bendersky et al. (2014) suggested that the effects of task conflicts on team outcomes depend on whether they are expressed during divergent or convergent phases of team processes (that is, decision-making versus final goal stage) and in which manner they are expressed (that is, inquisitive debate or personal advocacy). During inquisitive debates, team members are more open to other views, whilst in task conflicts guided by personal gain considerations team members are not open to information that is contrary to their goals and ideas.

Some authors have assessed *moderating factors that affect the influence of conflict types on performance* (e.g., De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003; O'Neill et al., 2013). Emotions, task type, group diversity, acceptability norms



and collaborative conflict management processes may, according to Jehn and Bendersky (2003), amplify, suppress, ameliorate or exacerbate the effects of a particular conflict type on the conflict outcomes performance/creativity and satisfaction/consensus. Whilst a suppressor such as a stance of resolving all conflicts may be positive in, for example, reducing negative effects of relationship conflict, it may forestall the positive effects of task conflict as well. In contrast, positive emotions as an ameliorator may reduce the negative effects of relationship conflict and enhance the positive effects of task conflict in the same setting (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). Whilst Jehn and Bendersky's study included a wide variety of moderating factors with regard to group characteristics, conflict type particulars and conflict management, and assessed their diverse effects conflict type-dependent, De Dreu and Weingart (2003) solely focused on team cohesion moderators. Under the conditions constructive conflict management and presence of high levels of openness, psychological safety and within-team trust, task conflict may be beneficial for team performance (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). The authors proposed the assessment of moderators to account for the positive effect of task conflict found in other studies, which had not been confirmed in their own findings. As a response to generally weak empirical results of direct conflict-performance linkages, O'Neill et al. (2013) similarly suggested investigating potential moderator variables (such as task type and teamwork setting) and effects of selected performance measurement methods on results.

Similarly, Jehn et al. (2008) suggested a further investigation of the various aspects of task conflict such as open discussion norms and emotions than limiting the assessment to whether a high or low level of conflict is present. As a refinement of Jehn et al.'s proposal, the conflict issue may be more clearly differentiated from other conflict components such as emotions, and other moderators such as conflict management may have a more important role in mediating between a particular conflict and its conflict outcome than hitherto assigned in organisational conflict research (for exceptions, see e.g., DeChurch et al., 2013; Weingart et al., 2015). The more in-depth investigation of task type, conflict intensity, project stage and moderating factors such as emotions, trust and conflict management point to the assessment that the conditions may be more limited under which conflict is productive (cf. Loughry & Amason, 2014) in terms of leading to a positive conflict outcome. The to-be-assessed reciprocal influencing of conflict characteristics, conflict expression and conflict management is

to enable a more complex depiction of how conflict impacts the conflict outcome variables.

Moreover, *it depends on how the conflict outcome is measured*, which can lead to diverse results. Objective indicators of performance such as financial performance, supervisor's ratings and decision quality generally lead to more positive evaluations of performance, in comparison to more subjective self-ratings of performance (O'Neill et al., 2013) and overall measures of performance including self-ratings (de Wit et al., 2012). De Wit et al. (2012) differentiated between the distal group outcomes innovation, productivity, and effectiveness, and the proximal outcomes emergent states and group viability. Task conflict and performance were more positively associated when performance was measured in terms of financial and decision quality aspects than understanding it as group cohesion and viability. Due to negative affect associated with conflict, de Wit et al. asserted that subjective evaluations diminish any positive relation task conflict may have on performance. Furthermore, the duration of a conflict can undermine team members' confidence in their team's ability to perform (O'Neill et al., 2013), thereby implying an effect on perceived performance from the perspective of team members. As the perception of team performance may be more negative than it is in reality, Bang and Park (2015) noted the importance of differentiating between actual and perceived team performance in assessing the effect of conflict. Negative emotions may serve as an example of leading to negative perception of team performance, even though the actual performance of the team is not as negative as perceived. High-performing groups, further, tend to have other types of conflicts and of less intensity levels than low performers (Jehn, 1997), which implies that the makeup of the group before the conflict makes a positive or negative outcome of the conflict in terms of performance more likely. Therefore, research findings are likely influenced by the performance level of the respective parties prior to the conflict as well as the particular operationalisation of performance. **Figure 9** depicts the performance framework: apart from assessing the performance level of conflict parties before and after the respective conflict, this thesis explores the way tasks are being accomplished as well as the interpersonal context with regard to performance (e.g., supporting colleagues in the accomplishment of tasks; working well with others). In addition, it is assessed what effect the respective performance level has on the individuals, teams and/or organisation.

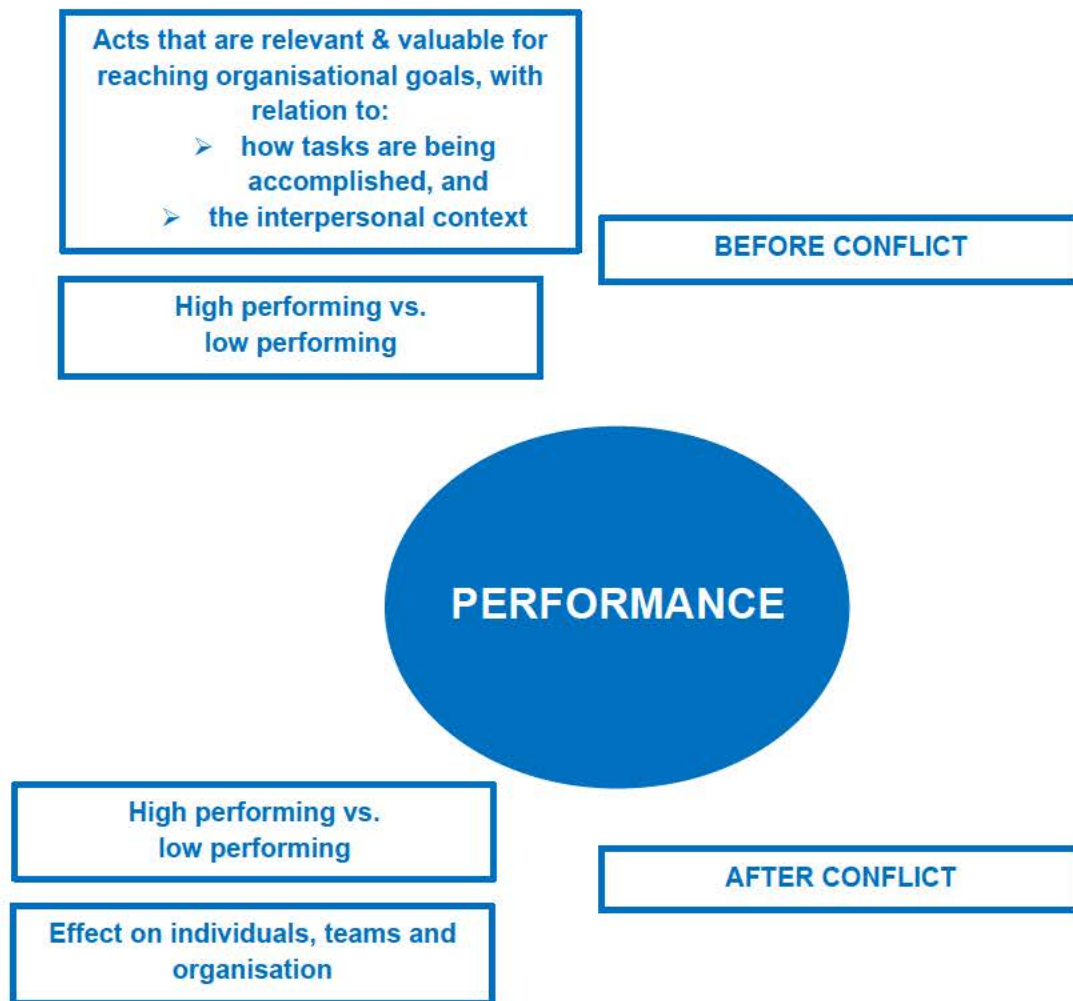


Fig. 9: Performance Framework (Own Figure).

## 2.6 Challenges to organisations facing conflict

Organisations are essentially human enterprises, which are governed by individuals' decisions, actions and motivations. On the one hand, economies grow and change through the motivations, decisions and actions of its employees (Lazear & Gibbs, 2009). On the other hand, altered working relationships caused by ineffective cooperation, leadership and conflict management can adversely affect the general performance of organisations. This is depicted in a declined labour and production capacity of the organisation and its employees (Hersey et al., 2008; Kurray, 2008). Counterproductive conflict behaviour leads to mistrust, fear, loss of communication, intra- and interpersonal distress, distraction from work as well as to an increased focus on the conflict on the side of the conflict parties, which causes *material as well as*

*immaterial costs to the organisation* (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Lawless & Trif, 2016; Lewis et al., 2006; Mayer & Louw, 2009).

*The focus on well-being of employees benefits the organisation's productivity*, underlining the need to make it part of its organisational goals (Dijkstra et al., 2011). According to Wright et al.'s (2007) research, job performance was the highest when employees scored highly on both psychological well-being and job satisfaction. By contrast, the occurrence of conflict has an effect on individual's job satisfaction and organisational commitment, leads to increased absenteeism and turnover intentions and thereby affects an organisation's production capacity (De Dreu & Beersma, 2005; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Giebels & Janssen, 2005). Feelings of frustration, reduced control and lowered self-esteem further contribute to reduced well-being, leading to emotional exhaustion, withdrawal coping mechanisms and depression (Giebels & Janssen, 2005; Spector & Jex, 1998). The conflict situation at work affects the individuals' motivation to come to work and their physical and mental health (De Dreu et al., 2004; Spector & Jex, 1998). Withdrawing behaviour also involves communicating and cooperating as less as possible with the other person which leads to mistakes due to miscommunication as well as double-work (Knippen & Green, 1999). The more intense the conflict becomes, the less are the conflict parties able to process and exchange information (Giebels & Janssen, 2005). Perceiving conflict as a threat, conflict parties, furthermore, tend to stick to their initial, possibly faulty decision, instead of correctly processing information (de Wit et al., 2013). As a result of the conflict, communication may also become hostile and hampered by misunderstandings and distortions. In the long run, conflict can "lead to low commitments to decision implementations... as well as to increased absenteeism, more grievances and reduced productivity" (Wall Jr. & Callister, 1995). Lack of adequate communication, therefore, hinders the conflict parties from performing at the best of their capabilities (Knippen & Green, 1999).

*This stands in contrast to research emphasizing the positive aspects of conflict in furthering creativity and learning, and improving decision-making* (Barki & Hartwick, 2001; Jehn, 1995; Wall Jr. & Callister, 1995). Even if conflicts are viewed as productive from an organisational perspective, they can be damaging when they become the organisational culture's dominant feature (Lewis et al., 2006). In the case of a non-profit organisation, Lewis et al. (2006) found that an organisational culture rife with non-acknowledged affective conflict and lack of discussing issues paralysed the

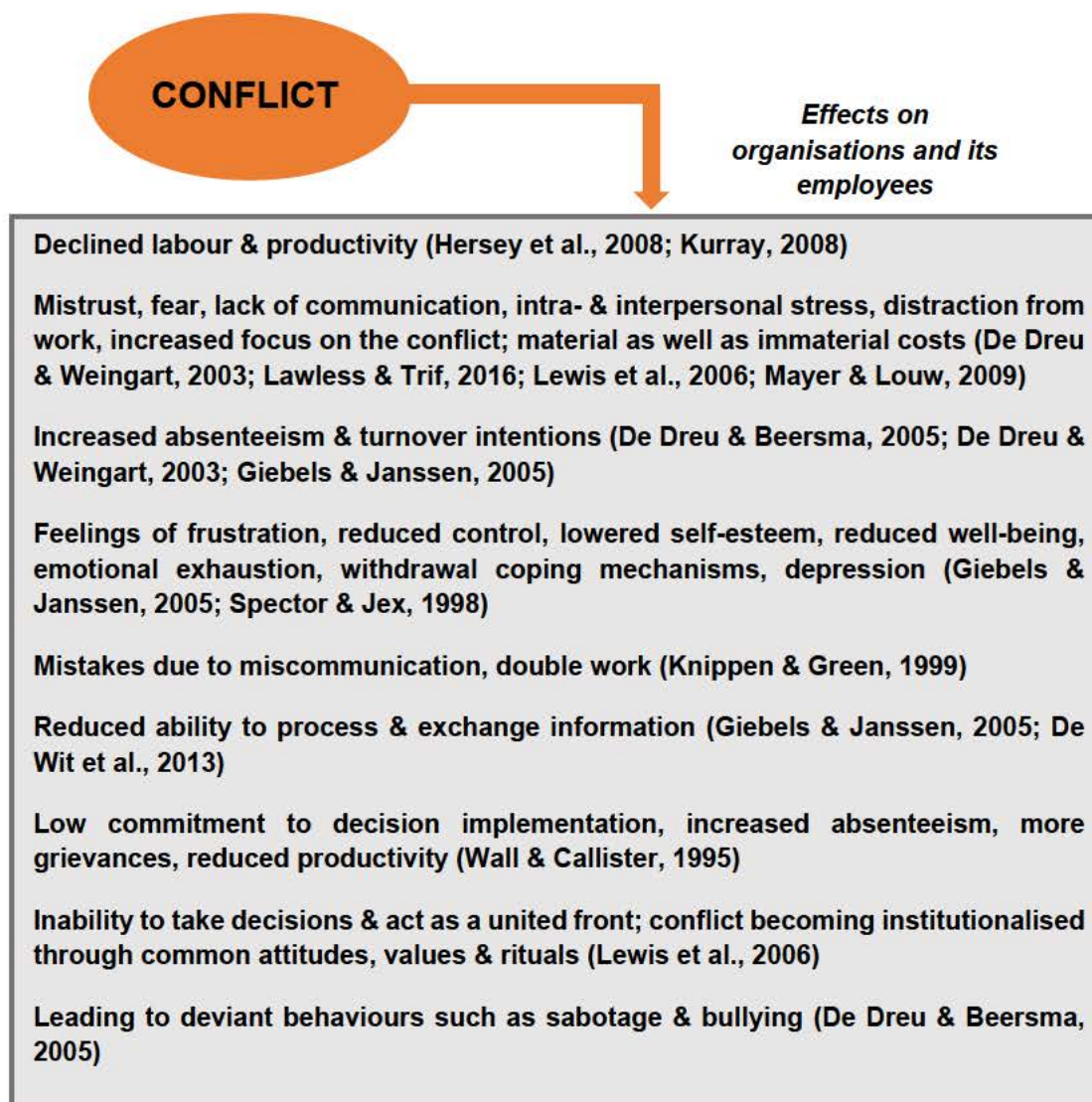
organisation from taking decisions and act as a united front. The passive approach to handling the conflict had adverse consequences for the future of the organisation as it was not able to meet the funding bodies' evaluation criteria. Secondly, it demonstrates the danger of not dealing with conflict as conflict can become "institutionalized through common attitudes, values and rituals" (Lewis et al., 2006), and hence more difficult to resolve. *Potential positive effects of little conflict do also not hold but are rather outnumbered by negative effects* (Wall Jr. & Callister, 1995) when the conflict increases in intensity and adversely affects team performance (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). No matter the type of conflict at hand, conflict has negative effects on affected individuals: Not only relationship conflict but also task conflict correlates with conflict stress in Giebels and Janssen's (2005) research, especially in situations of low third-party-help, and conflict stress is responsible for reduced well-being. Apart from decreasing the general well-being of employees and job satisfaction, conflict may even lead to deviant behaviours such as sabotage and bullying (De Dreu & Beersma, 2005).

Expected values from conflict can, according to Wall and Callister (1995), be better achieved through other means. Furthermore, individuals might not appreciate any organisational benefit in a conflict situation whilst experiencing conflict-related stress, anxiety and negative emotions such as anger and frustration (Amason & Schweiger, 1994; Loughry & Amason, 2014). Apart from conflict generally not being an enjoyable experience (Dijkstra et al., 2011) and having significant side effects, it has the tendency to escalate and spread to include further individuals (Wall Jr. & Callister, 1995). Even in satisfactory conflict management instances, negative effects of conflict can remain, which entails that conflict is not only a negative experience but also leads to negative outcomes in a well-managed conflict situation (Barki & Hartwick, 2001).

The focus should rather be on *decreasing the negative consequences of conflict* through the application of a problem-solving conflict management strategy (Dijkstra et al., 2011). In the same vein, Rahim (2011, 2016) attributes positive individual and organisational outcomes to cooperative conflict management styles whilst dominating and avoiding conflict management styles often result in conflict escalation and negative outcomes. The reason is a higher concern for the other party and win-win approach to conflict in cooperative conflict management approaches, in comparison to non-cooperative or avoiding styles. Therefore, it can be stipulated that conflict parties with a close or friendly relationship are more likely to engage in collaborative conflict

management as they have a higher regard for the other person's concerns and interest to mitigate any potential negative effects for the relationship. Similarly, in an environment of collaborative communication, high trust, where dissent is not perceived as a personal attack and diverse opinions are embraced, the negative effects of conflict can be reduced or mitigated (McCorkle & Reese, 2010). Thus, dealing effectively with conflicts and communication mishaps can influence and change conflicting behaviour, improve working relationships and impact the performance of organisations generally.

**Figure 10** provides an overview of reviewed literature with regard to the challenges conflicts pose for organisations and its employees, encompassing 'hard' and 'soft' factors such as reduced productivity, increased absenteeism, miscommunication, and depression.



**Fig. 10: Overview of Challenges (Own Figure).**

## 2.7 Summary

This chapter showed that conflicts can be understood and assessed differently: ranging from conflict definitions to various dimensions of conflict. Perspectives that understand conflicts as static and one-dimensional were contrasted with dynamic, multi-component conflict definitions. Instead of solely focusing on the conflict issue, the inclusion of the components conflict expression (or behaviour), and disputants' characteristics and relations is able to portray a more complete picture of conflict that covers the latent as well as the manifest levels of conflict. The reviewed dimensions of conflict include contradiction, interdependence, social norms and conflict culture, attitudes, personality characteristics, power and status, and conflict expression. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to assess all reviewed dimensions and levels of analysis – micro (individual), meso (interpersonal) and macro (organisational). The focus of this thesis is on the meso (interpersonal) level of analysis, considering the other levels' aspects and dimensions, where relevant, for my findings and discussion. In addition, the interactional level has at its core a process understanding of conflict. As conflict parties interact with each other, a conflict may change with regard to its degree, complexity and perception. A process of escalation and/or de-escalation can, therefore, be retraced. This thesis thus deviates from a static, single-property understanding of conflict and, taking insight from international conflict studies, mediation and organisational psychology, seeks to contribute to the conceptualisation of conflict as a multi-dimensional, dynamic phenomenon.

Apart from the concept of 'conflict', this chapter reviewed literature on the effects of conflicts on organisations and its employees. As organisations are governed by individuals' decisions, actions and motivations, counterproductive conflict behaviour of its employees can cause material as well as immaterial costs to the organisation such as increased absenteeism, reduced productivity and well-being of employees. 'Hard' as well as 'soft' factors are thus considered as potential challenges to organisations during my data collection and analysis. This thesis, therefore, challenges research that emphasises the benefits of certain types of conflicts and aligns with studies that assesses the negative consequences of conflict and its consequences for both relationships and work-related aspects.

Taking an interdisciplinary approach, this chapter presented conflict management strategies, styles or methods from organisational and international

conflict studies. Generally, conflict management models consider that different styles are used by conflict parties to deal with conflicts – ranging from more cooperative to competitive approaches, among others. The perspectives differ with regard to whether, firstly, one approach – cooperation – is to be preferred or the situation determines the appropriateness of the conflict management approach, and, secondly, whether conflict management is a one-step approach or involves a combination of approaches. This thesis seeks to contribute to this debate in following a processual understanding of conflict and conflict management: Depending on the characteristics and stage of conflict, a particular conflict management approach might be more or less appropriate, and a conflict might involve several conflict management attempts of varying levels of success.

Effective conflict management has, according to this study, the main objective of enabling conflict parties to handle conflicts in ways that minimise negative effects on interpersonal relations and performance. In comparison to performance, the effects of conflict on interpersonal relations have been neglected despite, firstly, the human interest in forming relationships and being liked by others and, secondly, the findings in this chapter's review of challenges to organisations that conflicts affect the communication between employees. This research can, therefore, contribute to knowledge on the interactional level of organisational conflict by including the variable 'interpersonal relations' and considering soft and hard factors.

The next chapter on methodology – **Chapter 3** – builds upon the findings of this review, establishment of my own understanding and linking of main concepts. It positions my research within research philosophical assumptions and outlines my research design, and data collection and analysis process. Whilst most organisational conflict studies utilise quantitative methods, this research follows a qualitative research approach. In taking a different approach to knowledge generation and focusing on conflict experiences through individuals' descriptions and reflections, this research provides a novel insight into conflict situations. **Chapter 3** then sets the premise for **Chapters 4 to 6** – representing the findings - and the development of the proposed conflict management framework model.



### 3. Methodology, Methods and Empirical Context

#### 3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided a critical in-depth literature review of conflict and conflict management studies in order to ascertain the theoretical background information for my research and establish the concepts most relevant for addressing my research objectives. This current chapter presents the reasons for the research methodology and methods that I had chosen to answer the following research objectives based upon my research questions:

1. Identify major and current challenges to organisations facing internal conflicts at interpersonal, intra-group and intergroup levels (**RQ1-oriented**).
2. Explore proposed and/or employed conflict management methods, conflict handling styles, strategies and techniques (**RQ2-oriented**).
3. Ascertain how the implementation of respective conflict management methods, conflict handling styles, strategies and techniques affect interpersonal relations and performance in selected organisations (**RQ3-oriented**).
4. Create an extended, interdisciplinary conflict management model that covers all aspects of organisational conflict as a contribution to organisational conflict studies (**synthesis of RQ1-RQ3**).

As the aim of my thesis is not solely to establish what challenges organisations face during conflict situations but rather uncover challenges and conflict dynamics at the interpersonal level, philosophical assumptions and paradigms – constructionism and interpretivism – that understand social phenomena as being socially constructed are more adequate for explaining how and why interactions of conflict parties led to certain processes and results. **Section 3.2** provides the philosophical assumptions and paradigms guiding my research, with a critical evaluation of existing positions and explanation as to why the chosen position is suitable for addressing my research objectives. Working retroductively, my research objectives as well as concepts from the literature review - **Chapter 2** – informed my research design, data collection and analysis. Thus, I acknowledge that as a researcher, I build upon previous knowledge

and my findings lead to a *refinement of existing theories* rather than creating new knowledge in a theoretical vacuum.

Subsequent **Section 3.3** presents the methodology, chosen research design and methods that were applied to gather and analyse qualitative data. This includes an exploration of the research methods semi-structured interviews, critical incident technique and caricatures and an illustration of how they were applied during my data collection stage. The section further provides information on the interview structure and sample selection: The majority of potential interviewees were contacted and generated via snowball sampling, relying on the networks of personal contacts, and the interviews took place in person, via Skype or telephone due to geographic factors. The chapter concludes with how I incorporated quality rigour markers such as transparency of research process and richness of described conflict experience, and ethical considerations in protecting and respecting interviewees' perspectives, feelings and thoughts into my research.

## **3.2 Research philosophical assumptions and paradigms**

### ***3.2.1 Ontological position***

*Constructionism* is the view that “all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). However, human beings do not create meaning in isolation from the objects they are conscious of as they are “being-in-the world”. Due to the interdependence of subject and world, only the interplay between humans and the world they live in makes meaning-creation possible (Crotty, 1998). Constructionism can, thus, account for change within a specific social phenomena as social phenomena and their meanings are constantly being constructed through human interaction (Andrews, 2012; Berger & Luckman, 1989). What we define as problems are, according to Gergen (2015), constructed reality and not independent facts and can therefore be changed via reconstruction. As we create “new worlds of meaning” through the interaction with others (Gergen, 2015, p. 4), it further implies that conflicts as a type of problem can be reconstructed. Furthermore, what we perceive as a problem is only our current view of reality and not an objective truth (cf. Burr, 2015 on construction of knowledge). The constructionist stance thus enables the researcher

to be less concerned with the relation of the constituted subject and constituted world but on the constituting activity (Deetz, 2011). Instead of focusing on, for example, the nature of individuals and social structures, social constructionism emphasises the dynamic interactions between individuals in explaining how phenomena and knowledge come into being (Burr, 2015). In their study of a hospital, Strauss et al. (1963) demonstrated the dynamic, processual social order of organisations that is constantly being formed by individuals and collective actions (as cited in Charmaz, 2006). Strauss et al.'s (1963) negotiated-order theory, therefore, disputes that social settings are definitively structured and offering social actors definite roles. To the contrary, societal arrangements and procedures are exposed to an ongoing process of negotiation and adjustment of action (Crotty, 1998). Constructionism, thus, challenges the objectivist stance that organisations are pre-given and confront social actors as external realities they cannot influence or change (Bryman, 2016). Social actors are rather the ones forming the reality they act in.

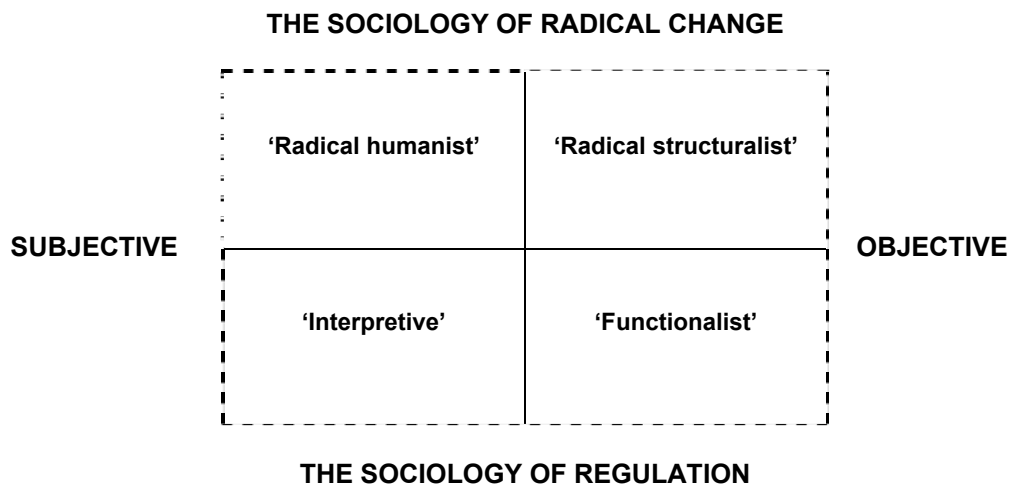
Constructionism is the preferred ontological position for this research as, firstly, the focus is on the role of actors in shaping interpersonal relationships and working processes within an organisation in comparison to solely structure-determined context. Secondly, organisational conflict is understood as a product of social interaction, thus a socially constructed problem, which is perceived as such by affected conflict parties. Thirdly, the focus on subjective meaning of social action enables the inclusion of perceptions, goals, interests and needs of the affected conflict parties; especially as conflict is regarded to stem from, for example, (perceived) incompatibility of goals. A more in-depth understanding of human behaviour in conflict situations is, therefore, possible. Finally, structures are not seen as given forces that act upon and constrain actors. The ongoing process of negotiation and adjustment of action which affects structures is more suited in explaining and understanding working processes as well as change and learning within organisations.

This ontological position stands in contrast to *objectivism* which understands social reality as “a complex result of causal relations between events, with the cause of human behaviour external to the individual” (Petty et al., 2012, p. 270). Reality and meaning generation, thus, is external to individuals' influence and consciousness (E. Bell et al., 2018; Crotty, 1998), with knowledge of this reality being generated through an “objective, unbiased observation of the world” (Burr, 2015, p. 2). The focus is on developing, testing and verifying theories in order to understand the world and regular

patterns of events and to establish objective knowledge or facts (Creswell, 2014; Crotty, 1998; Petty et al., 2012). Conflicts could be assessed from an objectivist and positivist view by, for example, focusing on, firstly, conflict causes external to the individuals such as shortage of resources or power asymmetry conditions or, secondly, standardised procedures for dealing with conflicts. Instead of explaining human behaviour and conflict from external to the individuals and taking a deductive approach in verifying pre-established hypotheses and variables, the focus of my thesis is on how the interactions of individuals lead to conflict and attempts at conflict management. The emphasis is, thus, on the individual conflict experiences that can lead to descriptions of social reality and refinements of existing theories (see also **Section 3.2.3.1** on retrodution, p. 105). Although individuals are constrained in their actions during conflict due to how the organisation and society expects individuals to react in such situations (e.g., conflict and conflict management cultures, see Choi, 2013; Gelfand et al., 2008, 2012), conflicts are socially constructed and only carry meaning through the interaction of affected individuals and their perceptions of the situation at hand. If conflict is not perceived as such, any external conditions might create the premise for conflict but do not lead to its expression (manifest state).

### ***3.2.2 Epistemological position***

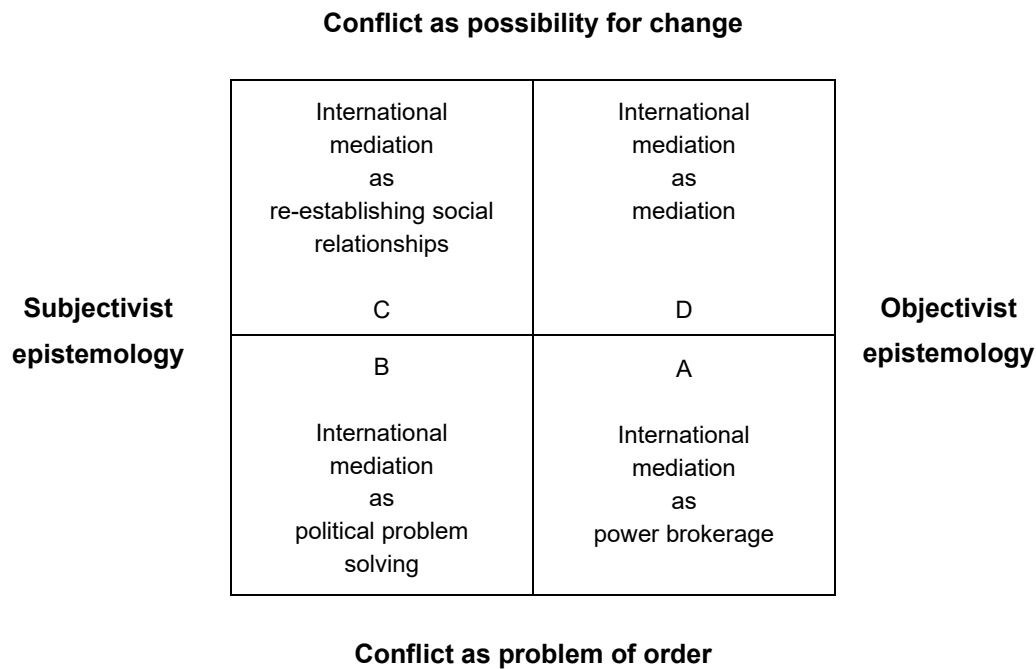
Burrell & Morgan (2017) developed a metatheoretical framework for social theories and therein distinguished four paradigms along the dimensions objective – subjective and regulatory – radical change (see **Figure 11**). They share characteristics but essentially understand and analyse social phenomena differently.



**Fig. 11: Metatheoretical Framework for Social Theories.** Adapted from “Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis,” Gibson Burrell and Gareth Morgan, 2017.

The epistemological foundations for this research are more aligned to the interpretive paradigm of Burrell and Morgan (2017) due to its concern to understand the social world at the level of subjective experience. Interpretivist positions subscribe to the view that the world does not exist independently of our knowledge of it but is socially constructed through the interaction of individuals (Grix, 2004). In the same vein, conflict is socially constructed through the interaction of the conflict parties who ascribe meaning to this social phenomenon and whose actions determine its process.

Kleiboer (1996) applied Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) theoretical framework to international conflict mediation (see **Figure 11** for the 2017 version of Burrell and Morgan’s framework). Theories in international relations can thereby be distinguished by their assumptions about (1) the nature of conflict (conflict as a challenge to order or as an opportunity for change) and (2) the ontological position behind theorising about conflict (realist/objectivist or nominalist/subjectivist epistemologies) (see **Figure 12**). International mediation as political problem-solving treats conflict as a problem of order and follows a subjectivist epistemology. Comparable to the interpretivist paradigm, the phenomenon of conflict is understood as socially constructed which is fed by mistrust, self-reinforcing misperceptions and consequential conflictual actions. Theorising about the conflict is about understanding and considering the dynamics and aspects of the particular conflict at hand rather than developing a general conflict theory.



**Fig. 12: Four Prototheories on International Mediation.** Adapted from “Understanding Success and Failure of International Mediation,” Marieke Kleiboer, 1996, p. 379.

In accordance with the interpretive paradigm and Kleiboer’s (1996) framework, an interpersonal conflict is in this thesis perceived as a socially constructed product which can only be understood from the subjective view of directly involved individuals. The purpose and function of the research is the description of intraorganisational conflict and its management and recommendation of changes through the perception of its employees in order to assess and possibly improve but not to judge the respective organisations, which is in line with the regulatory aspect of the interpretive paradigm. However, the alignment of the research with the interpretive paradigm is only meant as a helpful tool in positioning the research, thus allowing the crossing of boundaries for ‘creative theoretical development’ (Reed, 1985, p. 205, in: Buchanan & Bryman, 2011, p. 26). In addition, this thesis does not go as far as viewing organisations as existing only in ‘a conceptual sense’ as postulated by Burrell and Morgan (2017). Human and organisational problems, moreover, are too diverse to place them in a ‘box’, requiring different approaches in addressing them, and the same issue area can lead to different research outcomes, depending on the chosen assumptions and questions that are being asked (Deetz, 2011).

### **3.2.3 Methodology**

#### 3.2.3.1 Induction and deduction

*Induction* refers to the process by which generalizable inferences are drawn out of direct observation of empirical evidence (Grix, 2004). With the deductive stance, on the other hand, theory “informs research at the outset and hypotheses dictate what evidence the researcher looks for” (Grix, 2004, p. 113). In reality, most research includes *retroduction* – the interplay of induction and deduction. Ragin (1994) asserts that it is impossible to do research without some initial ideas and that the “interaction of ideas and evidence culminates in theoretically based descriptions of social life” (Ragin, 1994, as cited in Grix, 2004, p. 114). The interplay of induction and deduction is also seen as the guiding principle of this research: the existing theories and models provide the background to qualitative investigations, whilst the generated findings establish the conditions under which the theory will and will not hold, leading to a refinement of theory.

#### 3.2.3.2 Axiology: Values, bias and reflexivity

*Values* reflect either the personal beliefs or the feelings of a researcher which can intrude at any point during the course of research. The researcher may develop a sympathy or aversion for the people being studied, which influences the interpretation of gathered data and the drawing of conclusions (Charmaz, 2006). Whilst acknowledging that research is not free of values and *biases*, I as the researcher have to be *reflexive* and transparent about my prior knowledge, perceptions and assumptions with regard to the studied phenomenon and how this influences the research study (Charmaz, 2006; Gabriel, 2018; Mantzoukas, 2005). My previous conflict experiences and background knowledge of conflict studies can be valuable assets for engaging with the theoretical and empirical material, interacting with interviewees and understanding the challenges and dynamics involved in conflict processes and conflict management (cf. Gabriel, 2018; see also **Section 3.3.4** for my self-reflections, p. 122 ff.). Furthermore, the act of engaging with the research subject, influences and redefines what I write and the values that I hold (Gabriel, 2018). Therefore, as a qualitative researcher, I am aware that I am part and parcel of the

generation of knowledge through my values, observations, interactions and writing of the research (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

### 3.3 Research method and data collection

Studies of organisational conflict have been conducted using mainly quantitative methods in determining the effects of conflicts and use of conflict management styles such as Almost et al., 2010; Bruk-Lee et al., 2013; Rognes & Schei, 2010; and Van de Vliert & Euwema, 1994. For example, Rognes and Schei (2010) used surveys, experiments and scenario studies to explore the integrative approach's effect on outcome dimensions quality, fairness, satisfaction and trust. Van de Vliert and Euwema (1994) relied on role plays to assess personality traits underlying conflict behaviour. Apart from fictitious scenarios not depicting real-life conflict situations, surveys can only provide answers to preformulated questions and do not go beyond the follow-up questions of an interviewer.

In comparison, *qualitative research* can provide a more in-depth understanding of organisational conflicts. Apart from collecting data via surveys and departmental records relating to individual performance levels, Jehn (1997) conducted semi-structured interviews and observed work groups in order to verify the quantitative data's results and gather further information that could not be uncovered through quantitative research methods. Besides assessing other research questions through a mix of quantitative and qualitative research methods, Shah et al. (2020) identified categories of team origin through a literature review and examined conflict narratives with relation to the prevalence of these origins and conflict evolution over time. Thereby, Shah et al. (2020) were able to demonstrate that conflict mainly originates at the individual, dyad or subgroup level and not at the team level, and that not all team members share the same conflict experience.

The use of qualitative research methods enables an in-depth understanding of conflict within organisations, including adequate knowledge of the context, the perceptions and behaviour of participants. As it was not the purpose to numerically aggregate the information gathered from research participants (cf. Brinkmann, 2017; Stake, 2010), using research methods such as structured interviews, questionnaires or surveys would not have been able to meet the objective of obtaining quotable, unique information in my organisational conflict research. As conflict is a unique



experience for every individual (cf. Shah et al., 2020), semi-structured interviews are best able to capture interviewee's understanding of a conflict situation through a detailed description in his/her own words and thereby also reveal the underlying emotions and attitudes towards the other party (cf. Cassell, 2011; Woodside, 1945). On the one hand, they provide the interviewees the room to relate their conflict experiences in a more active, flexible manner and the interviewer the opportunity to flexibly respond to the situation and the emergence of new ideas (cf. Merriam & Tisdell, 2017). On the other hand, the interviews follow a guideline in terms of structure and questions to feature.

### **3.3.1 Interview**

#### 3.3.1.1 Interview and critical incident technique

In alignment with above points on uniqueness, flexibility and guidance, I conducted *semi-structured interviews*. Although I enabled the interviewees to relate the incidents based on their own experiences and asked them follow-up questions dependent on their responses, I had noted down questions that consider my research questions and guide the aspects that were to be covered in the interview (see **Appendix 1** for the interview guideline, p. 345). An open request such as *“Please describe a conflict that occurred between you and another staff within your organisation. You may start with how it began”*, for example, enabled obtaining a unique relation of the particular interviewee's experience whilst at the same time providing guidance in terms of starting with how the conflict began. Furthermore, according to Brinkmann (2017), it is neither possible to have a completely unstructured interview as the interviewer has an idea about what is to feature in the interview nor have a fully structured interview as the interviewees' responses always go beyond the predetermined structure.

In addition, the *Critical Incident Technique* (Chell, 2014; Flanagan, 1954) is selected as the most adequate interviewing technique in receiving accounts of conflict incidences at respective organisations, their management and consequences. Interviewees are to relate a conflict experience from their own perspective which is the basis for follow-up questions relating to the conflict at hand, how it was managed and what effect it had on interpersonal relationships and performance at a given company (see also Chell & Pittaway, 1998; Tjosvold, 1988 on application of CIT). Although individual cases are unique, the derived themes and types of outcomes may be

applicable to other organisations and in addition, conceptual frameworks can be explored via the use of the CIT technique (Chell, 2014). Hence, obtaining unique information does not mean that the results from different interviews cannot be compared. Similar patterns can still be observed such as, for example, the previous relationship between conflict parties having an impact on how the conflict is being dealt with and what effect it has on the conflict outcome and future relations (see **Chapter 6** on the effect on interpersonal relations, p. 226 ff.). Despite emphasising on the individual experience level, the CIT technique can, therefore, be used to make general assumptions about interpersonal conflicts and provide practical recommendations for handling such conflicts.

### 3.3.1.2 Use of caricatures

*Image elicitation* is used during interviews to facilitate conversation and encourage interpretation and personal reflection (Butler et al., 2014; Pain, 2012). As images use a different part of the brain in comparison to words, a combination of words-based interviews and image elicitation, therefore, enables a deeper understanding and discussion (Harper, 2002; Pain, 2012). As part of their class work, students in Page and Gaggiotti's (2012) study were tasked to select images that reflected their thoughts which led to their more in-depth engagement with the topic than mere words might have done, and even to a change in views (pre and post image elicitation). Although not all participants immediately revealed deeper, emotional information about their work identity, Butler et al. (2014), similarly, found that the conversation moved to a different level after introducing cartoon-style images. The selected images can, furthermore, assist participants to retrieve memories of past events, and express their feelings and emotions (Butler et al., 2014; Epstein et al., 2006; Harper, 2002). In Glaw et al.'s (2017) research, participants took photographs of their sources of meaning of life and then discussed them in subsequent interviews. This served as a new approach to examine the meaning of life for people with or without depression whereas past research had difficulty in getting adequate responses from participants (Glaw et al., 2017). Therefore, certain topics lend themselves to utilising both verbal and non-verbal ways where solely word-based methods cannot capture or provide the means through which the participants can adequately express themselves. Including images that align with the research questions help to focus the participants on the respective context

and serve as an “unbiased stimulus” as all participants view and discuss the same image(s) (Butler et al., 2014, p. 155). Apart from serving as an ‘ice-breaker’ and stimulus in conversations, images also assist in establishing rapport and trust between interviewer and interviewee and thus more personal and in-depth data (Pain, 2012). Hence, images are a tool to elicit a more responsive and in-depth discussion about the topic in question and assist participants to express their feelings and thoughts better, and even reveal subconscious aspects that would have otherwise been hidden (cf. Pain, 2012).

In my research, *caricatures* are similarly used as a tool through which experienced conflict can be expressed and understood. The images may retrieve aspects that may have been forgotten and relive feelings and thoughts that were experienced at the time of conflict or might still be upheld at the time of the interview towards the other conflict party and the situation as a whole. Used caricatures were purposely created for conflict management education in order to help understand the dynamics of conflicts and show possible indicators for constructive conflict management at individual, societal and international levels (Gugel & Jäger, 2015). Therefore, I considered the caricatures as ideal for my research as they portray dynamic conflict and conflict management situations and thereby assist to take the participants back to what they went through in their respective conflicts. Moreover, in depicting different conflict stages - from hardening of positions to loss of communication and coalition-building to harming the opposing party (based on Glasl’s Conflict Escalation Model and corresponding de-escalation strategies – see **Figure 6, Section 2.3**, p. 77) – the caricatures helped to determine the escalation stage(s) of related conflict(s) and choice of de-escalation methods or strategies.

In my study, interviewees were asked to choose caricatures among the two sets (**Figures 12 and 13**) that best depicted the conflict(s) they had experienced and encouraged to further elaborate on their choice. In comparison to studies that asked participants to take photos themselves with regard to the subject of interest (B. Kolb, 2008; Radley A & Taylor D, 2003), I provided the caricatures. The participants were thereby constrained to choose from predetermined caricatures than making decisions about how to portray experienced conflicts. However, the chosen caricatures were, firstly, specifically designed for educational purposes in order to explain the dynamism of conflicts and point out opportunities for constructive conflict management (Gugel & Jäger, 2015) and were likely more adequate than participants’ own photos, especially

considering the sensitive topic of conflict. Secondly, the caricatures were not as important as the descriptions of how the interviewees interpreted the pictures and related it to their respective conflicts. The caricatures helped the interviewees to express emotions and/or reflect on past conflict events. Thereby, the interviewees revealed further information that had not as yet come up or not as in-depth during the verbal stage of the interview. For example, for interviewee I1, three caricatures represented how the conflict ended. According to interviewee I1, caricature 4b depicted how the conflict parties started conversing on how to resolve the conflict, with the table in caricature 5b exemplifying that they were trying to rebuild something together, and after they had talked things over, everything worked out well, as displayed in caricature 6b. Therefore, the caricatures helped to reconstruct the conflict management process and provided the premise for further elaboration on how the parties involved relate with each other after the conflict ended. Using caricatures as an additional tool in the interviews, I was thus able to determine the behaviour of involved parties throughout the conflict as well as gather further information on the relationship between the conflict parties, their performance and how they dealt with the conflict.

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**Caricature 1**

**Caricature 2**

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**Caricature 3**

**Caricature 4**

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**Caricature 5**

**Caricature 6**

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**Caricature 7**

**Caricature 8**

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**Caricature 9**

**Fig. 13: Caricatures – Conflict Escalation.** Illustrations by Burkhard Pfeifroth, n.d., Reutlingen,  
<http://www.pfeifroth.de>

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**Caricature 1b**

**Caricature 2b**

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### **Caricature 3b**

### **Caricature 4b**

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### **Caricature 5b**

### **Caricature 6b**

**Fig. 14: Caricatures – Conflict De-escalation.** Illustrations by Burkhard Pfeifroth, n.d., Reutlingen, <http://www.pfeifroth.de>

#### 3.3.1.3 Interview structure

The *interview* was structured in following way (see **Appendix 1** for the interview guide, p. 345):

The interviewee was at first asked for permission to record the interview for data analysis purposes and assured of anonymity of data collection and usage. I then proceeded to inform him/her about the purpose of the interview which is to understand conflicts in his/her own organisation, which data I will use, together with other data, to derive recommendations on how such conflicts could be handled. This was followed by my own definition of conflict as “a dysfunctional process that involves at least two people, an incompatibility with regard to interests, goals or values, a certain disposition and relationship with the other party, and an expression of conflict through verbal and or non-verbal behaviour in the parties’ interactions”. This conflict definition was an

outcome of the literature review in **Chapter 2** and summary of essential definitional properties of conflict in **Section 2.2.1.3** (p. 19).

In order to establish the organisational context, the interviewee was asked background questions about the respective company he/she worked for and his/her particular position and responsibilities.

The next part focused on the critical incident the interviewee had experienced: He/She was asked to describe a conflict that occurred between him/her and a co-worker within his/her organisation, starting with how the conflict began. Follow-up questions centred on the conflict issue, the relationship with the other person before conflict, how the conflict was expressed in behaviour and how it affected the relationship and performance of the conflict parties.

Caricatures 1 to 9 (see **Figure 13**, p. 111 f.) were used to establish the evolution of the conflict by asking the interviewee to pick two pictures that depicted the different stages of the conflict. Follow-up questions centred on why he/she had picked these particular pictures and why they represented the conflict at hand. This led to questions about what attempts were made (if any were made) to resolve the differences, using Caricatures 1b to 6b (see **Figure 14**, p. 112f.) to determine the process of conflict management. This included questions about the outcome of the conflict: how they worked and related with each other after the settlement (if there was any settlement), and what the current status is.

The interview ended with questions about how conflicts are generally handled at respective organisation and further comments by the interviewee on conflict.

### **3.3.2 Sample**

I had intended to select five small and medium enterprises in the service sector via purposive sampling. However, those who were willing to be interviewed came from diverse backgrounds and diverse company sizes. I therefore changed my focus from SMEs and service sector to include *conflict experiences from diverse backgrounds*. **Figure 15** displays the *company size distribution*. The attributes were assigned according to following criteria: Small - less than 50 employees; medium - less than 250 employees; large - more than 251 employees. The sample comprised 12 interviewees who predominantly worked in large organisations and were from diverse sectors such



as insurance administration, IT consultancy, education, sales, business consultancy and medical research.

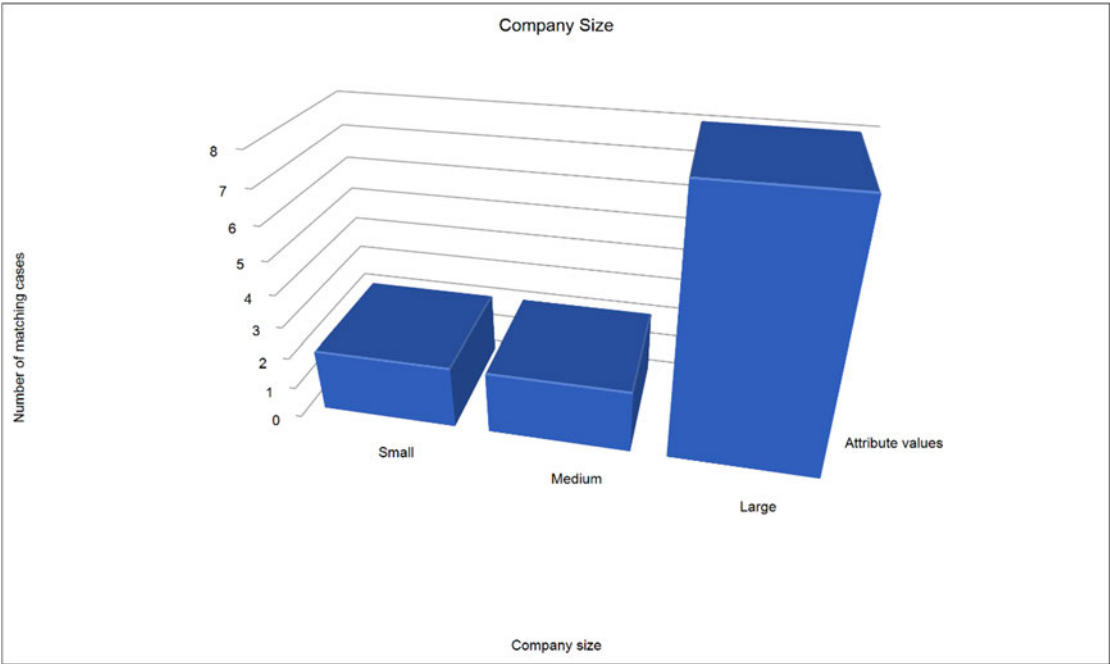
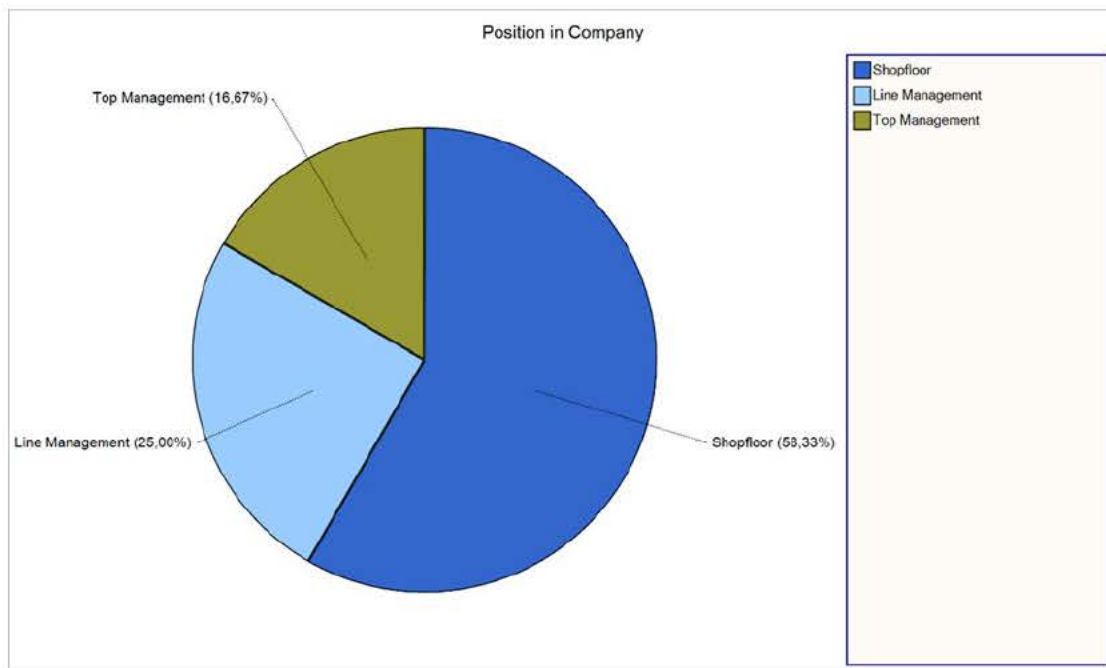


Fig. 15: Company Size Distribution (Own Figure).

The *distribution of participants by gender and age* was about equal: five participants were male (out of which two were younger than 35 years), seven participants were female (out of which four were younger than 35 years). Participants held *different positions*, with the majority (58.33%) working on the shopfloor level (see **Figure 16**). Five participants' work was project-based, whilst seven participants' work was not project-based. As the majority of contacts was generated through *snowball sampling*, I was not aware of the gender, age, company sector and size beforehand.



**Fig. 16: Position in Company Distribution (Own Figure).**

**Table 5** presents an overview of the 12 participants' profiles, providing information on personal characteristics (age and gender) and the company they worked for and where they experienced the narrated interpersonal conflict (company size, sector, position in company, work type and length of relationship with the other conflict party at time of conflict).

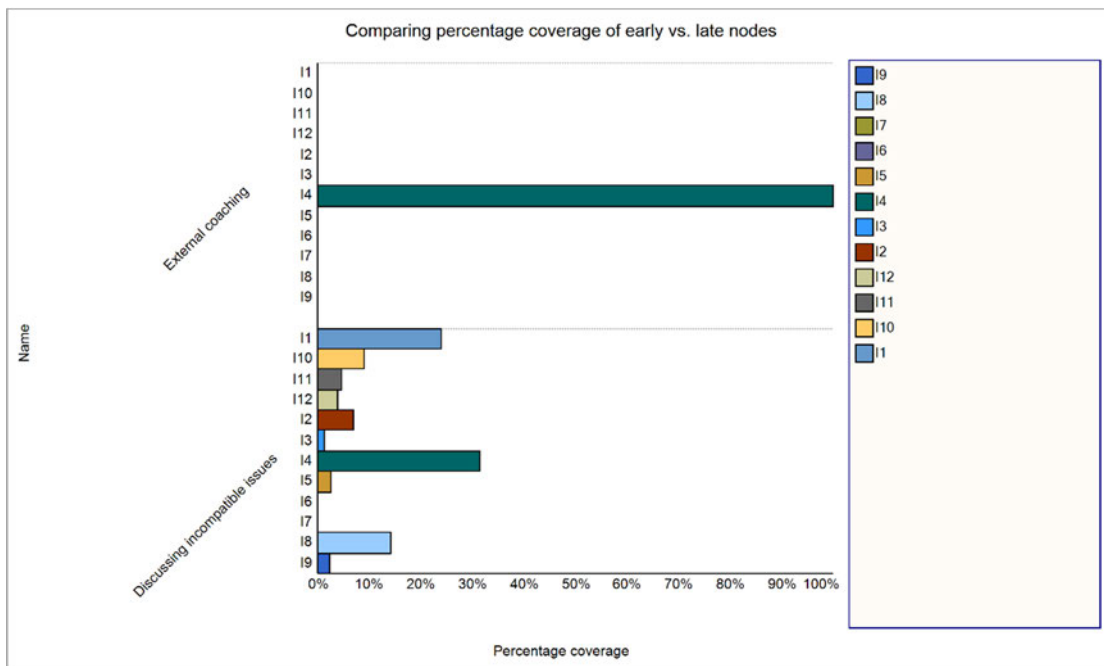
**Table 5: Participants' Profiles (Own Table)**

Name	Age	Gender	Company size	Sector	Position in Company	Work Type	Length of Relationship at Time of Conflict
I1	Younger than 35	Female	Small	Healthcare (Research)	Shopfloor	Project based work	Less than 1 year
I2	Older than 35	Female	Large	Store (Sales)	Line Management	Non-project based work	More than 1 year
I3	Younger than 35	Female	Large	Insurance (Administration)	Shopfloor	Non-project based work	More than 1 year
I4	Older than 35	Female	Large	Cleaning Products (Distribution)	Top Management	Non-project based work	More than 1 year

I5	Younger than 35	Female	Medium	Education (Teaching)	Shopfloor	Non-project based work	Less than 1 year
I6	Younger than 35	Female	Large	Insurance (Project Management)	Shopfloor	Project based work	Less than 1 year
I7	Older than 35	Female	Medium	Museum (Archive Management)	Shopfloor	Non-project based work	More than 1 year
I8	Older than 35	Male	Large	Business Consultancy (Project Management)	Line Management	Project based work	More than 1 year
I9	Younger than 35	Male	Large	IT Consultancy (Technical Expert)	Shopfloor	Project based work	Less than 1 year
I10	Older than 35	Male	Small	Business Consultancy (Project Management)	Line Management	Project based work	More than 1 year
I11	Older than 35	Male	Large	Security (Management)	Top Management	Non-project based work	Less than 1 year
I12	Younger than 35	Male	Large	Business Consultancy (Project Management)	Shopfloor	Non-project based work	More than 1 year

Regarding *generating interview contacts*, I relied on *personal contacts and networks via snowball sampling* to get further interview contacts. At first, I mainly received either no responses or negative responses. This might have also been due to the sensitive research topic in assessing conflict incidences. Negative responses included explanations such as not being interested in such a topic or that they do not experience conflicts. In these instances, no opportunity was provided to explain my research further or diffuse any negative associations with the term conflict. Upon relying on networks and snowball sampling to reach more potential interviewees, more than 330 individuals were reached out to. The 330 individuals include those I am personally aware of, excluding individuals that were reached via snowball sampling attempts of third parties.

The target was to interview 30 persons. Out of the contacted persons, 12 persons agreed to be interviewed. Although the target of 30 interviewees was not met, in line with Guest et al.'s (2006) understanding of *data saturation*, new information at the last two interviews did not produce significant change to the codebook. For example, the child nodes of the parent node 'conflict management' that were most frequently coded across all interviewees did not change throughout the coding process: "avoiding interactions", "changing workflows and or team", "discussing incompatible issue" and "third-party attempts at mediation". **Figure 17** compares the child nodes "discussing incompatible issues" and "external coaching". "External coaching" was a new code in the last interview. As it was only coded for one interviewee, it is likely not as significant as the highly mentioned code "discussing incompatible issues" by several interviewees.



**Fig. 17: Comparing Percentage Coverage of Early vs. Late Nodes** (Own Figure).

Apart from a focus on numbers, the quality of the data is an equal determining factor of data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The interviews generated detailed, in-depth accounts of conflict incidents that are presented in narrative form in **Chapters 4 to 6** to illustrate the research findings.

The interviews were held *in person, on the phone and via Skype*, and lasted between 30 and 55 minutes. For the electronic and phone interviews, I had sent the

caricatures to the interviewees beforehand by post or email. The first interview was conducted face-to-face and was used as a pilot to test and refine the interview structure and questions. Interviewee I6 (the *pilot interview*) was given opportunity to freely respond to the questions asked. I used probing questions to elicit further information with regard to the conflict development, conflict management and its effects on the performance and interpersonal relationship of involved parties. Apart from the utilisation of semi-structured interviews, I relied on a questionnaire to gather data on the interviewee's performance before and after the conflict. The pilot interview lasted 38 minutes which thereby was within the expected time frame of 30 to 45 minutes and at the same time provided ample time to gather in-depth information on the experienced conflict.

After the *pilot interview* and discussion with my supervisors, I refined the interview structure and left out the questionnaire in subsequent interviews, with the intention to rely fully on qualitative research methods. Moreover, I realised that the questionnaire did not enable me to gather in-depth information about how the conflict incidence affected performance. By contrast, in using the caricatures and follow-up questions I was able to receive a more in-depth picture of how the conflict developed and affected the performance and interpersonal relationship than via the use of the questionnaire. Interviewee I6 (the pilot interview) chose caricatures that depicted from her perspective on how a latent conflict that obstructed them in their work activities and led to discussions escalated, to the extent that they could not proceed with the project as both parties did not succumb. In comparison, when asking the interviewee to deliberate on her questionnaire answers, it was revealed that the interviewee is now more cautious in interactions with others due to the conflict experience and less motivated at work. Although the questionnaire provided information about how performance was affected by the conflict experience, only the follow-up questions led to more comprehensive responses. In the next interviews I continued to refer to the interview structure as a guideline. However, being now familiar with the general questions and structure, I was able to more flexibly respond and follow-up on interviewees' responses without focusing strictly on the outline. This was especially the case when interviewees had already touched on aspects that featured at a later stage in the interview structure.

### 3.3.3 Data analysis process

The first step before analysing the data involved uploading the interview data as recorded audio files in NVivo and transcribing them. All the interviews were held in German, and I transcribed the interviews in their original language. I proceeded in naming the codes and writing the content summaries of individual interviews in English, thereby translating the essence of the German interviews into English<sup>2</sup>. The content summaries are structured as follows: 1) a short summary of the narrated conflict incidence; 2) salient points raised during the interview and accompanying codes; 3) chosen caricatures by the interviewee that best represented the experienced conflict and conflict management, and justification for choice (see **Appendix 2** for content summary examples, p. 348).

Collected data was then analysed using *qualitative content analysis* to identify essential themes in related events. Exploring the uploaded data in NVivo via query command did not give any obvious initial results. In the first coding process, I reviewed the transcripts and coded all relevant information in the data in a descriptive manner. Instead of interpreting the data or attaching value to it, the description-focused coding strategy enabled me to present the data as the interviewee sees it (cf. Adu, 2019). After concluding the first coding process, I, however, realised that the codes were not detailed enough for my analysis and included codes that were of interest but not relevant for my research questions. I did a detailed literature search about coding (e.g., Adu, 2019; Bazeley & Jackson, 2013; Methodology Related Presentations - TCSP, 2015a, 2015b; Miles et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2015) and reorganised the coding process.

The second coding process involved going back to my research questions and deriving parent codes that are closer to the research questions: “Organisation’s challenges due to conflict”, “Conflict management”, and “Effects of conflict management implementation” with subcategories “Effect on interpersonal relations” and “Effect on performance” (see **Appendix 3** for an overview of generated codes and code descriptions, p. 353). Therefore, instead of generating parent codes through the data, I derived them directly from the research questions in order for the data to

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<sup>2</sup> With the background of a Masters in Anglistics, German as a mother tongue and work experience as a freelance translator, I had the required knowledge and skills to translate the German interviews into English and at the same capture the authentic voice and meaning of the interviewees.

harmonise with the research goals. I then recoded the data in NVivo, on the basis of the new parent nodes, employing an interpretation-focused coding strategy. This coding strategy does not merely describe interviewees' answers but involves deriving meaning and interpreting the answers (Adu, 2019). Instead of making the preliminary descriptive coding obsolete, interpretative coding can be used to complement the process of describing data with meaning and understanding generation (Adu, 2019). The first coding process was, therefore, a preparation for the second coding process which helped me to get to know the data better before embarking on interpreting relevant information. I then explored the data in terms of similarities and differences, generated themes, diagrams and tables, to be included in the methodology and findings chapters.

In order to organise and assess the data, I followed a reductionist approach: Firstly, in using parent nodes, I sought to assign codes to the three respective research questions which helped to focus on question-specific data. Secondly, the further exploratory analysis of the data involved placing direct quotations of the interview participants in displays and tables. This helped to bring all pertinent data for the individual themes and from multiple cases into a single form for further analysis (Miles et al., 2014). Longer descriptions and direct quotations accompanied the displays, led to the formulation of theme-specific conclusions and the answering of the research questions. Instead of assessing the phenomenon conflict as a whole, the reductionistic data analysis approach broke the problem into its constituent parts and reduced its complexity (cf. Kuckartz, 2019). It thereby had the potential to reduce or deconstruct the meaning embedded in the data, omit essence that is particular to specific conflict cases and lose sight of how the whole is interconnected (cf. Haverford College, 2016; Kuckartz, 2019; Maxwell, 2013). However, the focus of the taken approach was to explore in depth which aspects were pertinent and how they affected respective individuals, their relations and performance during and post-conflict. This helped to uncover the challenges and dynamics of conflicts and conflict management across the assessed cases and thereby address the objectives of this research (see **Section 3.1** for the research objectives, p. 99). Furthermore, the content analysis was supplemented by narrative summaries that, making use of quotes from the data, sought to depict the context and plot of the conflict experiences in Chapters 5 and 6 (cf. Maxwell & Miller, 2008, as cited in: Maxwell, 2013).

**Figure 18** illustrates the main steps of the data analysis process.

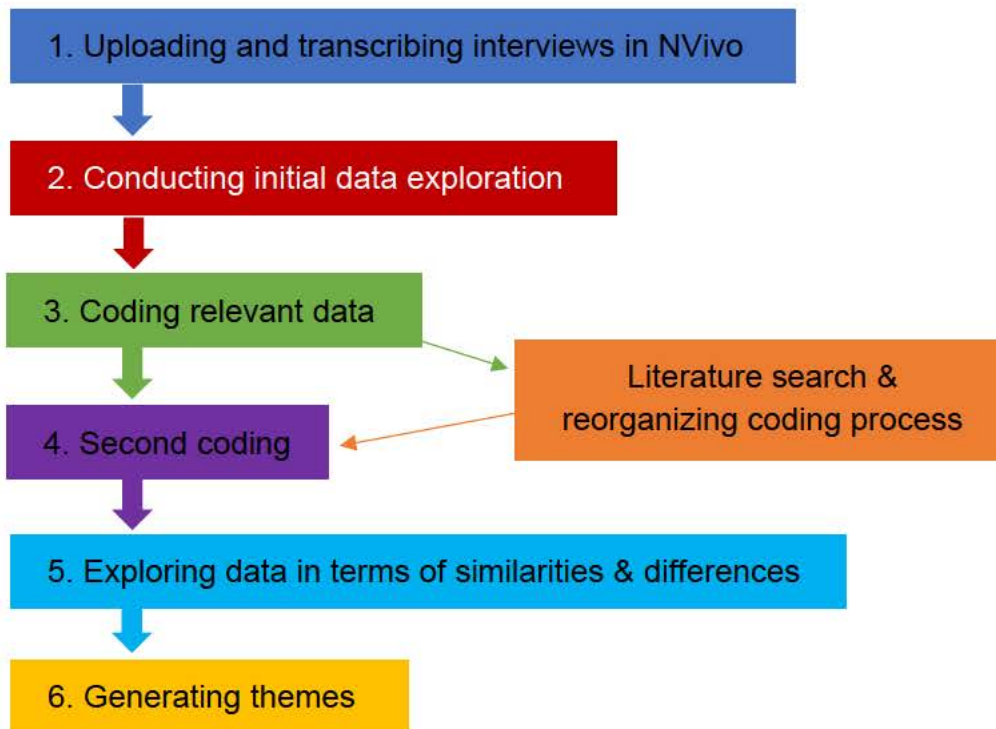


Fig. 18: Data Analysis Process (Own Figure).

### 3.3.4 Qualitative rigour and ethical considerations

Whilst acknowledging the importance of validation and reliability, qualitative researchers' approaches differ in the way they understand and apply these concepts (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Lincoln et al., 2017; Morse, 2017; Morse et al., 2002). The multitude of concepts and criteria can be likened to the postmodern assumption that there is "no single truth" and therefore not a single paradigm that social scientists could agree to (Lincoln et al., 2017). Apart from that, in contrast to the 1970/80s' focus on quantitative research, the exploration of new paradigms and qualitative inquiry has nowadays become acceptable and prominent (Lincoln et al., 2017). As a novel way in establishing rigour in qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) introduced new terms and criteria in the 1980s: that is, strategies for evaluating trustworthiness at the completion of a study such as peer debriefing, triangulation and negative case analysis (cf. Morse et al., 2002). By contrast, Morse et al. (2002) argued for building rigour during the process of inquiry rather than as a post-hoc evaluation which "would provide the research with certainty, confidence, and solid results" (Morse, 2017, p. 1384). Furthermore, threats to reliability and validity could not be corrected if only detected at



the end of a study (Morse et al., 2002). Apart from ensuring rigour during the process, it has to be determined whether a strategy is appropriate for the undertaken research. Morse (2017) distinguished between descriptive “hard” data and interpretive “soft” data. Whilst descriptive “hard” data can be validated with external sources, interpretive “soft” data such as perceptions, experiences and feelings may only be verified with the participant. Depending on the goal of the research, different strategies, therefore, would be more or less appropriate for determining rigour (Morse, 2017; Morse et al., 2002).

However, there are also verification strategies that establish qualitative rigour on a general level: establishing congruence between the research question and method components; appropriate sampling; collecting and analysing data concurrently; thinking theoretically; and theory development as an outcome of the research process as well as a template for comparison and further theoretical development (Morse et al., 2002). Similarly, Tracy (2010) presented eight criteria of quality in qualitative research that are not tied to specific paradigms and could serve as “common markers of goodness” (p. 839): *worthy topic; rich rigour; sincerity; credibility; resonance; significant contribution; ethics; and meaningful coherence*.

In line with Tracy's (2010) criteria, *my research topic is relevant and makes a significant contribution* as firstly, conflicts are reoccurring phenomena at workplaces and strategies how to deal with conflicts are ever needed; secondly, uncovering the challenges conflicts pose for organisations, and the effects of conflicts on interpersonal relations and performance create the premise for adequate conflict management that is able to minimise the side effects of conflicts. *Richness* is generated through detailed descriptions of interviewees' conflict experiences and explanations that make references to theories from different disciplines and backgrounds. With regard to *sincerity*, I am self-reflective about how my own understanding and experiences of conflict, as well my previous conflict studies may have influenced this research. For example, experienced negative effects of conflicts on interpersonal relations and performance led to my assumption that conflicts are predominantly negative in nature (in contrast to, e.g., Rahim's (2002) assumption that conflict contributes to organisational learning processes). Revealing my assumptions and previous experiences in **Chapter 1** enables the readers to better understand how I arrived at particular interpretations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2017) and why I left out aspects, such as

a positive understanding of conflict (see e.g., Weiner-Levy & Popper-Giveon, 2013 on being reflective about omitted aspects and one's positions).

In order to be *transparent about my decisions and research*, I document the process of how the research was conducted - from preliminary research design to data collection and data analysis – in this chapter and appendices and detailing where the focus changed amidst challenges such as getting more interviewees via snowball sampling. According to Adu (2019), providing a detailed overview of the coding and analysis process, will help the readers to “better understand and trust the findings” (p. 26) and assist fellow researchers to replicate the same process in future research. In using narrative accounts to tell the interviewees’ conflict experiences and thereby providing adequate and engaging detail, my research achieves credibility via thick description as well as engages the readers’ thoughts and feelings via relating others’ conflict experiences and thoughts (Adu, 2019; Tracy, 2010). Furthermore, my research is *meaningfully coherent* in achieving what it sought out to accomplish by being guided throughout by its research objectives (see **Chapter 3**, p. 99), using the methods semi-structured interviews and narrative accounts that align with the underlying constructivist paradigm, and interconnecting reviewed literature on conflict studies with my findings.

Finally, my research *attends to ethical concerns*. Before conducting the respective interviewees, I sought consent from the interviewees for recording the interview and explained to them the purpose of the research which is the assessment of the development of conflicts in organisations, how they are handled and what effects they have on the people and work processes. I further informed them about why I am conducting the interview (e.g., Tracy, 2010 on procedural ethics): to understand conflicts in their organisations, compare this data with data from other organisations and consequentially derive recommendations for handling such conflicts. I further informed them that I would not share the recording with other persons, not mention their names, names they mention and their organisation in my research, and delete the recording after analysing the data (e.g., Creswell & Poth, 2017 on protecting participants' privacy; see also the interview structure in **Appendix 1**, p. 345). Throughout the study, I am considering which information to reveal, in order to protect the integrity of the interviewees and the organisations they work for, and suggested to the interviewees that if desired, I will send them a copy of my thesis to them for their perusal and information. Further, I am mindful about respecting the interviewees and

their perspectives and treating their related feelings and thoughts with regard to their conflict experiences with utmost care and sincerity (e.g., Creswell & Poth, 2017; Tracy, 2010 on treating participants respectfully). As a researcher, I am aware that the interpretations of the data are subjective and marked by my own assumptions, knowledge and previous conflict experiences (cf. Creswell & Poth, 2017). However, I am presenting the conflict experiences in narrative form, including direct quotations from interviewees in order to present their voice as accurate as possible. At the same time, I am being mindful of what to share, considering the trust the interviewees had invested in me in relating sensitive personal conflict experiences and feelings they might not have shared with anyone else. In Adu's (2019) words, "out of this harmonious environment of mutual respect and trust comes rich data from willing participants" (p. 6), pointing to the additional benefit of rich data for treating participants respectfully.

### **3.4 Summary**

**Chapter 3** outlined the ontological and epistemological positions of this research, with conflict being understood as a socially constructed problem which is perceived as such by the affected conflict parties. Qualitative interview and critical incident technique were the chosen research methods for this thesis as they are able to collect in-depth accounts of conflict incidences at organisations, how they evolve over time and what conflict management attempts are employed. The subsection 3.2.2 Sample detailed the interview procedure, structure and interviewee characteristics. Finally, the steps involved in the data analysis process were provided – ranging from exploring the data to coding and themes generation.

In the following **Chapters 4 to 6**, uncovered themes and supporting data are displayed in matrixes or findings' summary table, enabling within- and cross-case comparisons (Maxwell, 2013; Saldaña, 2015). Relationships, connecting statements and events are presented in the form of narrative summaries with the purpose of putting the different categories into a larger context and understanding the way events are connected and influence each other (Maxwell, 2013). Research findings, in consideration of existing conflict models, will lead to an extended conflict management model.

## 4. Challenges to Organisations Facing Conflict

### 4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the research findings from the interview data that provide answers for Research Question 1: **What are the challenges enterprises face in manifest conflict scenarios?** Before assessing how conflicts are dealt with in the interviewees' companies (see **Chapters 5 and 6**), the starting point is to examine what the challenges were that respective companies faced in manifest conflict scenarios. I understand challenges as the negative effects conflicts have on the employees' ability to work to the best of their capacity. Apart from the effects on the persons involved, it was to be established what effects the conflicts had on the interpersonal level and the overall organisation. As I follow a dynamic understanding of conflict, it was also of interest whether these challenges impacted the employees, teams and organisations differently throughout conflict and whether they persisted past conflict.

This Chapter's focus is, firstly, on which challenges and aspects are most salient and stand out for the interviewees; secondly, how the interviewees evaluated the challenges at their workplace and their significance for their work and relations; and thirdly, whether these challenges changed over time, persisted or were removed.

In order to address these sub-questions as part of Research Question 1, I pursued a two-phase approach to assess and present the findings:

1) I assessed the interview data with regard to which challenges were the most salient across the 12 interviews and whether organisations' characteristics such as size of organisation and participants' characteristics such as, among others, position within the organisation, age and gender determined which challenges were paramount in respective conflict situations.

2) Upon review of the most salient challenges, I generated the themes for Research Question 1 and used mind maps to break down the themes into its components based on relevant evidence. I further elaborated on each theme by supporting it with interview data and depicting its respective changes during conflict in temporal or other relevant models.

## 4.2 Most salient challenges

The interview data was at first analysed with regard to *the most salient challenges* the interviewees and their respective organisations faced in manifest conflicts, and whether organisations and participants' characteristics mattered in that regard.

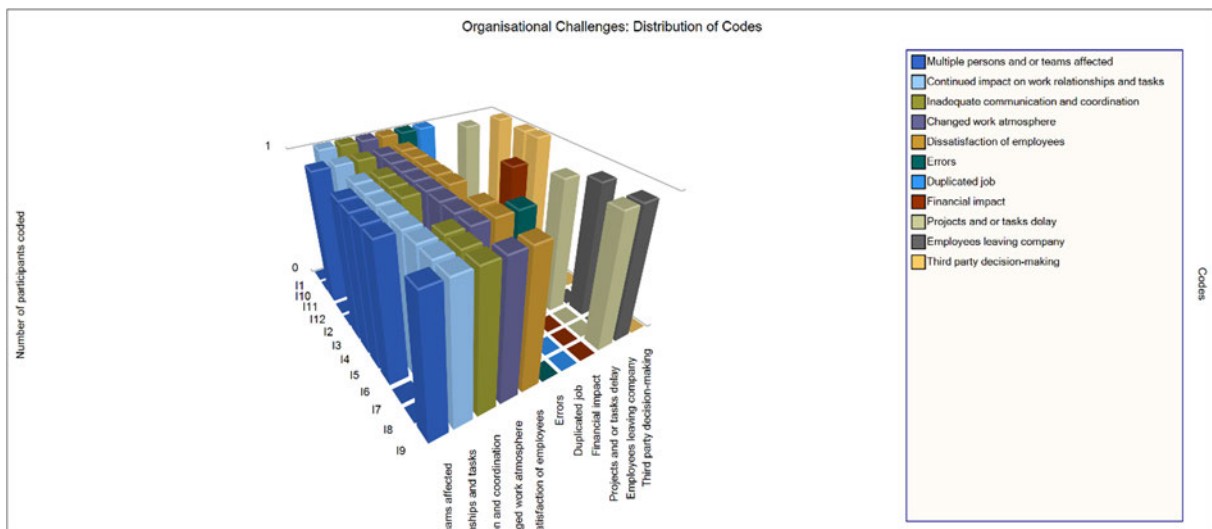


Fig. 19: Most Salient Organisational Challenges (Own Figure).

**Figure 19** depicts that the most salient challenges discussed by participants were *changed work atmosphere*, *continued impact on work relationships and tasks*, *dissatisfaction of employees* and *inadequate communication and coordination*. Therefore, it reveals that work-related as well as relationship aspects dominated the interviews. With regard to the respective company size, the challenges most salient for large companies were the same for small and medium-sized companies. However, it has to be qualified that most of the 12 participants were from large companies. It cannot be generalised from this that the company size does not matter. Nonetheless, the results depict a trend towards work-related as well as relationship aspects being important for conflict parties. Secondly, the length of relationship at the time of conflict did not have an impact on which challenges dominated the respective conflict situations (see corresponding table in **Appendix 4**, p. 357). I further explored whether participants' characteristics such as their position in the company, gender, work type and age mattered, with regard to the most salient organisational challenges (see **Appendixes 5 and 6** for corresponding tables, p. 358f.). However, the four salient organisational challenges in **Figure 19** remained dominant across all characteristics.

### 4.3 Themes

In order to generate the themes, I examined the similarity of codes by comparing the descriptions and coded evidence (see **Figure 19** for an overview of the codes, p. 127). As a result, I identified five themes: 1) *Changed work atmosphere and/or relations*, 2) *Personal dissatisfaction*, 3) *Changed interaction*, 4) *Changed quality and quantity of performance*, and 5) *Multiple parties affected*. **Table 6** depicts the organisational challenges' themes, their frequency, description and evidence. The following sections provide information on the individual themes and their composition.

The theme *changed work atmosphere and/or relations* resulted from the code "changed work atmosphere". As it refers to the way employees relate with each other and how it changes due to the conflict situation, I included 'relations' in the theme name, instead of solely stating 'work atmosphere'. Examples include having "a bit bumpy, very unusual" relations during the conflict situation up to changing friendships and frequent communication to permanently damaged relations.

The theme *personal dissatisfaction* embodies employees not being happy with the current situation at work due to the conflict and related factors. As leaving a company is a demonstration of someone's dissatisfaction with one's job at the extreme end, I included the code "employees leaving the company" – apart from "dissatisfaction of employees" - in the theme personal dissatisfaction.

Whilst themes "changed work atmosphere and/or relations" and "personal dissatisfaction" embody personal issues that accompany conflicts, themes "changed interaction" and "changed quality and quantity of performance" refer to interaction and task-related challenges during conflict and where applicable, post-conflict.

The codes "continued impact on work relationships and tasks", and "inadequate communication and coordination" shared interaction aspects such as, for example, distanced communication, withheld information, no agreement and no longer working as a team. Therefore, I merged them in the theme *changed interaction* to emphasise the shared interaction aspect that changed during conflict.

The codes "duplicated job", "errors", "financial impact" and "projects and/or tasks delay" all referred to challenges with regard to the performance of the affected individuals. Thus, the theme *changed quality and quantity of performance* subsumes these four codes. It was important to have them initially as separate codes in order to

recognise the diverse aspects as each conflict entailed different performance-related challenges.

Finally, the theme *multiple persons affected* refers to third parties that either become additional conflict parties to the given conflict or are affected by the conflict through the behaviour of the conflict parties. Direct involvement examples are acting reserved or hostile to one conflict party whilst indirect involvement expresses itself, for example, in a conflict party being unfriendly or even hostile to third parties due to conflict-related frustration.

**Table 6: Generated Themes (Own Table).**

Theme	Frequency	Description	Evidence
<b>Changed work atmosphere and/or relations</b>	10	The way employees relate with each other changes in terms of friendliness, less frequent communication, avoiding each other, amongst others.	<p><i>"That week, it was a bit bumpy; very unusual. I had the feeling that it was sometimes a bit childish."</i> (11)</p> <p><i>"She could always praise very well but it turned out in the end that it was all not genuine, it was all show."</i> (14)</p>
<b>Personal dissatisfaction</b>	11	Employees are not happy with the current situation at hand due to the conflict and related factors. It can range from being interested in having harmonious relations with colleagues to avoiding or fearing to meeting the other person up to considering changing jobs because of the conflict situation at hand.	<p><i>"It got to me when there was still a bit of a strange situation between us. I could also not dismiss it completely and always had it at the back of my head."</i> (12)</p> <p><i>"Pure hatred. I do not want to have anything to do with this person again."</i> (19)</p>
<b>Changed interaction</b>	18	Due to the conflict at hand, employees tend to avoid each other and communicate and coordinate less with each other which will in turn affect their performance and output. In some instances, the conflict did not only have an immediate effect on the task/project that triggered or experienced the conflict but also on	<p><i>"One tried to avoid each other. For example, they came on site when they knew that I was not around in order to work secretly."</i> (17)</p> <p><i>"The first thing was that information was withheld. Ultimately, the regular, short exchanges of information on the hallway, updating on new</i></p>

		subsequent tasks/projects and working relationships.	<i>information... It did not happen again automatically.” (I11)</i>
<b>Changed quality and quantity of performance</b>	7	Due to a lack of communication and coordination between employees at loggerhead, the same job may be executed by both that amounts to less productivity and loss of time for the company. Errors are also more likely to occur when highly interdependent employees and/or teams do not coordinate activities. Projects and/or tasks also get delayed due to the conflict at hand. Employees spend longer on a project or task than planned which restricts their ability to move on to other projects or tasks. It also leads to financial loss for the company in terms of higher labour costs, reduced turnover, amongst other financial losses.	<p><i>“We were slow then... often processed incorrectly or so because we did not consult each other and the other would have given a good tip or something valuable. That was really lacking then.” (I1)</i></p> <p><i>“The project that was planned for a year – one did not get as far as one had planned because one had to discuss details very comprehensively and often also repeatedly because one could often not come to an agreement again.” (I6)</i></p>
<b>Multiple parties affected</b>	6	The more persons are affected by the conflict, the more adverse are the consequences for the projects and tasks they are working on – from planning and coordination to execution.	<p><i>“I realised that the people that she employed were suddenly so reserved towards me. It was a bit like a poisoned atmosphere.” (I4)</i></p> <p><i>“I was stressed within and then I was also not as friendly towards the students as I would have wanted to be... I was then frustrated because it was not the students’ fault.” (I5)</i></p>

**4.3.1 Changed work atmosphere and/or relations**

In order to assess how the organisational challenge *changed work atmosphere and/or relations* expressed itself in the examined conflicts, I placed relevant evidence around the term and sought to compare the similarities and differences. **Figure 20** illustrates the different aspects raised by the interviewees with regard to changed work atmosphere and/or relations. Having established similar phrases, I sorted them into



the following four categories: *relations, feelings, behaviour & attitude*, and *third parties*. Nonetheless, the examined conflict situations did not necessarily only involve one but a combination of the aspects. The figure is only meant to provide an overview of the different aspects raised. Furthermore, as it is about demonstrating change, more aspects may be added or become prominent in the course of a conflict.

Relations that changed during conflict were dominated by either distancing oneself from the other conflict party and/or taking a turn for the worse in terms of strained, poisoned atmosphere. Conflictful relations expressed itself as “*poisoned atmosphere*”, “*strange*”, and “*strained relations*”, and distanced relations as “*not relate with each other as usual*”, “*more formal, less cordial*”, and “*very distanced*”. Interviewee I6 related how the conflict led to a working atmosphere and relations where personal conversations or exchanges outside of the team meetings no longer took place:

*“I would say that in the team, one only works together now on a professional manner. Although persons come together here who could, I believe, get along very well with each other. It is only limited to work meetings which are no longer fun. Even when has a day-long meeting because people travel there from long distances, one does not go out together for lunch.”*

This made her realise “*how deeply entrenched the conflict is*” that the team members even avoided any social gatherings and exchanges beyond project-related matters.

Similarly, interviewee I2 also experienced distanced relations during conflict: “*It was somewhat stupid for a day... we avoided each other and also gave each other silent treatment but yes, then it was done and over with.*” Instead of enjoying the previous cordial relationship, they avoided each other but still managed to accomplish their work tasks. The difference to the previous example is that they enjoyed a cordial relationship before conflict and despite a temporal conflict situation, they could move on again after they had cleared the air: “*It was then strange for a day, but we could then laugh about it again a few days later. Now it is more of a small tease between us, ‘Not that you will explode again.’*”

Despite having a very close “*mother-daughter like relationship*” before conflict, interviewee I4 even came to question the genuineness of the other person when the initial attacks started:

*“Yes, and then came the poisoned arrows and also this beastly side where she then realised that I was getting more successful, getting more*

*successful much faster and she was lagging behind... at the beginning we liked each other but it did not last for long. When one is genuine then it lasts longer than when one only pretends. And that is what I unfortunately had to painfully encounter – that all was only a show. And today, she is afraid of me and runs away or has also told a lot of evil things about me to others.”*

The envy expressed in personal attacks on the telephone and physical meetings was meant to weaken her and affected her immensely: *“So it was really evil because she wanted to diminish my strength to look better herself. It was really awful for me, and it was paralysing.”* This has damaged the relationship irreversibly beyond the conflict.

Similarly, interviewee I11 also related how a previous good relationship was altered by the conflict: *“Before the conflict, it was a friendly, collegial relationship – between me and the three others. And the day I announced that I wanted to look at the area more closely, the relationship changed.”*

Conflicts also affect conflict parties' feelings. *“Stressed within”, “mistrust”, “feeling mobbed”* and *“hatred”* fall into the category feelings, comprising negative feelings towards others as well as feeling stressed and mobbed due to the other person's behaviour. As an example for holding negative feelings towards others, interviewee I9 no longer wants anything to do with the other conflict party again, describing the feeling as *“pure hatred”*.

As another example for negative feelings, interviewee I7 described a level of mistrust that all conflict parties held towards each other:

*“When we were alone, one person acted very warm towards me on the surface which I did not fall for again at the end. The other person displayed a very hostile attitude towards me at the end and even openly sought conflict or shut off, did not communicate at all.”*

Despite several mediation attempts, the working relationship and cooperation did not improve.

By contrast, interviewee I11 described how the behaviour of the other conflict party made him feel: *“I felt a bit, I must say, mobbed if that is possible – but he told everyone, especially when I was not around, how bad I am and what a bad boss I am and what all bad things I have done, bad, bad, bad.”* The employee took his decision to make changes in the department's leadership personal and since then holds a grudge against him.

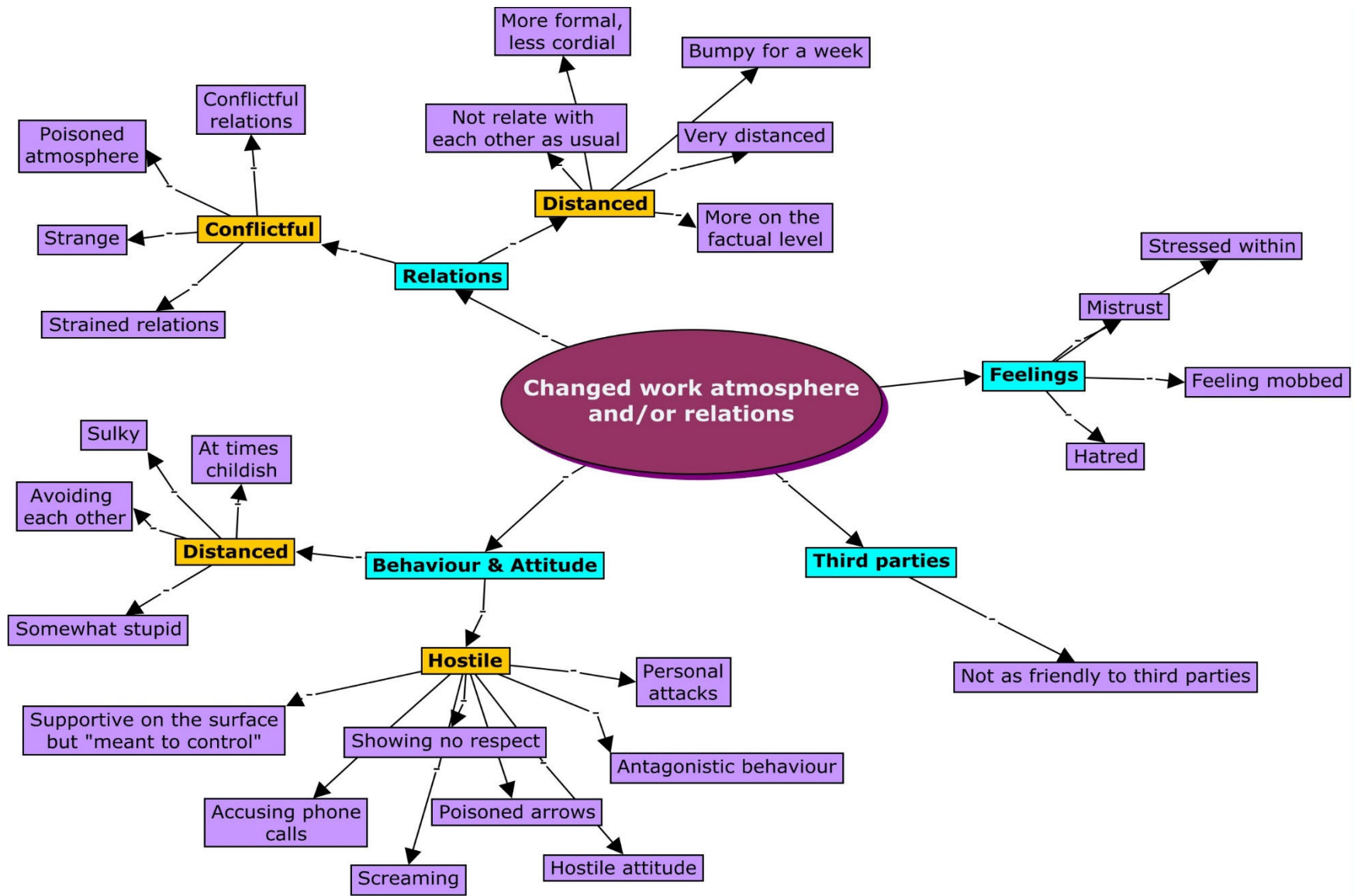


Fig. 20: Changed Work Atmosphere and/or Relations – Theme Aspects (Own Figure).

Aside from the category relations, distancing and conflictful manifestations also form a part of the category behaviour & attitude. Whereas distanced behaviour and attitude expressed itself as “sulky”, “at times childish”, “avoiding each other” and “somewhat stupid”, hostile behaviour and attitude showed itself via “personal attacks”, “antagonistic behaviour”, “screaming” and “showing no respect”. Interviewee I1 described how the behaviour was unusual for the time the conflict lasted: “It was a bit bumpy for a week; very unusual.” The period of distancing could, however, have been shortened if they had talked over the conflict issues earlier: “I had the feeling that it was at times a bit childish. Because I then thought that I could have already approached her after two days.”

Another distancing example was related by interviewee I3: “One wrote the emails a bit more formal or not as personal as before or did not relate with each other as before.” But as it was not “such a mega conflict”, “one could still talk with each other on a reasonable level. So, it did not result in screaming or something like that”.

By contrast, interviewee I9’s conflict situation escalated and deteriorated to the extent where the conflict parties stopped speaking to each other: “It was simply not possible because we only screamed at each other, or rather he did at me.”

Out of the three parties interviewee I11 had a conflict with, only two of them returned to collegial relations with him:

*“And the one who exploded that time is now calm, but he does not hide that he cannot stand me at all. He does not tell me that, but I hear it from others. He also excludes himself, where possible, from everything... He does not work actively against me, but he now shows passive resistance. But I think on a still professional level that one can handle”.*

In comparison, one has “returned to normalcy”, “is productive” and “motivated”, “engages himself” and “he has found something new that he likes to pursue”. The interviewee even expressed that he now has with him “a good relationship again. Nearly better than before, I must say”. The last one who said that he would no longer do anything:

*“...he still excludes himself from everything, but he says himself that he realised through that situation how the whole thing had stressed him and influenced him negatively. That in retrospect he is now even happy that it happened because he feels more relaxed now”.*

Therefore, although all conflict parties experienced the same conflict, each of them handled the situation differently and in end effect now also maintain different relations with interviewee I11.

Finally, the category third parties involves not being as friendly to third parties due to the conflict situation. Whilst one conflict party directly vented his anger towards others in conflict I11 - *"It also had direct effects on trainees because when they reported to work, they were told, 'I do not want to see you. Piss off.'*" – in a different conflict experience, interviewee I5's frustration with the conflict resulted in her not being as

*"...friendly towards the students as one wants to be. And then one is perhaps again or then I was also frustrated because it was not the students' fault. And it endured for the whole day and also till evening time until I thought to myself, 'Forget about it. One cannot change it. One cannot be in the same mood every day.'"*

In comparison to the first scenario, she was feeling guilty for allowing her mood to have an impact on the students: *"Yes, it is unfortunate when the students do everything right and then have to suffer because of me being stressed."*

Based on the findings, changed work atmosphere and/or relations thus encompassed distancing and/or hostile dimensions, depending on the conflict parties involved, their previous relationship and how they handled the present conflict. On the one hand, some who had a previous friendly relationship managed to overcome the temporary distanced relations and returned to normalcy post-conflict. On the other hand, those who experienced hostile behaviour and attitude during conflict – expressed by either one conflict party or both conflict parties – did in most cases not return to good relations but remained to have strained, conflictful relations. However, this also depended on how the conflict parties handled the conflict which is the focus of **Chapter 6** (see **Chapter 6** on conflict management, p. 226). **Figure 21** displays the general dynamics with regard to how the work atmosphere and/or relations changed, considering relations before and during conflict.

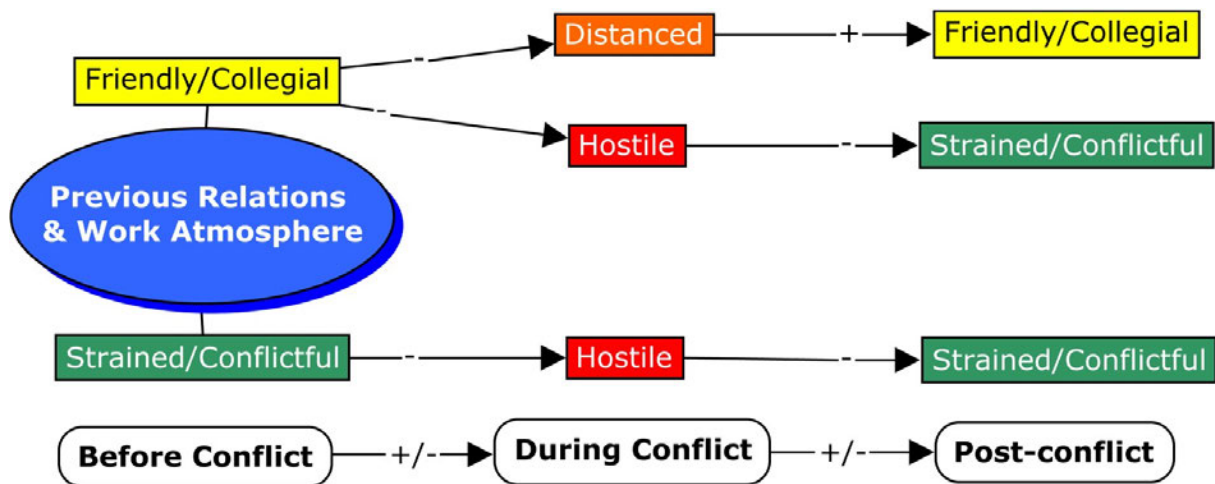


Fig. 21: Changed Work Atmosphere and/or Relations – Temporal Model (Own Figure).

#### 4.3.2 Personal dissatisfaction

*Personal dissatisfaction* seems to be an important organisational challenge as 9 out of 12 interviewees stated an aspect of personal dissatisfaction as a result of conflict. Each conflict embodied different facets of personal dissatisfaction, ranging from anger, disappointment to resignation. **Figure 22** depicts the range of aspects mentioned by the interviewees, which I sorted into the following categories: *overpowering, frustration, anger, disappointment, weighing down, overshadowing* and *resignation*.

Personal dissatisfaction was reflected in descriptions of feeling overpowered by the other conflict party's behaviour and attitude. Overpowering was expressed as "*holding power over her*", "*feeling personally attacked*", "*anxiety*", "*wearing him down*" and "*high blood pressure*". Whilst interviewee I6 related that possibly also due to a generation gap, the other party "*felt personally attacked by my person and the new direction that was introduced by our department*", other interviewees told of how the other conflict party tried – assuming intentional behaviour – to overpower them (I4 and I9).

Interviewee I4 described the power that the other party had over her during the initial phase of conflict: "*And then there were these phone calls. She then held a lot of power over me. I allowed it that she had so much power over my heart and always when I put the phone down, I cried.*" It did not only affect her emotionally but also physically: "*And then I got high blood pressure and was also afraid which was a strange feeling... If she was to call tomorrow, my pulse would rise again because we have not*

*talked on the phone for one-and-a-half years.*” In comparison to the beginning of conflict where she was afraid of meeting her, the table has now turned: *“But now she is more afraid of me and when she sees me, she runs away.”*

Similarly, interviewee I9 expressed how one conflict party was undermined by others, despite doing a good job at what he was doing:

*“And the poor guy... who was the only one who really did anything or could do anything and even had data with which one could work. And he was screamed at by three people during meetings, for hours, simply wearing him down.”*

This does not only apply to one colleague but to others who are not on the good side of the boss: *“One just senses it that they do not work together, that there is a warfare raging between them. That is, some of them are afraid - especially what they do - because of the choleric boss they have who picks on anyone.”*

The conflicts also affected the way employees are motivated in their jobs, with frustration being described as *“like them again”, “less motivation”* and *“reduced motivation and energy put into other projects”*. I3 asked herself whether there was a point in following up with the other department’s requests as they used to bypass her if they did not get the response they expected. As a consequence, she *“was less motivated... one believes that it will be questioned again anyway and checked again... For me personally it was then inner frustration... I tried to still accomplish my work although I was a bit frustrated.”*

Alike her experience, interviewee I6 recognised a reduced zeal and motivation which stands in contrast to her generally being a highly motivated person:

*“The energy that I put into things is now no longer led by my zeal or motivation but is guided. And I also practise this now with my colleagues and this also led to my abundant energy that was there to be very tamed and the motivation has surely diminished a lot. Yes. Although the conflict is no longer ongoing, this was what I learnt from it.”*

Therefore, the uncoordinated project experience together with the conflict had a long-term negative effect on the motivation and energy she puts into the projects.

The conflicts also produced animosity towards the other party and a general annoyance with the situation: ranging from expressions of *“hatred”* and *“no longer willing to work with the other party”* to *“situation angered her”*. Interviewee I9’s neutral

attitude towards the other person changed to “*pure hatred*” and unwillingness to continue working with this person.

An example for annoyance with the work situation that led to the conflict was related by interviewee I1: “*At the beginning I thought, ‘Hm, silly.’ And was annoyed.*” The annoyance led to her approaching the other party to address her grievances.

Disappointment can involve being personally disappointed in another person as in interviewee I4’s case - “*At the beginning, I cried and felt also personally disappointed.*” – as well as be the result of the conflict-related negotiations: One of them was “*happy*”, whilst the other was “*very, very disappointed*” in interviewee I12’s related conflict experience.



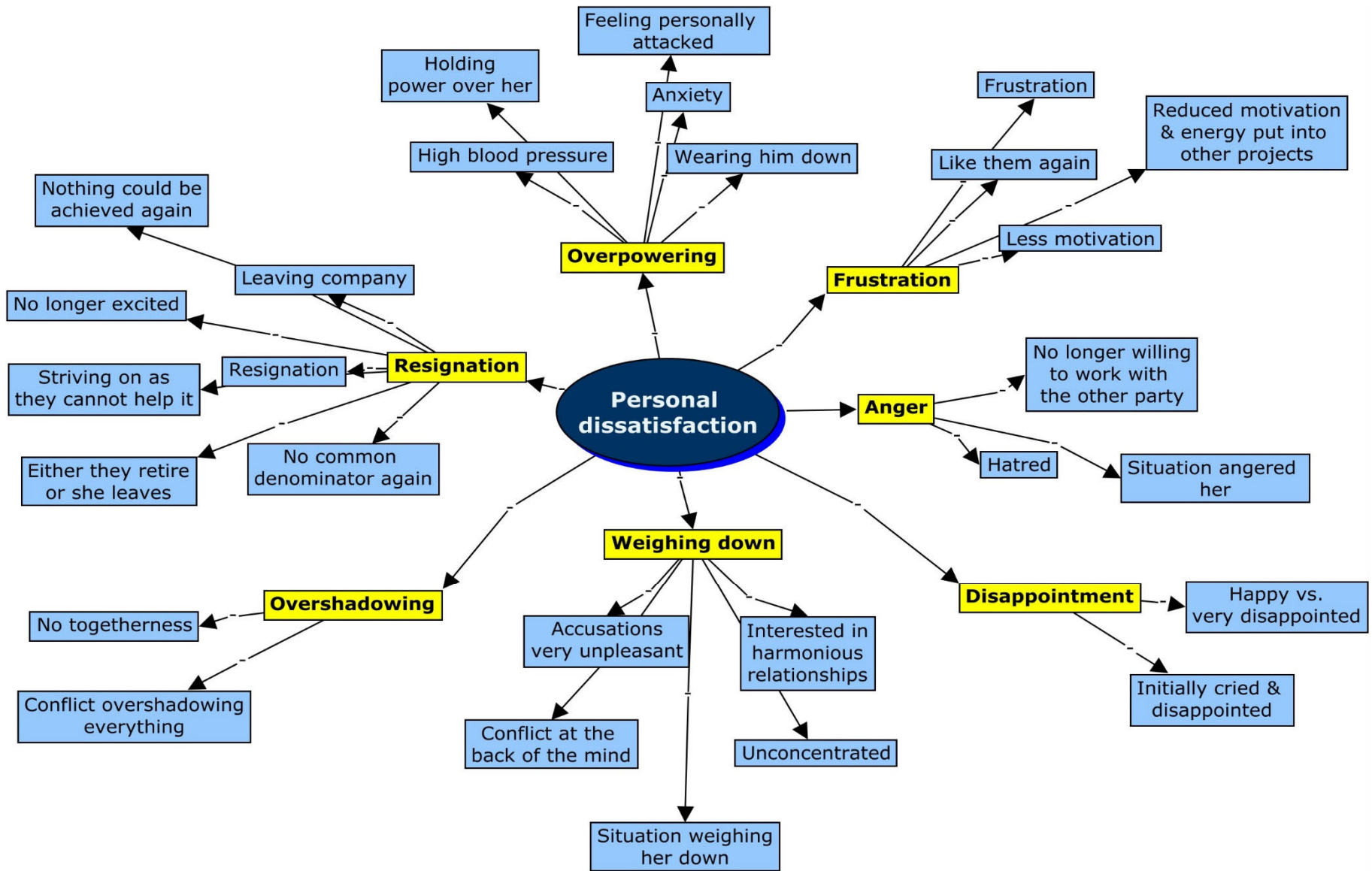


Fig. 22: Personal Dissatisfaction – Theme Aspects (Own Figure).

Apart from feeling disappointed, a conflict can also be constantly at the back of someone's mind and affect one's focus. Being "*someone who is interested in harmonious relationships*" and "*having a conflict with someone, especially when I like her*", interviewee I2 related how the conflict with her colleague affected her:

*"It got to me when the situation was still a bit strange between us. And I could also not totally dismiss it and I was a bit unconcentrated and always had it at the back of my mind and thought, 'Man, that was really silly. How can we settle this?'"*

Weighing down also involved "*very unpleasant*" accusations. Interviewee I7 described how the accusations from the other conflict parties affected her: "*It put a real strain on me. Exactly. Very unpleasant.*"

Despite having "*superb*" experiences and support in other areas, the conflict overshadowed everything for interviewee I7: "*In other areas, it was superb: the whole five years were great. But this was a main factor that overshadowed everything – this conflict with these persons.*"

Another example for overshadowing was given in interviewee I11's case as "*there was no togetherness*" again. This was also due to the resignation of three of the conflict parties involved that they had to strive on "*as they cannot help it*". One of the conflict parties "*returned to normalcy*", whilst another one expressed "*how the whole thing had stressed him and influenced him negatively. That in retrospect he is now even happy that it happened because he feels more relaxed now...*" and the third one showing "*passive resistance*". Although some time had passed since the conflict ended, two of the conflict parties still exclude themselves from everything, where possible: only doing what is expected of them but not beyond that.

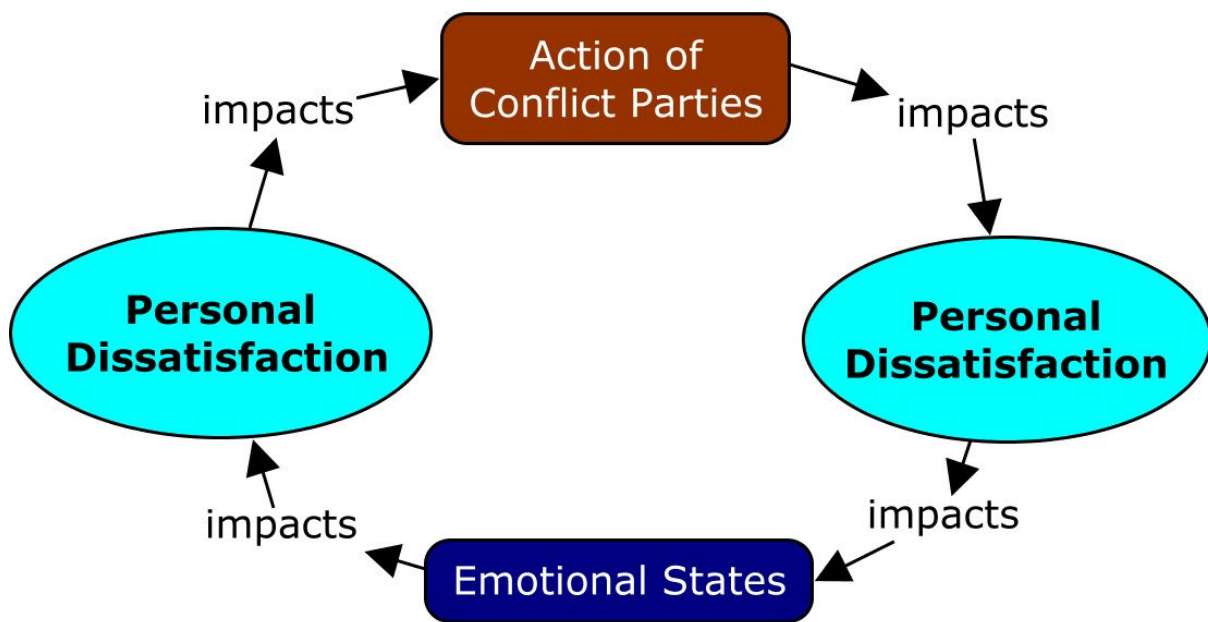
Resignation was also described as "*leaving company*", "*nothing could be achieved again*" and "*no longer excited*". Interviewee I7 related that after the conflict had lasted about three years, she thought to herself:

*"Hm, on the long-term... Either they retire, or I go elsewhere.' But they were too young to go on retirement. I actually did some soul-searching for the three years... because it was not a basis for a good work collaboration."*

As there was "*no denominator again*", the best approach was for her to leave the organisation.

Similarly, interviewee I9 recommended to the main person affected by the conflict to leave the company. As the work atmosphere did not make it conducive to continue working there, he heeded to the advice.

Based on the findings, personal dissatisfaction thus included aspects such as overpowering and weighing down that led back to the actions of conflict parties towards other conflict parties, as well as emotional states that were a result of conflict such as disappointment, frustration, resignation and anger. They differed to the extent they lasted beyond manifest conflict and in the most extreme situation led to a complete end of collaboration and communication, and to one party leaving the organisation. **Figure 23** displays the feedback loop between personal dissatisfaction, actions of conflict parties and emotional states: They increase each other's manifestation during conflict as antagonistic actions lead to personal dissatisfaction and negative emotional states and consequentially, further dissatisfaction with the work relations and situation as a whole. This encourages further actions to express one's displeasure and the cycle continues.



**Fig. 23: Personal Dissatisfaction - Cycle Model** (Own Figure).

### 4.3.3 Changed interaction

*Changed interaction* refers to how the conflict parties communicated with each and coordinated tasks, and how the conflict continued to have an impact on the work

relationships and tasks. **Figure 24** illustrates the categories on the interaction level: *coordination, communication, behaviour & attitude, relations, and no agreement.*

Individuals and teams experiencing “*disputes time and again*” and “*impact on interaction and coordination of tasks*” forms part of the category coordination. Interviewee 17 related how the ongoing conflict “*lead time and again to disputes, especially in the monthly departmental meetings but also in situations when they came on site which happened rarely*”. Apart from meetings, the daily work was also hampered by coordination issues that could have been handled better: “*There were often rather small daily queries which we worked on together, where we could have ‘passed the balls a bit better’.*”

A related category is communication which involved “*talking at cross purposes*”, “*distanced communication*”, “*not communicating again*” and “*no longer working as a team*”. In comparison to previous feedback and sharing of advice, interviewee I1 narrated how the conflict parties then resorted to “*very distanced*” and “*only the bare minimum*” communication and its consequences:

*“That was not so good because everyone did their own thing, and I did check off what was on my list and she on hers and it was not interactive at all. That is, no collaboration at all. No, we were even slow... it was often done wrongly or so because we did not consult the other and the other would have given a good tip or contributed something valuable. That was missing then.”*

Similarly, interviewee I11 related how the conflict affected regular information sharing:

*“The first thing was that information was withheld. That was in end effect the regular exchanges on the hallway, giving updates: ‘What is happening?’ That did not happen automatically again but only when I purposely asked and really only the answers to my questions and never beyond that.”*

Not communicating adequately can also lead to other risks such as not documenting that one took valuable objects along which poses “*a very big security risk*”. This happened as a result of trying to avoid meeting each other and working with the technical tools interviewee 17 had been advocating for:

*“I had criticised that for five years that one has to think more sustainably and work more sustainably, with the technical opportunities that we had.*

*But in the end, they had switched off because they said that they had done this work analogue for the past 20 years.”*

The problem, therefore, was that they were “*talking at cross purposes*” and according to I7, did not “*want to see the interfaces because they were very much fixed on other things*”.

When communication completely breaks down and does not even work via telephone or email, the only resort might be to reorganise the work operations, as in interviewee I9’s case:

*“I then sat there and said, ‘I simply cannot work like that. It does not make sense anymore’. We tried first by telephone and then per email – we said then that I should with... once in a week write a status email but he is just too dumb for that. And then we did, as said, separate that completely after two weeks and then it worked much better.”*

Apart from communication breaking down, conflict parties’ behaviour and attitude might even be used to side-line (“*leaving them alone in the dark*” or “*not accept her decision and bypass her*”) or pressurise others (“*exerting enormous pressure or authority*”). Interviewee I3 expressed that side-lining her department was part of the problem:

*“We were the first contact point for the colleagues and then they bypassed us and directly approached the other colleagues. That was also part of the reason why I said that we started having the feeling, ‘One does not believe us that we do the work or whatever.’ It had occurred that we had already sent a query to the colleagues a long time ago and they had already provided an answer. That we had already given the feedback, ‘Yes, and that does not work because so and so.’ And then they asked again the other colleagues without involving us or tried a different way again.”*

As a way of explaining why the other department might have acted that way, she explained that they perhaps “*did not know how else to help themselves*” and therefore bypassed them.

As an example for pressurising others, interviewee I11 described how the other conflict parties complained to his superior about his procedure and thereby “*tried to exert pressure though the higher management level*”. Although the higher manager

level did not decide in their favour, the decision was, however, postponed to a later stage: *"It worked in so far as it had to be discussed and time went by."*

With regard to continuous impact on work relations, the responses included *"trenches divided the office"*, *"very distanced"*, *"keeping her distance"* and *"not relate as usual"*. Interviewee I9 related how the office was divided between those who were the bosses' *"henchmen"* who *"screamed the loudest"* and *"liked everything he said"*, and those *"who countered him"*:

*"Those were the evil ones. And those were not to be talked to. They were left alone and in the dark. And really side-tracked. Whereby those were the ones who held the fort. And the other ones where of course those who were allowed to go to the meetings and were depicted as nice, who got project responsibility or portrayed in the best light.... So, he worked with such cheap tricks, really."*

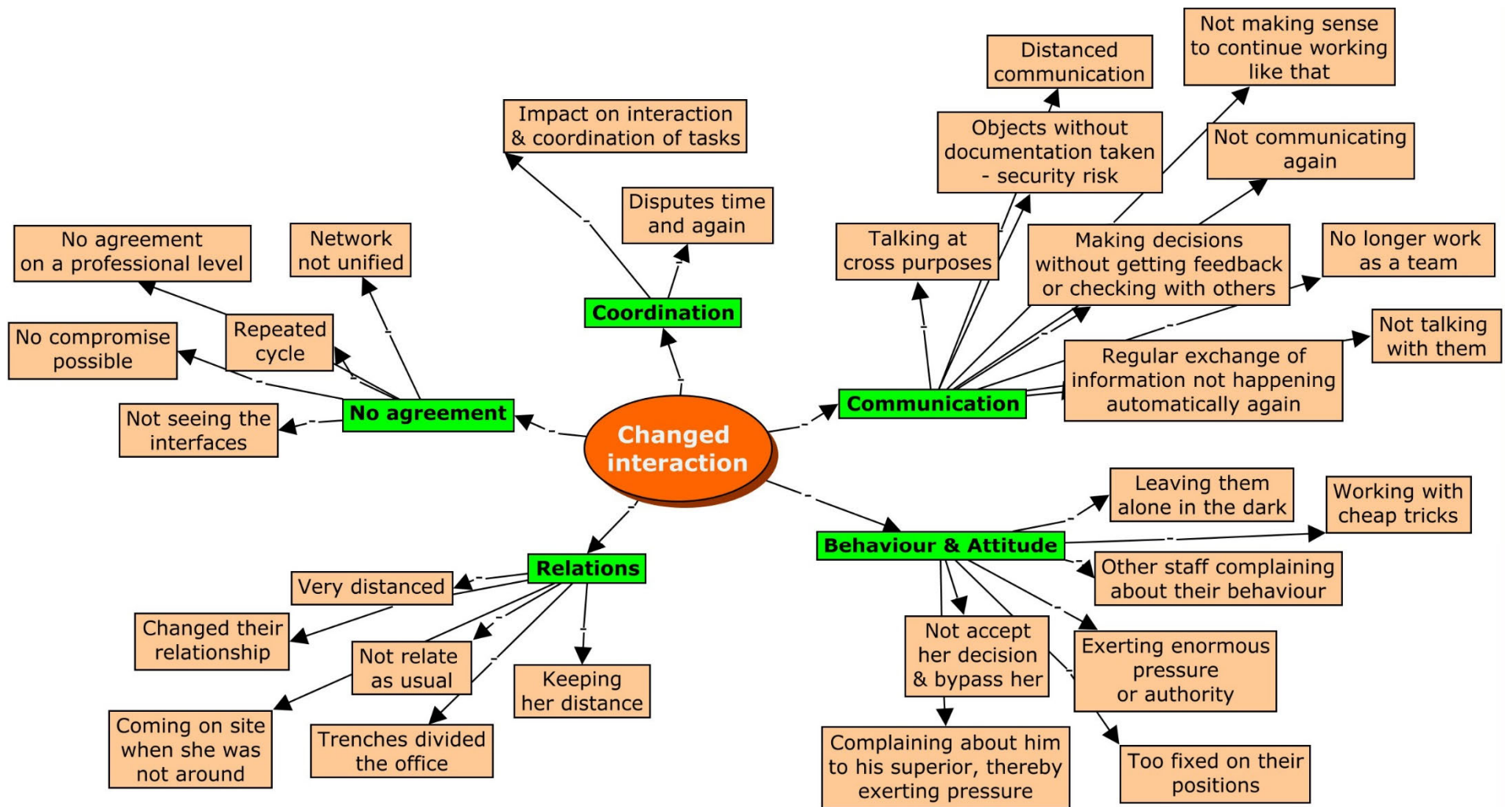


Fig. 24: Changed Interaction – Theme Aspects (Own Figure).

In a similar vein, interviewee I4 expressed how the conflict had damaged the relations: *“And I really see that from a business perspective, I want harmony in my company, but I can’t have harmonious relations with this woman again. Too much was damaged and no.”* And even though they have got to a stage where they can relate business-wise again, she maintains a personal distance: *“Even though I have the strength today and would approach her, she would always [bring] up the old stuff.”*

Interviewee I6 attributed the continuous *“unpleasant work atmosphere”* to the failure of the leadership to *“put its foot down”* when the project was behind, and the people were unhappy in the project they were working on:

*“...it is now a really unpleasant work atmosphere, to work together with the other people, because the leadership shied away – really shied away from... I asked for a project stop, I also think others from the team did. The leadership did not want that. And that is, I think, the cause for the present work atmosphere.”*

Especially in situations when an agreement can no longer be reached between the conflict parties - there is a *“repeated cycle”*, *“no compromise possible”* and *“network not unified”* - third-party involvement might be helpful to settle the conflict. Exemplary for this is interviewee I6’s case: *“The escalation was then often so far progressed that one could not proceed further as everyone insisted on his/her position. And then there was no compromise one could have agreed to.”*

When the internal differences have not been resolved, the challenges may continue, even when a position has been newly assigned:

*“But unfortunately, nothing has changed... And in the end, everything repeats itself what had already happened with me. Unfortunately. It simply shows that nothing much has changed there.”*

Even after interviewee I7 had left and someone else took over her position, the cycle repeated itself.

Based on the findings, changed interaction thus embodied aspects of quality and quantity of interaction, and a temporal dimension – temporary and persistent, with **Figure 25** depicting the four dimensions. Depending on the conflict situation, quality and/or quantity of interaction were impacted by the conflict, with varying levels of temporal persistence. For example, interviewees I4 and I7 experienced a change of quality and/or quantity of interaction on a persistent level whilst both I1 and I2 only faced it temporarily.



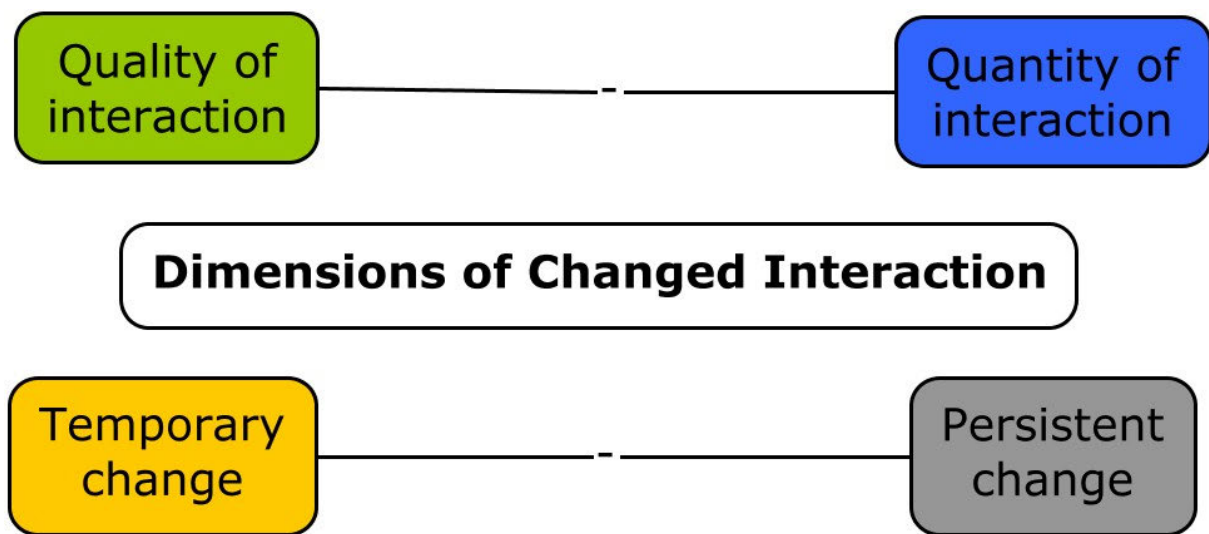


Fig. 25: Changed Interaction - Dimensions (Own Figure).

#### 4.3.4 Changed quality and quantity of performance

*Changed quality and quantity of performance* refers to the challenges the conflict parties faced with regard to performance, in terms of *duplicated job, errors, financial impact, productivity and projects and/or tasks delay* (as depicted in **Figure 26**).

Errors mainly occurred due to lack of communication and were expressed as “*embarrassing if outsiders would have found out about the errors*”, “*annoying when something had to be done thrice*”, “*errors due to non-communication*” and “*communication was very bad and led to errors*”. As an example, interviewee I1 related how limited communication led to errors: “*It was often done wrongly or so because we did not consult the other and the other would have given a good tip or contributed something valuable. That was missing then.*” It even slowed them down in their task accomplishment: “*We were even really slow and so... and often wrong. Not so good.*”

Similarly, conflict-related emotional states such as mistrust had affected communication and in effect led to errors in interviewee I7’s case:

*“Where one also realised as we mistrusted each other so much, the communication was so bad that things went wrong, simply with regard to their organisation. It is annoying when one has to do things thrice – wow, it can really be embarrassing if it comes out. Also, to the press or visitors or so.”*

Apart from having to correct errors, another aspect is, therefore, for the errors not to be noticed by externals.

Due to inadequate communication and coordination, conflict can also lead to duplicating jobs such as *“working on the same emails instead of coordinating it”* as interviewee I1 related:

*“We always walked on the same projects. We even had the same emails and then one said, ‘I will reply to it now...’ and that was not communicated then. One only said it afterwards, ‘I have already replied to this email.’ At that time, she had already started to reply but had not sent it yet. That meant that the time was then also gone. We therefore did it nearly double.”*

It could have even happened that someone received two emails due to the lack of communication: *“From two persons at the same time, same date, with the same content. Yes, that could really have happened.”*

Another conflict-related challenge is the delay of projects and/or tasks which the interviewees described as *“projects did not reach as far as had been planned”, “find an alternative that would not have been able to cope”, “4 months behind the project goal when leadership was changed”* and more. If interviewee I10 had conceded to let one of his project members to partly work on another project and find a replacement, it would have been *“laborious, that is take anyone about whom I know, ‘Well, he cannot cope really’ or I have to even search externally”*. It would have also been *“difficult project-wise and nearly impossible to let him work elsewhere for several days”*, especially due to the demanding case interpretations.

Instead of a struggle over a human resource, interviewee I6’s project had the challenge of being behind schedule as the conflict parties could not come to an agreement on minute issues:

*“That really led to a project that had been scheduled for a year to not reach as far as planned because one had to discuss details extensively and often also repeatedly because they could often not come to an agreement again.”*

Instead of something taking about an hour, it *“took ten times if not twenty times longer”*. At the time the leadership was changed, they were *“four months behind the project goal. For a project of 12 months, that is quite tight”*.

Interviewee I9 faced a similar scenario in terms of project delay:

*“The goal was, I think, to do an update of 12 systems, remove certain weaknesses, errors and set up a proper security. We managed to do one system in the first two-and-a-half weeks – that was, when I had to work with... In the following three days, the rest of the 16 systems.”*

His argument was that if he had allowed him to do his job in the first three days, they would have accomplished everything before any conflicts could have arisen.

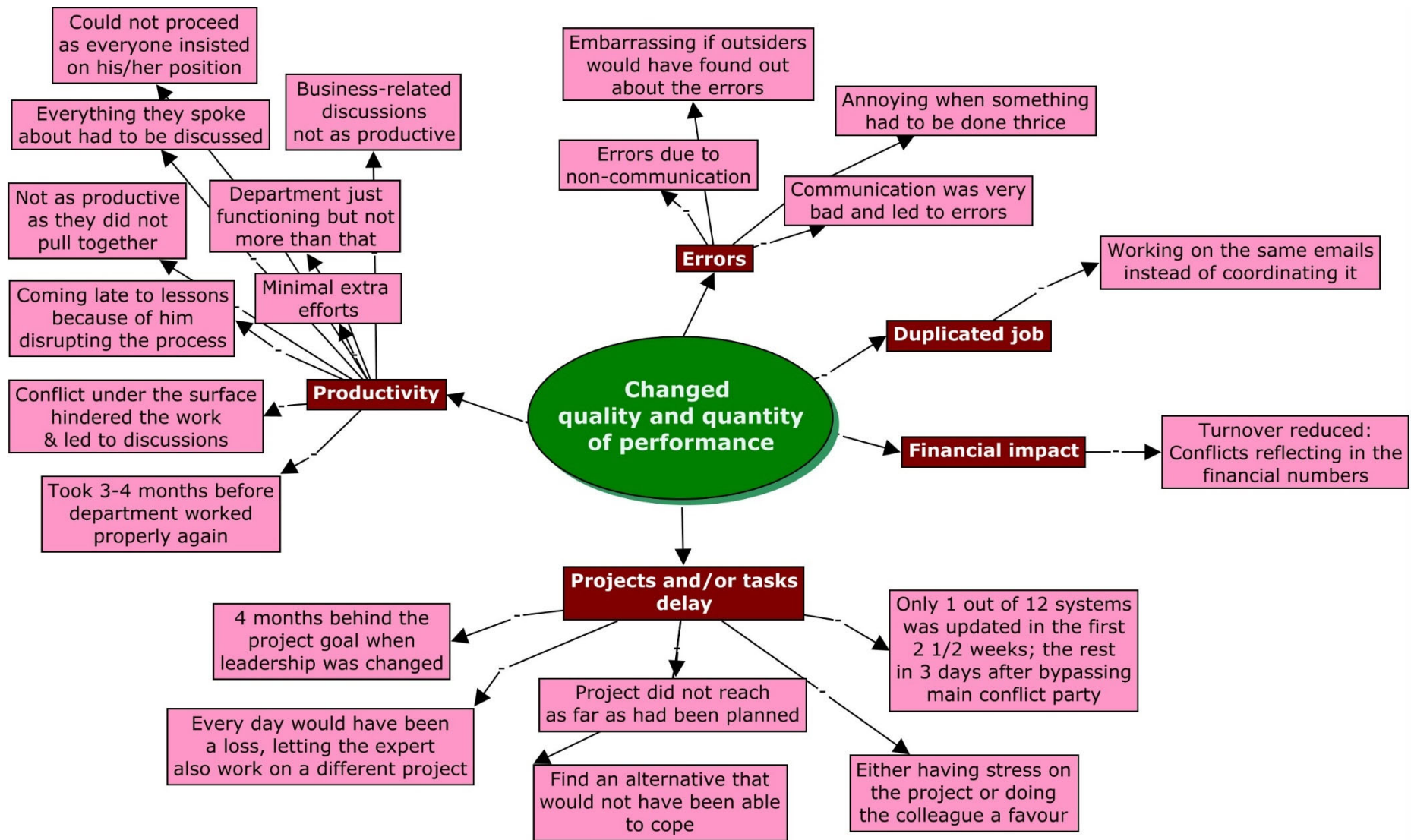


Fig. 26: Changed Quality and Quantity of Performance – Theme Aspects (Own Figure).

A reduced turnover can be an expression of the financial impact conflicts have. Interviewee I4 made a connection between disputes in the teams and the turnover: *“I just have to turn on the computer, then I see the turnover going down and I then know immediately that there is somewhere a dispute.”* Apart from the general tendency within the organisation, the other conflict party’s turnover has also reduced: *“I think that there has been a decline but if she had not had the conflict with me, then she would have had it with someone above me.”* Therefore, the way staff members relate with each other does not only adversely affect the persons involved but also the financial numbers of the organisation.

Finally, the inadequate interaction reflected in the level of productivity: *“business-related discussions not [being] as productive”, “everything they spoke about had to be discussed”* and *“department just functioning but not more than that”*. As interviewee I11 related:

*“As long as the conflict lasted, the department... just worked but nothing more happened because they did not do anything actively which is, of course, not good in a leading position, especially in an area where I had said that it required changes.”*

After the conflict, it took *“three to four months after the [leadership] change until it worked again properly at the work level”*.

The conflict situation also affected how discussions were conducted:

*“When one meets and is a bit stiff towards each other, then it is, of course, anything but productive. When I knew on that day that I had to speak to her because we had to talk over something business-related, then it was of course kind of strange, silly. One behaved then in a formal manner and one realised that it was not as we usually related with each other.”*

Interviewee I2 also remarked that it was not as productive as they did not *“want to pull at one string as we would otherwise have done”*.

Apart from the quality of the interactions, interview I6 also referred to the number of particulars to be discussed: *“Everything we talked about had to be discussed – no matter whether it was when to take breaks or anything else during meetings. It was*

going too far.” It hindered the work from progressing as they got held up by minute discussions.

Similarly, interviewee 18 felt provoked by the other conflict party asking about everything: “How does one do that? Do I go here? Do I take a first step here? Do I proceed with the left foot first or the right foot?’ I looked at that for 2-3 weeks and then I reacted.”

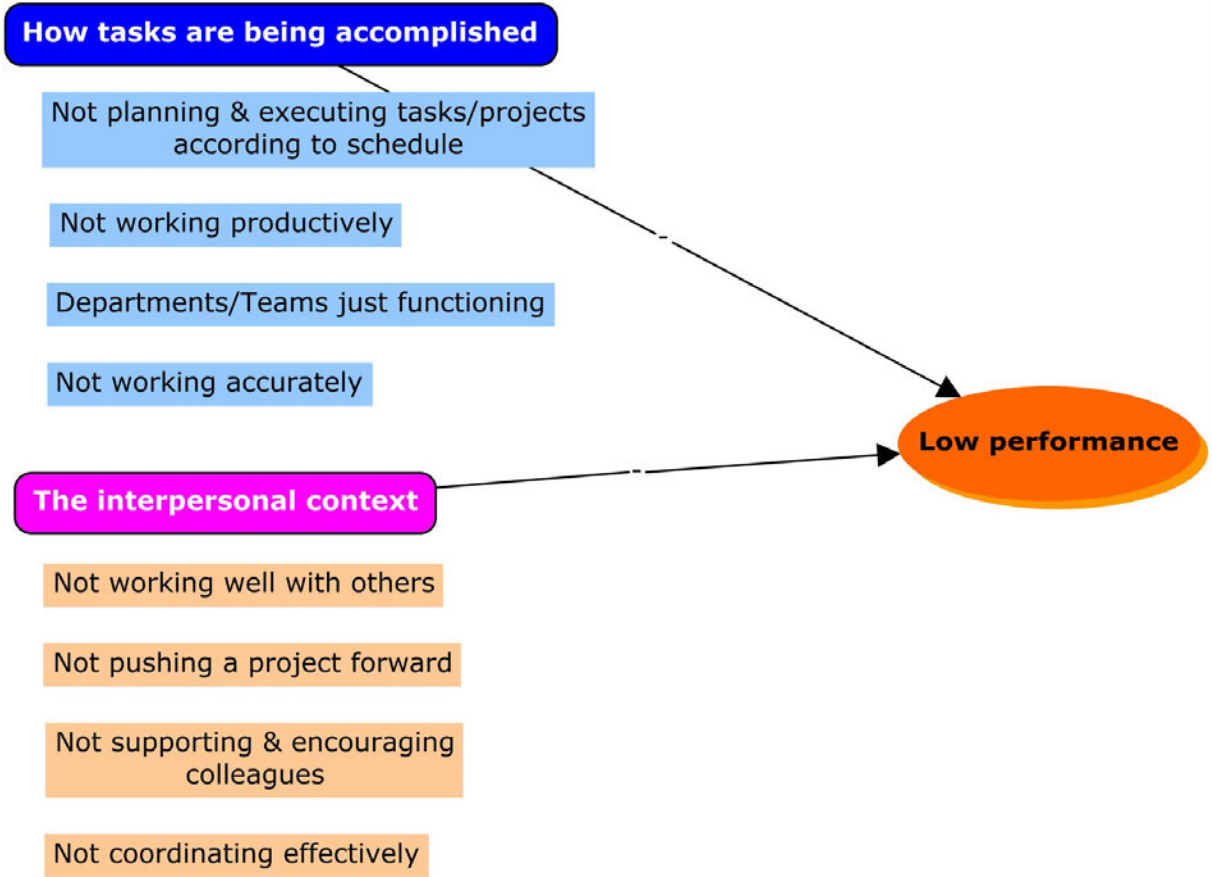


Fig. 27: Changed Quality and Quantity of Performance - Dimensions (Own Figure).

The findings thus showed that conflict situations led to lower performance levels, with regard to quality and quantity of performance. As **Figure 27** depicts, how tasks were being accomplished as well as the interpersonal context contributed towards the level of performance during conflict. Whilst the category ‘how tasks are being accomplished’ refers to the manner and way tasks were planned and executed (for example, not in a timely or accurate fashion), the category ‘the interpersonal context’ relates to how the conflict parties worked together during the conflict situation (for example, not supporting each other or not coordinating effectively). However, both

categories can be highly related as exemplified by interviewee I2's remark that the conflict parties were not as productive as they did not "*pull at one string*" as they usually did. The reduced interaction and coordination thus also affected their productivity.

#### **4.3.5 Multiple parties affected**

*Multiple parties affected* embodies the impact of the conflict situation on third parties, whilst including different levels of involvement – direct and indirect involvement. **Figure 28** depicts the different levels of involvement – direct and indirect involvement – in three categories: *behaviour & attitude of others*, *behaviour & attitude of conflict party towards others*, and *effect on others*.

'Behaviour and attitude of others' implies that third parties become involved or drawn into the conflict and might even act as one of the conflict parties towards another conflict party. It is expressed as "*no longer a willingness to compromise*", "*interrupting him*", "*avoiding her or giving strange responses*", "*overruling him*", "*not following through with topics he raised*", "*no longer showing him respect*" and "*decision made on higher level*". Interviewee I6 related how team members "*no longer showed respect*" towards one of the conflict parties:

*"[Although they] were not that involved in the conflict or were only marginally affected by it, they used this much more when relating with the person... So, that they interrupted him, that they did not follow through with some topics he raised."*

There was no longer a willingness to compromise as "*he had simply made clear that he would no longer be willing to compromise*", and decisions were either made by the managers or "*four people from the project group had to simply overrule him*".

Interviewee I4 similarly related how people from the other conflict party's group started acting strange towards her:

*"And suddenly I realised that there were statements, I was getting strange responses, or I realised that the people that she had employed were suddenly very reserved towards me."*

It affected her greatly as she also did not know why they behaved towards her like that: "*That was a phase when I really, when I did not feel well, when I thought, 'Others avoided me, and I did not know why'.*"

By contrast, 'behaviour and attitude of conflict party towards others' refers to situations where a conflict party acts in a certain way towards a third party, such as, for example, displaying hostile behaviour towards them: "*blocking on social media groups after attending her events*" or "*other staff told to 'piss off' when reporting to work*". Interviewee I11 related how a conflict party's behaviour also affected the trainees working under him: "*it had direct consequences for trainees as when they reported to work, they were told, 'I don't want to see you. Piss off'.*"



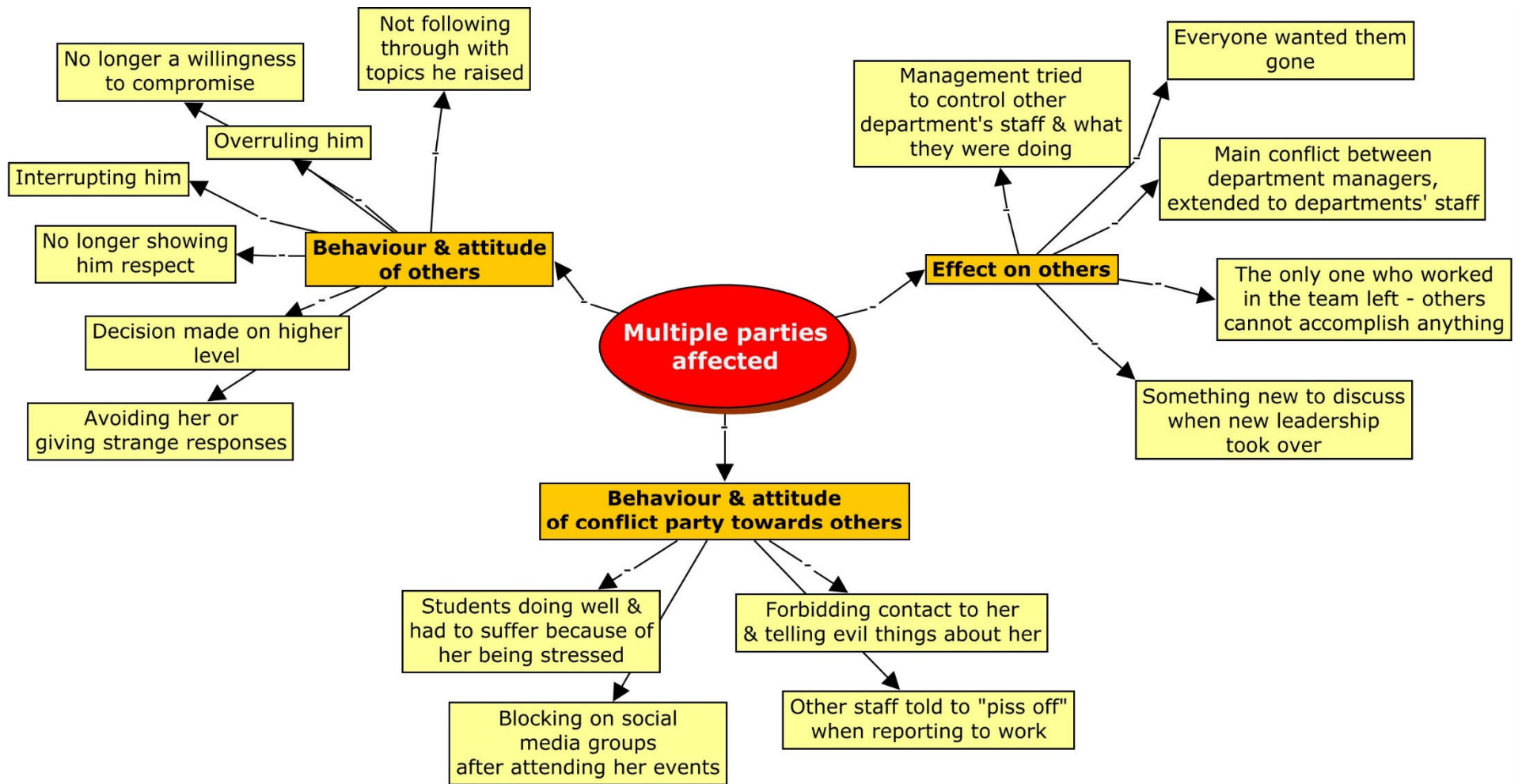


Fig. 28: Multiple Parties Affected – Theme Aspects (Own Figure).

Another example for direct consequences is interviewee I4's case where one conflict party forbade her group members to be in contact with the other conflict party and/or attend one of her meetings. If they did, they faced immediate consequences:

*"She then gets really nasty, blocks them on WhatsApp and Facebook. She removes the people then from the groups; as soon as she finds out that they went once to one of my meetings, she blocks her own people. So, kind of child's play."*

In comparison to the previous examples, interviewee I5's case demonstrated that non-intentional behaviour can also have a negative effect on third parties: *"One is stressed within and then one is perhaps not as friendly towards the students as one wants to be."* I described it as non-intentional behaviour as she expressed how her behaviour frustrated her as it was not the third parties' fault that she was stressed.

Finally, the last category 'effect on others' includes examples where third parties are being diversely affected by the conflict situation, such as having to adapt to new leadership or the departure of a colleague. These effects were expressed as *"everyone wanted them gone"*, *"main conflict between department managers extended to departments' staff"* and *"the only one who worked in the team left – others cannot accomplish anything"*.

As interviewee I11 related, everyone wanted the other conflict parties gone due to their adverse behaviour: *"The people, all saw on the one hand that all three were gone which we wanted anyway."* They now had something new to discuss when the new department leader took over:

*"The new person is someone that we like, and one even has something to discuss that diverts from the actual conflict situation. Because now a woman holds the leadership position for the first time."*

Other department members behaving hostile towards one conflict party and thereby causing the person to leave the company can present a challenge for respective department and company: In interviewee I9's case, the employee who left was the most resourceful person in the team:

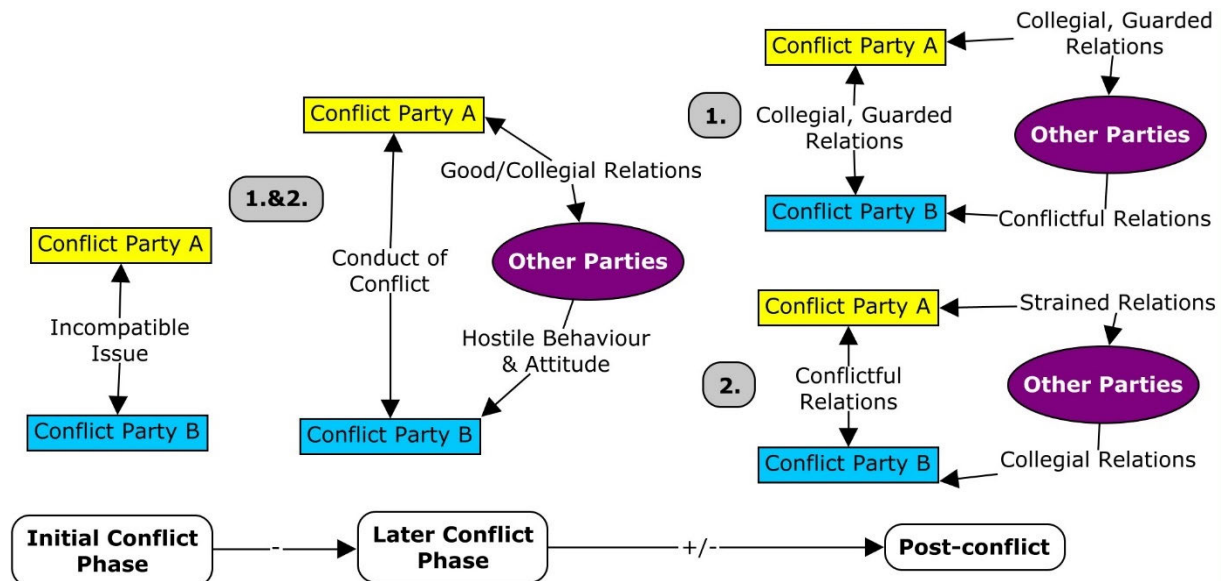
*"...because he has now left, they have a real problem now because they, as said, the other three colleagues, including their boss, are not capable to do anything, can't do anything, don't know anything, simply are not capable and they are now in a bad situation. And the only one who works in such a team leaves. That is of course bitter."*

A conflict may also affect several departments and staff members that are dependent on each other in the execution of tasks. Interviewee I3 related how managers from a different department “*tried to control our department*”, thereby “*doing a bit of micro-management*”:

*“One only has a limited amount of time, and one also has the targets of one’s own department and when a different department comes with their requirements where one though works together and does the preliminary work for them, then it is quite difficult to prioritise.”*

Moreover, the main conflict had been between the department managers which then “*extended to the departments’ staff*”. Thus, the conflict had started between other parties but then extended to other staff members and produced further conflict issues such as not wanting to be controlled by other department’s managers and prioritising tasks under time constraints.

Based on the findings, conflicts do not only present challenges to the initial conflict parties but also affect third parties who might be affected and involved in different ways during as well as post-conflict. **Figures 29-31** depict the different levels of involvement and temporal dimensions.

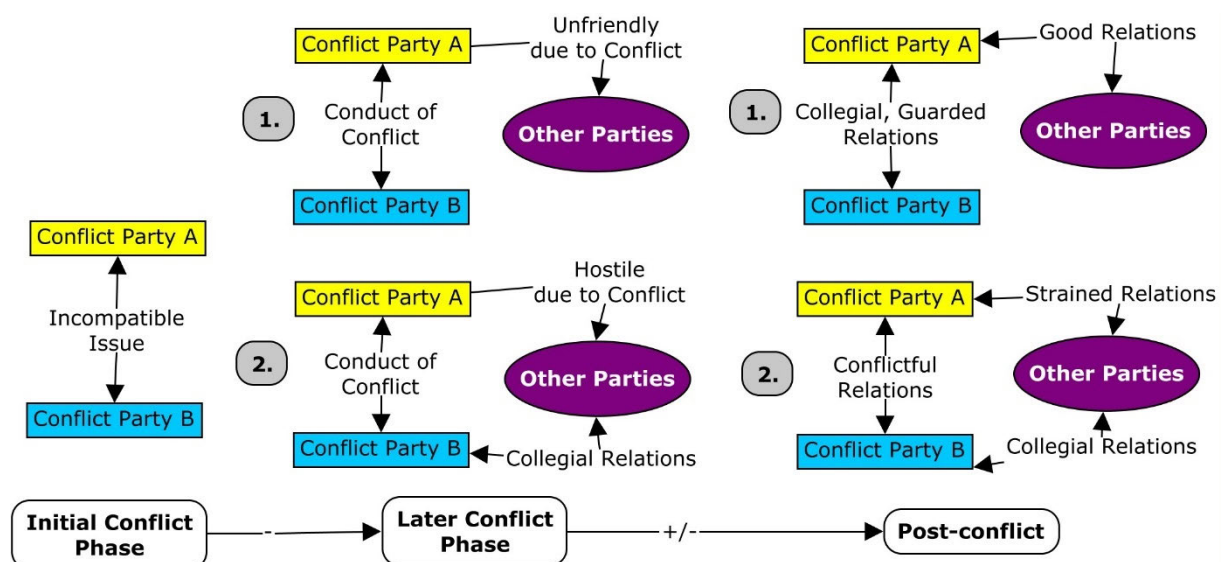


**Fig. 29: Multiple Parties Affected – Behaviour & Attitude of Others** (Own Figure).

**Figure 29** displays how the behaviour & attitude of others towards the conflict parties evolves during conflict and the state of affairs post-conflict. Both scenarios 1. and 2. have in common that the other parties maintained good/collegial relations with one of the conflict parties (Conflict Party A) during conflict and expressed hostile

behaviour and attitude towards Conflict Party B (for example, “no longer showing him respect” or “avoiding her or giving strange responses”). However, the relations developed differently post-conflict. Whilst Conflict Parties A and B were able to move from conflict towards collegial, guarded relations in scenario 1, the other parties still uphold conflictful relations with Conflict Party B (described by interviewee I6 as “the other three members refuse to work with him which I am sorry for”). In comparison, in scenario 2, as the conflictful relations persist between Conflict Parties A and B, the other parties have switched allegiance from Conflict Parties A to B. In interviewee I4’s words:

“[A] lot of people do not get along with her and then end up with me... She can influence people very well at the beginning and win them to her side but then many stop the work because of the way she is.”



**Fig. 30: Multiple Parties Affected – Behaviour & Attitude of Conflict Party Towards Others** (Own Figure).

By contrast to above scenarios, **Figure 30** depicts the behaviour and attitude of a conflict party towards others. Whilst scenario 1 shows how temporary unfriendly behaviour due to conflict (“had to suffer because of her being stressed”) turns again to good relations with other parties, scenario 2 is an example for hostile behaviour due to conflict (“told to ‘piss off’”) leading to strained relations with others post-conflict (as expressed in other parties being happy that leadership was changed).

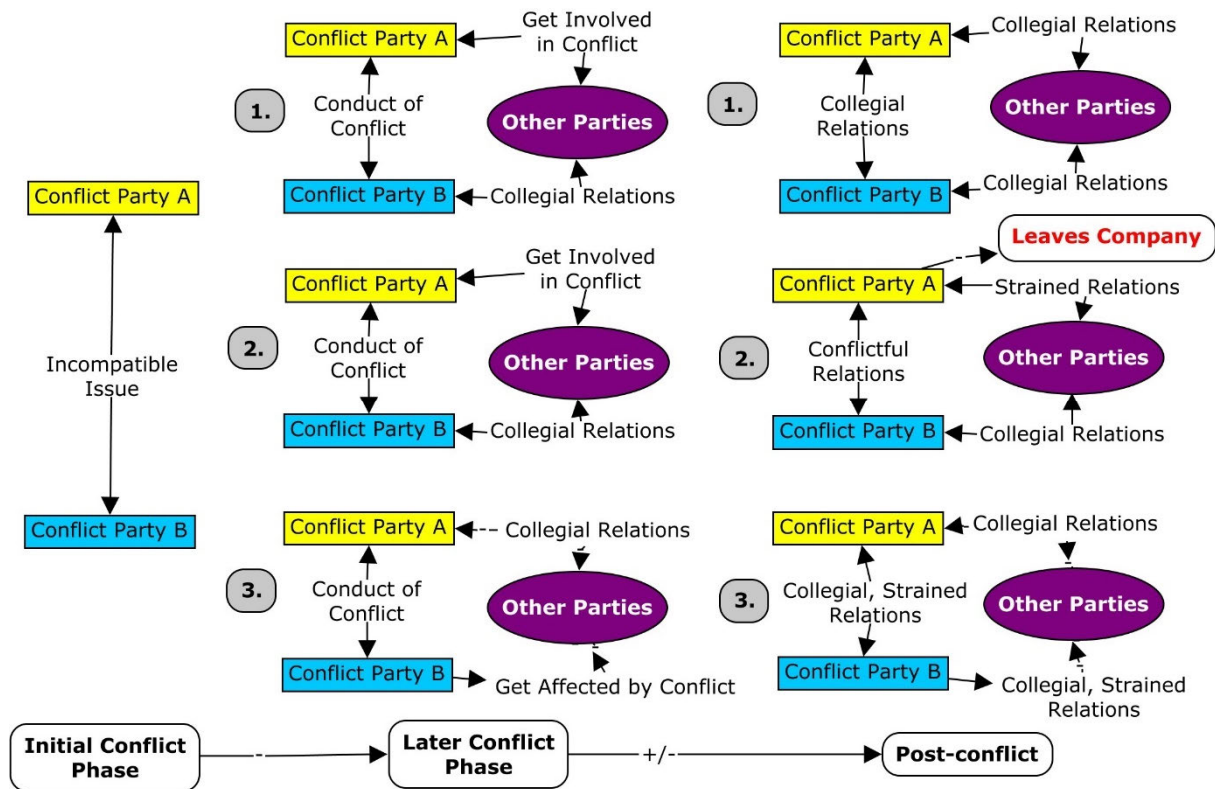


Fig. 31: Multiple Parties Affected – Effect on Others (Own Figure).

Finally, **Figure 31** illustrates how the involvement of other conflict parties in conflict can transform the relations over time. Scenario 1 depicts a case where other parties become part of the conflict parties (*“main conflict between department managers extended to departments’ staff”*) and get back to collegial relations with all parties past conflict. In scenario 2, the parties also become additional conflict parties during conflict. However, the conflict is not resolved - the continuous conflictful and strained relations contribute to Conflict Party A leaving the company that creates another problem for the company as the only resourceful person left (as expressed by interviewee I9: *“the only one who worked in the team left”*). In scenario 3, the other parties do not become conflict parties themselves and are merely impacted by the conflict between Conflict Parties A and B. Nonetheless, the conflict leaves behind collegial but strained relations between Conflict Party B and all the other parties. This might be explained by the relation of interviewee I11 that Conflict Party B had taken the conflict personal, maintained a grudge towards Conflict Party A post-conflict and with his contra-productive behaviour, disorganised work operations, with effects for other colleagues.

#### 4.4 Summary

The interviewees' relation of challenges to respective persons, team(s) and organisation in manifest conflict scenarios was diverse, including, to different levels, changes to task-related, interactional and personal aspects, and how persistent they were during and post-conflict. In all cases, conflicts led to a changed work atmosphere and/relations during conflict. Depending on previous relations, involved parties and expressed behaviour during conflict, this change was either persistent and showed itself in strained/conflictful relations or was of a temporary nature with friendly/collegial relations post-conflict. Antagonistic actions such as overpowering and weighing down other conflict parties led to personal dissatisfaction and negative emotional states that set in motion a cycle of action and personal dissatisfaction and in the most extreme cases, to one party leaving the company.

Conflict situations also impacted on the quality and/or quantity of interactions, affecting the way conflict parties communicated, related and behaved towards each other and coordinated tasks. The restricted interaction was either showing itself in temporary, distanced behaviour or persistent breakdown of communication and willingness to compromise. The findings also revealed lower performance levels as a result of conflict. With regard to the accomplishment of tasks, the manner and way tasks were planned and executed was not done in a timely or accurate fashion, the conflict parties did not work as productively as before conflict, and departments/teams were merely functioning but not working to the best of their ability. As regards the interpersonal context, conflict parties did not work well with the other, not supported each other and not coordinated effectively which also affected how productive they were during conflict.

Apart from affecting the conflict parties, third parties were also impacted and/or involved in the conflict situations. This ranged from becoming a conflict party him/herself and expressing hostile behaviour and attitude towards one of the conflict parties, to being an indirect target of aggression due to conflict-related frustration and stress on the side of the conflict parties. In situations where more parties got involved in conflict, the way conflict was handled determined whether relations remained strained and conflictful post-conflict.

In providing an understanding of what challenges the conflict gave rise to, how they were perceived by the interviewees and whether they persisted or were only of

temporary nature, these findings provide a background for the findings in the following chapters that focus on how conflicts are being managed and what effects conflict management implementation had on interpersonal relations and performance. The next chapter, **Chapter 5**, presents how the interpersonal conflicts were being dealt with in selected organisations. This includes replicating how the conflicts started and developed, and what measures were taken to manage the conflict situations.

## 5. Conflict Management and Organisational Conflict Processes

### 5.1 Introduction

Whilst **Chapter 4** established the challenges conflicts pose to individuals, teams and organisations, the second research findings' chapter focuses on the development/escalation of conflicts I1 to I12 and subsequent conflict management attempts. Its purpose is to provide answers for Research Question 2: **How are conflicts dealt with in selected organisations?** I understand *conflict management* as the handling and containing of an arising conflict in mitigating its negative effects and finding constructive ways of managing differences without necessarily resolving them (see also **Section 2.3** on conflict management, p. 66). Conflict management may involve diverse strategies, styles or methods for addressing conflicts such as discussing incompatible issues, accommodating others' needs, avoiding interactions, bullying into submission as well as third-party mediation or decision-making. It was to be established which conflict management approaches were utilised in conflicts I1 to I12 and what impact they had on the conflict outcome.

This Chapter's focus is, firstly, on assessing the 12 conflict episodes in detail with regard to their development/escalation and conflict management; secondly, establishing the most salient conflict management approaches, and similarities and differences between the 12 conflict management attempts; thirdly, presenting general ways of handling conflicts at respective organisations; and fourth, generating categories of conflict management based on the findings.

### 5.2 Conflict episodes – development and management

In order to help understand why certain conflict management approaches were utilised in respective conflicts, it has to be established how conflicts started and developed. Conflicts I1 to I12 are at first assessed in terms of their respective conflict phases: what the conflict was about, what the conflict parties' positions and concerns were with regard to the conflict issue and the other party, and how the attitude, behaviour and relations changed as a consequence of conflict escalation. In a second step, the conflict management stages are replicated, assessing what conflict management



attempts were made, whether other parties got involved, and how the relations and behaviours between the conflict parties changed.

### **5.2.1 Conflict I1**

Conflict I1 centred on different work speed and resulting workload discrepancy between two work colleagues of the same position and tasks (see **Table 7** for I1 conflict overview). One colleague (Conflict Party A) was faster and therefore did more work than the slower colleague (Conflict Party B): *“And then I always worked more than her and that got me angry after some time that I had to do more work.”*

Conflict Party A confronted Conflict Party B (**caricature 3**) who at first did not understand why the colleague had confronted her and rejected any wrongdoing: *“Then we talked about it, and she did not, yes, not take it as a big deal or perceived it differently.”* The conflict escalated in them being at loggerheads for a week. Conflict Party B was *“sulky”* because Conflict Party A had brought up the issue and *“she did not understand it”*. The week was *“difficult”*, *“bumpy”*, characterised by *“bare minimum”* communication, with *“everyone doing their own thing”* instead of working together as a team. After pointing out what had annoyed her, the interviewee described the conflict situation as two parties standing and facing each other for a week without doing anything (**caricature 4**).

After a difficult week characterised by less communication, they talked about the issue again (*discussing incompatible issues*), and Conflict Party B admitted to some of the issues Conflict Party A had raised (**caricature 4b**): *“She just did not feel like working and that was why she did everything a bit slower... And it was correct that she tried to push things to me.”* Conflict Party A also retracted and explained what had annoyed her. Then they deliberated on how they can improve working together (*accommodating others’ needs*) – trying to rebuild together what had been broken (**caricature 5b**). After that, they worked better together, and Conflict Party B did not push work to the other again (**caricature 6b**): *“... it then also improved. So that suddenly, she did not push things on my list again. She also did partly herself because she actually had the time for it.”* In the end, Conflict Party A was happy that she had brought up what had annoyed her as otherwise, Conflict Party B might not have been made aware of her behaviour’s consequences: *“I think, it needed that push that she realised that it gets noticed or I don’t know. Perhaps she was not conscious of it...”*

Thus, conflict management efforts for conflict I1 involved at first talking things over and then deliberating on how to improve working together.

**Table 7: Conflict I1 (Own Table).**

CONFLICT DEVELOPMENT/ESCALATION				
CONFLICT ISSUE & INITIATION	→	CONFLICT PHASE 1	→	CONFLICT PHASE 2
Conflict parties are in a conflict due to different work speed and resulting workload discrepancy.		Conflict Part A confronted Conflict Party B who responded by saying that it was not like that.		The conflict escalated in them being at loggerheads for a week. Conflict Party B was “sulky” because Conflict Party A had brought up the issue and she did not understand it.
As Conflict Party B was slower, Conflict Party A did more work which angered her after some time.		Conflict Party B did not take it as a big deal or perceived it differently.		The week was difficult, “bumpy”, characterised by “bare minimum” communication, being distanced and not working as a team.
		Illustration removed for copyright restrictions  <b>Caricature 3</b>		Illustration removed for copyright restrictions  <b>Caricature 4</b>

**Table 7 contd.: Conflict I1 (Own Table).**

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT			
DEALING WITH CONFLICT	PHASE 1	PHASE 2	
Conflict Management was marked by talking things over and deliberating on how to improve working together.	They started talking and Conflict Party B admitted to some of the issues Conflict Party A had raised. Conflict Party A also retracted and explained what had annoyed her.	At the end, after they had talked things over, everything worked well.	
	Then they deliberated on how they can improve working together – trying to rebuild together.		
Illustration removed for copyright restrictions  <b>Caricature 4b</b>	Illustration removed for copyright restrictions  <b>Caricature 5b</b>	Illustration removed for copyright restrictions  <b>Caricature 6b</b>	

### 5.2.2 Conflict I2

The conflict parties in Conflict I2 found themselves in conflict due to working on the same task that their common boss had assigned to both of them without their knowledge (see **Table 8** for I2 conflict overview). The task was to organise the farewell party for a common colleague. After they had started with their respective preparations, they discovered that they were both working on the same task: *“...and now one had done a lot towards it and the other had done a lot as well.”* It was very busy during that week with a lot of customer traffic which worsened the situation and stress level for both parties involved: *“We were both a bit overworked at that time.”*

The conflict started off as an open dialogue after they had found out that both were working on the same task (**caricature 2**):

*“Yes, we then quarrelled because she suggested something to me that I was not keen of and then she was quite annoyed because she had planned everything with this in mind and I had discussed something totally different with my boss.”*

At one point, they stood in front of each other and told each other their respective positions in a short and explicit fashion (**caricature 6**) - *“we then yelled at each other”*. The overreaction was exacerbated by the current work overload: *“We then quite lost our cool, didn’t have such a thick skin again.”* Conflict Party A insisted that she had already put in a lot of effort in the preparations and that’s how they should do it: *“No, that’s not how I want it because I have already prepared everything this way.”* At that point, she was not flexible enough as she had already thought of everything in her head and then the other party came with her counterproposal. Conflict Party B *“felt offended or disregarded”* and responded angrily that she should *“do her shit alone then”* which she in effect did.



They then went their own way *“sulkily”* and could not solve the issue immediately. The next day, they tried to avoid each other and gave each other silent treatment (*avoiding interactions*), with the conversation being *“restricted to essential matters”*. Both then swept in front of their own door, processed and reflected upon what had happened – in terms of a *“big clean-up”* (**caricature 4b**): *“Everyone reflected upon it again and said, ‘Well, it was not worth all the fuss’.”* Then they practically cleaned up and reconciled and *“and now everything is well again”* (**caricature 6b**). It was not one person approaching the other to reconcile but it was a *“tacit agreement”* to go back to

normal relations without talking about it again (*tacit agreement*). Now, it is only a tease between them: “*Not that you will flip again.*” Thus, conflict management for conflict I2 included both parties reflecting on what had happened and a tacit agreement to return to normal relations.

**Table 8: Conflict I2 (Own Table).**

CONFLICT DEVELOPMENT/ESCALATION				
CONFLICT ISSUE & INITIATION	➔	CONFLICT PHASE 1	➔	CONFLICT PHASE 2
Conflict parties are in a conflict due to the same task being given to them by their boss, without knowing about it.		The conflict started off as an open dialogue after they had found out that both were working on the same task.		At one point, they stood in front of each other and told each other their respective positions in a short and explicit fashion. Conflict Party A insisted that she had already put in a lot of effort in the preparations and that's how they should do it. The other colleague then flipped and said she should "do her shit alone then".
Both worked on the preparations separately.				Then they went their own way sulkily, giving each other silent treatment and avoiding each other.
		Illustration removed for copyright restrictions  Caricature 2		Illustration removed for copyright restrictions  Caricature 6

Table 8 contd.: Conflict I2 (Own Table).

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT			
DEALING WITH CONFLICT		PHASE 1	PHASE 2
Conflict Management was marked by both reflecting on what had happened and a tacit agreement to return to normalcy.		There was a 'cleaning up' from both sides. Both swept in front of their own door, processed and reflected upon what had happened.	
		Both decided that it was not worth all the fuss.	It was not one person approaching the other to reconcile but it was a tacit agreement to go back to normal relations.
		Illustration removed for copyright restrictions  <b>Caricature 4b</b>	Illustration removed for copyright restrictions  <b>Caricature 6b</b>



### 5.2.3 Conflict I3

Conflict I3 involved two departments who were having difficulty working together as there were different expectations about what tasks are to be prioritised, how they are to be done and who is responsible for what (see **Table 9** for I3 conflict overview). The conflict was primarily between the managers of the two departments (**caricature 6** depicting two persons facing each other) who communicated on behalf of their staff members, but it also affected the employees at the lower level. Another dimension was that the manager of one department (Conflict Party B) tried to “*micro-manage*” the staff members from the other department (Conflict Party A) which in turn annoyed them: “*...we were unwilling to recognise that we had to account to a department manager that is not our department manager how and when we do something.*”

Conflict Parties B often approached Conflict Parties A for accomplishing tasks for them. When it was not prioritised or refused, it was perceived as if they did not want to do those tasks: “*...there was a bit the latent presumption that one rejects it because one does not want to do it and not because of some kind of factual or capacity-related reasons.*” At the one hand, Conflict Parties B depended on Conflict Parties A whilst at the same time, they wanted tasks to be accomplished. At the other hand, Conflict Parties A had its own tasks to accomplish, apart from the other department’s tasks. Therefore, they had limited time and capacity to handle both satisfactorily:

*“...one has, of course, the requirements of one’s own department and when then another department comes with their requests where one though works together and assists, then it is difficult to prioritise.”*

At times it could not be realised due to technical hurdles: “*...certain things did simply not work out, exactly, because the technical realisation was not far reached enough that one could have accomplished it in the set time frame.*”

Attempts to discuss the issues did not lead to an agreement (**caricature 2**). Rather, Conflict Parties B then bypassed Conflict Parties A to contact the technical department directly. However, they gave them the same response as Conflict Parties A:

*“It was then that way that we had a long time ago enquired from the other colleagues and they had already responded. Had already relayed that, ‘Yes, it is not possible because so and so’.”*

The further consequence was that Conflict Parties A were frustrated within and felt less motivated to handle enquiries from Conflict Parties B - “...when there was an enquiry again from these persons then one thought, ‘Ah, those again’.”

There were attempts to talk over issues beforehand (*discussing incompatible issues*), but it did not work out without a moderator: “... one simply had the feeling that it would be good if someone neutral is present who then perhaps moderates it.” Conflict Parties B suggested an exchange workshop, with someone from the HR department as moderator (**caricature 3b**; *third-party attempts at mediation*). The workshop focused on what had worked well in the past and on existing prejudices:

*“prejudices that one thinks that the other department has”, “we, for example, wrote down, yes, we thought that they think that we do nothing and the like” or “drawing some pictures how the situation is for us”.*

In the end, they realised that what they had thought did not hold: “*Most of what one thought was not true. Especially that, as just related, ‘They don’t do anything’. - ‘No, we know that you do something. But we just want to move ahead.’*” As a result of the exchange workshop, they worked together again and tried to communicate better (**caricature 4b**). Thus, conflict management efforts for conflict I3 involved both direct talks and a neutral moderator from within the organisation to resolve existing prejudices and miscommunication.

**Table 9: Conflict I3 (Own Table).**

CONFLICT DEVELOPMENT/ESCALATION				
CONFLICT ISSUE & INITIATION	➔	CONFLICT PHASE 1	➔	CONFLICT PHASE 2
Conflict parties are in a conflict due to two departments having difficulty working together.		The conflict was primarily between the managers of the two departments who communicated on behalf of their staff.		When Conflict Parties A did not prioritise or reject Conflict Parties B's requests, it was not understood by them.
There were different expectations about who does what and who is in charge.		The manager of one department tried to control the staff members of the other department who were unwilling to account to other management about what they were doing and when they did it.		Conflict Parties B bypassed Conflict Parties A and contacted another department instead of accepting Conflict Parties A's decision – no agreement on a professional level.
		<p>Illustration removed for copyright restrictions</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Caricature 6</b></p>		<p>Illustration removed for copyright restrictions</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Caricature 2</b></p>

Table 9 contd.: Conflict I3 (Own Table).

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT			
DEALING WITH CONFLICT		PHASE 1	PHASE 2
Conflict Management was marked by both direct talks and involving a moderator to resolve existing prejudices and miscommunication.		There were attempts to talk over issues before, but it did not work out without a moderator.	They then worked together again and tried to communicate better.
		Conflict Parties B suggested an exchange workshop, with someone from the HR department as moderator. The workshop focused on what had worked well in the past and on existing prejudices.	
		Illustration removed for copyright restrictions  Caricature 3b	Illustration removed for copyright restrictions  Caricature 4b

#### 5.2.4 Conflict I4

Conflict I4 was a result of sudden animosity expressed by one party towards another (see **Table 10** for I4 conflict overview). This was a complete turnaround from how the relationship had started: Conflict Party A employed the other conflict party and they interacted on a friendship basis nearly daily, even establishing more of a 'daughter-mother' relationship: *"And at the beginning she saw me also more as a daughter that she never had."*

From one day to the next, Conflict Party B changed and started attacking Conflict Party A during phone conversations (**caricature 3**):

*"She then always tried with poisoned arrows – that is how I simply called them or recognised them as such – that she always tried to weaken me by telling me over the phone, 'You have this and that, I have heard this and that about you'."*

She also spoke bad about her behind her back and discouraged her team members from interacting with Conflict Party A: *"And suddenly I realised that there were ... strange statements or I realised that the people that she employed were suddenly very reserved towards me."* Initially, this highly affected the interviewee as she also did not understand the reason for the sudden change - *"And that was quite terrible for me, and it was a powerlessness."* – leading to high blood pressure and anxiety whenever the other party called because it was never anything pleasant but accusations.

The sudden change also made Conflict Party A reflect that the initial good relationship was not genuine from the side of the other party: *"But that was not authentic, not genuine, but I am also a very trusting person."* Conflict Party A attributed the changed behaviour to envy as she was more successful than Conflict Party B and had a higher position although the other person was much older than her: *"I just did a lot of things that she could not stand, and she could not accept it until today that I am superior to her financially and also with regard to position."* She made that attribution as the other party always told her that she was only successful because of her work contributions.

During the last confrontation, Conflict Party B attacked Conflict Party A in front of all colleagues at an event: *"... she berated me, and I stood there in shock and was really overwhelmed."* Upon collecting herself, Conflict Party A told her calmly that all was not true - *"... those are all intrigues and lies and I want that you set the record*

*straight*" - which led to Conflict Party B storming from the scene. Now at meetings, they sit together at a table without conversing, avoiding any form of interaction (**caricature 1**).

In terms of conflict management, Conflict Party A sought external help from a neutral coach who strengthened and helped her to distance herself and not let the attacks overwhelm her (*external coaching*): "*And she opened my eyes more and strengthened me for everything that came.*" After they had left the emotions behind, the conflict parties tried in a personal conversation to converse only on a business level (*discussing incompatible issues*). It worked out for some time until members of Conflict Party B's team liked Conflict Party A as a coach or entrepreneur more: "*She then removes people from the groups as soon as she finds out that they went once to one of my meetings*" (*bullying into submission*). Initially, Conflict Party A was anxious when meeting Conflict Party B but now the other party is more afraid of her and walks away (*avoiding interactions*). According to Conflict Party A, the conflict "*will not end*", "*it has been persistently silenced*". Therefore, none of the caricatures depicted to her how the conflict ended as the conflict is still ongoing. Thus, conflict management was marked by engaging neutral external help on the side of one party (Conflict Party A) and direct talks. However, the conflict was not settled and continues to be expressed through both bullying and avoiding behaviours.

**Table 10: Conflict I4 (Own Table).**

CONFLICT DEVELOPMENT/ESCALATION				
CONFLICT ISSUE & INITIATION	➔	CONFLICT PHASE 1	➔	CONFLICT PHASE 2
Conflict parties are in a conflict due to sudden animosity of one conflict party towards the other.		It started as “poisoned arrows” during phone conversations. Conflict Party B always looked up, pointing with her finger and saying, “You have, you have not done this” and the like.		Then there was a confrontation where Conflict Party B attacked Conflict Party A in front of all colleagues at an event.
Conflict Party A attributed it to envy as she was more successful and had a higher position despite being younger than Conflict Party B.		Conflict Party A experienced high blood pressure and anxiety whenever Conflict Party B called because it was never anything pleasant but accusations.		Now at meetings, they sit together at a table without conversing, avoiding any form of interaction.
		<p>Illustration removed for copyright restrictions</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Caricature 3</b></p>		<p>Illustration removed for copyright restrictions</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Caricature 1</b></p>

Table 10 contd.: Conflict I4 (Own Table).

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT			
DEALING WITH CONFLICT		PHASE 1	PHASE 2
Conflict Management was marked by both direct talks and involving external help (on one party's side).		Conflict Party A got external help from a neutral coach who strengthened her. It helped her to distance herself and not let the attacks overwhelm her.	After they had left the emotions behind, they tried in a personal conversation to converse only on a business level. It worked out for some time until members of Conflict Party B's team liked Conflict Party A as a coach or entrepreneur more.
The conflict did not end but is ongoing.			According to Conflict Party A, the conflict will not end. It has been persistently silenced.
		No Caricature Applicable	No Caricature Applicable



### 5.2.5 Conflict I5

A shortage situation contributed to conflict scenario I5, with only one photocopier being available for staff use (see **Table 11** for I5 conflict overview). Conflict Party B photocopied higher volumes, at times 500 pages, and did not allow Conflict Party A and other colleagues who urgently had to photocopy few pages to go first: *“One is not allowed to go first for 1-2 copies because he sees himself as more important and at times, one gets to class late which, of course, disrupts the whole process.”*

Conflict Party A felt that Conflict Party B thought he had the upper hand and could give her directions due to the age gap and perceived him as being *“inconsiderate”* and *“gruffy”*. Moreover, he behaved the same way towards other younger colleagues. When she told him that she had to go to her class, if he could not postpone his copying, he replied, *“Well. He is well into it, and he would want to finish it now”*. She had two choices: either to wait or to change her lesson plan:

*“But as this change is very difficult to spontaneously change in some cases, I then decided to wait. Apologised to the class and said that I will come later because these materials are important.”*

These materials were especially essential when the students were to prepare for an exam where they needed adequate guidance. Therefore, the conflict resulted in stress for Conflict Party A as she at times got late to her class, and it also caused her to vent her frustration at the students, thereby affecting others negatively who did not have anything to do with the conflict.

The conflict was symbolised by two persons facing each other and not wanting to give way or give in to the other (**caricature 2**). Others are just looking but do not get involved or side with one party as *“it did not matter”* to them. Then there was finger pointing because Conflict Party A was annoyed with his behaviour (**caricature 6**):

*“He had already photocopied for such a long time, and he does this often. And that is of course a disturbance when one only has one photocopier and then one of course talks to other colleagues about it and then perhaps points with the finger towards him in one’s mind.”*

As others were also affected by the photocopier shortage situation, it also annoyed them and it further contributed to a hardening of positions, that one is no longer willing to compromise but insists on his/her position:

*“That one wants to do one’s own thing now at all costs and is no longer really willing to compromise. Because perhaps everyone has the most logical and reasonable declaration for him/herself why he/she has to photocopy something right at this moment.”*

They did not have a conversation about the conflict but afterwards, there was like a *“tacit agreement that this conflict is now over”* (tacit agreement). It also did not happen again afterwards. Conflict Party B was then also *“a bit more understanding, at times then asked, ‘Does someone only have one page to photocopy before I start with my bulk photocopying?’”* (accommodating others’ needs). After everyone had tidied up his/her mess, got rid of his/her anger, it was like they both decided that *“the conflict was not that important for one to stay angry”* and then tried *“to be more considerate towards the other”* (**caricature 4b**). According to Conflict Party A, it struck both parties *“not to face each other like that but perhaps also reiterate their respective position”*. Thus, conflict management for conflict I5 was marked by a tacit agreement on both sides to end the conflict and accommodating behaviour in being more sensitive and considerate towards the other hereinafter.

**Table 11: Conflict I5 (Own Table).**

CONFLICT DEVELOPMENT/ESCALATION				
CONFLICT ISSUE & INITIATION	➔	CONFLICT PHASE 1	➔	CONFLICT PHASE 2
Conflict parties are in a conflict due to a shortage situation (only one photocopier).		Conflict Party A felt that Conflict Party B saw himself as more important and able to give her directions due to the age gap and perceived him as being inconsiderate and gruffy.		Then there was finger pointing because Conflict Party A was annoyed with Conflict Party B's behaviour. She then spoke with other colleagues about this situation, thereby pointing the finger at him.
Conflict Party B photocopied higher volumes and did not allow Conflict Party A and other colleagues to go first.		They faced each other and did not want to give way or give in to the other. Others are just looking but do not get involved.		As others were also affected by the shortage situation, it also annoyed them and further contributed to a hardening of positions (no longer willing to compromise but insisting on one's position).
		<p>Illustration removed for copyright restrictions</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Caricature 2</b></p>		<p>Illustration removed for copyright restrictions</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Caricature 6</b></p>

Table 11 contd.: Conflict I5 (Own Table).

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT			
DEALING WITH CONFLICT		PHASE 1	PHASE 2
Conflict management was marked by a tacit agreement on both sides to end the conflict and be more sensitive and considerate towards each other in the future.		They did not have a conversation about the conflict but afterwards, there was like a tacit agreement that the conflict is over.	
		After everyone had tidied up his/her mess, got rid of his/her anger, it was like they decided that the conflict was not that important for one to stay angry and then tried to be more considerate towards the other.	
		<p>Illustration removed for copyright restrictions</p> <p>Caricature 4b</p>	

### 5.2.6 Conflict I6

The conflict parties in conflict I6 were experiencing conflict due to different departments' aims and personal differences with one of its team members (see **Table 12** for I6 conflict overview). Conflict Party A got into a project team that already had problems with one of its project team members and differences with regard to their various departments' aims.

Coupled with his isolation within the team, Conflict Party B felt personally attacked by Conflict A as a new addition to the team and her department's directions and was unwilling to enter into compromises:

*“And then it was actually like that, that I came as a young person with new ideas and approaches - and that the regular operations which the other one was exposed to - for five years - he was already on that position - these were radical changes and developments where one of course believes, ‘Why should a new colleague know more about things?’”*

Although the conflict might not have been avoided, Conflict Party A acknowledged that she could have reacted more sensitively to Conflict Party B's concerns:

*“And then I reacted at the beginning, honestly said, quite wrongly and voiced my opinions and did not yet have that sensibility at that time to consider that so that one could have lessened the conflict.”*

According to Conflict Party A, it was good that the differences were voiced openly:

*“Although it sounds drastic, I was called the ‘boss enemy’, and we really said, ‘A minefield is between us.’ But that was actually a figurative language which led to the situation where we were both aware that we could personally not be on the same wavelength, but it was important to both of us to progress with the issue at hand.”*

The conflict was “predominantly under the surface so that it hindered the work and also often led to discussions during meetings” (**caricature 1**). It was not obvious, but team members were “conscious of it”. They tried to keep it as a latent conflict most of times but there were time and again escalations where they could no longer proceed: “... the escalation was often so far reached that one could not proceed any longer, with everyone being persistent on his position.” Additionally, there were instances where “it got to a level that did not involve personal attacks but went below the belt” (depicted by finger pointing in **caricature 5**). The conflict escalated to an extent where they could

*“no longer come to an agreement”* on issues, every issue had to be discussed in detail and repeatedly, and decisions had to be taken on a higher level (**caricature 5**). As Conflict Party B had lost favour with a lot of other persons beside Conflict Party A, he did not have any supporters which made him feel cornered and consequently louder than if he had had further supporters at his side. A lot of other colleagues did no longer show him respect: *“That one interrupted him, no longer followed his lead on many topics”*. Thereby, more parties got involved in the conflict although they had not been part of it from the initial stage.

Checking what was happening or processing – *“it did not happen at all; nil”*. It then led to the replacement of the project leader as it was determined that there needed to be a different management from ‘above’ (*third-party attempts at mediation*) as the present project leader was very passive: *“One positioned someone in the middle or tried to position someone who can handle it differently which, however, did not work with us.”* However, the aim was not to resolve the issues but to get the project back on track as they were four months behind the project goal. According to Conflict Party A, everyone treating him-/herself on their own illustrates the situation best (**caricature 2b**). The issues were not solved but *“swept under the carpet”* (*non-tackling of issues*). As leadership did not get involved in trying to solve the issues and left the team to its own devices to somehow complete the project, it affected the work atmosphere and personal relations not only in this project but also in the long term. It had further consequences for Conflict Party B as he now works under a different manager as the previous manager no longer wanted to work with him (*changing workflows and or team members*), but it did not better the relations within the team. Hence, conflict management was marked by replacing the project leader and interest in reaching the project goal. However, the issues at the heart of the conflict were not addressed and resolved.

**Table 12: Conflict I6 (Own Model).**

CONFLICT DEVELOPMENT/ESCALATION				
CONFLICT ISSUE & INITIATION	→	CONFLICT PHASE 1	→	CONFLICT PHASE 2
Conflict parties are in a conflict due to different departments' aims and personal differences with one team member.		The conflict was predominantly under the surface so that it hindered the work and also led to discussions during meetings. It was not obvious, but team members were conscious of it.		They tried to keep it as a latent conflict most of times but there were time and again escalations where they could no longer proceed, with everyone being persistent on his/her position.
Conflict Party B felt personally attacked by a new addition to the team and her department's directions.				The conflict escalated to an extent where they could no longer find agreement on issues, every issue had to be discussed in detail and repeatedly, and decisions had to be taken on a higher level.
		<p>Illustration removed for copyright restrictions</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Caricature 1</b></p>		<p>Illustration removed for copyright restrictions</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Caricature 5</b></p>

Table 12 contd.: Conflict I6 (Own Model).

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT				
DEALING WITH CONFLICT	→	PHASE 1	→	PHASE 2
Conflict Management was marked by replacing the project leader and interest in reaching the project goal.		Checking what happened or processing it did not happen at all. It was about reaching the project goal and the project leader was very passive.		Everyone treated him-/herself on their own illustrates the situation best (caricature 2b). The issues were not solved but 'swept under the carpet'.
However, the issues at the heart of the conflict were not addressed and resolved.		It then led to the replacement of the project leader as it was determined that there needed to be a different management from 'above'. However, it did not work out in their situation.		
		<p>Illustration removed for copyright restrictions</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Caricature 2b</b></p>		



### 5.2.7 Conflict 17

The conflict parties in conflict 17 were in conflict due to non-agreement over working methods (see **Table 13** for 17 conflict overview). The conflict was between three persons where two persons (Conflict Parties B) were confronted by a new generation (Conflict Party A), and the opinion and working methods of the new generation was not really accepted.

Being at the bottom of the hierarchy, Conflict Parties B expected Conflict Party A to “assist them in a certain way” but not take liberties beyond that: “... it was highly hierarchically structured, and one noticed that one is all the way at the bottom of the hierarchy, and it was a very unfair behaviour.” When she showed interns or volunteers how to do certain things in a collection, she was told that she “was not to do that”. It led time and again to disputes, especially during the monthly departmental meetings and at the archive where she was stationed. The monthly departmental meetings where the only channel where Conflict Party A could raise her concerns and bring up any issues, especially as her position was at the interface of other departments:

*“... in the departmental meeting, I have possibly, also because of my youth or lack of experience, not brought up my concerns in a diplomatic manner and spoke a different language, especially in comparison to the older colleagues.”*

Although other colleagues of the same hierarchy level as Conflict Parties B supported her concerns and tried to mediate, Conflict Party A was not able to find a common denominator with Conflict Parties B.

Conflict Party A described the general conditions of the meetings as “nice, just like a tea party”, as depicted in **caricature 4**: Two parties were facing each other – on one side, Conflict Party A saw herself on the left side with folded arms because she was also “stubborn”, thinking that she was “in the right”; on the other side, some stand below and try to restrain the gentleman (Conflict Parties B) who stands on the chair. At the same time, “there was still coffee on the table”. It reached a level where Conflict Party A was openly accused of trying to boycott the work of the senior colleagues because she wanted to introduce new methods such as working with a digital database than working analogue. The conflict proceeded by them destroying the basis on which they stood – “removing the foundations and not considering them at all” (**caricature**

9). The fallen briefcases in **caricature 9**, according to Conflict Party A, stand for the things

*“...one had built up for a long time, that one does not consider again but that one only attacks each other and somehow destroys the general conditions which should be there for doing a good job or existed, actually”.*

In terms of conflict management, the department head organised clarification talks, and others also tried to mediate between the conflict parties, even when Conflict Party A was not present (*third-party attempts at mediation*):

*“... they did that very well and they really tried, and I thought that that was very nice and correct. But as said, they never took my side or defended the others – it was really a very good mediation, a mediation attempt that they initiated time and again.”*

But Conflict Parties B were, according to Conflict Party A, *“hard nuts that were difficult to crack”*. The conflict also affected their amount of interaction: Both parties avoided to cross paths, and Conflict Parties B sometimes came to the archive when Conflict Party A was not around (*avoiding interactions*).

As a result of the conflict, Conflict Party A decided to leave the organisation (symbolised by ‘looking elsewhere’ in **caricature 1b**, trying to look where else one could go):

*“... I also went with the injunction that I somehow do not like it that a position gets occupied where I realise that the positions had hardened to an extent where nothing can be achieved again, and it would therefore be good if there was a wind of change.”* (*changing workflows and or team members*).


It was a hard decision but during job interviews, she realised that she could picture herself working elsewhere and that someone had to make the first step. The level of mistrust between the conflict parties had even reached the extent that Conflict Parties B went to her farewell party, in a way *“to make sure she really left”* which made Conflict Party A uncomfortable: *“...they had a smile on their faces, but it was very uncomfortable.”* After Conflict Party A left, those left behind tried to find a cure to the situation (**caricature 2b**). However, nothing has changed, and Conflict Parties B do not allow her replacement to work to her full capacity. Therefore, conflict management was marked by mediation attempts by others which, however, were not successful and

consequential avoiding behaviours. Moreover, the conflict cycle continued even after Conflict Party A left the organisation as the issues with regard to working methods were not resolved.

**Table 13: Conflict I7 (Own Model).**

CONFLICT DEVELOPMENT/ESCALATION				
CONFLICT ISSUE & INITIATION	➔	CONFLICT PHASE 1	➔	CONFLICT PHASE 2
Conflict parties are in a conflict due to non-agreement over working methods.		The general conditions were nice, just like a tea party. Time and again, there were disputes, and at the meetings, it escalated. Both parties were stubborn and thought they were in the right (folded arms). A few persons were there who tried to mediate.		The conflict proceeded by them destroying the basis on which they stood – removing the foundations and not considering them at all.
Conflict Parties B did not accept changes to working methods introduced by a new, younger colleague.		Conflict Parties B openly accused Conflict Party A that she boycotted their work.		There was a mistrust between the conflict parties where they did not trust each other again.
		<p>Illustration removed for copyright restrictions</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Caricature 4</b></p>		<p>Illustration removed for copyright restrictions</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Caricature 9</b></p>

Table 13 contd.: Conflict I7 (Own Model).

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT			
DEALING WITH CONFLICT		PHASE 1	PHASE 2
Conflict Management was marked by mediation attempts by others which, however, were not successful and consequential avoiding behaviours.		The department head organised clarification talks, and others also tried to mediate between the conflict parties, even when Conflict Party A was not present. But Conflict Parties B were 'hard nuts that were difficult to crack'.	After Conflict Party A left, those left behind tried to find a cure to the situation. However, nothing has changed, and Conflict Parties B do not allow her replacement to work to her full capacity.
The conflict cycle continues even after Conflict Party A left the organisation as the issues were not resolved.		Conflict Party A decided to leave the organisation (looking elsewhere in caricature 1b).	
		Illustration removed for copyright restrictions  <b>Caricature 1b</b>	Illustration removed for copyright restrictions  <b>Caricature 2b</b>

### 5.2.8 Conflict I8

Conflict I8 centred on differences over project methods and power struggle (see **Table 14** for I8 conflict overview). Conflict Party A was to lead a major project in the company and the other conflict party (Conflict Party B) was to work with him in the project. Conflict Party A was still a bit insecure in leading such a big project and even thought that Conflict Party B might have wanted to lead the project himself: *“That is why I might have observed him particularly.”*

This was reinforced by Conflict Party B’s behaviour: He did not seem to want to follow the project methods and procedure because he had his own perspective about projects and did his own thing: *“From the beginning, I had the feeling that he does not want to follow the project methods and procedure because he has his own perspective on projects.”* But the interest to lead the project himself might have also contributed to that: *“Perhaps that was why he did not really respond to my methods and directives...”*

Conflict Party A felt provoked that Conflict Party B asked him about every little thing (**caricature 6**): *“How does one do that? Do I go here? Do I make the first step here? Do I go with my left foot or my right foot first?”* What was more important to Conflict Party A was that the content is correct than whether a line is 11 or 12 mm thick: *“... it provoked me when he asked me whether the line should be 11 mm thick and light grey and that constantly.”* It could have been unintentional as Conflict Party B is generally a *“very meticulous type”*, but Conflict Party A felt provoked, especially as this continued for a longer period of time.

The conflict then gradually escalated within a period of eight to twelve weeks because Conflict Party B did not work with the projects methods that Conflict Party A had introduced: *“And he placed his own methods there very egoistically and also did not work with the templates the way all the others did.”* Consequentially, Conflict Party A had to spend more time on editing the work Conflict Party B had submitted. He had two options to react to such behaviour:

*“Either relaxed by telling your junior consultant, ‘Look at what he has done. Enter it into our templates’. Or like I did it that time, possibly because of a certain insecurity, with the following approach, ‘You will now act how I want you to’.”*

It reached another stage of escalation when they told each other their piece of mind (**caricature 7**): *“Everyone told the other what kind of ass he is and why that is so and what the other thinks...”*

The injunction to talk over issues came from their common boss who told them to *“sit down now”* which they did (*third-party attempts at mediation*). They opened up to each other, with Conflict Party A being surprised how “self-reflective” Conflict Party B was and also told him so (*discussing incompatible issues*). This mutual opening up would, however, not have worked if they had not understood each other on a private level:

*“When I think about that I would have to do that with someone... and one comes across 4-5 candidates in one’s professional life of which one thinks, ‘I will never [get along] with you idiot; I can never [get along] with you’. ... If it had been one of those candidates, one would never open up.”*



Therefore, if there had been a mutual feeling of *“hatred”*, they would not have opened up to each other and portrayed a weakness that could have been taken against them: *“... one has to watch out that one is not vulnerable, weak.”* As depicted by **caricature 2b**, something was surely damaged but then they helped each other to *“heal”* in terms of talking over things. Then they swept up the broken pieces and managed to complete the project tasks in an orderly fashion (**caricature 4b**). After that, they did not work on projects together which was due to the fact that they were always working on other projects. However, unconsciously, they might have also not involved the other because of the previous conflict experience (*avoiding interactions*): *“No, let it be. Let me rather take the other one.”* Thus, conflict management in conflict I8 involved mediation attempts by their superior which led to them talking over issues and in effect contributed to the successful completion of the project. Despite that, there remained a subconscious caution about working with each other again in future projects.

**Table 14: Conflict I8 (Own Model).**

CONFLICT DEVELOPMENT/ESCALATION				
CONFLICT ISSUE & INITIATION	➔	CONFLICT PHASE 1	➔	CONFLICT PHASE 2
Conflict parties are in a conflict due to differences over project methods and power struggle.		Both conflict parties annoyed each other, made each other angry. Conflict Party A felt provoked when Conflict Party B asked him about every little thing.		The escalation occurred when they told each other what kind of 'ass' the other is and why that is.
Conflict Party B did not seem to want to follow Conflict Party A's project methods and procedure (own perspective) - might have wanted to lead the project himself.		The conflict then gradually escalated because Conflict Party B did not work with the methods Conflict Party A had introduced.		It was not a physical but a methodical and verbal fight, with other persons staying out of it.
		<p>Illustration removed for copyright restrictions</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Caricature 6</b></p>		<p>Illustration removed for copyright restrictions</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Caricature 7</b></p>



Table 14 contd.: Conflict I8 (Own Model).

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT			
DEALING WITH CONFLICT		PHASE 1	PHASE 2
Conflict Management was marked by a mediation attempt by their superior which led to them talking over issues.		They involved their common boss to solve the conflict so that they could work again properly. He told them to 'sit down now' which they did.	
Opening up to each other and resolving issues led to the successful completion of the project.		Something was surely damaged but then they helped each other to 'heal' in terms of talking over things.	
		Illustration removed for copyright restrictions  Caricature 2b	Illustration removed for copyright restrictions  Caricature 4b

### 5.2.9 Conflict I9

The conflict parties in Conflict I9 were in conflict due to bullying behaviour (personal issues) (see **Table 15** for I9 conflict overview). The department was split between those who liked everything the boss said (Conflict Parties B) and those who countered him by voicing other perspectives (Conflict Parties A).

Conflict Party A was involved in a four-week project, entering the project neutrally and with an open mind (with the initial situation being “calm” as in **caricature 1**). From there, it went downhill: *“It already started on Monday. We met on Monday 10 am. Until Tuesday 12 pm... it was already clear that it would not work out...”* From calmness, the situation changed to “direct attack” (**caricature 3**): *“One side was suddenly obstinate.”* According to the interviewee, a caricature was missing that displayed *“how many are picking on one person”* – a group against the technical contact person. They did not want to hear the technical person’s opinion and just ignored him. Everything he said was per se wrong to the boss. It did not matter whether it was right or wrong: *“Just because he had said it, it was wrong.”* After two to three sentences, the technical contact person was only screamed at in order to intimidate him (*bullying into submission*). The subordinates supported the boss’ position and joined in the intimidation: *“And he was screamed at by three people during the meetings, for hours, they simply wore him down.”*

The interviewee saw himself more as the person who sat at the table and observed everything and could go at any time (as the consultant). Nonetheless, he was attacked as well by Conflict Party B when he agreed with the technical person: *“... I do not want you to repeat what my employees say. I want that you state your opinion.”* Therefore, as he had the same position, he was *“also on the hit list”*. After three days, Conflict Party A refused to continue working with the project leader (Conflict Party B) as the meetings did not result in anything but screaming (**caricature 5**): *“...and then it quickly reached a point where I said, yes, we have to stop here.”* (*avoiding interactions*)

Conflict Party B had no interest in resolving the conflict (*non-tackling of issues*):

*“... it was, of course, to his liking that this employee looked bad because we had a timeline within which we had to complete the project. And it is of course super when the employees you do not like anyway do not do well on the job.”*

The cooperation began after the source of the conflict was bypassed, in terms of “bypassing” Conflict Party B and all official processes. They changed the workflow in one of Conflict Party B’s subordinates to be communicating with his boss, and the interviewee only spoke with the technical contact person (*changing workflows and or team members*). Upon receiving the authority for this project from a superior shortly before project end, the technical contact person became the main contact, and they were able to complete the project in a few days: “*So really shortly before the [project] end. And then we could finally start and what we wanted. And we were able to do as we pleased. And it then actually worked.*”

Understanding **caricature 5b** as standstill, that was the only caricature that applied to the conflict management phase: “*Because nothing happened for two-and-a-half weeks, only standstill, and then in end effect, within three weeks, everything was built.*” Hence, conflict management for conflict I9 was marked by changing the workflow, bypassing the main conflict party and that way, successfully completing the project. Although the project was successfully completed, the underlying issues were not resolved, providing the breeding ground for future conflict, and the technical contact person (part of Conflict Parties A) eventually left the organisation.

**Table 15: Conflict I9 (Own Model).**

CONFLICT DEVELOPMENT/ESCALATION				
CONFLICT ISSUE & INITIATION	➔	CONFLICT PHASE 1	➔	CONFLICT PHASE 2
Conflict parties are in a conflict due to bullying behaviour (personal issues).		It started calmly (caricature 1).		After Day 3, communication was no longer possible as Conflict Party B only screamed at Conflict Party A. In support of Conflict Party B, others joined in to scream at Conflict Party A and those of the same position.
The department was split between those who liked everything the boss (Conflict Party B) said and those who countered him.		As Conflict Party B was obstinate, it entered the next phase (caricature 3).		Conflict Party A requested for a change as there was only standstill, no progress.
<p>Illustration removed for copyright restrictions</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Caricature 1</b></p>		<p>Illustration removed for copyright restrictions</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Caricature 3</b></p>		<p>Illustration removed for copyright restrictions</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Caricature 5</b></p>

Table 15 contd.: Conflict I9 (Own Model).

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT			
DEALING WITH CONFLICT		PHASE 1	PHASE 2
Conflict Management was marked by changing the workflow, bypassing the main conflict party and that way, successfully completing the project.		Nothing happened project-wise for 2 ½ weeks, understanding caricature 5b as standstill.	In the next phase, they bypassed the conflict (that is, Conflict Party B) and consequently, everything was 'built' (completed).
Although the project was successfully completed, the underlying issues were not resolved, and Conflict Party A left the organisation.		Conflict Party B had no interest in removing the conflict because it was to his liking that Conflict Party A looked bad. The failure of the project would have made Conflict Party A look bad.	The incompatible issues were, however, not discussed and provide the breeding ground for future conflict.
		<p>Illustration removed for copyright restrictions</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Caricature 5b</b></p>	<p>Illustration removed for copyright restrictions</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>No caricature applicable</b></p>

### 5.2.10 Conflict I10

Conflict I10 centred on differences over resource shortage and the direction of the company (see **Table 16** for I10 conflict overview): *“Two different units want a resource and where it will be deployed... that is the ostensible conflict; the underlying conflict is perhaps also the direction of the company... the decision which of the projects or areas is more important.”* Conflict Party B wanted an expert to partly work on her project team that had already been allocated to Conflict Party A’s project: *“The wish was uttered that it was like that, and it would be great if the person could do that.”*

This would have been a disturbance and “risk” for the interviewee’s project as one of his resource persons would not be able to dedicate fully to his project. Therefore, he declined the request:

*“... then one says, ‘I can understand that. I can also totally relate to it that it would be worthwhile... for your task. Unfortunately, it is difficult at the moment because of demanding case interpretations, every day is essential, difficult’ and so on.”*

But the other colleague kept on asking whether it would not be possible. The conflict thereby came about because his *“no was perhaps not accepted”*. Conflict Party A contributed this to the wish of every project leader to have a *“dream team”*:

*“...there are then very few that are like super consultants. You know that you can always take them, they are great, they do a super job and so on, who everyone wants on one’s project.”*

As Conflict Party A’s project was *“a bit complex, with regard to timing”*, a replacement might not have been able to handle the job adequately or he would have had to even search externally. Therefore, he had to decide whether to do the colleague a favour or decline the request: *“... do I want to create stress for myself on the project or is it worthwhile to partly [oblige] the colleague, ‘Look, yes, I will help you’.”* Starting from a discussion stage (**caricature 1**), the conflict developed to an open and not hidden conflict in terms of all involved parties knew what the conflict was about, one talks about it and others get to know about the conflict (**caricature 6**).

The conflict then intensified as one had to take a decision where the company was heading. If the company decided to do it one way, it was also a decision for the future and a decision against a different direction (which sectors and topics to focus on). Conflict Party A’s project sector was one of the organisation’s major project sectors

whilst Conflict Party B's own was declining. Therefore, the organisation had to decide which project sector was more important: to further support the already blooming sector or help a different sector to grow.

As they could not come to an agreement on their own after some back and forth (*discussing incompatible issues*), it was referred to management to make a decision (*third-party decision-making*). Conflict Party A chose **caricature 4b** as the damage has already been done, and it has to be "*cleaned up*". The previous caricatures depicted that only first aid was provided, and the damage still persisted. No final decision had been made yet, but the aim was to repair or better what had been damaged, with **caricature 5b** depicting the hope or belief where it is heading:

*"So, because it is still about, this cooperation... what one still has... or what one has, that it does not get damaged or should it have been damaged that one eliminates [what is not working] or mends it."*


According to Conflict Party A, the conflict was not to an extent where one gets too emotional or embraces each other after conflict; therefore, caricature 6b was not applicable. Thus, conflict management of conflict I10 was marked by direct discussion between conflict parties and referral to management to make a final decision. The decision of management was not only for this issue but also about the future direction of the company. Depending on the decision, it might have further consequences for the conflict parties and teams involved as "*decision for*" something was also a "*decision against*" something.

Table 16: Conflict I10 (Own Model).

CONFLICT DEVELOPMENT/ESCALATION				
CONFLICT ISSUE & INITIATION	➔	CONFLICT PHASE 1	➔	CONFLICT PHASE 2
Conflict parties are in a conflict due to differences over resource shortage and direction of company.		Conflict Party B asked a few times whether the expert could not work on the other project for days, but Conflict Party A kept on declining that it was not possible.		It was an open conflict as all involved parties knew what the conflict was about, one talked about it and others got to know about it.
Conflict Party B wanted someone on her project team that had already been allocated to Conflict Party A's project.				The conflict then intensified as one had to take a decision on where the company was heading (which sectors and topics to focus on).
		<p>Illustration removed for copyright restrictions</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Caricature 1</b></p>		<p>Illustration removed for copyright restrictions</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Caricature 6</b></p>



Table 16 contd.: Conflict I10 (Own Model).

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT			
DEALING WITH CONFLICT		PHASE 1	PHASE 2
Conflict Management was marked by direct discussion and referral to management to make a final decision.		The damage had been done and had to be 'cleaned up' (caricature 4b).	No final decision had been made yet, but the aim was to repair or better what had been damaged, with caricature 5b depicting the hope or belief where it was heading.
The decision of management was not only for this issue but also about the future direction of the company. Depending on the decision, it might have further consequences for the conflict parties and teams involved.		As they could not find an agreement on their own after some back and forth, it was referred to management to make a decision.	
		Illustration removed for copyright restrictions  <b>Caricature 4b</b>	Illustration removed for copyright restrictions  <b>Caricature 5b</b>

### 5.2.11 Conflict I11

Conflict parties in conflict I11 were in conflict due to announced changes in one department (see **Table 17** for I11 conflict overview). Conflict Party A wanted to make changes in Conflict Parties B's department which was threatening to affect their leadership position, influence and income.

Conflict Party A investigated one department within the company as a lot of things did not function as they should. After having had a closer look at the department, he discovered a lot of things that needed to be changed:

*“One thing that stood out for me was that three persons headed the department and all three had the same job description, exactly the same tasks and also in end effect, I did not see a difference between the three and even the three themselves could not describe what the actual difference was between them.”*

The resulting problem was that no decision could be taken as all three persons did the same and did not talk with each other: *“They decide without getting feedback or checking with the others.”* Apart from the feedback issue, others also complained that the three *“exerted enormous pressure or rather power, no matter what one wanted to do as long as the three did not – yes, one had no chance against the three”*.

Conflict Party A informed Conflict Parties B that in the future, *“at time X”*, there should only be one leader (**caricature 1**): *“At the same time, I also announced that I would also like to keep one of the three as the leader but it does not necessarily have to be one of them.”* By that, he tried to counteract any attempts to boycott his decision (*discussing incompatible issues*, in terms of having personal individual conversations):

*“... I had heard rumours that the three had more or less coordinated with each other that from the day that I say, there will now only be one [leader], they would all throw in the towel and leave me out in the rain because then I would have to come back to them and then they could exert pressure again.”*

From that day forward, the behaviour of Conflict Parties B changed immediately towards Conflict Party A. They united against him and tried with different tactics to stop this change. One such attempt involved complaining to Conflict Party A's superior: *“... they tried to exert pressure through the next level of management. It worked in so far as it, of course, had to be discussed and time went by.”*

The zenith of the conflict was marked by a “pure fight” because of the behaviour of Conflict Parties B towards A (**caricature 9**):

*“...in end effect, they cut off the legs of their own success or area because nothing worked again because of their behaviour. All of their performance was invested to thwart everything and behave destructively.”*

The department was then “*just functioning but nothing more happened*” which was having effects on operations and other parties.

As Conflict Parties B did not collaborate, Conflict Party A then did not keep one of the persons on the position but chose a new person as department leader (*changing workflows and or team members*). Conflict Parties B were at first shocked as “*they were very confident that their own plan would work ... and that no one else would take that position*”. They reacted differently to this new development, with diverse consequences for the work atmosphere, relationships and tasks (*bullying into submission*):

*“...the one with the complaints...he told everyone loudly, especially when I was not there, how bad I am and what a bad boss I am and what bad things I have done... The one who snapped called in sick regularly at the following days but always called in sick in a way that made it difficult to find a replacement... And the one who kind of threw in the towel, of course, did not do anything again in all other areas where he had to do additional tasks which made daily operations very, very exhausting...”*

Consequently, everything they had built was in rumbles (**caricature 1b**): “*In rumbles because they had been offered that one of the three could continue but all of them simply threw in the towel.*”



The initial impulse for it to get better only came when others told Conflict Parties B to stop their behaviour and pull themselves together: “*Guys, you have to stop with this behaviour. It does not help anyone.*” Conflict Parties B then resigned themselves to the situation: It was just “*a matter of accepting the decision*” and “*striving on*” (‘sweeping’ in **caricature 4b**). But when it came to settling the conflict issue, to “*help to erect the table again, someone else should do that. One does not help with that*”. Apart from a general “*resignation*”, they adjusted to the situation differently, with differing post-conflict relations with Conflict Party A and new leadership. Thus, conflict management efforts for conflict I11 were marked by direct individual talks and weighing

in of others to get Conflict Parties B to adjust their contra-productive behaviour. The conflict, however, had long-lasting consequences for work relations, with one of the conflict parties holding on to a personal grudge against Conflict Party A and avoiding behaviour towards the new leader.

**Table 17: Conflict I11 (Own Model).**

CONFLICT DEVELOPMENT/ESCALATION				
CONFLICT ISSUE & INITIATION	➔	CONFLICT PHASE 1	➔	CONFLICT PHASE 2
Conflict parties are in a conflict due to announced changes in one department.		The beginning was when Conflict Party A announced that he wanted to have a closer look at why this and that happened in the department.		The department was then just functioning, but nothing more happened which was having effects on operations and other parties.
Conflict Party A wanted to make changes in Conflict Parties B's department, affecting their leadership position and influence.		The behaviour of Conflict Parties B changed immediately towards Conflict Party A, and as the next phase, they launched an attempt to stop it by complaining to A's superior.		At the zenith of the conflict, it was a pure fight because of the behaviour of Conflict Parties B towards A, and they 'cut off the legs' of their own success or area – nothing functioned again.
		<p>Illustration removed for copyright restrictions</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Caricature 1</b></p>		<p>Illustration removed for copyright restrictions</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Caricature 9</b></p>

Table 17 contd.: Conflict I11 (Own Model).

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT			
DEALING WITH CONFLICT		PHASE 1	PHASE 2
Conflict Management was marked by direct individual talks and weighing in of others to get Conflict Parties B to adjust their contra-productive behaviour.		Conflict Party A talked to Conflict Parties B individually that there could only be one leader, but Conflict Parties B rejected the decision unanimously, thinking that he would change his mind.	The initial impulse for it to get better only came when others told Conflict Parties B to stop their behaviour and pull themselves together.
The issues were not resolved, and upon pressure of others, Conflict Parties B resigned themselves to the new situation in different ways (character-specific).		Conflict Party A then chose a different leader that is not one of them. Consequently, everything they had built is in rumbles (caricature 1b). In rumbles because they had been offered that one of the three (Conflict Party B) could have continued but all of them threw in the towel.	Everyone handled it their own way; there is no togetherness. Someone else should erect the 'table' again. It is just a matter of accepting the decision and striving on ('sweeping' in caricature 4b).
		<p>Illustration removed for copyright restrictions</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Caricature 1b</b></p>	<p>Illustration removed for copyright restrictions</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Caricature 4b</b></p>

### 5.2.12 Conflict I12

Conflict I12 centred on differences over area of responsibility (see **Table 18** for I12 conflict overview). Conflict Party B got active in Conflict Party A's area of responsibility *"for which he did not have the permission"*.

Conflict Party A confronted Conflict Party B over it but Conflict Party B did not see anything wrong with attending to A's clients and said that *"he was in the right"*. They talked on the phone for some time – *"in a factual tone... without cursing, screaming, or the like"* (discussing incompatible issues). But despite that effort to talk over the incompatible issues, both parties *"remained obstinate"* and insisted on being in the right (**caricature 4** depicting being *"obstinate"* via folded arms, hands in the pockets and shut mouths). With fingers pointing at each other, both parties felt they were in the right and rather blamed the other (**caricature 5**). They were angry with the other party – *"on the inside"*, *"not screaming at each other or the like"* – in a way trying *"not to let it show"* that it was making them angry (**caricature 6** partially applies).

Both remained obstinate and did not want to back down. Therefore, a higher authority had to decide for them on how to settle this issue (*third-party decision-making*): *"They were two people of the same hierarchy level and as they could not come to an agreement, the boss, their superior, had to exercise his authority."* As the conflict parties could not settle the issue amicably, the decision by higher authority produced a winner and a loser: The boss decided that the one who had become active in the other one's area of responsibility should *"continue serving the clients because he was successful"*. And the other one who was actually responsible had to lose out.

The conflict parties did not repair anything together but *"there was some repairing in the sense that the boss made a decision, and it was then clear how to proceed"* (**caricature 5b**). There was some 'tidying up' and 'sweeping' (**caricature 4b**), in the sense that *"it was clear now how to continue and who is responsible for what"*. On the personal level, the decision did not create a win-win-solution: *"One was happy, and the other was very, very disappointed."* Consequentially, the conflict situation affected how they related with each other: They did not say anything again to each other on the personal level apart from 'hello' and tried to avoid each other (*avoiding interactions*). Thus, conflict management efforts of conflict I12 involved discussing incompatible issues and a third party deciding on how to settle the issue. Although the

issue was solved on the work level in terms of who continues to serve the clients in question, the relationship remained severely affected post-conflict.



**Table 18: Conflict I12 (Own Model).**

CONFLICT DEVELOPMENT/ESCALATION				
CONFLICT ISSUE & INITIATION	→	CONFLICT PHASE 1	→	CONFLICT PHASE 2
Conflict parties are in a conflict due to one party becoming active in the other party's area of responsibility.		Conflict Party A confronted Conflict Party B about his actions but Conflict Party B did not see anything wrong with it. Both parties remained obstinate and insisted on being in the right (caricature 4).		They were angry with the other party – on the inside, not screaming at each other or the like (caricature 6 partially applies).
Conflict Party B became active in Conflict Party A's area of responsibility without permission (attending to his clients).		Both parties felt they were in the right and rather blamed the other (caricature 5).		
Illustration removed for copyright restrictions  <b>Caricature 4</b>		Illustration removed for copyright restrictions  <b>Caricature 5</b>		Illustration removed for copyright restrictions  <b>Caricature 6</b>

Table 18 contd.: Conflict I12 (Own Model).

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT			
DEALING WITH CONFLICT		PHASE 1	PHASE 2
Conflict Management was marked by discussing incompatible issues and a third party deciding how to settle the issue.		Both remained obstinate and did not want to back down. As they could not come to an agreement on their own, their common supervisor then had to decide how it got settled.	There was some 'tidying up' and 'sweeping' (caricature 4b), in the sense that it was clear now how to continue and who was responsible for what.
As the conflict parties could not settle the issue amicably, the decision by higher authority produced a winner and a loser.		The conflict parties did not repair anything together but there was some repairing in the sense that the boss made a decision, and it was then clear how to proceed (caricature 5b).	
		Illustration removed for copyright restrictions <b>Caricature 5b</b>	Illustration removed for copyright restrictions <b>Caricature 4b</b>

### 5.3 Conflict development

The preceding **Section 5.2** presented an overview of conflicts I1 to I12 and how they were dealt with in respective organisations. This **Section 5.3** explores related conflict experiences with regard to the conflict issue, number of conflict parties involved, and conflict development/escalation.



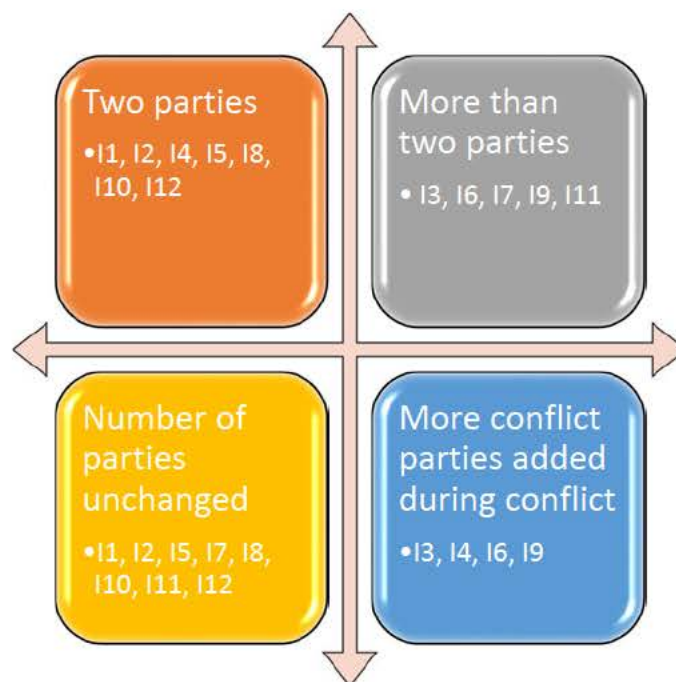
Fig. 32: Conflict Issue Overview (Own Model).<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 32** presents related *conflict issues* in two categories: *task-/process related* and *personal issues*. Examples for task-/process-related issues were “work speed and workload discrepancy”, “shortage situation – personnel or material”, “non-agreement over working methods” and more. Personal issues involved, for example, “sudden animosity towards one party”, “power struggle”, and “bullying behaviour”. Two conflicts – I6 and I8 - involved task-/process related as well as personal issues: Whereas conflict

<sup>3</sup> Pictures in **Figure 32** are freely available Microsoft images.

I6 centred on different departmental aims and personal differences with one team member, conflict I8 involved non-agreement over working methods as well as a related power struggle. The power struggle was related as the interest to lead the project might have subconsciously led to differences over how to execute the project. Moreover, 3 out of the 4 conflicts that centred on personal issues had long lasting consequences for interpersonal relations and work processes during conflict as well as post-conflict.

Conflicts also differed with regard to the *number of conflict parties involved*: two parties, more than two parties, number of parties unchanged, and more conflict parties added during conflict (see **Figure 33** for an overview of conflict parties involved). Conflicts that involved more parties generally were more complex in terms of adding more diverse interests and personal characteristics to the situation (conflicts I3, I6 and I11), exerting more pressure on one of the conflict parties that is the weaker link (conflict I9) or 'lone ranger' against multiple parties (conflict I11).



**Fig. 33: Number of Conflict Parties' Overview** (Own Figure).

The conflicts can further be distinguished with regard to *how they developed and/or escalated in the course of conflict*. **Figure 34** provides an overview of how conflicts I1 to I12 developed from phase 1 to phase 2 and sums up individual overviews that were presented in **Section 5.2**.



Fig. 34: Conflict Development/Escalation Overview (Own Figure).

Although each conflict had its own unique underlying issues, expression of conflictful behaviour and attitudes, there were similarities in terms of development. **Phase 1** often involved some form of dialogue and discussion surrounding the conflict issue, ranging from open dialogue (I2) to confrontation (I1, I9, I12) and accusations (I4, I7). Apart from that, in a number of instances, parties were being obstinate, feeling in the right and/or unwilling to concede to the respective other party's concerns or requests (for example, I1, I5, I6, I9, I10, I12). Therefore, Phase 1 still involved some form of discussion. In comparison, **Phase 2** either showed itself in a) avoiding behaviour ("silent treatment" in I2, "bypassing" in I3), b) standstill in terms of communication and agreement being no longer possible (I6, I9), no progress (I9) or even destroying one's own basis (I7), and/or c) open confrontation ("pure fight" in I11, escalations in I6). In some instances, a higher authority had to be approached to decide on how to progress and break the deadlock (I6, I10). **Figure 35** exemplifies described tendencies for Phases 1 and 2.



**Fig. 35: Conflict Phases** (Own Figure).

## 5.4 Conflict management approaches

Upon establishing how conflicts developed/escalated, **Section 5.4** firstly examines which conflict management approaches were most prominent in related conflict experiences, and the similarities and differences between the 12 conflict management attempts. Secondly, it explores how conflicts are generally dealt with in respective organisations (as related by interviewees). Finally, it presents categories of conflict management based on the findings.

### 5.4.1 Conflict management distribution

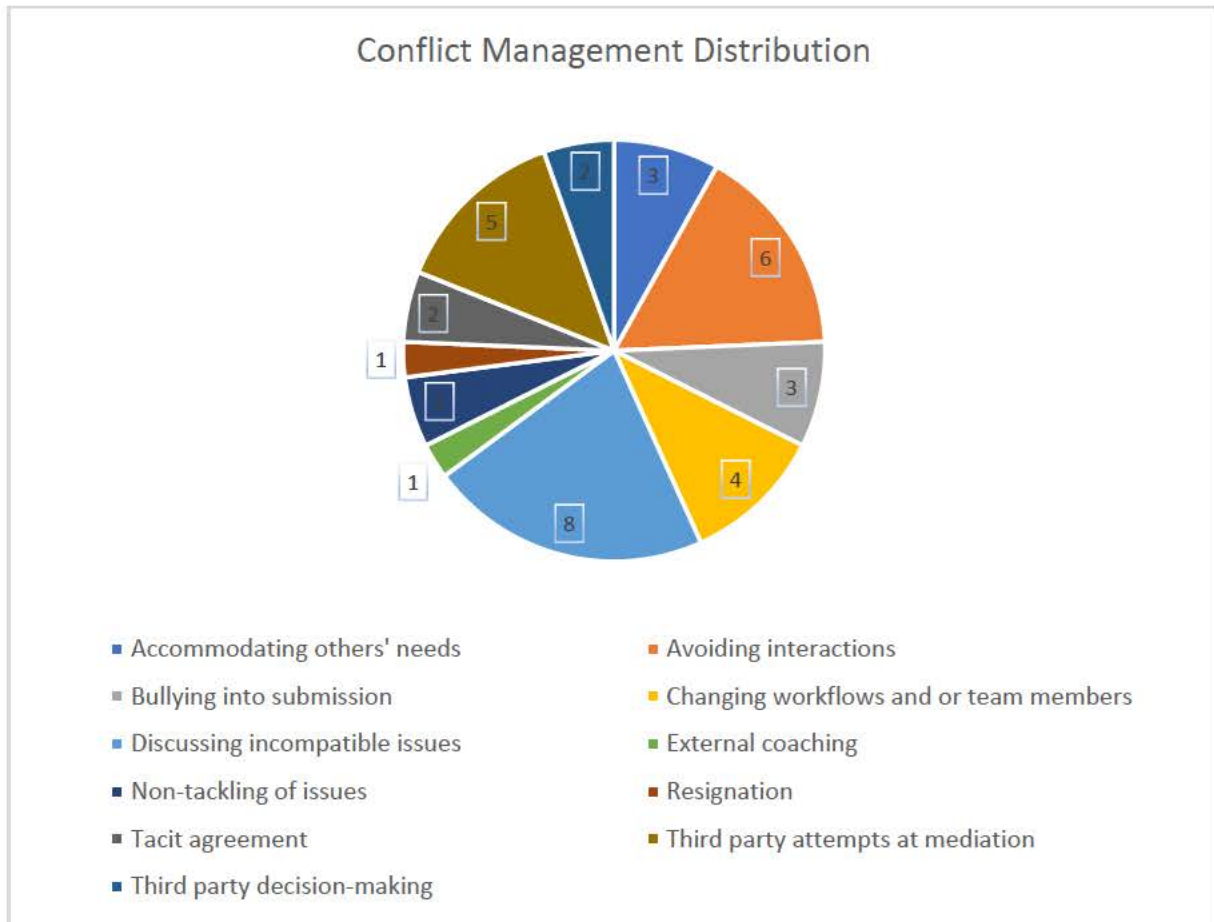


Fig. 36: Conflict Management Distribution (Own Figure).

Figure 36 depicts that the most salient conflict management approaches were avoiding interactions (6), discussing incompatible issues (8), and third-party attempts at mediation (5). Although the conflicts I1 to I12 were very diverse in terms of conflict issue, number of conflict parties involved, and development/escalation, most of them involved attempts to discuss the incompatible issues, to varying levels of success. After an initial confrontation about the conflict issue, both conflicts I1 and I8 involved opening up to each other and discussing how to settle the incompatible issues between them. In comparison, discussions or attempts to discuss issues between the conflict parties in conflict I3 were not successful without a moderator, and an exchange workshop headed by a third party helped to eradicate misconceptions and improve communication between the departments.

Therefore, it has to be considered whether, on the one hand, one conflict involved more than one conflict management approach, and on the other hand, which

conflict management approach was utilised at which conflict stage. As illustrated in **Figure 37**, all 12 conflicts involved more than one conflict management approach - ranging from two to four approaches. Whereas, for example, conflict I8 involved two conflict management approaches (discussing incompatible issues, and avoiding interactions), conflict management for conflict I11 consisted of discussing incompatible issues to changing workflows and or team members, resignation and finally third-party attempts at mediation. The first three phases for conflict I11 did not improve the situation but rather led to boycotting behaviour that was meant to negatively affect the department (thus, 'resignation' highlighted in orange). The behaviour only improved through the intervention of colleagues (phase four in green).

A number of conflicts were settled on the positive side: these involved 'accommodating others' needs' (conflicts I1, I3 and I5), and 'tacit agreement' (conflict I2). Instead of solely pursuing one's own self-interest, the parties, thus, compromised and considered the other party's concerns, and/or decided that the conflict was not serious enough to warrant damaging the interpersonal relations.

Third-party attempts at mediation assisted parties to settle their differences and/or normalise working operations and relations (conflicts I3 and I11), with the exception of conflict I6. The third party mediating in conflict I6 did not attempt to settle the issues between the conflict parties but solely pursued the interest of getting the project back on track. Thus, the project was successfully completed but the work atmosphere and relations continued to be affected.

With regard to 'third-party decision-making', it produced winners and losers (conflict I12 and likely conflict I10 upon final decision-making). Therefore, third-party decision-making did not create a win-win solution for both parties but left one party satisfied and one party disappointed.



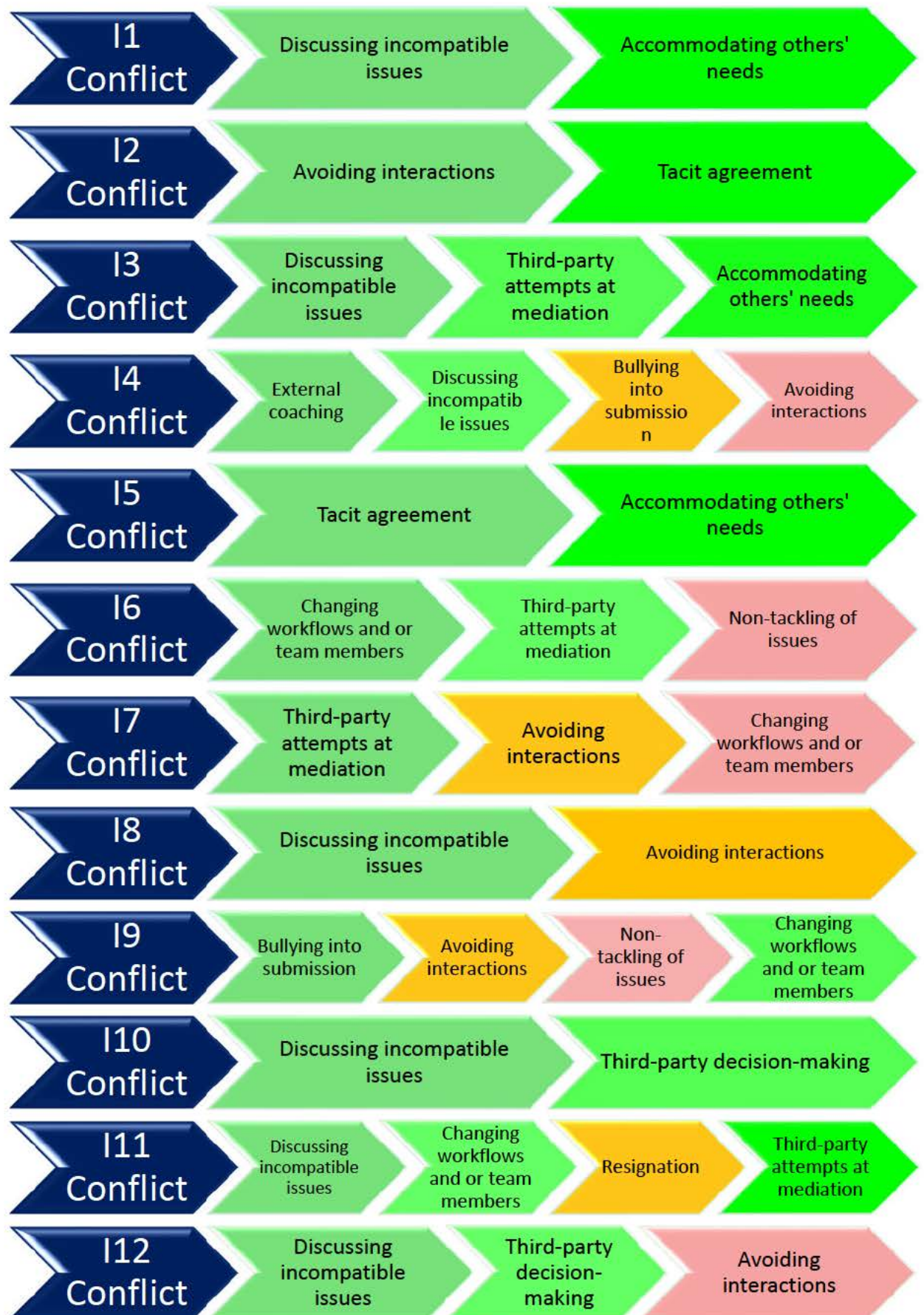


Fig. 37: Conflict Management Overview (Own Figure).

Other conflict situations ended negatively (highlighted in pink or orange, depending on the outcome): Either parties avoided communicating with each other (avoiding interactions in conflicts I4 and I12), left the organisation (changing workflows and or team members in conflicts I7 and I9), or did not address the incompatible issues that led to conflict and continued to express conflictful behaviour (non-tackling of issues in conflict I6).

In sum, conflict situations went through several conflict management phases, including positive developments towards settlement and, in some instances, setbacks. Strategies such as discussing incompatible issues, changing workflows and or team members, and/or involving a third party mediating between conflict parties were utilized for settling the respective conflicts. However, in some cases, setbacks occurred, with parties avoiding interacting with each other and/or bullying the other into submission. In the worst-case scenarios, the interpersonal relations were permanently destroyed, affecting how they related with each other daily, and consequently led conflict parties in two cases to leave the respective organisation.

#### **5.4.2 General conflict management**

Apart from describing a particular conflict experience and related conflict management approaches, I also asked conflict parties to relate how conflicts are generally dealt with at their respective organisations. Those conflict parties holding a higher position, on the one hand, emphasised on settling differences between employees as soon as they occurred. Upon realising backbiting between the team members, interviewee I4 intervenes in the form of personal talks before it turns it a conflict. On the other hand, interviewee I4 related that he tends to take someone off from a project in order to solve a conflict because he assumes that not everyone can work with everyone (changing workflows and or team members).

Some issues at work may lead to conflicts time and again such as work schedules and vacation times. Interviewee I11 related that conflicts are often about work schedules which are often mediated by the workers' council and similar bodies. The final decision is, however, taken by the manager responsible for work schedules. Although these conflicts are frequent and are at times fought hard, they are all very practised in it. It means that the people can laugh and work with each other shortly after the conflict has been settled. Similarly, interviewee I1 also mentioned work

schedule issues as a frequent conflict issue. When conflicts arose, the boss was involved in trying to find a solution, restructuring the way staff worked together and changing working schedules so that the parties could work better together. However, it did not always work out, and the issue often occurred again after some weeks. As the underlying issue could not be settled, it led time and again to conflicts. In a similar vein, interviewee I2 as the department leader is the one who has to put her foot down or make decisions when there are conflicts between other staff, and they cannot settle it on their own. She wants it to be a fair decision: for example, this year one person can take vacation around this time and the next year, it will be the colleague's turn. But when she decides, the conflict is over for her, and it also has to be over for the other staff.

Apart from a higher authority at the workplace, trained mediators may also get involved in settling conflicts: In serious situations at interviewee I5's organisation, a crisis team will be involved as they have the adequate training for solving the conflict in the best possible manner, whilst for other issues, either the social worker for students' concerns or the principal for conflicts between other party constellations mediate between the conflict parties.

Third parties, however, only get involved when the conflict parties themselves are not able to resolve the differences among themselves. In interviewee I9's case, his team resolves disputes over professional matters in escalation meetings where they check what the problem is, how it can be solved and delegate the tasks for problem solving. Therefore, it depended on the issue: whether it needs third-party involvement or not.

In general, the discussions displayed a tendency towards active management of conflicts rather than using avoidance approaches to let the conflicts linger on. Where issues cannot be solved between the conflict parties themselves, a third party generally gets involved to make a decision and arrangements where required. It, however, has to be distinguished whether the respective interviewee him/herself is the third party and in the position to decide versus the case where the interviewee him/herself is one of the conflict parties. In the related conflict experiences in **Section 5.3** where the interviewee was him/herself experiencing conflict with another party, he/she did not have the decision power to end the conflict by his/her terms. Therefore, being oneself in a conflict situation, preferred strategies in the third-party position do not apply in such circumstances, and avoiding interactions, among other conflict management

approaches, are utilised as well as involvement of higher authorities (see **Figure 36** for an overview of conflict management approaches for conflicts I1 to I12).

### **5.4.3 Conflict management categories**

The assessment of conflict management findings in **Section 5.4** has revealed that conflict management approaches fall into different categories. As depicted in **Figure 38**, conflict management approaches can firstly be distinguished by whether only the *conflict parties* are involved in conflict management versus some level of *third-party* assistance or decision-making.

At the third-party level, I distinguished between the subcategories *third-party assistance* and *decision-making* as decision-making means that the third party has the last word in the conflict settlement whereas assistance implies that the third party only assists the parties in finding a settlement to the conflict and decision-making rests with the conflict parties. Assistance includes *external coaching* of one party (assisting the party to be able to deal with the conflict at hand) as well as *third-party attempts at mediation* between both conflict parties (involving private face-to-face or panel discussions).

With regard to the category conflict parties, five subcategories encompass the conflict management strategies, styles or approaches utilised by the conflict parties in conflicts I1 to I12. *Relationship-oriented* and *discussion* are more cooperative approaches and involve two-sided interactions to settle the incompatible issues. Whereas relationship-oriented approaches go as far as conceding part of one's self-interest and accommodating the other party's needs, discussion involves speaking about the issues that stand between them and voicing opinions and possibly a way out of the conflict situation. In comparison, the three other approaches are more individual-centred approaches. *Coercion* is applied by one party towards the other, involving acts of harassing and personal attacks in order to make one colleague submit to directives, procedures or no apparent reason.

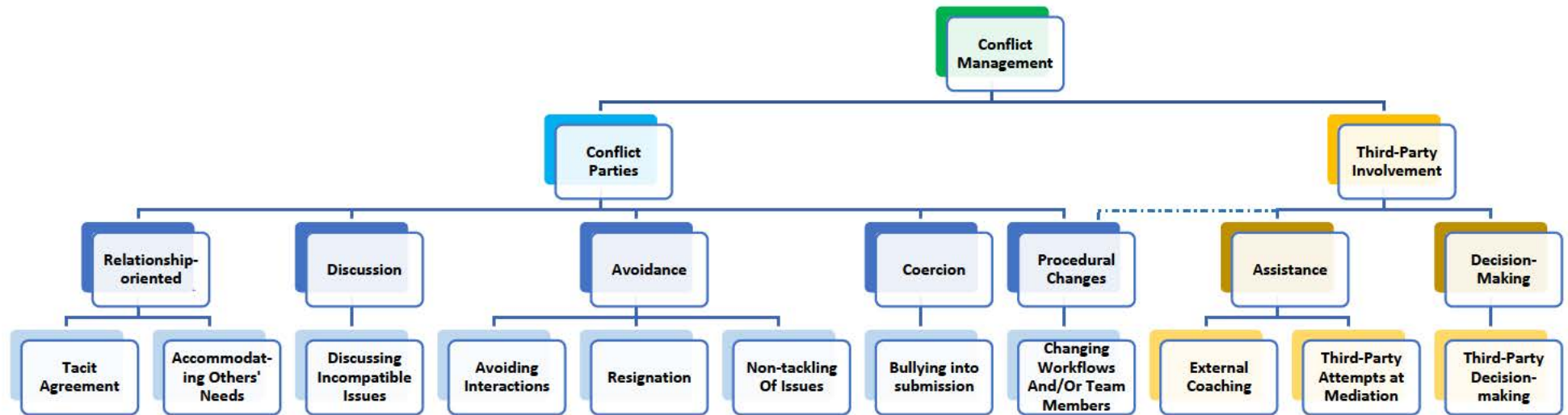


Fig. 38: Conflict Management Categories (Own Figure).

*Avoidance strategies* either 1) involve reduced interactions between the parties in the short or long term, 2) resignation of parties with the consequence of indifference to work at hand and non-interest to resolve the issues, or 3) non-tackling of issues with long-term consequences for the work atmosphere and interpersonal relations. Finally, *procedural changes* may involve both parties but in the related conflict experiences, one party sought to change workflows and or team members when a project or task got stalled. It was mostly the conflict party him/herself who made the decision for a procedural change; in one instance, the change was effected by a higher authority. As the request came from the conflict parties to effect the change, I decided to keep the subcategory procedural change solely under the category conflict parties. However, I highlighted possible third-party involvement with a dotted line.

## **5.5 Summary**

Related conflict experiences differed with regard to conflict issue, number of conflict parties and conflict development. Task/process-related issues such as non-agreement over working methods, shortage situation, among others, were mostly mentioned as the cause of conflict, whereas personal issues had generally more long-lasting consequences for personal relations and work processes. Whilst some conflicts were between two conflict parties, other conflicts involved more than two parties from the onset of conflict or in the course of conflict.

With regard to conflict development, the caricatures selected by the respective interviewee assisted to illustrate and re-enact the attitudes and behaviours of the conflict parties, and how they changed during conflict. On the basis of selected caricatures and further elaborations by the interviewees, I could delineate the development phases of conflicts. Phase 1 often entailed some form of dialogue and discussion, ranging from dialogue to confrontation and accusations. In comparison, Phase 2 was either marked by avoiding behaviour, standstill or open confrontation.

In the same vein, conflict management underwent different stages, with conflicts I1 to I12 being subject to two to four conflict management attempts, and positive developments and/or setbacks. The most salient conflict management approaches were avoiding interactions, discussing incompatible issues, and third-party attempts at mediation. As more than one conflict management approach was utilised in each conflict, solely considering the most prominent conflict management approach would,

however, not give an adequate picture of the respective conflict management attempts. Whereas conflicts that utilised accommodating others' needs and tacit agreement at the final phase were positively settled, conflict management approaches avoiding interactions, changing workflows and/or team members in terms of employees leaving the organisation, and non-tackling of issues denoted a negative conflict outcome. When third parties got involved and mediated between conflict parties at the final conflict management stage, it helped conflict parties to settle their differences and improve communication and understanding. By contrast, third parties making decisions for conflict parties settled issues by deciding who will be responsible for what and how to proceed in projects. However, it produced a winner and a loser and hampered interpersonal relations beyond the immediate conflict situation.

Thus, conflicts underwent various developments in terms of escalation and conflict management, with more cooperative conflict management approaches leading to more successful settlements in terms of work processes and interpersonal relations than self-centred approaches. There was also a tendency and preference expressed towards active conflict management than utilising avoiding approaches that would likely worsen situations and make conflicts to linger on. Building upon this chapter's assessments and conclusions, the following chapter, **Chapter 6**, explores how the choice of certain conflict management approaches impacted interpersonal relations and performance of respective conflict parties.

## **6. Conflict Management Outcome: Consequences for Interpersonal Relations and Performance**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The previous **Chapter 5** explored the conflict management approaches utilised in respective conflict situations which provides the background for assessing the effects of these conflict management approaches on the conflict outcome in **Chapter 6**. The third research findings' chapter thus seeks to provide answers for Research Question 3: **How does the implementation of conflict management methods to internal organisational conflicts affect interpersonal relations and performance?** I, therefore, state that the way tasks are being accomplished as well as how persons relate with each other within the work environment may be adversely affected by conflict situations. Depending on the way conflicts are handled then determines how individuals consequentially work together. This includes, among others, whether individuals and teams work well together, whether tasks are well coordinated, and whether individuals support each other in task/project execution.

This Chapter's focus is, firstly, on examining the 12 conflict episodes with regard to the effects of conflict management on interpersonal relations and performance; secondly, exploring similarities and differences between the cases with regard to conflict management effects, and transformation of interpersonal relations and performance; and thirdly, establishing which conflict management implementations facilitated certain conflict outcomes – improved, neutral or affected interpersonal relations/performance.

### **6.2 Conflict episodes - effects of conflict management implementation**

In order to explore the effects of conflict management, as a first step, conflicts I1 to I12 are assessed with regard to *how the respective conflict management implementations affected interpersonal relations and performance*. This forms the basis for drawing similarities and differences between cases in the second section of the chapter: which conflict management implementations had no effects, led to improved or affected interpersonal relations/performance.



### 6.2.1 Conflict I1

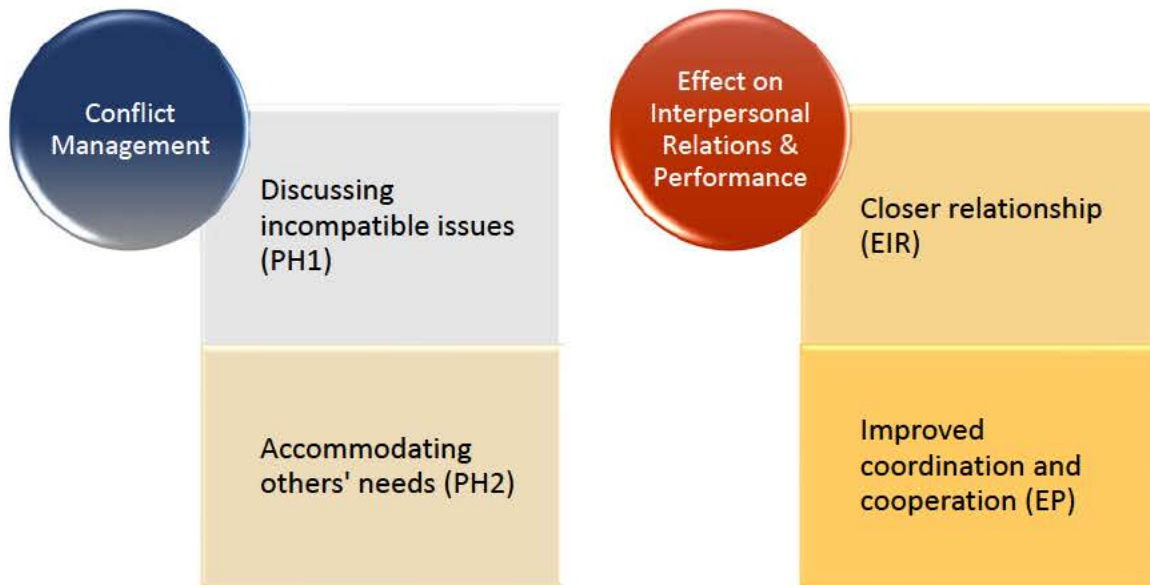
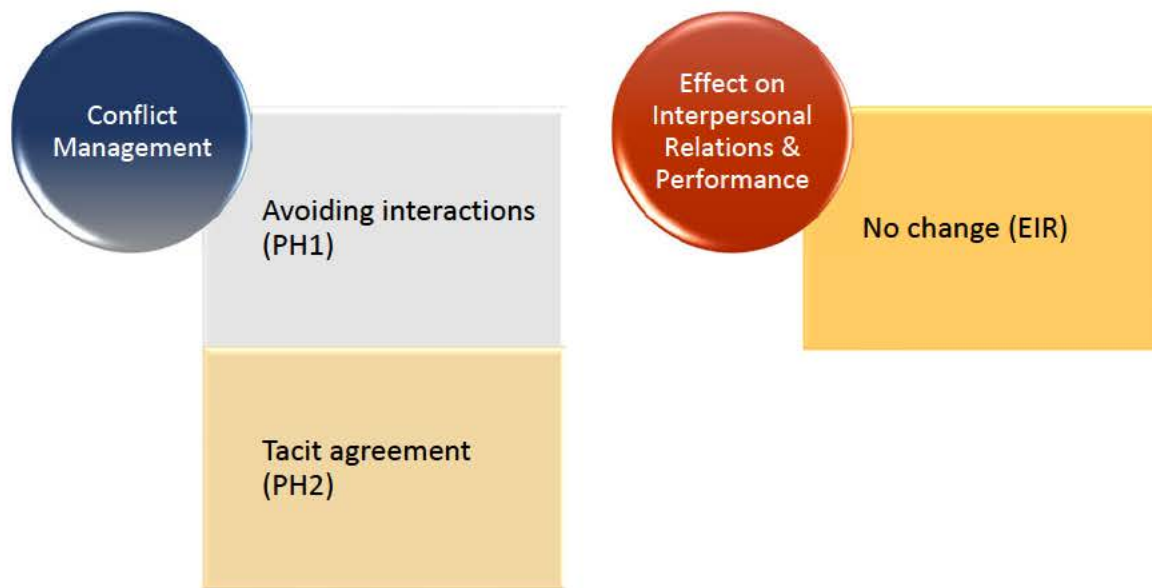


Fig. 39: Effect of Conflict Management Implementation – Conflict I1 (Own Figure).

Discussing the issue that had angered Conflict Party A in conflict I1 enabled a better, closer working relationship than before the conflict (see Fig. 39 for an overview of the effect of conflict management implementation in conflict I1). Although they got on well before the conflict, it improved further after the conflict (*closer relationship*): “... we got on better at the end or even very good.” Afterwards, they often went out together to have a drink or eat out at lunch time and opened up more to each other: “... we both opened up more. I don’t know whether it was by accident or if it simply came through that.” According to Conflict Party A, after she had voiced the issue, she herself opened up more as she was no longer that stressed with the situation. Furthermore, one of the points that they deliberated upon was what they could do better in the future that both are satisfied with, thereby accommodating each others’ needs and concerns: “*Working together was just great. It was much easier. It was just no longer that tense.*” It culminated in working together more (*improved coordination and cooperation*): “*One started, the other finished it, or we simply discussed it together and finished it together.*” Instead of working separately on their tasks, they therefore “*acted like a group*” at the end in “*working together and complementing each other*” and “*no longer facing each other but together.*” Conflict Party A no longer had to do as much as before whereas the other did no longer take a ‘laissez faire’ approach to working, was more committed

to work and no longer pushed tasks to the other’s task list. Therefore, they improved on their coordination and cooperation that was even better than before the conflict. Thus, implemented cooperative conflict management efforts in conflict I1 led to improved relations and improved performance.

### 6.2.2 Conflict I2



**Fig. 40: Effect of Conflict Management Implementation – Conflict I2 (Own Figure).**

Although the conflict parties in conflict I2 at first chose to avoid interacting with each other and solely communicated on essential matters, they both decided that this conflict was not worth being angry with each other for long and reconciled. They did not further discuss the issues but there was a tacit agreement to go back to normal relations. Their previously good relationship was only affected for a short-term, and they “*can relate on a friendly basis again*”, and “*all is well again*” (see **Fig. 40** for an overview of the effect of conflict management implementation in conflict I2). Therefore, by reconciling and returning to normal relations, the interpersonal relationship and performance were both not affected in the long term (*no change*). The conflict is now only something they tease each other with: “... *we could laugh about it again, a few days later. Now it is more of a small tease, ‘Not that you will flip again.’*” Thus, implemented cooperative conflict management efforts in conflict I2 contributed to normalcy in relations and performance, with no change reported for both factors.

### 6.2.3 Conflict I3

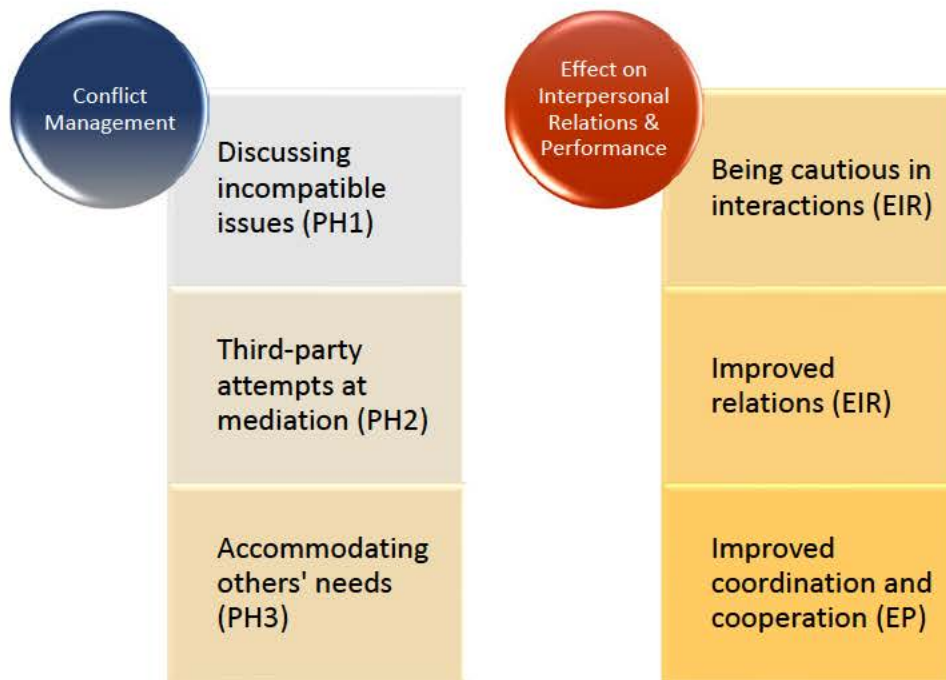


Fig. 41: Effect of Conflict Management Implementation – Conflict I3 (Own Figure).

The first stage of conflict management – discussing incompatible issues – did not improve communication between the departments in conflict I3, and in interactions or email correspondence, Conflict Party A was more formal or not as personal as before (*being cautious in interactions*) (see Fig. 41 for an overview of the effect of conflict management implementation in conflict I3). During Phase 2 – third-party attempts at mediation – the exchange workshop led by a moderator helped to remove prejudices and misconceptions between the departments:

*“Most of time, what one had thought was not true. Especially that, as said, ‘They don’t do anything.’ ‘No, we know that you do something. But we want that there is progress.’ Exactly - because of that communication.”*

Consequently, the relationship was “better” after the workshop (*improved relations*). The communication and working together improved after the workshop, and when there was any undertaking, they “*tried to involve the colleagues more*” (*improved coordination and cooperation*). Furthermore, by better explaining and responding more in-depth to requests of the other department, Conflict Party A tried to accommodate the others’ needs:

“Yes, when I had to reject something, I then personally tried where possible to write down an explanation, perhaps also more comprehensively than I would have done before that. Or perhaps, when something occurred, one then called them...”

Thus, third-party assistance and cooperative conflict management in conflict I3 contributed to improved relations and improved performance.

#### 6.2.4 Conflict I4

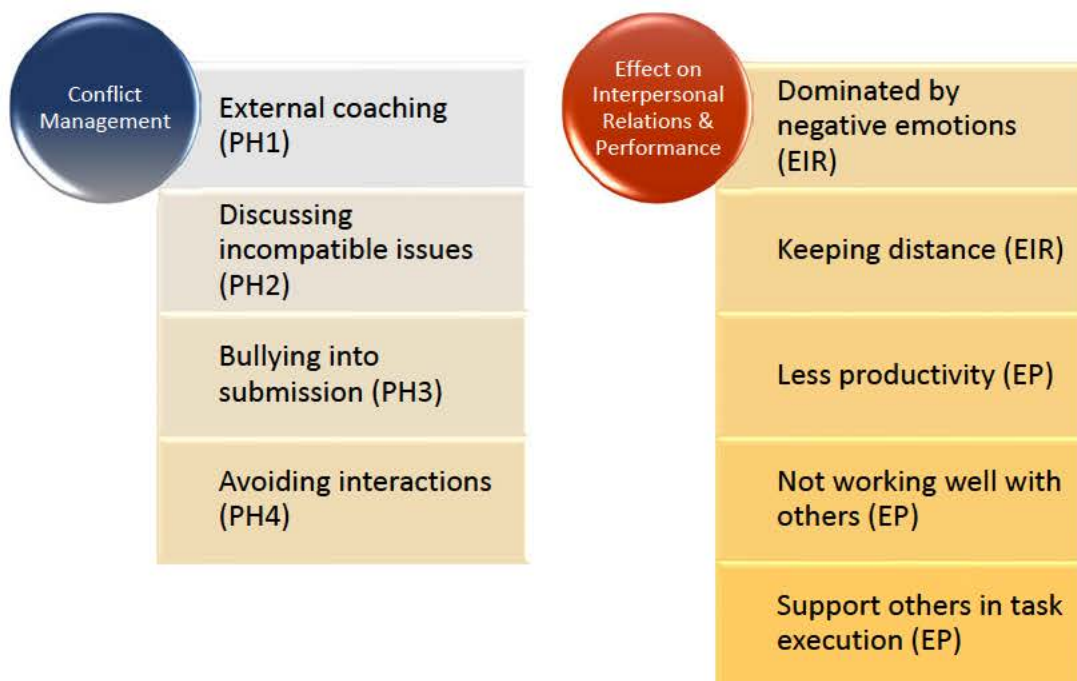


Fig. 42: Effect of Conflict Management Implementation – Conflict I4 (Own Figure).

In receiving external help from a neutral coach as Phase 1 of conflict management, Conflict Party A was strengthened and emboldened for any attacks from the other side. They consequently tried in a personal conversation to converse only on a business level. It worked out for some time until members of the other person’s team liked her as a coach better. As Conflict Party B tried to bully not only Conflict Party A but also control her team members to do things as she wanted them to do, it had the effect that they were no longer working well with each other (*not working well with others*), and it also led to a loss in productivity which “*showed itself in the turnover*” figures (*less productivity*) (see Fig. 42 for an overview of the effect of conflict management implementation in conflict I4). As Conflict Party B is still part of the business and does

a lot of things well, Conflict Party A would support her in task execution whenever she would contact her with regard to that (*support others in task execution*): “Today I would say, ‘Okay, I would love to help you out, you are part of my company. If you need something, I will help you.’ Despite all that fuss.” Despite that, the relationship got damaged to a point that they keep their distance:

*“And I no longer hug her, I do not allow people like that close to my heart again; I rather stretch out my hand or I wave from far. She also does that nowadays, and I do not want more than that.”*

They can sit at the same table during events but they do not interact with each other (*keeping distance*). Even thinking of the other calling, can raise Conflict Party A’s heartbeat, thinking of whether she has done anything wrong:

*“When tomorrow her number or her name would appear on my display, I would then think, ‘O God, have I done something wrong?’ ... but then I would come back to my senses, ‘Stop, I have not done anything wrong.’”*

When she thought of once approaching the other party to seek her expertise, Conflict Party B looked away as soon as she saw her which discouraged her from going through with it. Therefore, the relationship that Conflict Party A likened to a “mother-daughter” relationship before the conflict, is now dominated by negative emotions and minimum to no interaction (*dominated by negative emotions*): “So we were always in constant contact and then all of a sudden, from this familiar, friendly [relationship] – so much spite.” Thus, as cooperative conflict management was not successful to settle the personal issues between the conflict parties, consequentially employed individual-centred conflict management approaches in conflict I4 contributed to persistently strained relations and affected performance.

### 6.2.5 Conflict I5

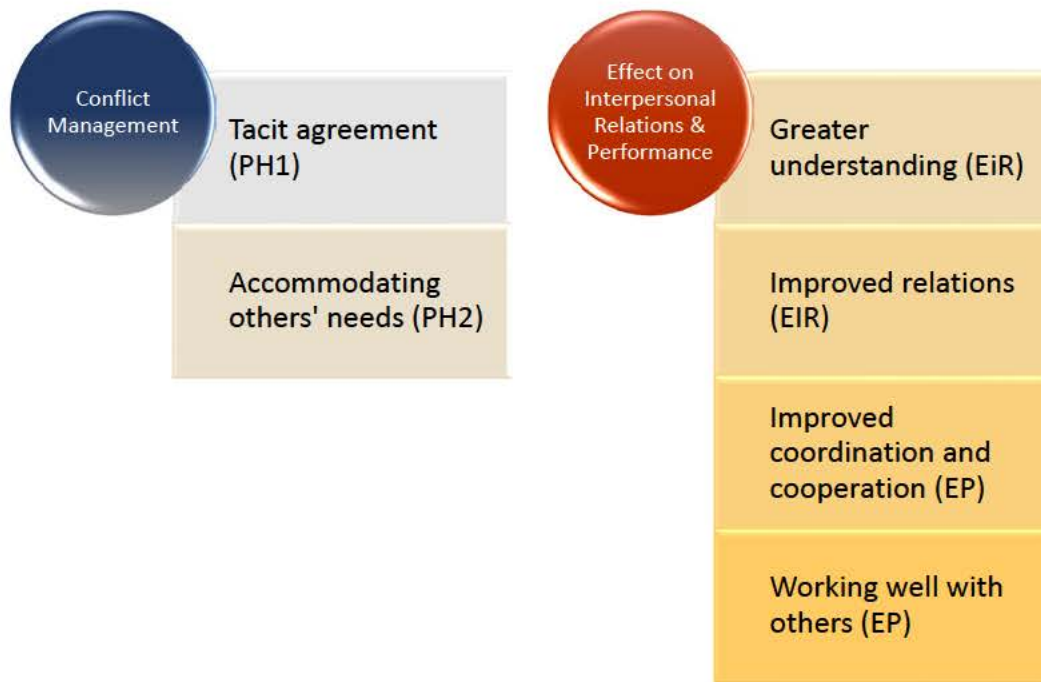
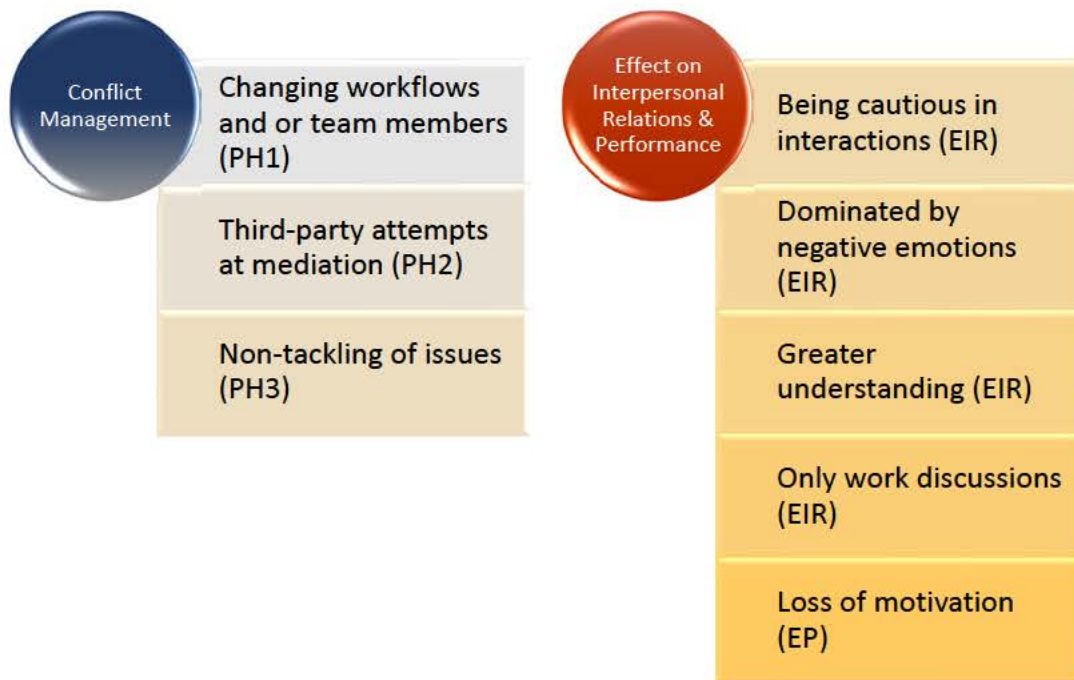


Fig. 43: Effect of Conflict Management Implementation – Conflict I5 (Own Figure).

The conflict parties in conflict I5 did not have a conversation about it but afterwards, there was like a tacit agreement that the conflict was over. They reflected and decided on their own that the conflict was not that important for one to stay angry. They also tried to handle the other more sensitively and be more considerate towards one another. When Conflict Party B had to make many photocopies, he *“became a bit more lenient”* and asked at times whether someone had to photocopy only 1-2 copies before he photocopied the large volume (*improved coordination and cooperation*). Apart from improving on coordination and cooperation, they work better together, and Conflict Party A can ask the other to go first in order to avoid the previously experienced conflict-related stress (*working well with others*) (see **Fig. 43** for an overview of the effect of conflict management implementation in conflict I5). They even improved in terms of relations and converse now more than before (*improved relations*). The conflict experience thus led to a development in their relationship: They realised that they could remove this issue between them without much effort and are *“now on a bit different level”* where they *“can relate more free and easy with each other”* because they *“can appraise the other better”* and stand up for their opinion (*greater understanding*): *“That both have this self-confidence to change their opinion and also*

*stand up for it.*” Thus, implemented cooperative conflict management efforts in conflict I5 led to improved relations and improved performance.

### 6.2.6 Conflict I6



**Fig. 44: Effect of Conflict Management Implementation – Conflict I6** (Own Figure).

In order to get the project back on track in conflict I6, the project leader was replaced as it was determined that there needed to be a different management from ‘above’. The new project leader’s attempts to handle things differently than the previous project leader did, however, not solve the conflict situation at hand: “... *one put or tried to put someone in the middle who can handle it differently but unfortunately, it did not work out for us.*” The project was successfully completed but as the issues that had led to the conflict were not tackled, it had “*an enormous impact*” on the interpersonal relations within the team (see **Fig. 44** for an overview of the effect of conflict management implementation in conflict I6). Because they “*only discuss work issues and do not work openly, honestly or friendly together*” in the team, there “*are only issues or persons one has to communicate about/with*” (*only work discussions*). The work atmosphere remains unpleasant which Conflict Party A attributed to the leadership not getting involved to solve the conflict issues (*dominated by negative emotions*). The uncoordinated project experience and conflict has also led to a reduced motivation and

energy she puts into subsequent projects and is now guided than motivation-led in how she approaches projects (*loss of motivation*): *“I think that I work nowadays with less zeal or less drive... This effervescent energy which was there is now very tamed, and the motivation has surely gone down a lot.”*

It also did not end well for Conflict Party B personally: He now works under a different manager as his superior no longer wanted to work with him. Furthermore, he remained in the team as his work contract cannot be terminated but the other team members refuse to work with him, and he has *“become now very passive, does not actively engage himself in such projects”*. Conflict Party A, in comparison, felt sorry for the effects the conflict had for Conflict Party B. Because of the conflict experience, she and Conflict Party B now know how to deal with each other and get on with their work (*greater understanding*):

*“The funny thing is that meanwhile, we get on very well. By realising that as persons, we are very different and ... it being clear to us very early on that we just do not work well together...”*

As the conflict *“was never really about personal issues”* but work-related issues such as *“how to approach certain issues”*, both had the interest to progress in their work, and consequentially, *“talked it over and tried to make it better”*: for example, by hinting to the other in a humourous manner whenever they had *“stepped on a mine”*.

However, Conflict Party A remains cautious in her interactions with Conflict Party B (*being cautious in interactions*): Whilst he tries to discuss personal matters with her and find connection points on a different level, she has drawn a line for herself what to discuss and what not to discuss: *“I think that it is great how it has now developed but I have now drawn this line.”* She lends him a listening ear, is helpful but he would not get personal information from her. Thus, too passive third-party assistance and predominantly individual-centred conflict management efforts in conflict 16 contributed to strained relations and affected performance. Whereas the main conflict parties now relate better due to greater understanding and appraisal of the other, the conflict persists as a latent conflict in the team.



### 6.2.7 Conflict I7

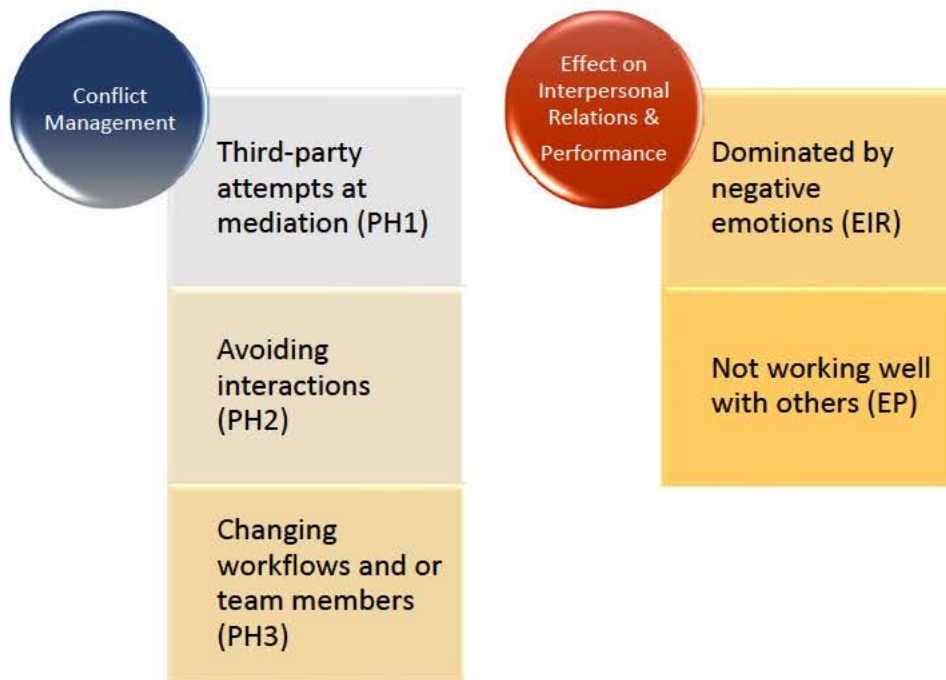


Fig. 45: Effect of Conflict Management Implementation – Conflict I7 (Own Figure).

Although other parties of the same hierarchy level as Conflict Parties B tried to mediate between the conflict parties in conflict I7, Conflict Parties B were “*hard nuts*” that were too difficult to crack. As the issues could not be settled between them, they resorted to avoiding crossing paths and interacting with each other. Conflict Parties B sometimes went to the archive when they knew Conflict Party A was not around. Due to the lack of communication, things went wrong, and objects were taken away without documenting it. Although their relationship had started off well – “*collegial and open and interested and friendly and very very polite*” -, at the end of the conflict, there was “*a high level of mistrust*” where they did not trust each other again (*dominated by negative emotions*) (see **Fig. 45** for an overview of the effect of conflict management implementation in conflict I7). At times, Conflict Parties B also displayed antagonistic and/or controlling behaviour towards Conflict Party A:

*“... the person that was always hearty on the surface and could never voice any criticism towards me when we were alone, she supported me in certain projects but I always had the feeling, and others also confirmed that to me, that it was not to support me but rather to control me as one did not want that I did something on my own” and “... the other person*

*had a very antagonistic attitude towards me at the end and even openly sought conflict with me or shut down completely, did not communicate at all.”*

As the positions were hardened with no change in sight, Conflict Party A then chose to leave the organisation:

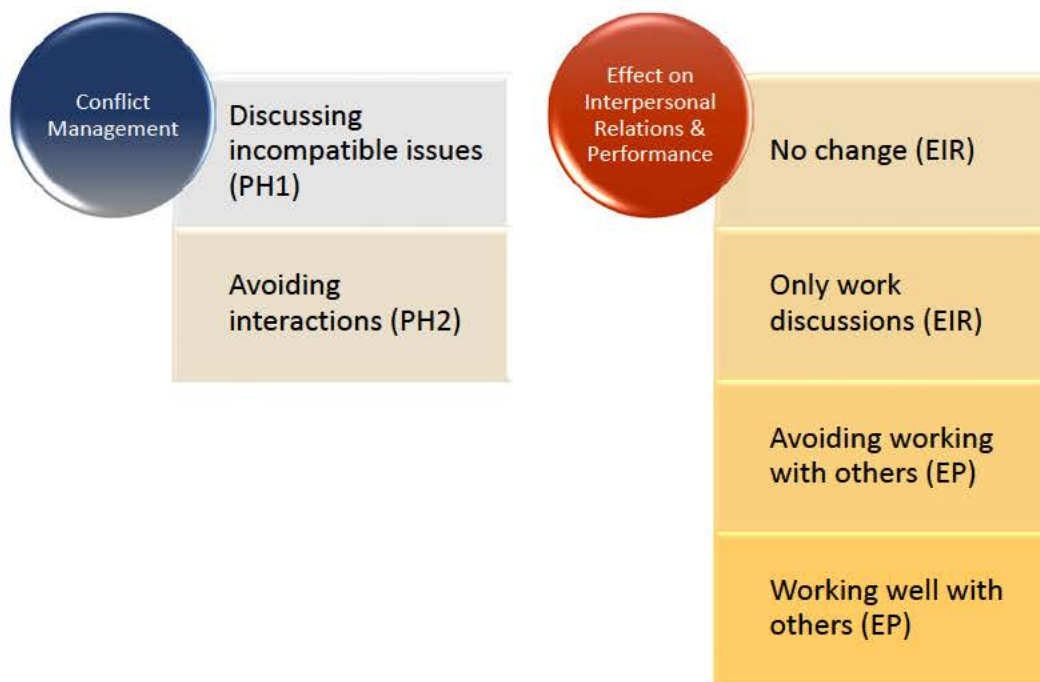
*“I also left with the message that I do not like to occupy a post when I realise that the positions have hardened to an extent where no one can achieve anything, and it would be good to have a wind of change. And one component had to be replaced.”*

As someone had to give in, she chose to “*make the first step*”. The mistrust between the parties became obvious at her farewell party as Conflict Parties B’s presence and smiles were rather uncomfortable and depressing: “... *it felt like they wanted to make sure that I really left.*” Conflict Party A’s hope that her departure would make change feasible was, moreover, dashed as Conflict Parties B did not allow the new person to work to her full capacity (*not working well with others*):

*“But as far as I have heard, nothing has changed because the person – despite the trust placed in her – was put again in the same category as myself where one said, ‘Ok. You are professionally and hierarchically somewhere where you are not to tell us anything, and you have to take care of certain things. And beyond that, you don’t have to say anything’. And what happened in my case ultimately repeats itself. Unfortunately.”*

Although her replacement had been with the organisation for a long time and enjoyed confidence within the organisation, the cycle of conflict continued as the previous issues reoccurred: for example, no consensus on which work procedures are to be followed. Thus, as mediation attempts by third parties were not successful, consequentially employed individual-centred conflict management efforts in conflict 17 contributed to strained relations and affected performance.

## 6.2.8 Conflict I8

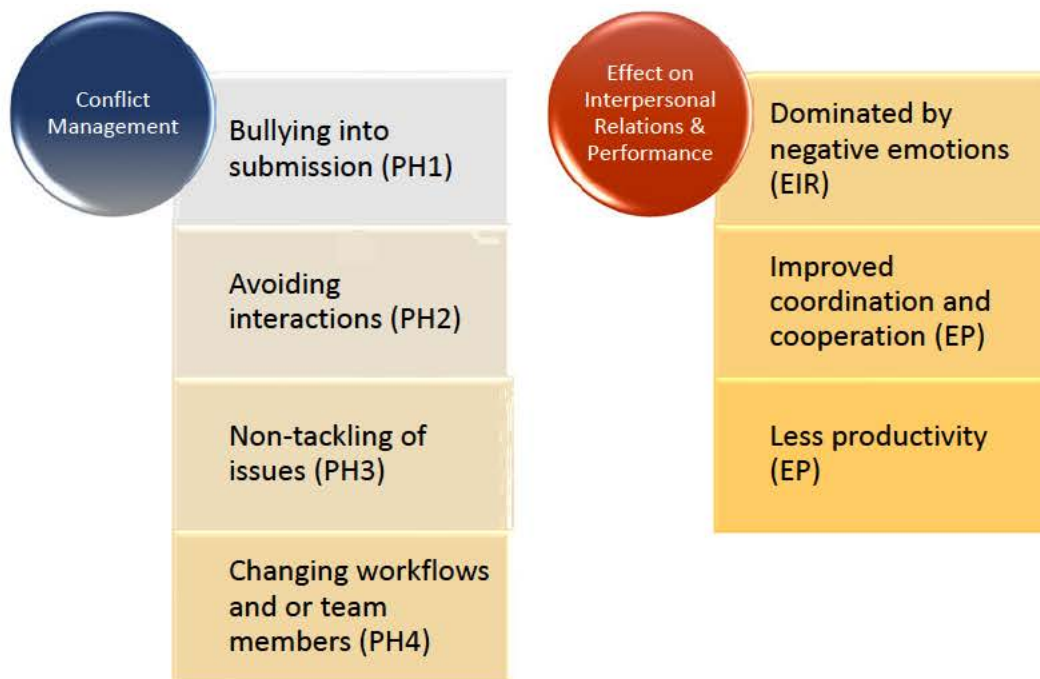


**Fig. 46: Effect of Conflict Management Implementation – Conflict I8** (Own Figure).

The zenith of the conflict coincided with conflict management Phase 1: After telling each other what kind of “ass” the other is, they also opened up to each other about why they thought that way and reflected on what had happened. After the self-reflection on both sides, they completed the project tasks successfully: *“Then we still completed the tasks in the project in an orderly manner.”* Talking it over was, according to Conflict Party A, very useful to help each other to ‘heal’ and ‘sweep up the broken pieces’ (*working well with others*). It could, however, only happen because they got along well in private. Having had a friendly work relationship (*only work discussions*) with mutual respect before the conflict, *“it did not change”* (*no change*), and they *“relate decently, respectfully”* with the other (see **Fig. 46** for an overview of the effect of conflict management implementation in conflict I8). Whilst they always got on well privately, they afterwards avoided each other with regard to work-related matters (*avoiding working with others*): *“And when it was not really necessary, one steered clear of the other laborwise and as said, it was never a problem on the private level.”* They have not worked together on a project for the past three years which might be due to the fact that there were various projects and both were involved in different projects. But perhaps, they also avoided each other unconsciously: *“Or we perhaps unconsciously got out of the other’s way because we did not want to go through that again after we*

*had talked things over.*” Thus, implemented cooperative and individual-centred conflict management approaches in conflict I8 led on the one hand to avoidance behaviour in terms of not working together on projects whilst their previous friendly relationship remained unchanged.

### 6.2.9 Conflict I9



**Fig. 47: Effect of Conflict Management Implementation – Conflict I9** (Own Figure).

Screaming at employees who did not share his opinion and thereby bullying them into submission, Conflict Party B did not have an interest in removing the conflict (*dominated by negative emotions*) (see **Fig. 47** for an overview of the effect of conflict management implementation in conflict I9):

*“... he had no interest in removing this conflict because it was of course to his liking that this employee looked bad because we had a timeline within which we had to complete it. And it is of course perfect when the employees that one does not like anyway do not do their work well.”*

Therefore, if the project had not been completed within the stipulated timeline, it would have reflected back on Conflict Party A. As Conflict Party’s conflictful behaviour did not enable progress on the project, interviewee I9 stopped interacting with him. As Conflict Party B demonstrated unwillingness to change the working relationship, they bypassed

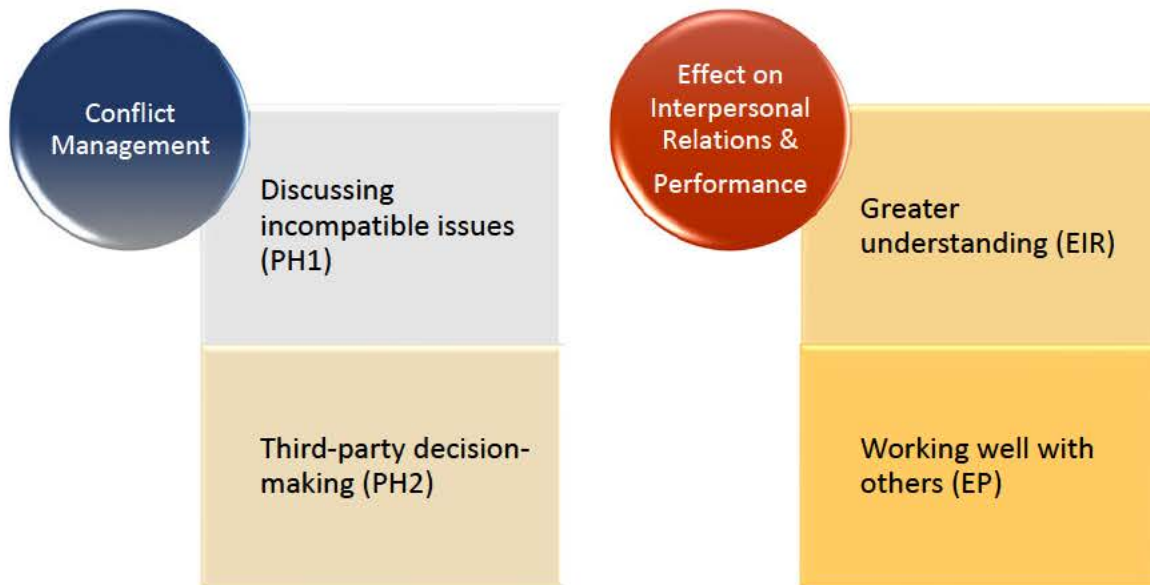
him in the end: *“And we then completely separated that after two-and-a-half weeks and then it worked out much better.”*

The cooperation began after they had changed the workflow, with Conflict Party B receiving the authority for the relevant systems from a superior almost at the end of the project (*improved coordination and cooperation*). In bypassing the source of the conflict, they could complete the project within the last few days: *“What we did not manage to accomplish within the two-and-a-half weeks, we could then complete within four days.”* Upon recommendation of interviewee I9, Conflict Party B left the organisation due to the unpleasant work relations which put the organisation in a difficult situation (*less productivity*):

*“Because he is now gone, they have a real problem because as I said, the other three colleagues, including the boss, can’t do anything, have no clue, are just not capable and they are now, of course, in a bad position. And the only one who works in such a team leaves. That is of course bitter.”*

This created a void that the organisation then had to deal with and potentially fill with another capable candidate. Thus, in bypassing the main source of conflict, they could successfully complete the project. However, the implemented individual-centred conflict management approaches in conflict I9 - that is the unwillingness to settle the differences - contributed to persistently strained relations and affected performance.

### 6.2.10 Conflict I10



**Fig. 48: Effect of Conflict Management Implementation – Conflict I10 (Own Figure).**

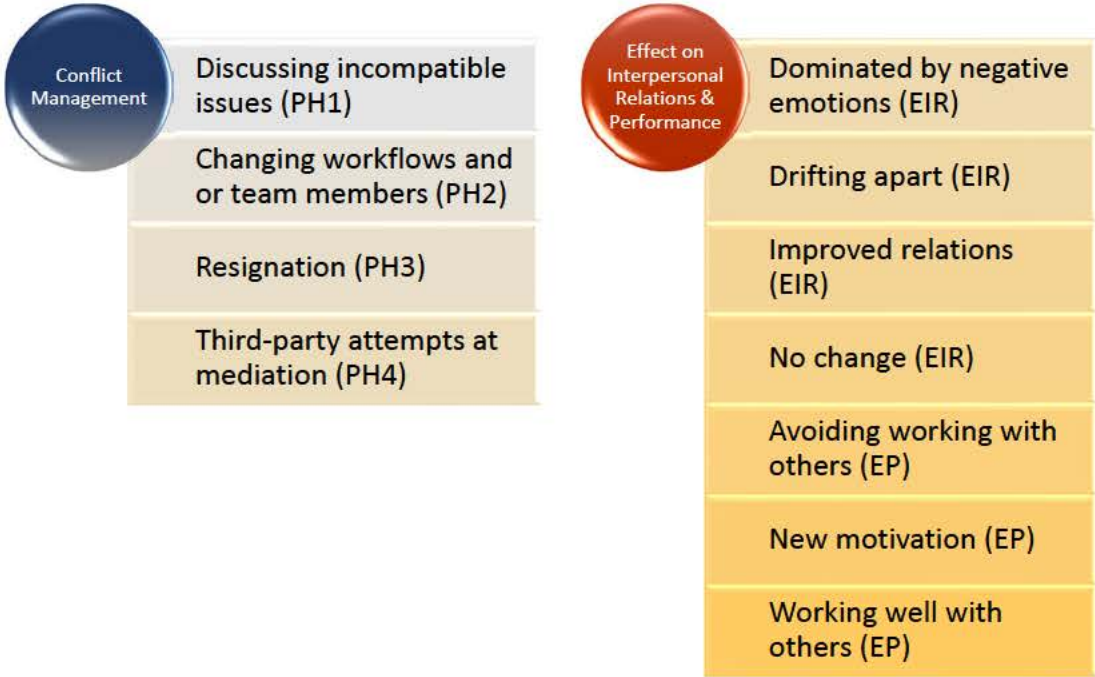
The conflict parties continued discussing the incompatible issues in conflict I10. As they could not come to an agreement, their common boss was called upon to make a decision. The back and forth did have an effect on the relationship, as they could not solve it on their own and invested effort in discussing the issue a number of times (see **Fig. 48** for an overview of the effect of conflict management implementation in conflict I10):

*“I think that it does something to a relationship; also, that is now a conflict that one could not solve on one’s own and also this investing [of time and energy], ‘No, but still. No, but still’ does not benefit the relationship.”*

However, it is Conflict Party A’s belief or hope that the experience might deepen or “strengthen the relationship” as they “went through a conflict” and “told each other what they thought” (greater understanding): “We weathered a storm together and that perhaps also gives the relationship a certain depth.” Therefore, even if the relationship got damaged, the focus is on “repairing or bettering it” (working well with others). Thus, the unsuccessful cooperative conflict management effort in conflict I10 led to third-party involvement which outcome will determine the effects on relations and performance. However, due to the existing friendly relationship, Conflict Party A’s belief

is that the experience will lead to a greater understanding and repaired working relations.

**6.2.11 Conflict I11**



**Fig. 49: Effect of Conflict Management Implementation – Conflict I11 (Own Figure).**

In personal conversations, Conflict Party A made it clear to Conflict Parties B that there can only be one departmental leader going forward, and that it does not necessarily have to be one of them. Consequentially, as all three told him that they would not do it on those terms, Conflict Party A gave the leadership position to a different person within the organisation. Conflict Parties B were at first shocked and as a result, more or less threw in the towel: They either did not do anything again in certain areas or tried to affect the business negatively. The initial impulse for it to get better came from the colleagues who told Conflict Parties B to pull themselves together.

With regard to how it affected interpersonal relations and performance, the three persons comprising Conflict Party B reacted differently to the new situation (see **Fig. 49** for an overview of the effect of conflict management implementation in conflict I11). One person *“took the whole issue personally”* and *“does not hide that he cannot stand”* Conflict Party A (*dominated by negative emotions*) whilst Conflict Party A maintains a professional, rather distanced relationship with him (*no change*). Another person *“still*

*excludes himself from everything where possible*”, showing passive resistance but not actively working against Conflict Party A: “... *but he himself said to me that he only realised through this situation how the whole thing had stressed and influenced him negatively.*” Whilst he and the first person try to avoid the new leader (*avoiding working with others*), the last of the three (Conflict Party B) is “*back to normalcy, is productive, engages himself, and has found something new for himself that he likes to pursue*” (*new motivation*). Conflict Party A has “*with him personally a very good relationship again*” – “*perhaps even better than before*” (*improved relations*). With regard to the relationship between Conflict Parties B, the previous work situation had united them – “*we three against the rest of the unit*” – especially as they were not popular among other staff members due to their behaviour. The conflict experience “*seemed to have affected their friendship*” that went beyond mere collegial relations (*drifting apart*): “*the issues that were personally important to them seem to be different now*”, and instead of three-against-all, they then “*became more individuals*” within the organisation. Thus, whilst different conflict management approaches were implemented from cooperative to individual-centred and third-party assistance in conflict I11, only third-party assistance was able to get Conflict Parties B to be cooperative and work better with staff members. However, two of the three individuals comprising B demonstrate passive resistance in their work attitude and avoid working with the new leader. Therefore, the performance and relations remain to be affected with regard to two of the parties, whilst one person has returned to normalcy.



## 6.2.12 Conflict I12

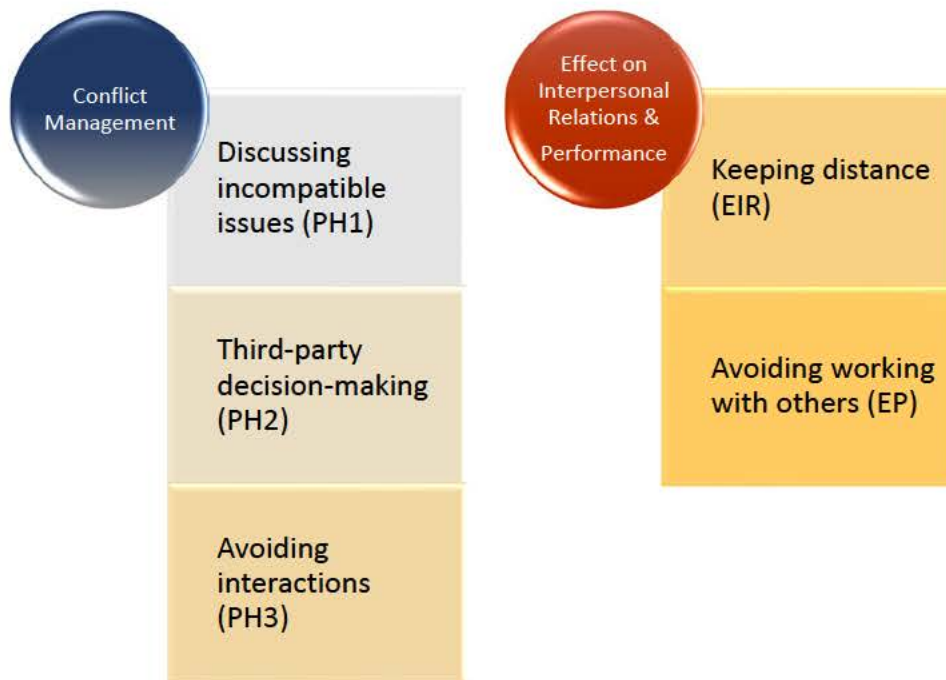


Fig. 50: Effect of Conflict Management Implementation – Conflict I12 (Own Figure).

Although the conflict parties of conflict I12 discussed the issue for some time on the phone in an objective manner, neither wanted to back down, and they could not find a solution on their own. Their common superior then had to make a decision on how to settle this issue. He decided that the one who had become active in the other one's area of responsibility should continue serving the client because he had been successful. As Conflict Party A thus lost his client to the colleague, he was very disappointed with the decision. The outcome affected the relationship between the two colleagues (see **Fig. 50** for an overview of the effect of conflict management implementation in conflict I12): Whereas they had a good relationship before the conflict and Conflict Party A had even recommended Conflict Party B for the job, they "avoided crossing paths" and "did not say anything apart from 'Hello' to each other" after the settlement. As they avoided working with each other, it influenced some work processes (*avoiding working with others*). However, no contracts were lost through that: "And in fact, it did not matter to the boss who serves the clients – the main thing was to be successful. And as such, it did not have a negative effect on business dealings." Third-party decision-making, thus, had mainly consequences for their

interpersonal relationship that remained “*strained and conflictful*” (*keeping distance*), whereas their performance was affected by their avoiding behaviour.

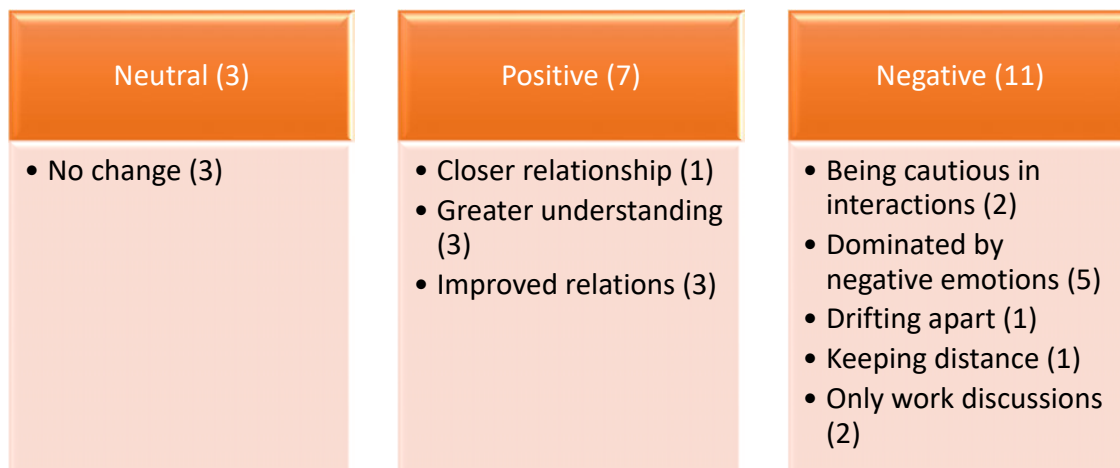
### **6.3 Effects of conflict management implementation on interpersonal relations and performance**

Building upon preceding **Section 6.2**'s presentation of effects of conflict management implementation in conflicts I1 to I12, this **Section 6.3** identifies the *similarities and differences of the 12 cases with regard to interpersonal relations and performance*. **Table 19** provides an overview of effects of conflict management implementation on interpersonal relations and performance for conflicts I1 to I12. Aside conflict I2 with one code “no change”, all the other conflicts involved some kind of effect on interpersonal relations and performance: Either interpersonal relations and/or performance were at the same level as before conflict (no change), improved or were strained/negatively affected post-conflict. Examples for improved relations are the codes “closer relationship”, “greater understanding” and “improved relations” whereas improved performance was coded as “improved coordination and cooperation”, “new motivation”, “support others in task execution” and “working well with others”. In comparison, strained/conflictful relations' codes included “being cautious in interactions”, “dominated by negative emotions”, “drifting apart”, “keeping distance” and “only work discussions”, and affected performance was coded as “avoiding working with others”, “less productivity”, “loss of motivation” and “not working well with others”.

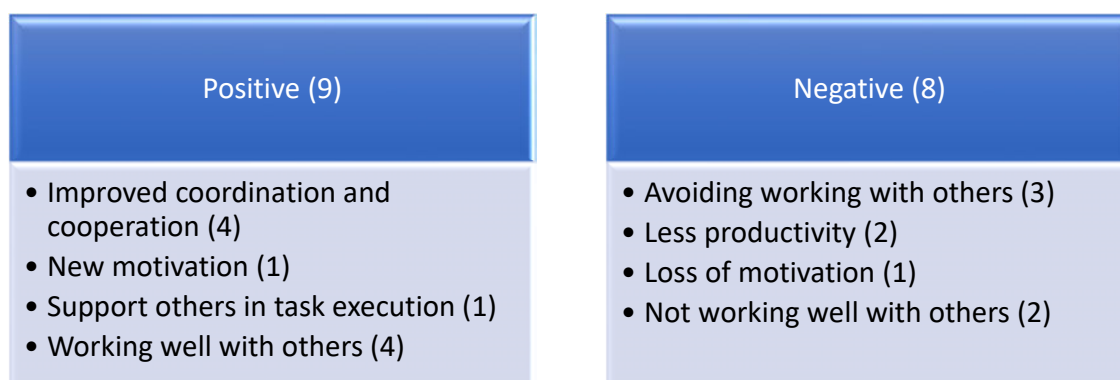
Although effects on interpersonal relations were coded 22 times and effects on performance, by comparison, 18 times, the numbers do not reveal whether relations/performance improved or remained affected. Whereas the interpersonal relations' code “dominated by negative emotions” was coded most often (5 times), improved performance codes' “improved coordination and cooperation” and “working well with others” followed with 4 times coding. In order to emphasise the distribution of the different values, **Figures 51 and 52** present an overview of the categorisation of codes – neutral, improved, strained/affected – for interpersonal relations and performance respectively (**Sections 6.3.1 and 6.3.2** will further assess these values).

Table 19: Effects of Conflict Management Implementation - Overview (Own Table).

Person	I1	I10	I11	I12	I2	I3	I4	I5	I6	I7	I8	I9	Total (12)
<b>EFFECT ON INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS</b>													22
Being cautious in interactions	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
Closer relationship	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Dominated by negative emotions	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	5
Drifting apart	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Greater understanding	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	3
Improved relations	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	3
Keeping distance	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
No change	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3
Only work discussions	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
<b>EFFECT ON PERFORMANCE</b>													18
Avoiding working with others	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3
Improved coordination and cooperation	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	4
Less productivity	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2
Loss of motivation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
New motivation	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Not working well with others	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	2
Support others in task execution	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Working well with others	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	4
<b>Total (unique)</b>	2	2	7	2	1	3	5	4	5	2	4	3	40



**Fig. 51: Effects of Conflict Management Implementation on Interpersonal Relations** (Own Figure).



**Fig. 52: Effects of Conflict Management Implementation on Performance** (Own Figure).

It further has to be assessed which effects were coded in which case (see **Fig. 53** for the coding-by-case distribution). Whereas some cases had a number of codes (e.g., I11 with seven codes), other cases reported fewer effects (e.g., I10 and I7 with two codes, respectively). In the case of I11, the number of effects might be attributed to the number of persons involved, with each of the three persons comprising Conflict Party B reacting differently to the post-conflict situation. The multiparty constellation in cases I4 and I6 also led to a high number of codes (5 effects coded). If one compares how teams were affected in cases I4 and I6 (apart from effects on main conflict parties), case I4 solely reported performance effects (codes “not working well with others” and “less productivity”),

whereas effects for case I6 consisted of interpersonal relations' aspects (codes "dominated by negative emotions" and "only work discussions").

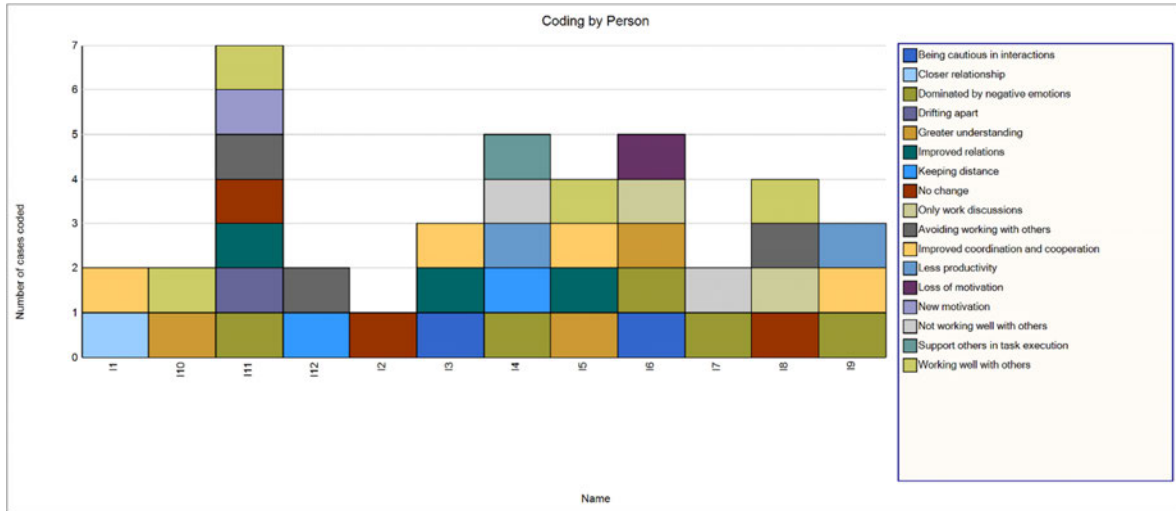


Fig. 53: Effects of Conflict Management Implementation – Coding by Person (Own Figure).

Having so far focused on the effects of conflict management implementation – overview, distribution and values – the following **Sections 6.3.1 and 6.3.2** relate to the implemented conflict management approaches and the resulting effects for interpersonal relations and performance, respectively.

### 6.3.1 Effects of conflict management implementation on interpersonal relations

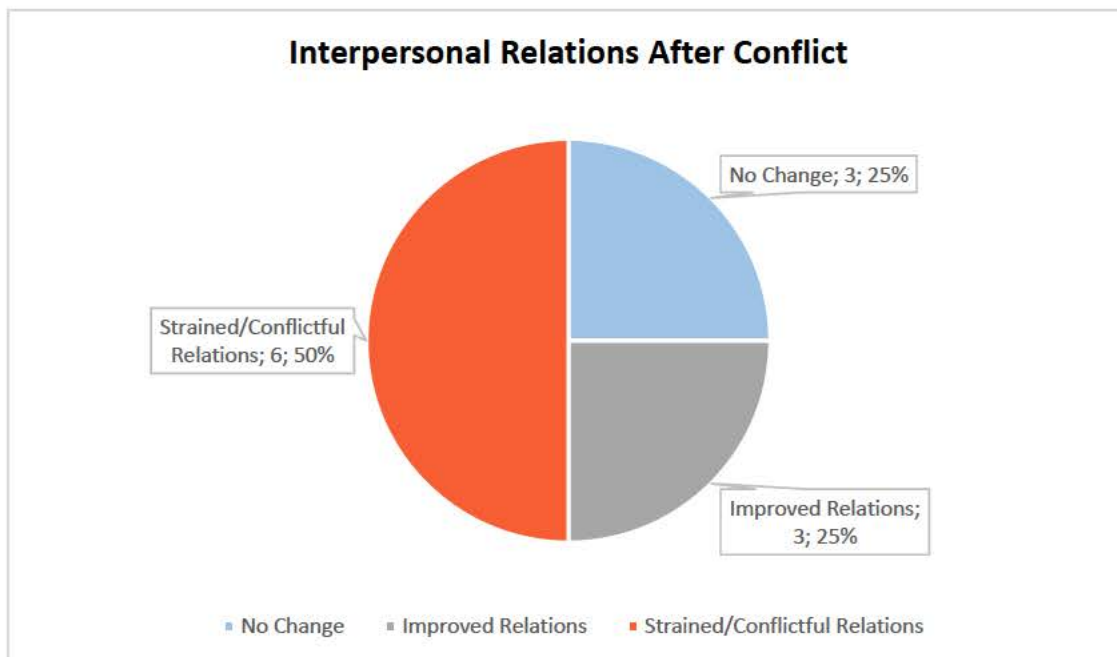
**Table 20** provides an overview of the *transformation of interpersonal relations*, presenting findings on relations before, during and after conflict, and utilised conflict management approaches. The colours in the last column highlight the different outcomes: 'light blue' for unchanged relations, 'grey' for improved relations, 'light red' for mixed cases (partly improved relations, partly strained relations), 'dark red' for strained/conflictful relations. In the subsequent figures, I counted 'light red' cases as strained/conflictful relations due to the persistent effect on involved parties and their interactions.

**Table 20: Transformation of Interpersonal Relations - Overview (Own Table).**

<b>Conflict / Interpersonal Relations</b>	<b>Before Conflict</b>	<b>During Conflict</b>	<b>Conflict Management</b>	<b>After Conflict</b>
<b>11</b>	Friendly relations	Difficult, bumpy for a week; sulky; very distanced	Discussing incompatible issues (PH1) → Accommodating others' needs (PH2)	Closer relationship: Everything okay again; getting along well; no tension anymore
<b>12</b>	Cordial	Strange; somewhat stupid; more on the factual level	Avoiding interactions (PH1) → Tacit agreement (PH2)	Relating normally again; like each other again
<b>13</b>	Friendly relations on business level	More formal, less cordial; still able to relate on a reasonable level	Discussing incompatible issues (PH1) → Third-party attempts at mediation (PH2) → Accommodating others' needs (PH3)	Better relations again
<b>14</b>	Friendship; speaking daily	Accusing phone calls; sending poisoned arrows; envy; like mobbing	External coaching (PH1) → Discussing incompatible issues (PH2) → Bullying into submission (PH3) → Avoiding interactions (PH4)	Distanced relations on business level; serenity vs. fear & spreading evil information
<b>15</b>	Collegial relationship	Conflictful relations; stress within – not as friendly to third parties	Tacit agreement (PH1) → Accommodating others' needs (PH2)	Collegial relationship; more conversations than before; can relate freer and easier with the other; greater understanding
<b>16</b>	Collegial relations	Changed relations; team members not showing respect towards B;	Changing workflows and or team members (PH1) → Third-party attempts at mediation (PH2) → Non-tackling of issues (PH3)	Only working together on business level; not working together openly, honestly or friendly in the team;

		unrelenting behaviour of B		greater understanding but careful what information to reveal
17	Collegial relations; respect	Mistrust; avoiding each other; hostile attitude (B1); supportive on the surface but meant to control (B2)	Third-party attempts at mediation (PH1) → Avoiding interactions (PH2) → Changing workflows and or team members (PH3)	Mistrust
18	Friendly relations on business level	Avoiding each other laborwise but not a problem on the private level	Discussing incompatible issues (PH1) → Avoiding interactions (PH2)	No change
19	Open-minded; business-level relations	Personal attacks; screaming	Bullying into submission (PH1) → Avoiding interactions (PH2) → Non-tackling of issues (PH3) → Changing workflows and or team members (PH4)	Hatred; no interest in any relations again
110	Friendly relations	The back and forth not good for the relationship	Discussing incompatible issues (PH1) → Third-party decision-making (PH2)	Hope/belief that it might strengthen the relationship
111	Friendly relations on business level	Changed relations; three against one; felt mobbed by B1	Discussing incompatible issues (PH1) → Changing workflows and or team members (PH2) → Resignation (PH3) → Third-party attempts at mediation (PH4)	One-sided hatred (B1); Distanced (B2); Very good relations (B3)
112	Friendship	Avoiding each other	Discussing incompatible issues (PH1) → Third-party decision-making (PH2) → Avoiding interactions (PH3)	Conflictful, strained relations; avoiding each other; only say hello

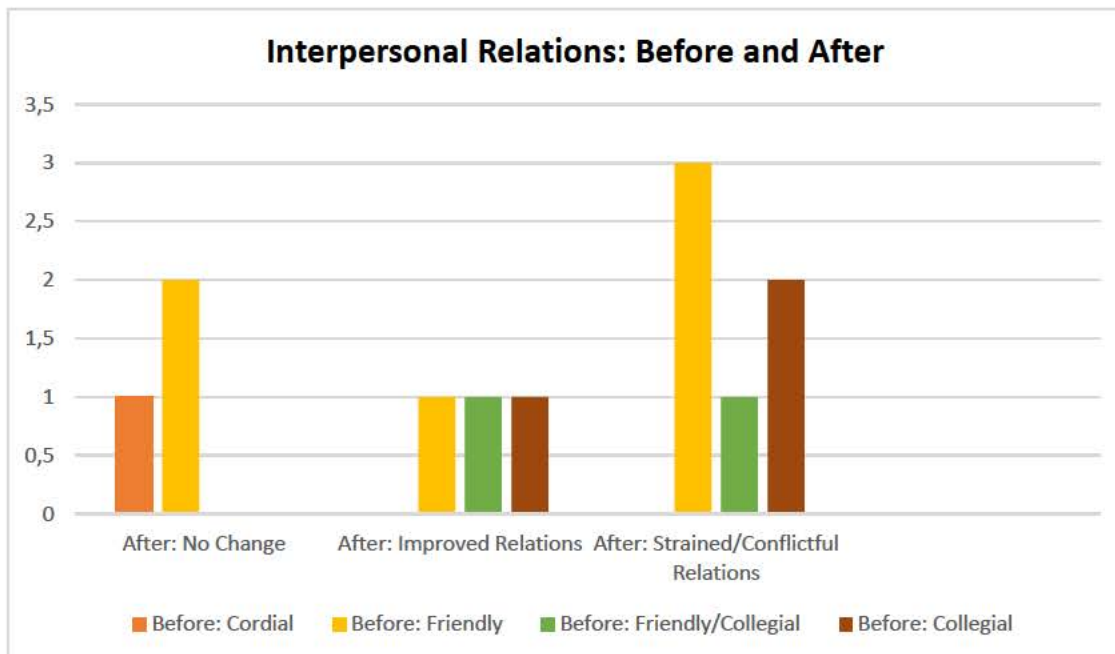
Based on **Table 20**'s differentiations of post-conflict interpersonal relations, **Figure 54** displays the percentages of the three values "no change", "improved relations" and "strained/conflictful relations": 50% of cases ended with strained/conflictful relations, whereas 25% experienced improved relations and 25% no change of relations.



**Fig. 54: Interpersonal Relations After Conflict** (Own Figure).

Post-conflict relations, furthermore, have to be related to relations before conflict: **Figure 55** compares *interpersonal relations before and after conflict*. Whereas none of the pre-conflict relations were reported as strained/conflictful but "cordial", "friendly", "friendly/collegial", or "collegial", 6 out of 12 relations ended up being strained/conflictful post-conflict. Therefore, previous friendly or collegial relations did not guarantee good relations post-conflict.

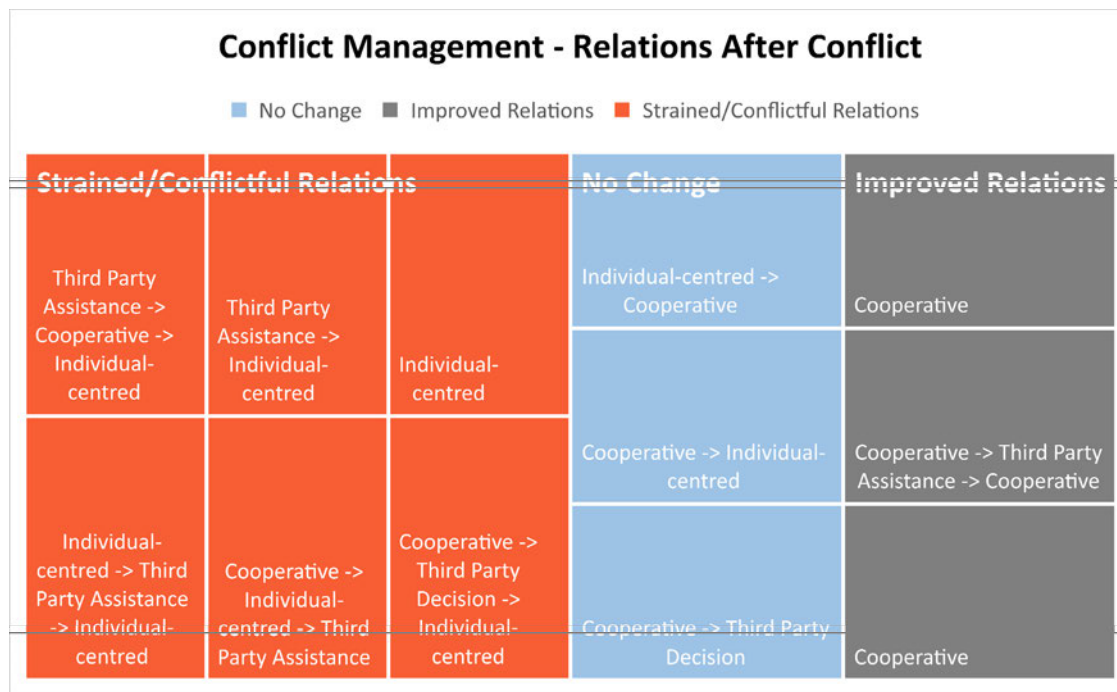




**Fig. 55: Interpersonal Relations Before and After Conflict (Own Figure).**

As depicted in **Figure 56**, conflict management influences how conflict parties relate with each other post-conflict. *Improved relations* resulted from cooperative and third-party assistance approaches, with cooperative approaches forming the last phase of conflict management (that is, accommodating others' needs in all 3 cases). By comparison, *strained/conflictful relations* involved mainly individual-centred approaches (see **Chapter 5** for the differentiation of conflict management approaches, p. 162 ff.). Whereas third-party assistance, third-party decision and/or cooperative approaches were also utilised in some cases, individual-centred approaches were applied as the final conflict management approach in 5 of 6 cases (for example, avoiding working with others, changing workflows/and or team members, or non-tackling of issues). The diverse results in the middle column 'no change' can be attributed to the following: Whereas all 3 cases did not report changes to interpersonal relations, one case is not conclusive (third-party decision outstanding), and one case's avoiding behaviour only relates to how the parties are working together post-conflict, without an effect on their friendly interpersonal relations. Only considering the results for the columns 'improved relations' and 'strained/conflictful relations', thus, reveals that cooperative and accommodating behaviours facilitated a

positive relationship after conflict, whereas individual-centred approaches brought about and reflected strained/conflictful relations postconflict.



**Fig. 56: Conflict Management Implementation – Effect on Interpersonal Relations After Conflict** (Own Figure).

### 6.3.2 Effects of conflict management implementation on performance

**Table 21** provides an overview of the *transformation of performance*, presenting findings on performance before, during and after conflict, and utilised conflict management approaches. The colours in the last column highlight the different outcomes: ‘light blue’ for unchanged performance, ‘grey’ for improved performance, ‘light red’ for mixed cases (partly improved performance, partly affected performance), ‘dark red’ for affected performance. In the subsequent figures, I counted ‘light red’ cases as affected performance due to the persistent effect on involved parties and their interactions (applying to cases I8, I9 and I11 as some aspects worsened).

**Table 21: Transformation of Performance - Overview** (Own Table).

<b>Conflict / Performance</b>	<b>Before Conflict</b>	<b>During Conflict</b>	<b>Conflict Management</b>	<b>After Conflict</b>
<b>11</b>	Working separately on tasks; no previous conflict issues that affected performance	Bare minimum communication; non-coordination of tasks; duplicating job; errors	Discussing incompatible issues (PH1) → Accommodating others' needs (PH2)	Working together more; acting like a group; complementing each other; togetherness
<b>12</b>	No previous conflict issues that affected performance	Not pulling together; not as productive due to distanced relations	Avoiding interactions (PH1) → Tacit agreement (PH2)	All is well again
<b>13</b>	No previous conflict issues that affected performance	Not agreeing on a professional level; less motivated; bypassing A's department	Discussing incompatible issues (PH1) → Third-party attempts at mediation (PH2) → Accommodating others' needs (PH3)	Working together again; trying to communicate better; involving the other department
<b>14</b>	Daily communication & coordination	Reduced turnover; avoiding interacting with each other; negative effect on others	External coaching (PH1) → Discussing incompatible issues (PH2) → Bullying into submission (PH3) → Avoiding interactions (PH4)	No longer working well with each other; less productivity because of B's destructive behaviour; still willing to support B business-wise
<b>15</b>	No previous conflict issues that affected performance	Affecting work processes; negative effect on others	Tacit agreement (PH1) → Accommodating others' needs (PH2)	B now more lenient; handling the other more sensitively; more considerate; able to discuss issues
<b>16</b>	Existing differences regarding departmental	No agreement on issues; every detail had to be discussed; project delay;	Changing workflows and or team members (PH1) → Third-party attempts at mediation	Reduced motivation & zeal to execute projects/tasks

	aims & team member B	unwillingness within team to compromise	(PH2) → Non-tackling of issues (PH3)	
<b>17</b>	n/a	Non-agreement on work procedures; talking at cross purposes; errors and security risk due to non-communication	Third-party attempts at mediation (PH1) → Avoiding interactions (PH2) → Changing workflows and or team members (PH3)	New person not able to work to her full capacity; still no agreement on work procedures
<b>18</b>	No previous conflict issues that affected performance	B not following project methods & procedure; minimal extra coordination effort	Discussing incompatible issues (PH1) → Avoiding interactions (PH2)	Successful completion of project tasks; avoiding working with each other unconsciously (laborwise)
<b>19</b>	Existing non-resolved issues that affected performance	Not talking & cooperating with those who had other opinions; project delay; lack of expertise (B)	Bullying into submission (PH1) → Avoiding interactions (PH2) → Non-tackling of issues (PH3) → Changing workflows and or team members (PH4)	Cooperation started after bypassing B; completion of project; less productivity as only capable staff (A) left & others do not have adequate expertise
<b>110</b>	No previous conflict issues that affected performance	Time investment due to back & forth; project risk: either find a less capable replacement or have stress on the project	Discussing incompatible issues (PH1) → Third-party decision-making (PH2)	Focus on repairing or bettering the working relationship; awaiting decision (in favour of A or project risk)
<b>111</b>	No previous conflict issues that affected performance	Providing only information when asked; department just functioning; negatively affecting business processes;	Discussing incompatible issues (PH1) → Changing workflows and or team members (PH2) → Resignation (PH3) → Third-party attempts at mediation (PH4)	Avoiding new leader (B1); Avoiding new leader, excluding himself where possible (B2); Working well with new leader (B3)

112

	negative effects on others		
No previous conflict issues that affected performance	Not communicating with each other	Discussing incompatible issues (PH1) → Third-party decision-making (PH2) → Avoiding interactions (PH3)	Avoidance behaviour influencing some work processes

Based on **Table 21**'s differentiations of post-conflict performance, **Figure 57** displays the percentages of the three values "no change", "improved performance" and "affected performance": 58% of cases ended with affected performance, whereas 25% experienced improved performance and 17% no change of performance. In comparison to **Figure 54** that displayed the value percentages of interpersonal relations after conflict, there is a difference in the percentages 'no change' and 'strained/conflictful'/'affected' percentages. The reason is that one case reported unchanged relations but affected performance, leading to the difference in percentages. The similarity in percentages between interpersonal relations and performance after conflict, however, reveal that with regard to this research's findings, interpersonal relations and performance are equally affected during as well as after conflicts.

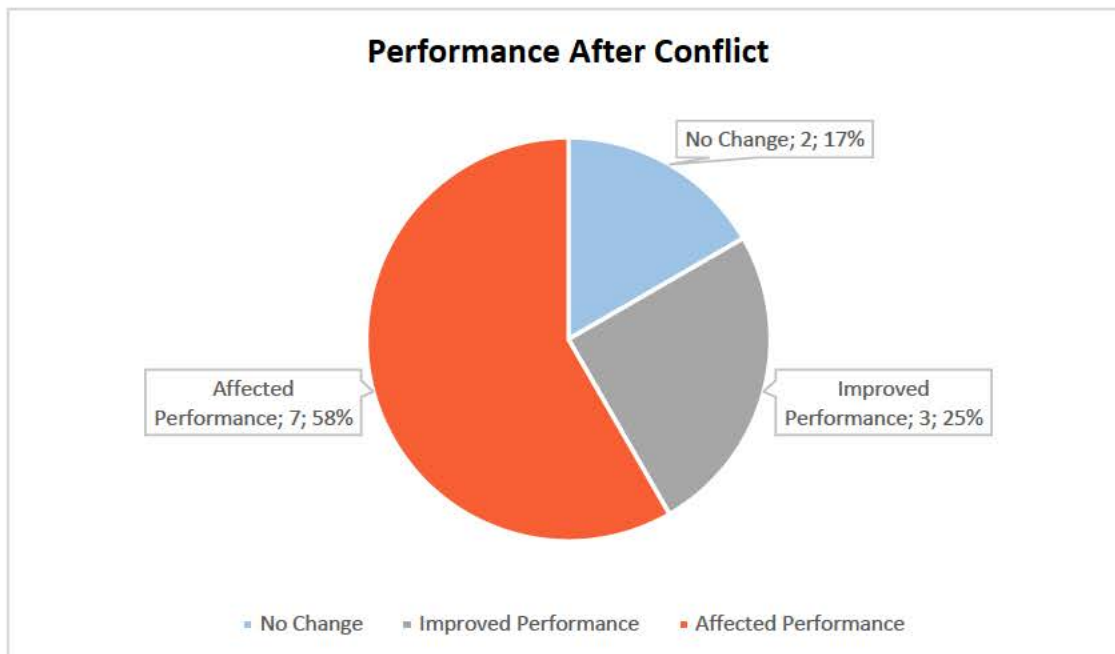
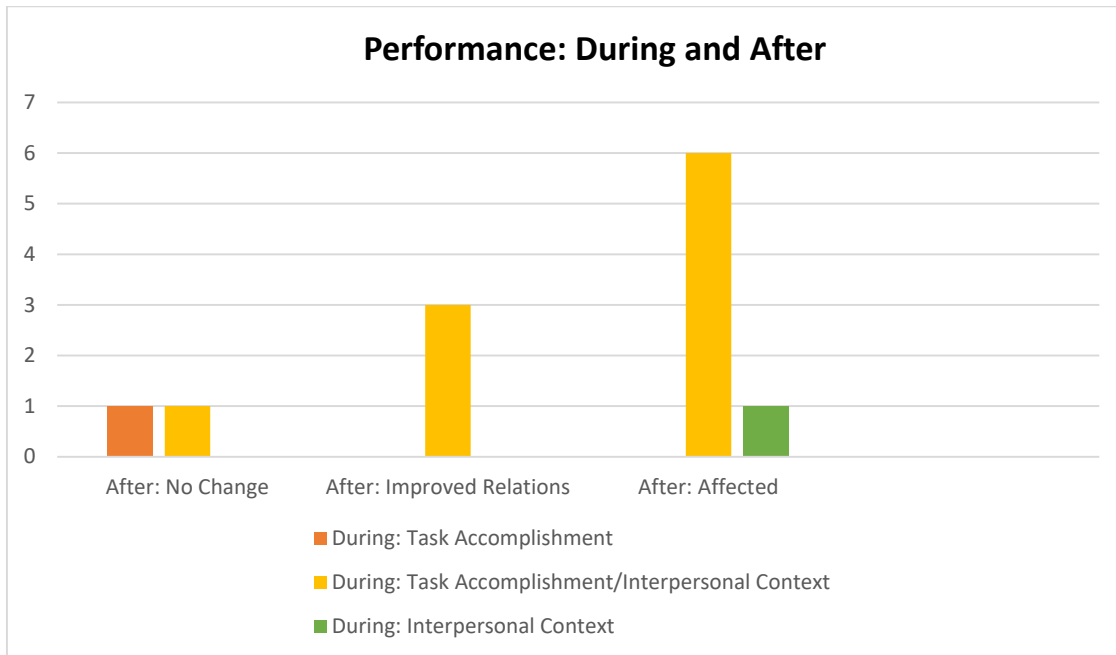


Fig. 57: Performance After Conflict (Own Figure).

As the majority of cases did not report previously affected performance before conflict (see column 1 'previous performance', **Table 21**), I solely compared *performance during and after* conflict in **Figure 58**. Performance values were distinguished by whether they described how tasks were being accomplished or related to the interpersonal context (in line with changed quality and quantity of performance dimensions in **Chapter 4, Figure 27**, p.152). Examples for the way tasks are being accomplished are 'not working productively', 'departments/teams not functioning', among others. Interpersonal context examples are, among others, 'not working well with others' and 'not coordinating effectively'. With regard to the dimensions, 9 out of 12 cases reported task accomplishment as well as interpersonal context being affected during conflict. After conflict, out of the task accomplishment/interpersonal dimension 1 case was unchanged (pre-conflict stage), 3 cases improved, and 6 cases remained affected. It is of interest here that the 2 cases who had existing issues that affected performance before the related conflict still experienced affected performance post-conflict (with regard to task accomplishment/interpersonal context). Therefore, the majority of conflicts affected both task accomplishment and the interpersonal context and lasted beyond conflict.



**Fig. 58: Performance During and After Conflict** (Own Figure).

**Figure 59** presents the effect of respective conflict management approaches on performance. In line with improved relations, *improved performance* resulted from cooperative and third-party assistance approaches, with cooperative approaches forming the last phase of conflict management (that is, accommodating others' needs in all 3 cases). By comparison, *affected performance* involved mainly individual-centred approaches, including avoiding working with others and non-tackling of issues. As in most cases, interpersonal relations and performance were both diversely affected during conflict, the effects on both variables are comparable: Cooperative and accommodating behaviours furthered a positive performance after conflict, and individual-centred approaches fostered and sustained affected performance post-conflict.

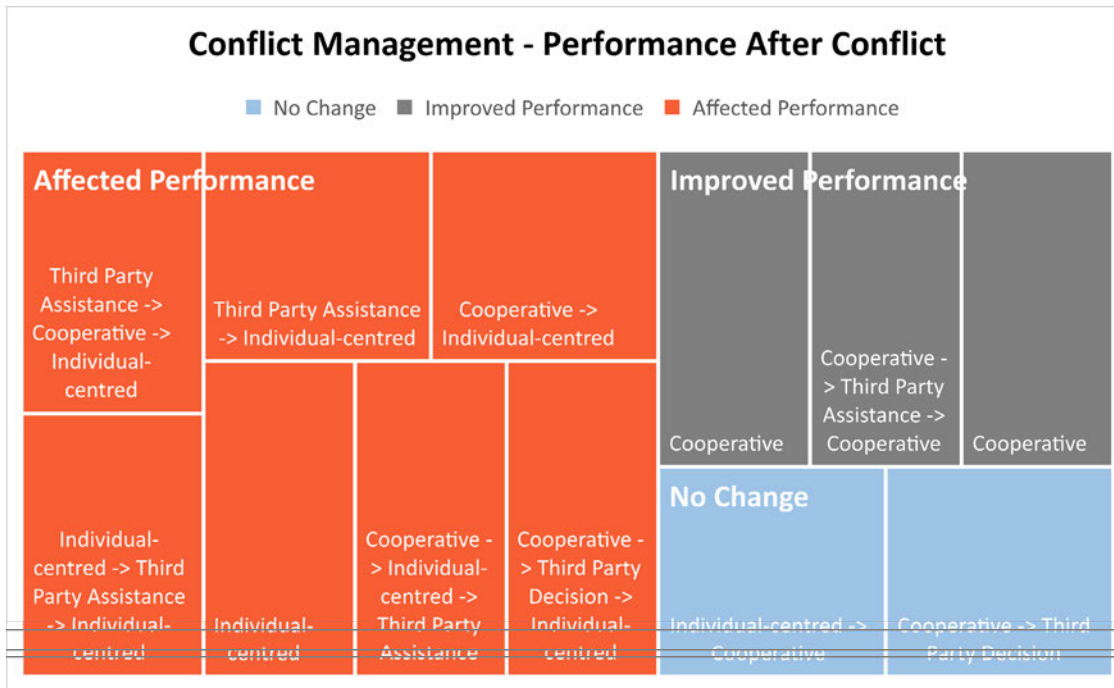


Fig. 59: Conflict Management Implementation – Effect on Performance After Conflict (Own Figure).

#### 6.4 Conflict management outcome

The assessment of conflict outcomes and utilised conflict management approaches in **Section 6.3** revealed that certain conflict management approaches are more likely to lead to certain relations and performance values. As depicted in **Figure 60**, *cooperative conflict management* facilitated improved relations and improved performance post-conflict. By contrast, *individual-centred conflict management* fostered strained/conflictful relations and affected performance. The value ‘no change’ only applied to three cases, including a non-decided case and a case where only the variable performance was affected. With regard to relations and performance, cooperative behaviour assisted to safeguard the existing good relations in the ‘no change’ cases. Whilst other conflict management approaches such as third-party assistance, third-party decision, previous cooperative and/or individual-centred conflict management were utilised at earlier conflict management stages, cooperative and individual-centred conflict management approaches stand out as the final stages of conflict management in the majority of cases.



Nonetheless, it has to be considered that *previous conflict management approaches provided the background and basis for the subsequent conflict management approaches*. For example, previous failed attempts of parties settling the issues themselves through discussions led to avoiding interactions in conflict I8. Thus, unsuccessful cooperative conflict management was followed by individual-centred conflict management. In comparison, the involvement of a third party turned the situation around in conflict I3, leading to cooperative conflict management of the conflict parties. Therefore, the 'grey' boxes in **Figure 60** listed the conflict management approaches preceding the last stage conflict management approaches.

As a general tendency, however, the findings reveal a *positive effect of cooperative conflict management on the conflict outcome*. Thus, conflict management approaches that can assist to bring about a cooperative attitude and behaviour of the conflict parties seem to be beneficial for interpersonal relations and performance. This can include third-party involvement if it has the aspiration to settle the conflict issue and restore normalcy to work relations and processes.

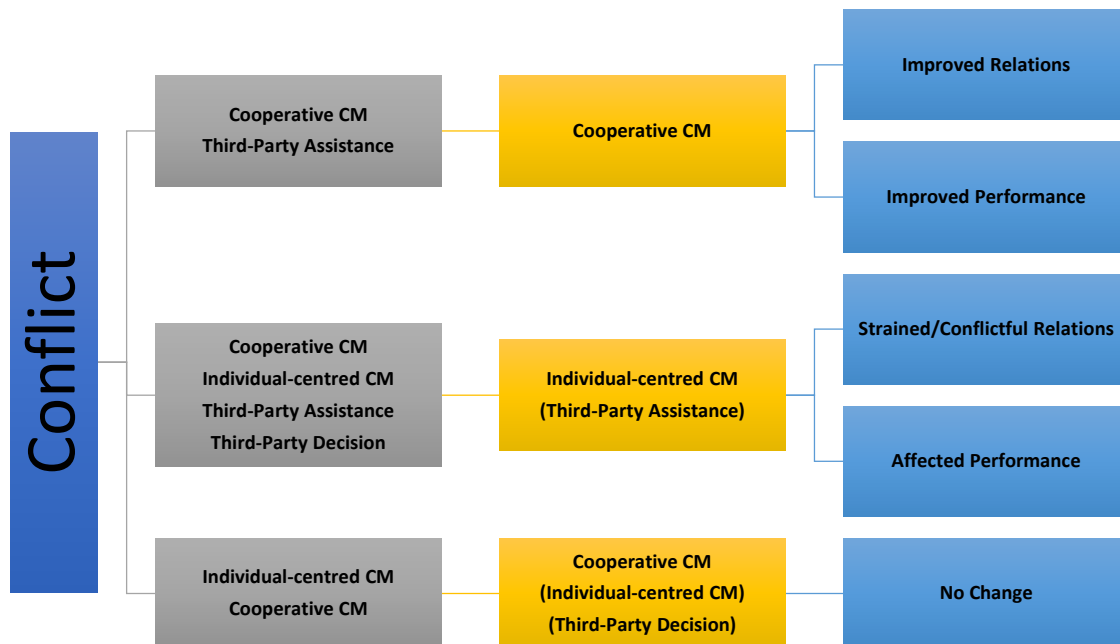


Fig. 60: Effects of Conflict Management Implementation – Categories (Own Figure).

## 6.5 Summary

This Chapter explored how the choice of certain conflict management approaches impacted interpersonal relations and performance of respective conflict parties. 11 out of 12 conflicts experienced an effect on interpersonal relations and performance. Relations either improved in terms of greater understanding or closer relationship or were strained/conflictful post-conflict. In the same vein, performance either improved in terms of, for example, improved coordination and cooperation, and working well with others, or was affected post-conflict. Strained/conflictful relations showed itself in being cautious in interactions or keeping a distance, whilst affected performance was characterised by avoiding working with others, loss of motivation, among others.

Comparing pre-conflict and post-conflict interpersonal relations revealed that friendly or collegial relations pre-conflict did not guarantee good relations post-conflict: 50% of cases ended with strained/conflictful relations, 25% with improved relations and 25% with no change to relations. Similarly, the majority of cases did not report affected performance before conflict; however, post-conflict, 58% of cases ended with affected

performance, 25% with improved performance and 17% with no change to performance. Therefore, the conflict experiences and the way the conflicts were handled had a lasting effect on interpersonal relations and performance for approximately 50% of the assessed cases.

Assessing which conflict management implementation led to which conflict outcome revealed that cooperative conflict management facilitated in safeguarding existing good relations and performance or even led to improved relations and performance. By comparison, conflicts that employed individual-centred conflict management at their last conflict management stage ended up with strained/affected relations and/or affected performance. As all of the 12 cases employed more than one conflict management approach, it has to be assessed which previous approaches were utilised and for which reasons they had failed or laid the basis for an eventual successful conflict settlement. However, the general positive tendency of cooperative conflict management versus individual-centred conflict management could be established with regard to the conflict outcome.

Based upon the assessments and conclusions of **Chapters 4, 5 and 6**, the following chapter, **Chapter 7**, discusses the findings and develops a conflict management framework model.

## 7. Integration of Research Findings and Discussion

### 7.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to discuss my findings and this thesis' contribution to previous research reviewed in **Chapter 2**. In exploring the answers to the three research questions provided in the **Findings Chapters 4, 5 and 6** – *what are the challenges enterprises face in manifest conflict scenarios (RQ1); how are conflicts dealt with in selected organisations (RQ2); how does the implementation of conflict management methods to internal organisational conflicts affect interpersonal relations and performance (RQ3)* - it seeks to establish *the influence of organisational conflict management on interpersonal relations and performance*. Furthermore, it sets this research into context with previous research and confirms, criticises or extends previous concepts or models.

The first part focuses on **Chapter 4**'s findings and answers to Research Question 1 on the challenges enterprises face in manifest conflict scenarios.

On the basis of **Chapter 5**'s findings, the second part assesses answers to Research Question 2 on the way conflicts are dealt with in selected organisations.

The third part explores **Chapter 6**'s findings and answers to Research Question 3 on the way the implementation of conflict management methods to internal organisational conflicts affects interpersonal relations and performance.

Finally, the findings of all three parts are synthesised, leading to the proposition of a conflict management model.

### 7.2 Challenges to organisations facing conflict

This research examined what the challenges were that assessed companies faced in manifest conflict scenarios. It was empirically determined which challenges and aspects were the most salient, how the interviewees evaluated the challenges at their workplace with regard to their work and interpersonal relations, and whether these challenges were of temporary nature or persisted beyond conflict. Apart from assessing how these challenges affected the main conflict parties, it was also established whether other

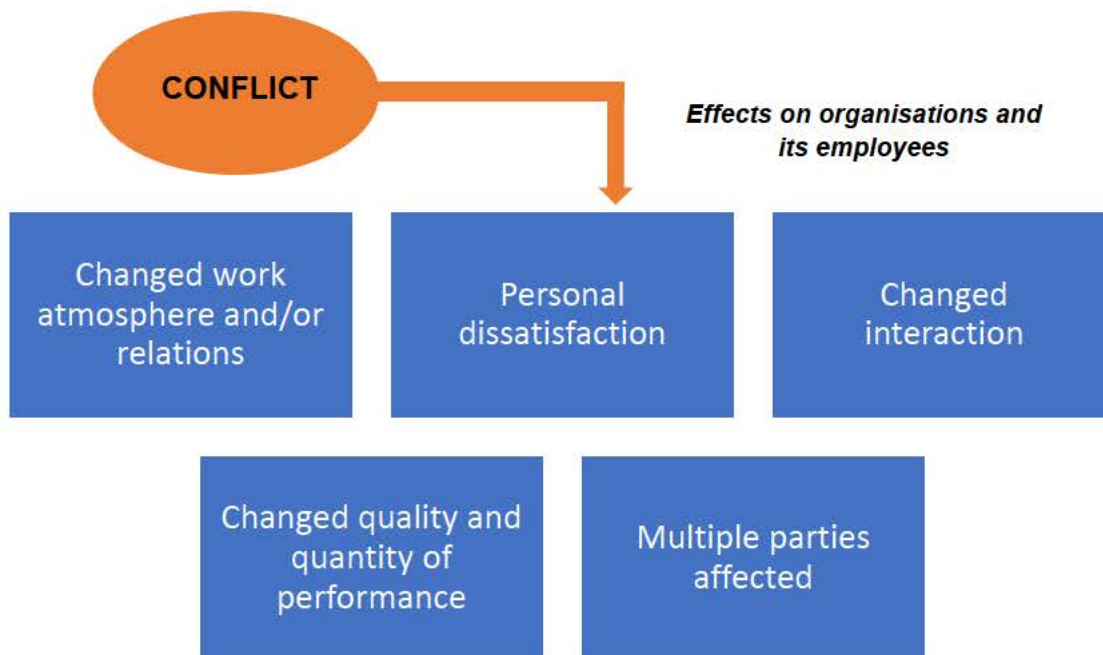
persons were in one way or the other affected and/or involved. This section presents the five themes ascertained in this research with regard to conflict-related challenges and sets them into the literary context.

### **7.2.1 Salience, evaluation and temporal nature of challenges**

This research ascertained that *counterproductive conflict behaviour has adverse consequences for involved individuals and the organisation as a whole*. These consequences ranged from individuals' experiencing dissatisfaction, stress and frustration to interpersonal lack of communication and coordination, and teams and/or departments not functioning properly due to the conflict at hand. The conflict parties' increased focus on the conflict and, in some instances, hostile attitude and behaviour towards the other hampered their ability to relate and interact normally with each other. This, furthermore, negatively impacted the tasks/projects they were working on together and in some cases, also affected other team members and departments. This is in line with previous research that identified negative consequences of counterproductive conflict behaviour such as mistrust and loss of communication on the side of the conflict parties which in turn incurred material and immaterial costs for the organisation (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Lawless & Trif, 2016; Lewis et al., 2006; Mayer & Louw, 2009).

Five themes – *changed work atmosphere and/or relations, personal dissatisfaction, changed interaction, changed quality and quantity of performance, and multiple parties affected* – emerged from the data, with all but the theme 'multiple parties affected' prominently discussed by the research participants (see **Figure 61 below** for an overview of research findings with regard to organisational challenges). Thus, *work-related as well as relationship aspects were reported and prominently featured in their respective conflict experiences*. This validates previous research that emphasises linkages between soft and hard factors: for example, well-being of employees benefiting the organisation's productivity (Dijkstra et al., 2011), and conflict's effects on individual's job satisfaction and organisational commitment leading to absenteeism and turnover intentions (De Dreu & Beersma, 2005; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Giebels & Janssen, 2005). Similarly, this research found that employees' *personal dissatisfaction* with the situation at hand due to

the conflict and related factors had consequences for their personal well-being, their relations with others and their turnover intentions. The personal dissatisfaction ranged from being interested in having harmonious relations with colleagues to avoiding or fearing to meet the other person up to considering changing jobs because of the conflict situation at hand.



**Fig. 61: Research Findings: Challenges to Organisations Facing Conflict** (Own Model).

Apart from the conflict weighing the conflict parties down, it also affected their focus, with the conflict being at the back of their mind, weighing them down or overshadowing other work issues. Previous literature related the increased focus on the conflict to only relationship conflicts and argued for task conflicts to have positive effects on team performance (Jehn, 1995; Simons & Peterson, 2000). In this research, *the increased focus on the conflict and negative effect on the individuals and teams involved was a concern in relationship and task conflicts alike*. Thus, this research extends this and demonstrated that conflicts do not only create challenges for interpersonal relations but also the way tasks and projects are being accomplished.

Furthermore, this research found that *the way employees had previously related and interacted with each other changed* in terms of friendliness, less frequent communication, avoiding each other, amongst others. Previous friendly relations altered during conflict, conflict parties started harbouring negative feelings towards the other, even to the extent of behaving hostile to the other. Similarly, previous research had showed that communication may turn hostile (Wall Jr. & Callister, 1995) and attitudes and behaviours change the further a conflict escalates (Glasl, 2011). In line with De Dreu & Beersma's (2005) finding that conflicts may even lead to deviant behaviours, in this research, bullying and sabotaging behaviours were directed towards one of the conflict parties in 2 of the 12 assessed cases.

Due to the conflict at hand, *employees tended to avoid each other and communicated and coordinated less with each other which in turn affected their performance and output*. This confirms previous research that identified lack of communication between employees hindering conflict parties from performing at the best of their capabilities (Knippen & Green, 1999) and related withdrawal coping behaviours as a consequence of reduced communication and coordination (Giebels & Janssen, 2005; Spector & Jex, 1998). In line with de Wit et al. (2013)'s assertion that conflict parties tend to stick to their initial and possibly faulty decision instead of correctly processing information, this research similarly found that not wanting to see interfaces and talking at cross purposes hindered conflict parties from communicating adequately with the other, with the consequence of hardening of positions and communication breaking down. In another case in this research, incorrect interpretations of the others' attitude and behaviour contributed to prejudices and 'polarisation in thinking' (Glasl, 2013) which could only be removed upon opening up about one's views and perceptions. Therefore, the change in interaction hampered how the conflict parties communicated with each other and coordinated tasks which in turn had an impact on the work relationships and tasks.

Withdrawing behaviour, according to Giebels & Janssen (2005), moreover, leads to mistakes due to miscommunication and double work. Additionally, Knippen & Green (1999) noted that poor communication, poor cooperation and wasted time result from people in conflict not working well together. This was validated in this research as due to a lack of communication and coordination between employees at loggerhead, the same

job was executed by both parties that amounted to less productivity and loss of time for the company. Similarly, Morton (1994) attributed errors and misinformation to conflict-related reduced communication. In this research, errors occurred when highly interdependent employees and/or teams did not coordinate activities. Projects/tasks, furthermore, got delayed due to the conflict at hand. Employees spent longer on a project/task than planned which restricted their ability to move on to other projects or tasks. It also led to financial loss for the organisation in terms of reduced turnover and capable employees leaving the organisation due to the conflict situation. Therefore, this research contributes to literature on performance during conflict, with regard to how *conflictful behaviour leads to avoidance behaviour which disrupts communication and coordination between parties and produces costly mistakes.*

*The more persons were affected by the conflict, the more adverse were also the consequences for the projects and tasks they were working on – from planning and coordination to execution – and post-conflict interpersonal relations.* In some instances, the conflict had started between certain parties, then extended to other staff members and produced further conflict issues. Third parties thereby became involved or drawn into the conflict and even acted as a conflict party towards one of the initial conflict parties. These multiparty conflicts were also more difficult to settle than the conflicts that only involved two parties, with some parties maintaining strained, conflictful relations post-conflict. In other situations, one of the conflict parties displayed hostile behaviour towards third parties as a result of conflict-related anger and frustrations. Therefore, conflicts do not only present challenges to the initial conflict parties but also affect and involve third parties in different ways. This confirms previous research findings that conflicts have the tendency to escalate (Glasl, 2013; Rubin et al., 1994) and spread to include further individuals than at the initial stage of conflict (Jehn et al., 2013; Shah et al., 2021; Wall Jr. & Callister, 1995). In line with Shah et al. (2021), not all conflicts in this research, however, spread to include others and remained dyadic conflicts. In comparison to previous research, this research provided insight into different involvement of third parties: from direct involvement to being diversely affected by the conflict of other team members (see **Figure 28** for an overview, p. 155). With regard to the former aspect, all conflicts reported in this research displayed escalation tendencies, with attitudes and behaviour changing as



conflicts developed. This research, therefore, contributes to literature on conflict escalation and third-party involvement and provides insight into how individual conflicts develop and spread.

*In some instances of this research, the conflict did not only have an immediate effect on the task/project that triggered the conflict but also on subsequent tasks/projects and working relationships.* Especially those who experienced hostile behaviour and attitude during conflict – expressed by either one conflict party or both conflict parties – did in most cases not return to good relations but remained to have strained, conflictual relations. Therefore, the challenges conflicts pose to individuals, interpersonal relations and organisations can under certain conditions last beyond the current conflict and continue to hamper the way employees work together. In line with previous researchers' assertions to decrease the negative consequences of conflict through adequate conflict management (e.g., Dijkstra et al., 2011; McCorkle & Reese, 2010; Rahim, 2011, 2016), this creates the premise for settling conflicts and mitigating or removing the consequences of conflict so that the conflict does not linger on and continues to impact on work processes and persons involved. This research's findings showed that the type of conflict management mattered in mitigating the negative effects of conflicts and improving relations and performance of involved parties. This is in line with DeChurch et al. (2013) and Rahim (2011, 2016), that the way conflict parties interact with each other and handle the conflict can influence and change conflicting behaviour, improve working relationships and impact the performance of teams and the organisation in general. Conflict management and its effect on relations and performance are the subject of the following sections.

### **7.3 Conflict management and organisational conflict processes**

This research examined how conflicts were dealt with in selected organisations. It was empirically assessed how conflicts developed and how they were managed, which conflict management approaches were the most salient and at what stage they were utilised, and what the similarities and differences between the conflict management attempts were. This section at first outlines this research's contribution to conflict conceptualisation. It

then elaborates on utilised conflict management approaches in the assessed 12 conflicts and what implications it has for conflict management research.

### **7.3.1 Conflict conceptualisation – process and dimensions**

#### 7.3.1.1 Conflict as a dynamic process

This research ascertained that *conflicts undergo different phases, with varying levels of escalation and consequences for disputants' relations and behaviour*. **Phase 1** often involved some form of dialogue and discussion with regard to the incompatible issue. This ranged from open dialogue to confrontation and accusations. **Phase 2** either showed itself in avoiding behaviour, standstill in terms of communication and agreement being no longer possible, no progress, destroying one's basis, and/or open confrontation. In line with Glasl (2013), changes in perception, feelings, will and behaviour could be ascertained in this research, with the various changes influencing and reinforcing each other. For example, noticing that Conflict Party B did not adhere to the work procedures affected the feelings and thoughts of Conflict Party A in conflict I8 towards the other party, led to misperceptions of the other person's motives and resulted in venting his anger at the climax of the conflict (p. 192 ff.). In conflict I6, polarised views over the conflict issue led time and again to confrontations which furthered the hardening of positions, making one of the conflict parties the bogeyman which isolated him in the end within the group (p. 183 ff.). An example for withdrawing behaviour is conflict I2 (p. 167 ff.): The conflict parties clashed over the incompatible issue and expressed their annoyance verbally. This further led to hurt feelings on the side of the 'losing' party, tension in their work relationship and withdrawal behaviours. The conflict dimensions underwent change and were not necessarily the same at the end of conflict: The attitudes and behaviours changed during conflict and, in some instances, more incompatible issue(s) were added in the course of conflict. An example for additional incompatible issues is conflict I7 which initially centred around non-agreement over working methods – working analogue or using digital means (p. 187 ff.). In the course of conflict, disagreement over precautions regarding contamination of objects was added. As conflict parties interacted with each other, the

conflict therefore changed with regard to its degree, complexity and perception. A process of escalation can, thus, be retraced.

Thus, this research contributes to conflict studies in demonstrating that *conflicts are not static phenomena but develop throughout their lifetime* (other literature with a dynamic approach to conflict: Cronin & Bezrukova, 2019; Jehn & Mannix, 2001; Korsgaard et al., 2008; Pondy, 1967; Rubin et al., 1994a; Weingart et al., 2015; Wu & Sekiguchi, 2019). This stands in contrast to the majority of conflict studies that assess conflicts only at a certain point in time: According to Cronin and Bezrukova (2019), despite conflict literature generally acknowledging the dynamic nature of conflict, seventy-two percent of their reviewed studies “examined conflict in a single episode” (p. 775), thus focusing on static conditions than conflict dynamics and making it impossible to determine how conflicts change over time.

#### 7.3.1.2 Conflict dimensions

In **Chapter 2**, *the three conflict dimensions situational factors, disputants’ characteristics and relations, and conflict expression resulted out of the review of other conflict studies’ categorisations, constructs and definitions*. Depending on the characteristics of the three dimensions and their potential change throughout the conflict process, certain conflict management efforts may be utilised, with effects on the conflict outcome variables interpersonal relations and performance. Whilst the three conflict dimensions embody personal and interpersonal aspects, the focus in this section is on the interpersonal aspects due to this research’s level of analysis. Personal aspects are mentioned if relevant and related by the interviewees. However, a more detailed exploration of personal aspects may be explored in future research.

This research validated that *conflict is not only defined by its conflict contradiction*. In line with previous research (Baros, 2004; Galtung, 1996; Glasl, 2013; Pondy, 1967), a conflict can only be called as such when incompatibilities on the levels of disposition and/or substantive issues go along with behavioural contradictions. Conflict only becomes obvious to both parties when it is expressed (Galtung, 1996; Glasl, 1999b, 2013; Thomas, 1992a; Weingart et al., 2015). Whilst latent conflict is at the subconscious, inferred level,

explicit, overt actions make manifest conflict tangible to both conflict parties (Galtung, 1996) and observable to third parties. In this research, Conflict Party A's annoyance with the other party's approach to work in conflict I1 and its consequences on the unequal workload, for example, only became obvious to Conflict Party B after she had expressed her grievances in an open confrontation (p. 163 ff.). Similarly, in conflict I4, Conflict Party B's feelings of envy and anger towards Conflict A had not been known by Conflict Party A until they were expressed in the form of attacks and accusations, with Conflict Party B expressing that Conflict Party's A success is also based upon her efforts (p. 175 ff.). Expressions of one party therefore influenced the other party's thoughts, emotions and behaviours which determined the further course of action. Thus, this confirms previous research that the development of conflicts depends on the interactions of individuals that are comprised of intentional and non-intentional actions and counteractions (C. A. Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Glasl, 1999a; Knapp et al., 1988; D. M. Kolb & Putnam, 2014; Rubin et al., 1994; Thomas, 1992a; J. Yang & Mossholder, 2004).

This understanding of conflict as a three-dimensional concept contradicts studies that predominantly focus on the conflict issue/ type to conceptualise conflict and explain the effects of conflict on, for example, team performance and satisfaction (Behfar et al., 2011; Bendersky & Hays, 2012; Jehn, 1995, 1997). Although some of these studies explored dynamics, they either focused on how conflicts change from one conflict type to another (e.g., relationship conflict following task conflict) and/or variables that mediated between conflict type and conflict outcome (Elbanna, 2009; Guenter et al., 2016; Janssen & Giebels, 2013; Lau & Cobb, 2010; Rispens, 2012; Simons & Peterson, 2000; Xie & Luan, 2014; J. Yang & Mossholder, 2004). In limiting the understanding of conflict to a single dimension (conflict contradiction), they are not able to depict the linkages between conflict and effects on variables such as performance and have to rely on mediators such as trust, moderators' role ambiguity and team membership (*ibid*). Understanding conflicts to be solely determined by its incompatible issue narrows the perspective on what conflict is and cannot portray a complete picture of conflict that covers the latent and manifest levels of conflict and is able to reconstruct how the different dimensions of conflict change throughout conflict.

Additionally, whilst previous research emphasised the negative effect of relationship conflicts and the positive effect of task conflicts under certain conditions such as being beneficial at an early decision-making stage and not transforming into relationship conflict (Amason, 1996; Amason & Sapienza, 1997; Bendersky et al., 2014; Cosier & Rose, 1977; Farh et al., 2010; Guenter et al., 2016; Guetzkow & Gyr, 1954; Jehn, 1995, 1997; Jehn & Mannix, 2001; Mooney et al., 2007; Schweiger et al., 1986; Simons & Peterson, 2000), this research did not find evidence for this. *Task/process/relationship issues were not at the forefront of the conflicts but how the parties interacted with each other, how they perceived and processed the situation, and later, how they managed the conflict mattered.* Furthermore, *personal issues did not feature prominently, and conflicts centred mainly on task- or process-related issues* (depicted in **Figure 32, Chapter 5**, p. 213). Despite that, conflicts posed challenges to conflict parties, teams and the organisation, regardless of whether the conflicts centred on task, process or personal issues (see also **Section 7.2** on organisational challenges due to conflict, p. 262).

Apart from contradiction, *interdependence* has been cited as a structural precondition for conflicts that affects how people interact to achieve their goals, with consequences for the conflict process and outcome (Deutsch, 2006a, 2014; Johnson, 2003; Johnson & Johnson, 2005). The type of interdependence and subjective perception of involved individuals determine whether the conflict parties follow a cooperative or competitive approach to managing their interpersonal conflicts (Deutsch, 2006a, 2014). Regarding positive interdependence, positive attitudes towards the other party and open-mindedness to the other party's ideas and wants were favourable in determining a positive conflict outcome in this research. Conflict I5 is an example for both tacitly agreeing to be more considerate of the other party's wants and discussing incompatible issues more openly with each other (p. 179 ff.). Similarly, conflict I3 involved accommodating the other party's concerns by attempting to communicate better upon resolving the current conflict (p. 171 ff.). In comparison, negative interdependence characterised by preferring the other not to do well and obstructing the other's goals and aspirations impeded a win-win outcome for both parties and had negative consequences for the conflict outcome. An example for obstructing behaviour is conflict I11 where Conflict Parties B tried to negatively affect business operations in order to cause Conflict Party A to change his

decision on departmental changes (p. 204 ff.). Two of the conflict parties maintained a passive work attitude beyond conflict, thus presenting an ongoing challenge to Conflict Party A and the organisation. In conflict I6, the conflict parties were not willing to compromise and give in to the other party's suggestions (p. 183 ff.). This affected their ability to come to an agreement even on minor issues which also affected post-conflict teamwork. Depending on whether the parties are positively or negatively linked therefore affects how they interact and relate with each other and has consequences for their interpersonal relations, team and organisation. Thus, this research contributes to literature on interdependence and conflict in portraying the differences in taking a positive or negative interdependence approach during conflicts and what effects it has on the conflict outcome. The employed holistic approach in line with Deutsch (2006a, 2014) stands in contrast to approaches that focus on a certain element such as task interdependence and related level of interaction. Interdependence encompasses more aspects than reducing it to the amount of interaction and collaboration; the nature of the interdependence such as the underlying attitudes towards the other person need also to be considered.

*Social norms and the conflict culture* also determine how individuals interact and manage conflicts arising between them (Cialdini et al., 1991; De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008; Jehn, 1995, 1997; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003; Kuhn & Poole, 2000; Troth, 2009; J. Yang & Mossholder, 2004). Whereas the focus of this research was not on exploring social norms and conflict culture, interviewees commented on the organisational social contexts they were embedded in, with regard to the general work atmosphere, conflict issues and conflict management approaches. As an example for a 'dominating conflict culture' (Gelfand et al., 2008), interviewee I9 related that a harsh tone dominated at the workplace, with it "not being nice" in any of the departments (p. 196 ff.). Conflicts were expressed through open confrontation and heated discussions, with interactions over the issues and progress not being possible. This also prevented collaborative conflict management from being utilized as it did not align with the existing conflict culture. In comparison, interviewees I1 and I2 both described 'collaborative conflict cultures' (Gelfand et al., 2008) that were characterized by general friendly relations among staff (p. 163 ff. and 171 ff., respectively). Superiors got actively involved in settling disputes between parties that could not come to an agreement on incompatible issues, trying to find mutually acceptable

solutions to conflicts. Therefore, this research contributes to conflict studies' research in showing that apart from the individuals' concerned, the organisational context also determines which behaviours are more likely to be enacted and whether they employ more cooperative or competitive conflict management styles (Deutsch, 2006a; Gelfand et al., 2008; Jehn, 1997; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003; Kuhn & Poole, 2000; Van de Vliert & Euwema, 1994).

Apart from the conflict contradiction and the expression of conflict, how persons act in conflict is also determined by their *dispositions and relations with the other conflict party*. Firstly, other studies revealed that individuals' unique way of thinking, behaviour and traits determined how persons perceived conflict and related with each other (Chun & Choi, 2014; Dijkstra et al., 2005; Graziano et al., 1996; Ilies et al., 2011; Park & Antonioni, 2007; Tekleab & Quigley, 2014). In this research, some of the interviewees alluded to their traits and those of the other conflict party in explaining their respective behaviours. For example, interviewee I6 contributed the clash with the other person to the different personalities: a 'blue', highly structured person versus a person with 'red-green tendencies' (p. 183 ff.). Similarly, interviewee I11 attributed the extreme reaction of one of the other conflict parties in terms of his 'explosive' reaction to the change in leadership and persistent negative feelings towards interviewee I11 to his being a more 'emotional' person (p. 204 ff.).

Secondly, pursuing certain actions and conflict handling strategies were not attributed to *status and power* differences by the 12 interviewees. As they did not feature in related conflict experiences, this research could not validate previous studies (Callister & Wall Jr., 2001; Chun & Choi, 2014; Coleman, 2006; Rahim, 1986; Rubin et al., 1994; Tabak & Koprak, 2007) that investigated how power and status can affect different aspects of a conflict process.

Thirdly, *attitudes* can influence how a conflict is expressed and which conflict management approach is utilised (Deutsch, 2006a; Galtung, 1996, 2009; Glasl, 2013). Although a person's bias or behavioural disposition towards another person is relatively stable due to prior experiences and evaluative association in memory with regard to that object, a certain context and personal factors can lead to a change in attitudes and/or verbal behaviour (Ajzen, 2001; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, 2007; Fazio, 2007). An example in this research for changed attitudes and behaviours is conflict I4: The close friendship

changed suddenly when Conflict Party B started attacking Conflict Party A during phone conversations and speaking badly about her behind her back (p. 175 ff.). In hindsight, Conflict Party A, however, questioned the initial good relationship, whether Conflict Party B had only been pretending and had not been a genuine friend. Whilst at first struggling with the contentious attitude of the other, Conflict Party A then managed to cope with the situation, realizing that she could not change the other person but only her attitude to the person and the situation. By comparison, the other person continued to express contentious behaviour towards her and tried to avoid her presence. Therefore, the changed attitude and behaviour of Conflict Party B impacted the feelings, thoughts and behaviours of Conflict Party A, adapting to the changed circumstances. Therefore, conflict parties may under certain conditions change their attitudes and/or verbal behaviour towards the other party during or through conflict.

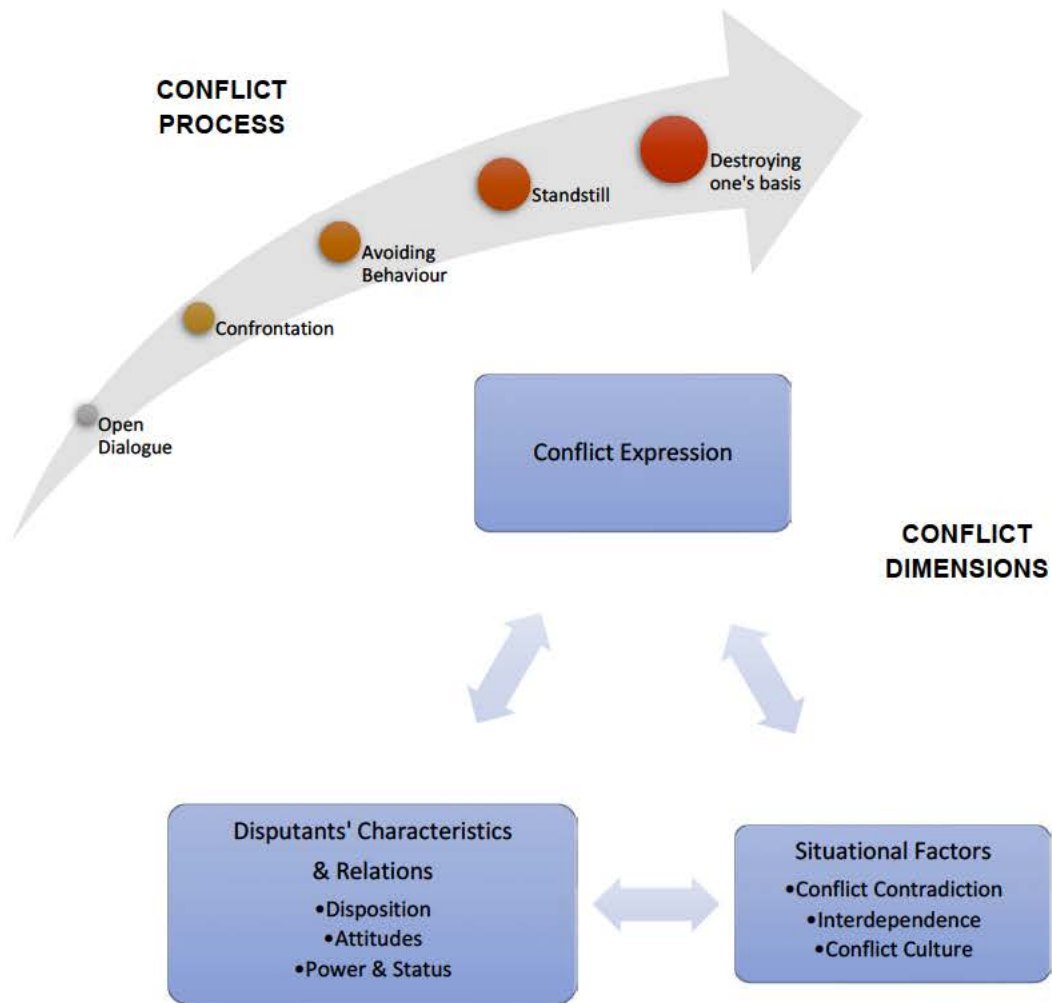
In appraising the situation, they may also act in a certain way that does not correspond to the actual attitudes but is rather followed for face-saving or other considerations (Fazio, 2007). An example for temporary contentious behavioural expressions in this research is conflict I2: Under the present condition of more customer traffic than usual and accompanied stress and work overload, both conflict parties overreacted and told each other their respective positions in a short and explicit fashion (p. 167 ff.). This contentious situation did, however, not affect their relations and attitudes in the long-term and after giving each other silent treatment over a day, they returned to normal relations. Similarly, conflicts I1 and I5 were characterized by contentious behaviours during conflict but returned to normal relations after conflict (p. 163 ff. and 179 ff., respectively).

However, there were also examples for conflict situations that changed previous positive attitudes and behaviours to negative attitudes and behaviours during and beyond the immediate conflict. Conflict I12 turned the two parties from friends to 'enemies', with a 180 degree change in attitudes and behaviours towards the other (p. 209 ff.). In the same vein, respectful, friendly relations between the conflict parties in conflict I7 ended in mistrust and minimum to no communication (p. 187 ff.). Similarly, as a result of conflict I6, team members now only work together on a professional level although the people involved could relate very well on a personal level, according to the interviewee (p. 183



ff.). Instead of relating friendly and honestly with each other, interactions are guarded due to the previous conflict experience. When conflict parties have contentious relations, this may also impact how they react in newly arising conflict incidents and which conflict management approach they will opt for (Deutsch, 2006a; Galtung, 1996, 2000). Thus, previous good relations and attitudes towards other persons may significantly impact the occurrence of new conflicts and provide the premise for settling conflicts in a nonviolent and creative manner (Galtung, 1996) in order to halt a continuance of contentious behaviour in future encounters. An example for successful conflict management and changing attitudes for the better was conflict I3 (p. 171 ff.): The exchange workshop helped to remove existing prejudices and enabled the conflict parties to understand each other's motives and perceptions better.

Thus, this research contributes to conflict studies in exemplifying the role of attitudes for conflict expression and conflict management. Firstly, in accordance with Fazio (2007)'s understanding of attitudes, attitudes may remain relatively stable and only verbal behaviours reflect the temporary conflictful situation. In the aftermath of conflict, the parties return to normal relations and behaviours as no change in attitude had occurred. Secondly, under certain conditions, attitudes likely change during conflict due to an increasing 'enemy image' of the other (Galtung, 1996, 2009; Glasl, 2013). This has an effect on the expression of conflict and the approach that is taken to manage the conflict. The more unfavourable a person is inclined towards the other person, the more contentious will be the resulting behaviour and the less cooperative the conflict management approach (cf. Deutsch, 2006a). This also has lasting effects for how the parties relate with each other post-conflict and how they handle future conflict issues.



**Fig. 62: Research Findings: Conflict Conceptualisation - Process and Dimensions (Own Model).**

**Figure 62** sums up the findings of this section in depicting conflict's processual character and the three conflict dimensions that influence each other during conflict. Taking the presented dynamic, processual conflict conceptualisation as its basis, the next section discusses this research's contribution to conflict management and its placement with regard to other research.

### **7.3.2 Conflict management**

*Conflict management* refers to the handling and containing of an arising conflict in mitigating its negative effects and finding constructive ways of managing differences without necessarily removing the underlying issues that gave rise to the conflict (Berghof Foundation, 2012; Rahim, 2011). It focuses on the behavioural aspects of conflict and enables assessing different kinds of strategies, styles or methods employed by the conflict parties to address their incompatible issues (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979) – ranging from cooperative to avoiding and competitive approaches. Previous research can generally be categorised into three perspectives:

Firstly, the most adequate conflict management approach depends on the given situation and might be more or less appropriate (Rahim, 2011; Thomas, 1992a). Depending on how the conflict parties conceptualised the present conflict, they would choose between different strategies that either reflected a higher concern for their own concerns or others' concerns: The concrete value determined whether they pursued an integrating, dominating, obliging, avoiding or compromising conflict-handling style (Rahim, 2011; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979).

Secondly, in comparison to the contingency approach, authors like Deutsch (1973, 2006a, 2014), Tjosvold (1991) and Tjosvold et al. (2014) emphasised that cooperative management of conflict is the ideal approach to follow because it leads to mutually beneficial solutions that satisfy all involved parties and contrasted it with competitive conflict management that only seeks to benefit one party and results in suboptimal conflict outcomes.

Thirdly, instead of a singular approach to conflict management, conflict situations may involve a combination of different strategies – either sequentially or simultaneously (Knapp et al., 1988; Munduate et al., 1999; Rubin et al., 1994; Van de Vliert, 1997). The individuals involved change their approach to conflict management – consciously or unconsciously - to reach a certain desired outcome (goal accomplishment or maintenance of good relations) as a result of the parties' interactions (Medina & Benitez, 2011; Rubin et al., 1994; Van de Vliert, 1997). This depicts the adaptability in conflict parties' conflict handling behaviour and how different approaches may combine in the respective conflict

situations. It further underlines that conflicts involve unconscious or impulsive reactions to conflict (Kolb & Putnam, 2014) and mixed messages - covert and overt strategies - (Van de Vliert, 1997) which might have unintended consequences for the further interactions of conflict parties and the conflict outcome (Rubin et al., 1994).

This research validated the third *dynamic perspective of conflict management*. Just as conflict development involved different phases, *conflict management underwent different stages*, with conflicts I1 to I12 being subject to two to four conflict management attempts. These conflict management attempts involved positive developments and/or setbacks, with the parties adapting their behaviour and conflict management to the reactions and responses of the other party. An example is conflict I4 that involved external coaching and discussing incompatible issues as positive developments, a relapse into bullying into submission and finally avoiding interactions (p. 175 ff.). Apart from being an example for involving different conflict management approaches, this conflict underwent positive developments as well as setbacks, with lasting consequences for the affected parties and teams. Similarly, other conflicts also saw positive developments towards settlement and/or setbacks (for an overview of utilised conflict management approaches in assessed conflicts see **Figure 37, Section 5.4.1**, p. 219).

Whilst the most salient conflict management approaches across the 12 conflicts were avoiding interactions, discussing incompatible issues, and third-party attempts at mediation (see **Figure 36** on Conflict Management Distribution, **Section 5.4.1**, p. 217), *it was essential which conflict management approach was utilised at which conflict stage*. As each conflict underwent several conflict management approaches, solely considering the most prominent conflict management approach would, however, not give an adequate picture of the respective conflict management process. Conflicts that utilised accommodating others' needs and tacit agreement at the final phase were positively settled. It can be contributed to the parties' compromising and considering the other party's concerns instead of solely pursuing one's own self-interest. By contrast, conflict management approaches avoiding interactions, changing workflows and/or team members in terms of employees leaving the organisation, and non-tackling of issues denoted a negative conflict outcome as latter approaches are individual-centred and are not construed to bring about a mutually satisfactory solution. Munduate et al. (1999)

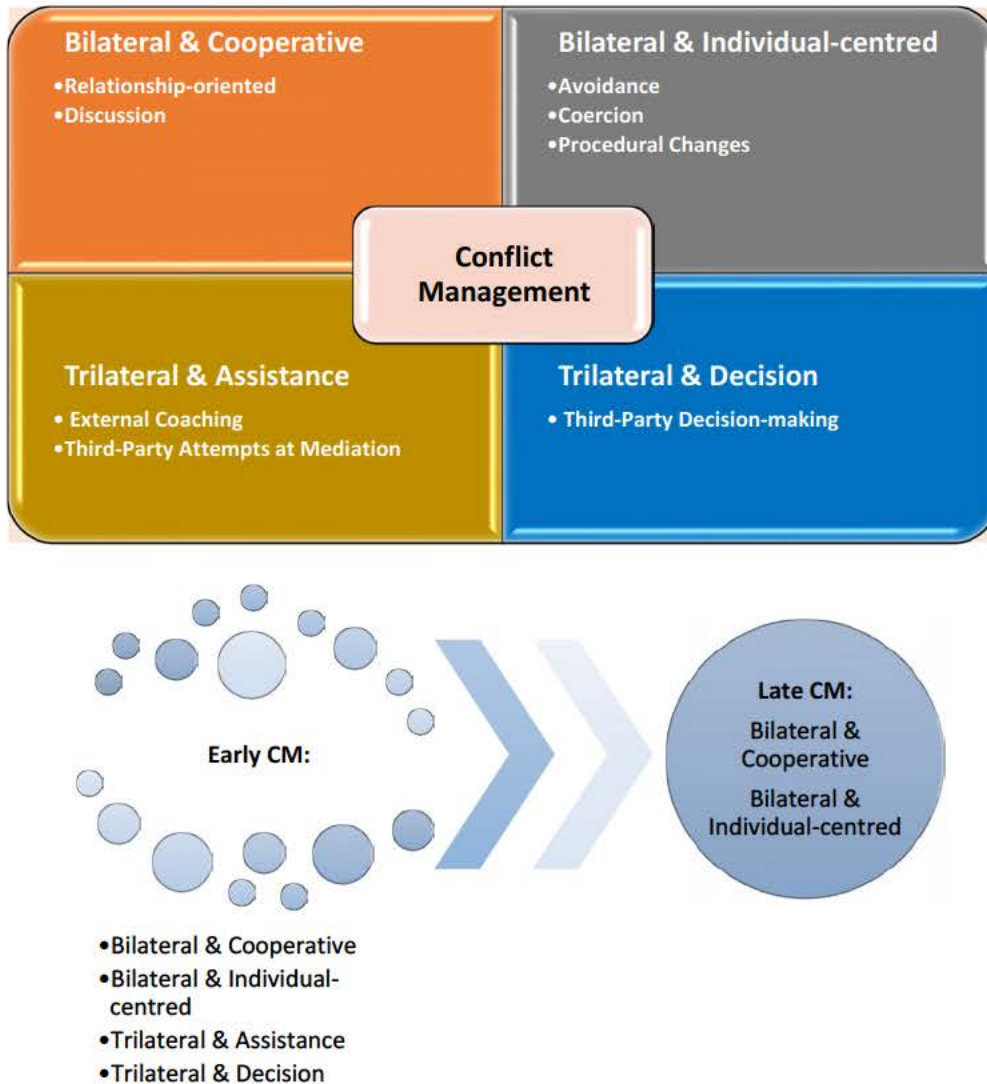
similarly found that conflict parties utilise different conflict handling styles in conflicts: A multiple conflict handling approach was more effective than using a single conflict handling style. In comparison to this research, they did, however, not assess why and at what stage a particular conflict handling style was used. Therefore, this research extends knowledge on combined conflict management approaches in revealing, firstly, which conflict management approaches were mostly utilised, secondly, why the conflict parties chose to follow a certain approach through uncovering the dynamics of conflict and conflict management, and thirdly, which conflict management approaches were effective in settling the conflict – distinguishing between early and final stages of conflict management.

Furthermore, *this research explored whether and how third parties got involved in conflict management*. I found that the effectiveness of third-party involvement depended on the level of involvement: When third parties mediated between conflict parties and sought to address the conflict issues, it helped conflict parties to settle their differences and improve communication and understanding. For example, an exchange workshop led by a neutral party in conflict I3 assisted to remove prejudices and improve communication between the departments affected by the conflict (p. 171 ff.). By comparison, when third parties did not address the conflict issues, merely sought progress for task/project accomplishment and not considered interpersonal aspects or decided for the conflict parties on a win-lose basis, tasks/projects were successfully completed but the work atmosphere and interpersonal relations continued to be affected. An example is conflict I6 where the passive team leader was replaced with someone who would be able to handle the situation differently (p. 183 ff.). However, it did not work out in this conflict situation, especially as the focus was solely on putting the project back on track but not to address the incompatible conflict issues. In conflict I12, the common boss decided on who was to continue serving the clients: Although Conflict Party B had encroached on Conflict Party A's area of responsibility, the decision was made in Conflict Party B's favour due to his success (p. 209 ff.). This created a winner and a loser with lasting consequences for their relationship. In line with international conflict studies, the level of involvement of third parties, therefore, determines whether the decision authority remains with the parties or has been relinquished to the third party, and whether it enables a win-win or win-lose

solution to the conflict (Bercovitch & Jackson, 1997, 2001; Kleiboer, 1998; Langenscheid, 2000; Moore, 2003). Moreover, mediating between the parties and trying to improve their relations rather than imposing a solution is, in line with Glasl (2013), more adequate in lower intensity situations. This is also in accordance with studies that purport a transformational leadership style for positively handling conflicts and improving collaboration than following a leadership style that avoids conflict management or aggravates conflict by exerting one's authority (McKibben, 2017; Römer et al., 2012; Zhao et al., 2019). As further elaborated in **Section 7.4**, the consequences of conflicts on interpersonal relations warrant a consideration of personal aspects in conflict management than just seeking success and accomplishment of tasks/projects. According to Zhang et al. (2019), peers can, furthermore, also intervene in conflicts to informally talk to individual conflict parties or help to mediate between colleagues for the sake of peaceful work relations. In this research, three conflicts involved third-party assistance: either by an external coach that tried to help one conflict party to deal with the conflict at hand or another party trying to mediate between the conflict parties. Therefore, intervening parties do not necessarily have to be superiors. In considering knowledge from international conflict and mediation studies and exploring this research's findings with regard to third parties, this research, therefore, contributes to organisational conflict studies in assessing the different roles and levels of involvement of third parties in organisational conflict management.

In summary, in line with previous research's observations of conflict dynamics and combined conflict management (e.g., Cronin & Bezrukova, 2019; Euwema et al., 2003; Korsgaard et al., 2008; Munduate et al., 1999; Rahim, 2011; Van de Vliert, 1997), this research underlines the significance of following a dynamic perspective of conflict and conflict management than focusing on a static understanding of conflict and conflict management. The findings revealed that conflicts underwent various developments in terms of escalation and conflict management, with more cooperative conflict management approaches leading to more successful settlements in terms of work processes and interpersonal relations than self-centred approaches. There was also a tendency and preference expressed by the interviewees towards active conflict management than

utilising avoiding approaches that would likely worsen the situations and make conflicts to linger on.



**Fig. 63: Research Findings: Conflict Management – Pattern and Process** (Own Model).

**Figure 63** depicts, on the one hand, the process character of conflict management – early conflict management approaches to mostly utilised late conflict management approaches, and, on the other hand, the classification of utilised conflict management approaches in the 12 conflicts – bilateral & cooperative; bilateral & individual-centred; trilateral & assistance; trilateral & decision. It is of significance to distinguish between conflict

management approaches in terms of who is involved in conflict management (*bilateral vs. trilateral*) and where the focus in conflict management lays (*cooperative vs. individual-centred*). However, the process character of conflict management is essential for understanding individual conflicts as every assessed conflict in this research involved multiple conflict management approaches. Therefore, both aspects were depicted in **Figure 63**'s conflict management model. As this research was interested in which conflict management approaches minimised the negative effects on interpersonal relations and performance, the next section discusses how the implementation of these different conflict management approaches had an effect on interpersonal relations and performance.

#### **7.4 Conflict management outcome: consequences for interpersonal relations and performance**

Building upon the previous section's exploration of conflict management approaches, this section examines how the implementation of conflict management approaches to internal organisational conflicts affected the conflict outcome. It was empirically assessed how interpersonal relations and performance were impacted by respective conflict management approaches in the 12 conflict situations, and which conflict management implementations facilitated which particular conflict outcomes.

##### **7.4.1 Effects of conflict management implementation on interpersonal relations**

In assessing interpersonal relations in organisations, this research found that *previous friendly or collegial relations did not guarantee good relations post-conflict*. With reference to the temporal and closeness dimensions of **Figure 7 (Section 2.4, p.85)**, friendly, long-term relations were as adversely affected as friendly, short-term relations. None of the pre-conflict relations were reported as strained/conflictful but cordial, friendly, friendly/collegial or collegial, and 6 out of these relations ended up being strained/conflictful post-conflict. As an example, conflict I4 involved a long-term friendship, with the parties conversing daily pre-conflict, that resulted in distanced relations on the business level post-conflict (p. 175 ff.). Similarly, conflict I12 changed from long-term



friendship to conflictful/strained relations post-conflict (p. 209 ff.). This stands in contrast to previous research that argued for the beneficial effect of previous friendly relations and closeness on how conflicts are handled due to the high interest in maintaining the relationship and higher concern for the other party (Deutsch, 1973; Rispens et al., 2011; Rognes & Schei, 2010; Rubin et al., 1994). In line with Rubin et al. (1994), this can be attributed to the more intense emotional reactions, disappointment and consequential retaliatory behaviours when the friend does not act according to expectations and frustrates the other's concerns. Regarding conflict I4, Conflict Party B suddenly changed towards the other party which severely shocked and affected Conflict Party A emotionally and physically (p. 175 ff.). Conflict Party A consequentially described the previous friendly attitude and behaviour of Conflict Party B as fake and pretentious. Conflict I6, similarly, involved Conflict Party B disappointing Conflict Party A in serving his clients without permission, thereby placing his concerns and interests higher than that of the other party and repaying him negatively for helping him to get that job position (p. 183 ff.). Therefore, the failure of one party to consider the other party's needs in his/her actions, and the other person's attribution of this behaviour to traits and the general attitude towards him/her (cf. Kelley, 1979) did not only help to escalate both conflicts but also affected the relationships permanently.

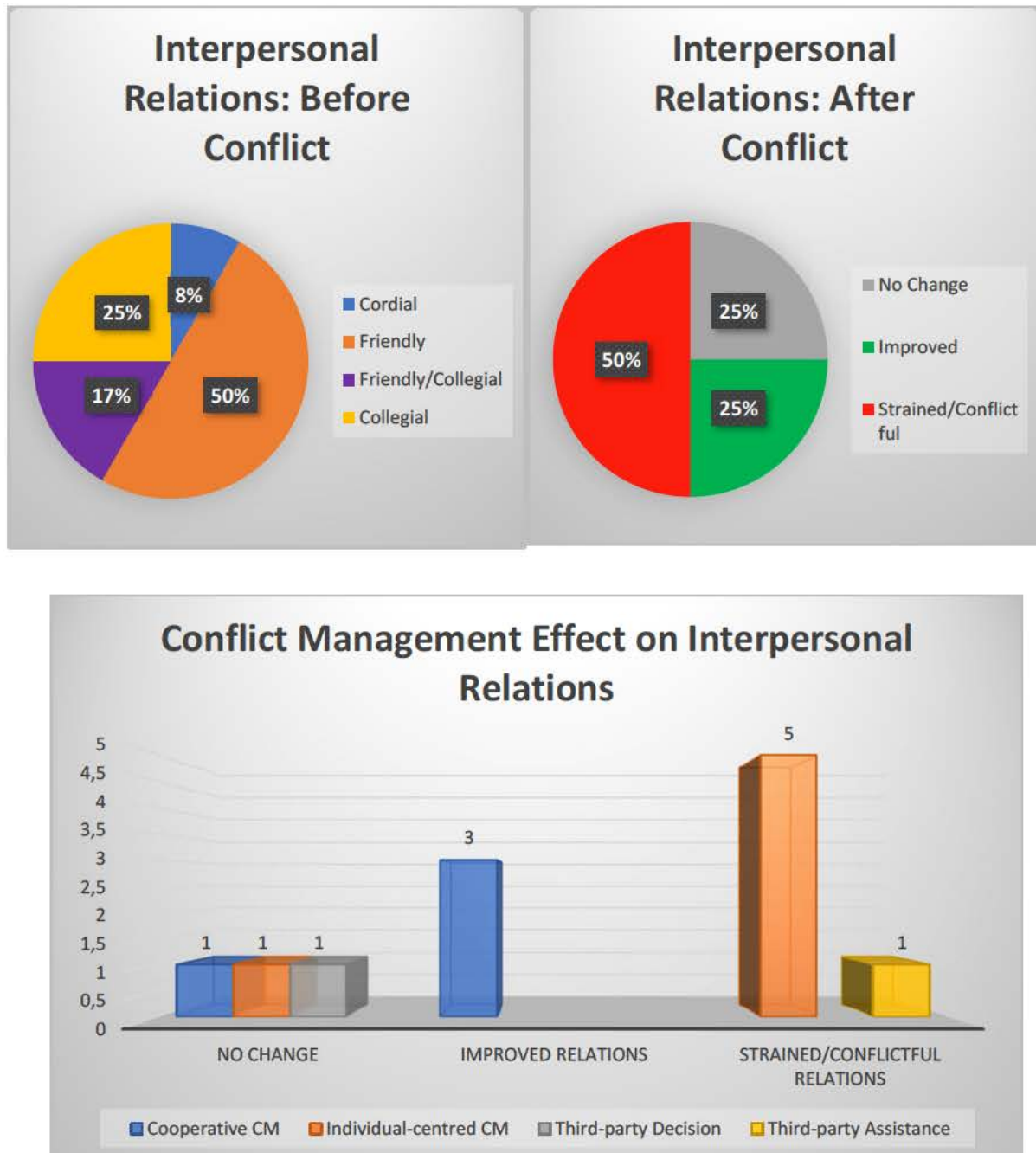
When the conflict has affected how parties communicate and relate with each other, the relationship has undergone a change that is difficult to reverse. This underlines the importance of active conflict management that seeks to accommodate the other person's concerns and aspirations and ceded on some minor issues than solely pursuing one's own concerns and persisting on one's position (Kelley, 1979; Medina & Benitez, 2011; Rubin et al., 1994). This research ascertained that *improved relations resulted from cooperative and third-party assistance approaches*, with cooperative, relationship-oriented approaches – accommodating others' needs and tacit agreement - forming the last phase of conflict management. As an example, conflict I1 was settled through discussion of incompatible issues (Phase 1) and accommodating others' needs (Phase 2), resulting in the parties getting on well with each other and having even closer relations than before the conflict (p. 163 ff.). Although the conflict parties in conflict I2 avoided interacting with each other in Phase 1, they consequentially resorted to a tacit agreement

in Phase 2 that the conflict was not worth to be angry with each other for a long time and returned to normal, friendly relations (p. 167 ff.). Finally, third-party assistance (Phase 1) helped the parties in conflict I3 to understand each other better, leading to attempts to accommodate the others' needs (Phase 2) in subsequent interactions (p. 171 ff.).

By comparison, *strained/conflictful relations mainly resulted out of individual-centred approaches* such as avoiding working with others, changing workflows and/or team members, or non-tackling of issues. Third-party assistance, third-party decision and/or cooperative approaches were also utilised in some cases. However, in 5 of 6 cases, individual-centred approaches were utilised as the final conflict management approach. As third-party attempts at mediation (Phase 1) were not successful in settling the conflict, the conflict parties in conflict I7 resorted to avoiding interactions (Phase 2) and subsequently Conflict Party A decided to leave the organisation due to the conflict situation (changing workflows and/or team members – Phase 3) (p. 187 ff.). Conflict I6 also involved changing workflows and/or team members (Phase 1) and third-party attempts at mediation (Phase 2). As the third-party mediation had not been successful, non-tackling of issues (Phase 3) dominated the last phase of conflict management (p. 183 ff.). Previous research predominantly focused on how contentious past experiences negatively affect attitudes and behaviour in new conflict episodes and consequentially the choice of respective conflict management approach (Bercovitch & DeRouen Jr., 2011; Collier, 2003; Kriesberg, 2003; Lund, 2001; Rispens et al., 2011). However, to my knowledge, previous studies did not assess how a currently applied individual-centred conflict management approach affects interpersonal relations. Thus, this research's findings extend previous knowledge in illustrating how the implementation of individual-centred approaches negatively affects post-conflict interpersonal relations. It was beyond the scope of this research to examine how a current conflict episode and its effects on interpersonal relations influences future conflict episodes between the same parties. This could be done in future research taking a longitudinal approach that assesses several conflict episodes between respective parties.

**Figure 64** sums up the results for interpersonal relations: Firstly, despite overall previous good interpersonal relations, the conflict experience had long-lasting effects on the interpersonal relations of 6 out of 12 cases which continued to face strained/conflictful

relations post-conflict. Secondly, cooperative conflict management facilitated positive relations post-conflict, whereas individual-centred approaches brought about and reflected strained/conflictful relations post-conflict.



**Fig. 64: Research Findings: Conflict Management – Effect on Interpersonal Relations (Own Model).**

#### **7.4.2 Effects of conflict management implementation on performance**

Whilst most cases did not report previously affected performance before conflict, this research found that in 9 out of 12 cases, *both task accomplishment and interpersonal context were affected during conflict*. As an example, conflict I11 did not report previous conflict issues that affected performance (p. 204 ff.). During conflict, however, the department was just functioning because of the contra-productive behaviour of Conflict Parties B which, furthermore, also affected third parties. Regarding Conflict Party A, Conflict Parties B only communicated when absolutely necessary and only provided information when asked. Similarly, the conflict parties in conflict I4 did not experience affected performance prior to the present conflict but rather communicated daily (p. 175 ff.). During conflict, both task accomplishment and interpersonal context were affected which reflected itself in reduced turnover, avoidance of interacting with each other and a negative effect on third parties. Furthermore, most cases reported affected performance beyond conflict, relating to both task accomplishment and the interpersonal context. Whilst other research investigated the effects of conflicts on performance, they focused on certain characteristics of conflicts such as conflict type and/or intensity level to account for a positive or negative outcome (Amason, 1996; Amason & Sapienza, 1997; Bendersky et al., 2014; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Farh et al., 2010; Jehn & Mannix, 2001; Pelled et al., 1999; Simons & Peterson, 2000). In comparison to this research, they did not compare, firstly, how performance changed over time and, secondly, which aspects of performance were affected. This research, therefore, contributes to knowledge on how interpersonal conflicts affect performance with regard to performance characteristics and temporal changes.

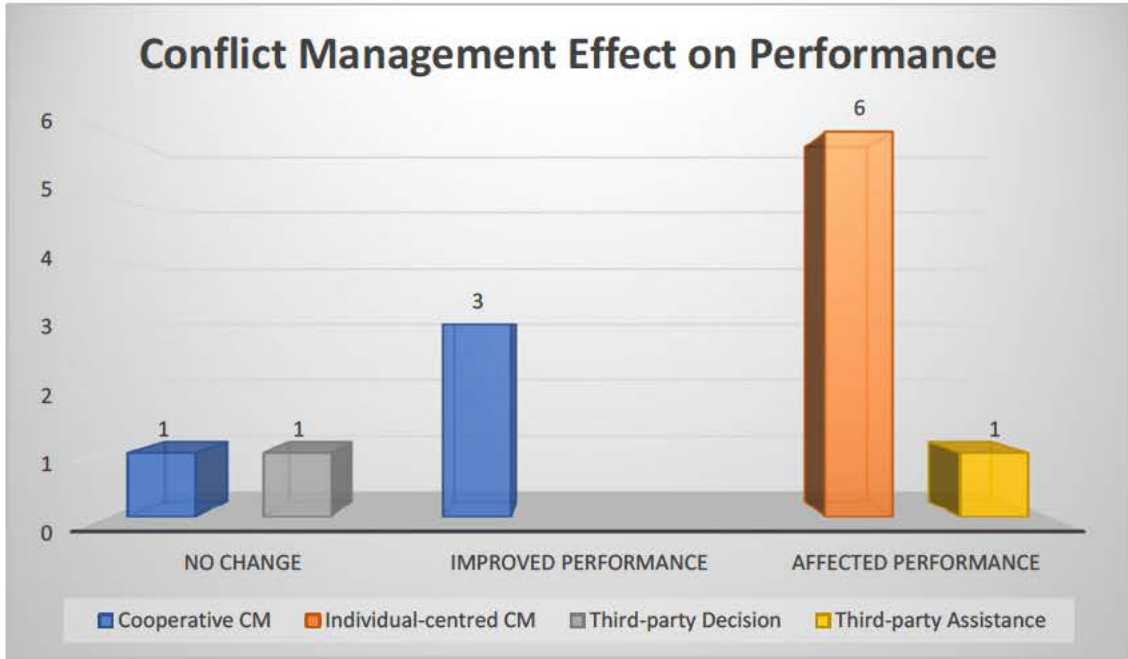
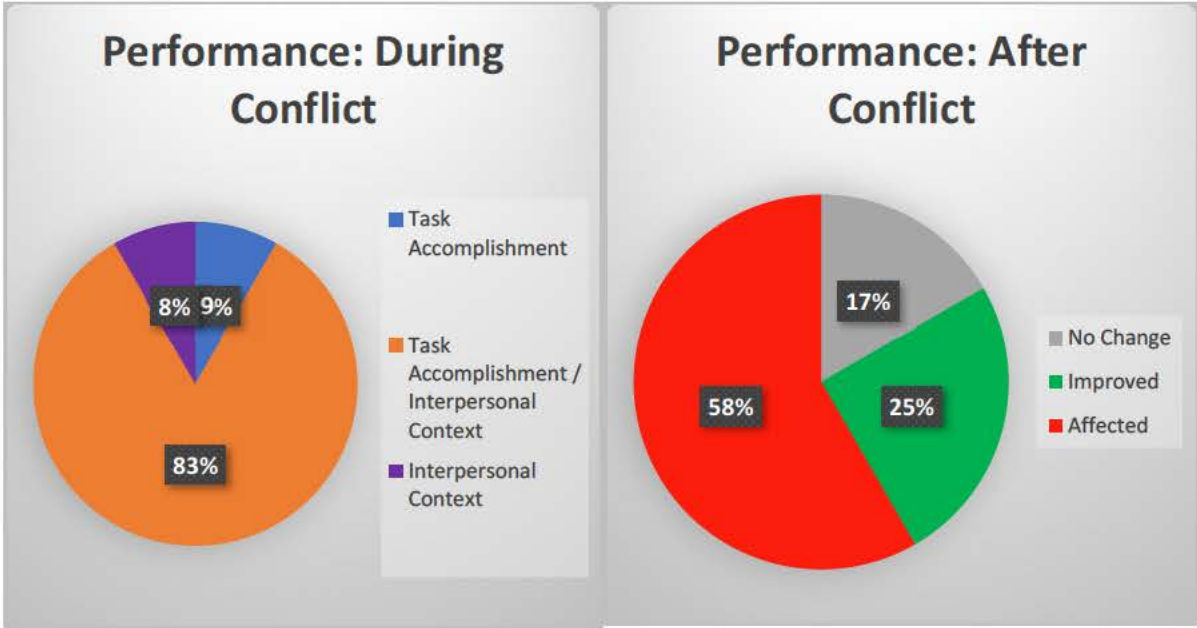
Other research assessed moderating factors such as emotions, task type, teamwork cohesion, acceptability norms and conflict management processes to account for positive or negative effects of conflicts on performance (Bang & Park, 2015; De Dreu & Van Vianen, 2001; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; DeChurch & Marks, 2001; Jehn et al., 2008; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003; O'Neill et al., 2013). Regarding conflict management, Jehn and Bendersky (2003) argued for employing collaborative conflict management in dealing with task conflicts and more rights-based techniques for relationship conflicts. The

stated reason was that constructive discussions over the conflict issue have a positive effect on productive levels but not on satisfaction and relation-based aspects of the conflict. Therefore, they suggest selecting a conflict management approach that is beneficial in the conflict situation at hand. By comparison, DeChurch et al. (2013) found that collectivistic conflict management – openness and collaboration - is more beneficial for team performance and team affective outcomes than individualistic conflict management – avoiding and competing. Similarly, Dimas and Lourenço's (2015) results revealed a positive effect of cooperative conflict management and efforts for reducing conflict for group performance and team satisfaction. In the same vein, Maltarich et al. (2018) found that conflict management approaches affected the relationship between conflict type and performance, with competitive conflict management contributing to a negative effect on performance for both task conflict and relationship conflict. This research validated these previous findings in revealing that *cooperative and accommodating behaviours at the last stage of conflict management furthered improved performance after conflict, whereas individual-centred approaches such as avoiding working with others and non-tackling of issues fostered and sustained affected performance post-conflict* (see **Figure 59, Section 6.3.2**, p. 258, for an overview of conflict management implementation and its effect on performance). An example for improved performance is conflict I5 that relied on conflict management approaches tacit agreement (Phase 1) and accommodating others' needs (Phase 2) that resulted in being more considerate towards the other party and able to discuss issues when they arose post-conflict (p. 179 ff.). By comparison, conflict I7 involved third-party attempts at mediation (Phase 1), avoiding interactions (Phase 2) and changing workflows and or team members (Phase 3) (p. 187 ff.). Its reliance on individual-centred conflict management approaches in Phases 2 and 3 demonstrated that the parties could no longer come to an agreement on issues and ultimately led to Conflict Party A leaving the organisation. It, however, did not present a solution to the conflict as the new person that took over Conflict Party A's position faced the same incompatibility over work procedure issues with Conflict Parties B.

In comparison to other literature that suggested task conflict to be beneficial for performance in terms of opportunity to voice opinion, better decision making, cognitive

understanding of issues, innovation and satisfaction (Behfar et al., 2011; Cosier & Rose, 1977; De Dreu & West, 2001; de Wit et al., 2014; Jehn, 1994, 1995; Mooney et al., 2007; Pelled et al., 1999; Schweiger et al., 1986; Simons & Peterson, 2000), this research showed that *conflicts are not beneficial for performance*. This can be attributed to the changed work atmosphere and interaction dynamics between conflict parties affecting how individuals communicate and work with each other. It consequentially affects how they accomplish tasks, with consequences for organisational goal accomplishment (see also **Section 7.2**, p. 262 ff., for an overview of conflict-related organisational challenges). Furthermore, as conflicts inherently embody several dimensions (see **Section 7.3.1**, p. 268, on conflict conceptualisation), task, process and relationship conflicts have the same basis (situational factors, disputants' characteristics and relations, and conflict expression). This contradicts previous research that attributed changed attitudes and expression of negative emotions to task conflict transforming into relationship conflict (cf. Cronin & Bezrukova, 2019; Humphrey et al., 2017; Rahim, 2011; Rispens, 2012; Simons & Peterson, 2000; Xie & Luan, 2014; J. Yang & Mossholder, 2004).

**Figure 65** sums up the results for performance: Firstly, task accomplishment as well as the interpersonal context were affected during conflict, demonstrating that conflicts do not only affect the task at hand but also how team members work with each other. This likely also has consequences for other tasks the team members are working on together if a changed attitude towards the other team member and resulting conflictful behaviour continue to dominate their relationship. This is especially the case as, secondly, the findings revealed that 7 out of 12 continued to experience affected performance post-conflict. Thirdly, similarly to the effect of conflict management approaches to interpersonal relations, cooperative approaches in the last phase of conflict management contributed to improved performance post-conflict, and individual-centred approaches fostered affected performance post-conflict.



**Fig. 65: Research Findings: Conflict Management – Effect on Performance (Own Model).**

## 7.5 Conflict management model

Based on the discussion in **Sections 7.3 and 7.4**, this research, therefore, validates and extends previous knowledge as depicted in the conflict management model in **Figure 66**. It demonstrates that, firstly, *conflict is a multi-dimensional concept and dynamic process*, embodying the dimensions situational factors, disputants' characteristics and relations, and conflict expression that influence each other during conflict. As a conflict intensifies, the perception of the respective other party's actions and attitudes affect how the parties feel, think and behave towards the other party, and further conflict issues might also be added to the conflict during its process.

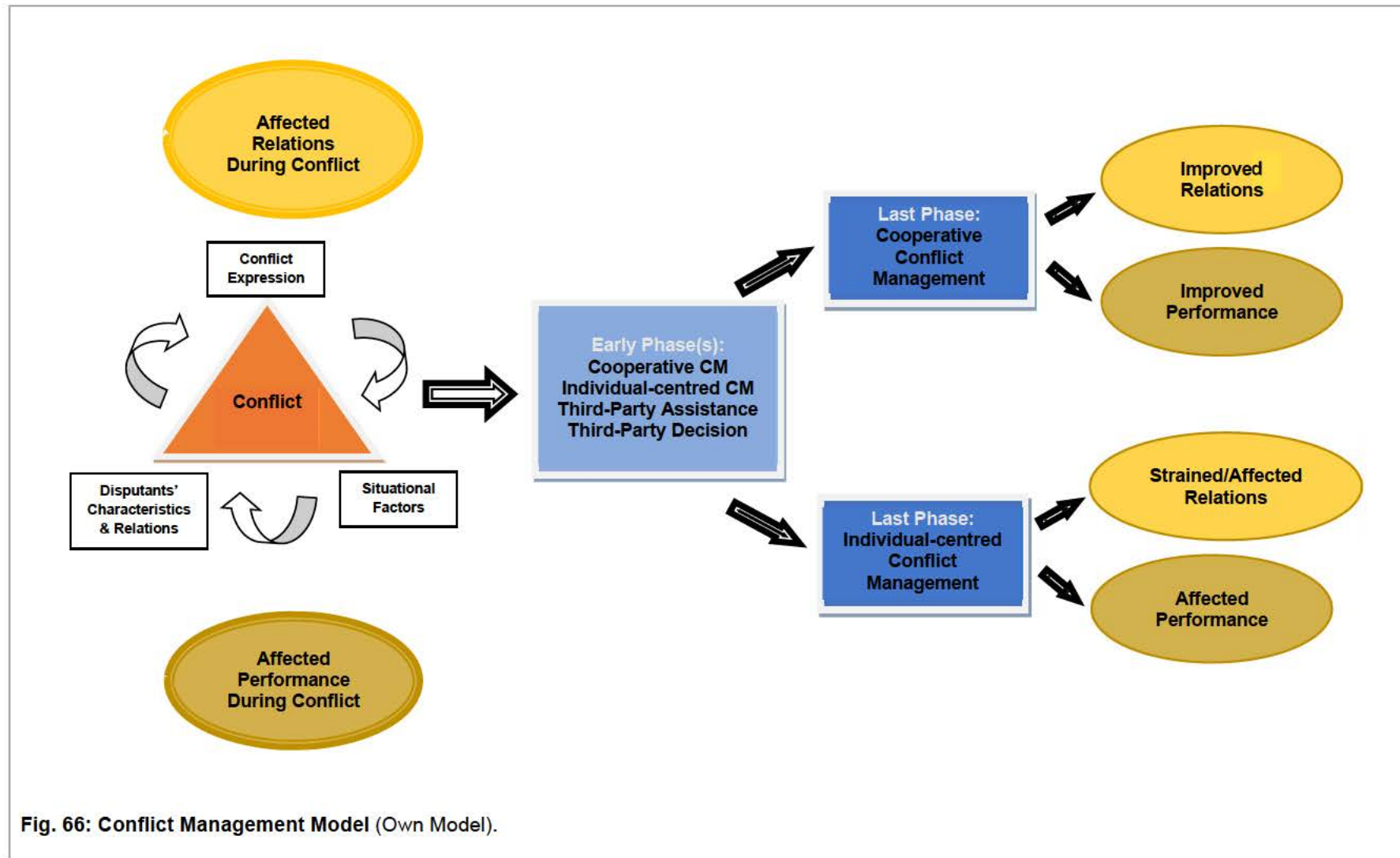
Secondly, *interpersonal relations and performance both get affected during conflict*, even if parties enjoyed good relations and performance before the conflict. This stands in contrast to previous research emphasising, on the one hand, the beneficial effects of conflict for decision-making and creativity and, on the other hand, the significance of existing good relations for how conflicts are being conducted.

Thirdly, *conflict management mediates between conflict and conflict outcome variables such as interpersonal relations and performance*. Instead of relying on exogenous mediating variables such as task type, project stage and group diversity, the effect of conflict on outcome variables is explained through how conflicts are being handled.

Fourth, *conflict management is not a static but dynamic concept, involving several phases for handling the conflict at hand*. Whilst different types of conflict management approaches might be utilised at the early phase(s) of conflict – ranging from cooperative conflict management, individual-centred conflict management to third-party assistance and third-party decision -, the last conflict management approach has consequences on how the parties continue to relate and work with each other.

Fifth, the particularly employed conflict management approaches determine the characteristics of the conflict outcome variables, with *cooperative conflict management in the last phase facilitating improved relations and performance and individual-centred approaches in the last phase fostering strained relations and affected performance*.





Thus, the derived conflict management model proposes that conflict and conflict management both embody a dynamic and processual character. As conflicts develop, several conflict management approaches may be utilised to settle the incompatible issue. The choice of cooperative and accommodating behaviours in the last phase of conflict management, however, is suggested to have the most beneficial effect on restoring normalcy in the interpersonal relations and performance which were diversely affected during conflict.

## **7.6 Summary**

This research is concerned with the challenges enterprises face in manifest conflict scenarios, the way conflicts are dealt with in organisations, and the way conflict management implementation affects interpersonal relations and performance. It validated previous research that identified the consequences of counterproductive conflict behaviour on affected individuals and the organisation as a whole. By contrast to other research, this research showed that negative consequences were not restricted to solely relationship conflicts; rather, all conflicts posed challenges for interpersonal relations and the way tasks and projects were accomplished. Challenges ranged from individuals' experiencing dissatisfaction, lack of communication and coordination, altered relations, reduced quality and quantity of performance, and multiple persons affected by the conflict. Furthermore, it was ascertained that challenges may persist beyond the immediate task/project that triggered the conflict and have consequences for subsequent tasks/projects and interpersonal relations.

In contrast to most conflict studies that assign static properties to conflict and assess them only at a certain point in time, this research demonstrated that conflicts undergo different phases and have a multi-dimensional character. The conflict dimensions disputants' characteristics & relations, situational factors, and conflict expression influenced each other during conflict. The conflict process involved conflict phases such as open dialogue, confrontation, avoiding behaviour, standstill and destroying one's basis. This research, therefore, extends the conflict conceptualisation with regard to process and dimensions.

Instead of following a singular approach to conflict management, this research ascertained that as a result of the parties' interactions, several conflict management approaches were employed in a conflict situation. This research showed which conflict

management approaches were employed in conflict situations, what conflict dynamics led to their utilisation, whether they were of cooperative or individual-centred nature, and how effective they were in settling the conflict. Furthermore, it was assessed if and how third parties got involved in conflict management: ranging from assistance to deciding for the conflict parties with regard to the conflict. This led to a classification of conflict management approaches with regard to bilateral versus trilateral involvement and cooperative versus individual-centred focus. This research, therefore, contributes to research purporting combined conflict management in showing which conflict management approaches were utilised in which situations and considering the involvement of third parties.

This research, furthermore, showed that interpersonal relations and performance were both affected during conflict. In comparison to previous research, the findings revealed that previous good relations and performance did not guarantee less contentious consequences for how the parties related and worked with each other during as well as after conflict. It rather mattered which conflict management approaches were employed, especially at the late stage of conflict management. Whilst different conflict management approaches were utilised at the early stages of the 12 conflicts, at the later stage, cooperative conflict management helped to facilitate improved relations and performance, and individual-centred conflict management fostered and sustained strained relations and affected performance. Therefore, this research contributes to conflict management research in tracing the effectiveness of different conflict management approaches for interpersonal relations and performance.

The next chapter presents this research's implications for theory and practice, and limitations, and provides an outlook for potential future research.

## 8. Conclusions

### 8.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide a summary of the main findings, the implications and limitations of this research and give an outlook on potential future research. The first section summarises the main findings with regard to the three research questions, followed by this research's contributions and recommendations for theory and management. This chapter then proceeds with presenting limitations of this research with regard to mainly methodology and concludes with potential areas of future research.

### 8.2 Summary of main findings

This research revealed that *conflicts present challenges for both task/project accomplishment and interpersonal relations*, hampering the way parties interact and relate with each other. They do not only affect the immediate conflict parties but also the teams that they are embedded in and the organisation as a whole: The findings revealed that other individuals might either be drawn into the conflict, become conflict parties themselves, help to assist to settle the differences between the third parties or are in some way or the other negatively affected by the conflict. Additionally, challenges may last beyond the immediate conflict and continue to impact interpersonal relations and performance. In some instances, one of the conflict parties might choose to leave the organisation due to the persistent conflict-related challenges.

Furthermore, the findings showed that *conflicts are not static phenomena but dynamic in nature and consist of three dimensions* – disputants' characteristics & relations, situational factors, and conflict expression - *that influence each other during conflict*. As the way conflict parties think, feel and behave towards each other changes, interactions change from open dialogue to confrontation and may at one point involve avoiding each other and complete standstill in task/project progress. The worst-case scenario of conflict escalation involves destroying one's basis and everything one has strived to achieve gets destroyed in the process.

Based on a dynamic understanding of conflict, *conflict management is not of a static nature and undergoes several phases*: The parties tend either towards cooperative or individual-centred behaviours, and conflict management involves solely the conflict parties or also third parties with varying degrees of intervention (ranging from assistance to decision making). Third-party involvement is helpful for conflict management when the selected approach tends towards assistance and mediation between parties rather than decision making and addresses the incompatible issues between the conflict parties.

Additionally, *previous good interpersonal relations and performance do not guarantee non-contentious interactions during conflict*. Rather, *interpersonal relations and performance get both affected during conflict*. The choice of conflict management approaches consequently determines whether this effect on interpersonal relations and performance is temporary or of a persistent nature. *Whereas a cooperative approach in the last stage of conflict management facilitates improved interpersonal relations and performance, individual-centred conflict management fosters and sustains strained interpersonal relations and affected performance*.

### **8.3 Implications of findings**

This research contributes to previous research on organisational conflict, provides insight into how conflicts are being managed and what effect conflict management has on interpersonal relations and performance. **Table 22** provides an overview of the *implications of this research's findings*. The subsequent sections discuss these implications further.

**Table 22: Implications of Findings for Theory and Management - Overview (Own Model).**

<b><i>Implications of Findings</i></b>	<b>Description</b>
<i>Implications for Theory</i>	1) Extending knowledge on the challenges conflicts pose to involved individuals, teams and the organisation with regard to relationship as well as work-related aspects
	2) Extending conflict conceptualisation to include multi-dimensionality and dynamic, processual character of conflict than focus on single property and static description of conflict
	3) Extending insight into dyadic conflict and its effect on other parties and potential change to team conflict
	4) Establishing a processual understanding of conflict management that potentially includes very diverse approaches within the same conflict
	5) Extending insight into third-party involvement in conflicts in differentiating between the effects of third-party assistance and tackling of incompatible conflict issues versus decision making
	6) Establishing the significance of cooperative conflict management over individual-centred approaches for interpersonal relations and performance
<i>Implications for Methods</i>	1) Portraying a more comprehensive account of conflict experiences and conflict management in following a qualitative approach to collect and analyse the data, in particular utilising the critical incident technique and caricatures for data collection and content analysis and graphic illustrations during data analysis
<i>Implications for Management</i>	1) Challenging the practice of emphasising the beneficial effects of some conflicts by highlighting that all conflicts pose challenges for interpersonal relations and task/project accomplishment
	2) Providing a model framework for handling conflicts that includes a dynamic understanding of conflict and conflict management and demonstrates the consequences conflict management has on interpersonal relations and performance

### **8.3.1 Implications for theory**

Firstly, this research's findings invalidate the currently prevailing view in organisational conflict studies that certain types of conflict – task conflicts - are beneficial for decision making, creativity and/or learning in organisations (Jehn, 1995; Rahim, 2002; Simons & Peterson, 2000) and are to be even stimulated in comparison to conflicts perceived as dysfunctional (e.g., Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2018; O'Neill & McLarnon, 2018; Tjosvold, Wong, & Feng Chen, 2014; Tjosvold & Ding, 2001). In this research, *all assessed conflicts pose challenges to involved individuals, teams and the organisation*. These challenges include both relationship and work-related aspects: personal dissatisfaction, changed work atmosphere and/or relations, personal dissatisfaction, changed interaction, changed quality and quantity of performance, and multiple parties affected. This validates research that identifies negative consequences of counterproductive conflict behaviour such as lack of communication, reduced well-being and productivity of affected individuals (Giebels & Janssen, 2005; Knippen & Green, 1999; Spector & Jex, 1998), and costs of workplace conflict to organisations such as absence, sickness and replacement of employees, management time and damaged organisational morale (Saundry et al., 2016; Saundry & Unwin, 2021). It further *contributes to the debate of including soft and hard factors to the analysis of conflict-related challenges* (De Dreu & Beersma, 2005; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Dijkstra et al., 2011; Giebels & Janssen, 2005; Kuriakose et al., 2019; Lewis et al., 2006). Furthermore, this research shows that challenges persist beyond conflict and continue to affect individuals involved if they do not get resolved. The negative conflict-related consequences for this research's interview participants involved not only immediate reduced or strained communication, reduced well-being and productivity but, to varying extents, also long-term consequences: In the most extreme instances, previous friends continued to hold a grudge against the other and interacted only when required by work dynamics. Post-conflict productivity decreased in some cases as a consequence of loss of motivation and zeal to execute projects, strained communication and avoidance or destructive behaviours. Therefore, this research makes the argument for active management of conflicts in order to repair and reverse the damage to interpersonal relations and performance.

Secondly, by working interdisciplinarily and taking insight from international conflict studies, mediation and organisational psychology for the understanding of

conflicts (e.g., Cialdini et al., 1991; Deutsch, 2006a; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, 2007; Fazio, 2007; Galtung, 1996, 2009; Glasl, 2013; Jensen-Campbell & Graziano, 2005; Kleiboer, 1996, 1998; Park & Antonioni, 2007; Rubin et al., 1994; Tekleab & Quigley, 2014; Wall Jr. & Callister, 1995), this research contributes to a *multi-dimensional, dynamic conceptualisation of organisational conflicts*. The findings reveal that conflict is not only determined by its contradiction but also by how the conflict parties feel, think and behave towards each other. In line with authors Galtung (1996) and Glasl (2013), conflict can therefore only be called a conflict if several dimensions are affected. Furthermore, conflicts evolve and potentially escalate over time: The findings identify several phases in a conflict lifecycle that move from open dialogue to confrontation and avoidance behaviours up to destroying one's basis. This research thus goes beyond other research's focus on a single property such as conflict issue and static description of conflict at one point in time (e.g. Jehn, 1995, 1997) and *extends the existing conceptualisation of organisational conflict*. It thereby follows other recent studies that have criticised a static understanding of conflict and emphasised the dynamic character of conflicts that develop over time (e.g., Cronin & Bezrukova, 2019; Kuriakose et al., 2019; O'Neill & McLarnon, 2018; Wu & Sekiguchi, 2019). Despite this similarity with regard to conflict dynamics, my research differs from these recent studies in including a multi-dimensional character of conflict and not restricting conflict to its conflict issue. Understanding conflict as a three-dimensional concept uncovered during the interviews not only what (1) the respective incompatible issue was but also what the conflict parties (2) felt and thought about the other conflict party before, during and post-conflict and how conflict was (3) expressed in their interactions. Informed by a review of other disciplines (e.g., Deutsch, 2006a, 2014; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, 2007; Galtung, 1996; Glasl, 2013, 2020; Rubin et al., 1994), the dynamic development of interpersonal conflicts in organisations was therefore grounded in a three-dimensional conceptualisation of conflict and thus provided more depth to the understanding of conflicts and their life cycle than a single-dimensional approach would have done.

Thirdly, the literature review revealed a focus on team conflict and little empirical research on dyadic conflict (with exception of Cronin & Bezrukova, 2019; Humphrey et al., 2017; Korsgaard et al., 2008; Shah et al., 2020, 2021), whereas conflicts often arise out of dyadic interaction and then affect the group level (Cronin & Bezrukova, 2019; Humphrey et al., 2017). This research *contributes to dyad-level research in assessing the dynamics involved in two-party conflicts and revealing the effects dyadic conflicts*



*have on other individuals in the same group, department and organisation.* This research has shown that although conflicts originated at the dyad level, it diversely affected other parties: In some cases, they became conflict parties themselves by siding with one of the conflict parties and acting antagonistically towards the other party. In other cases, they got indirectly affected when conflict parties displayed conflictful behaviour towards them due to conflict-related stress. Thus, this research provides insight into the way dyadic conflicts can spread to other group members and thereby contributes to how group-level conflicts generate out of dyad-level conflicts.

Fourth, this research has shown that *conflict management is not a one-step-approach but consists of several phases that build upon each other and are a result of previous approaches' success/failure and interactions of conflict parties.* This stands in contrast to other perspectives that focus on pursuing the most adequate conflict management approach and thereby reduce conflict management to a one-step-approach (Deutsch, 1973, 2006a, 2014; Tjosvold, 1991; Tjosvold, Wong, & Chen, 2014). This research validates the conglomerated, complex perspective that involves a combination of different strategies in sequential or simultaneous fashion (Knapp et al., 1988; Munduate et al., 1999; Rubin et al., 1994; Van de Vliert, 1997). Moreover, it *extends the conglomerated, complex perspective* by, on the one hand, showing that, in line with the contingency perspective (Rahim, 2011; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979; Thomas, 1992a), *parties' actions reflect either a cooperative or individual-centred focus*, and on the other hand, *unravelling the role third parties have in conflict management* (see also **Figure 63**, p. 281, on conflict management pattern and process). Thus, this research revealed that conflict management in a given conflict is more than pursuing a single conflict management approach or style but is multi-faceted and contributes the following knowledge to conflict management research: Throughout the conflict life cycle, (1) two or more conflict management approaches are likely utilised, (2) these approaches differ with regard to their cooperative or individual-centred focus, and (3) might involve third parties to differing extents. Building upon each other, the respectively utilised conflict management approaches and their focus (cooperative or individual-centred) and success rate determine the further course of action and has consequences for interpersonal relations and performance.

Fifth, this research *extends insight into third-party involvement in conflicts* in establishing that the effectiveness of a third-party intervention depends on their level of engagement: Mediating between the conflict parties and addressing incompatible

issues is more effective towards improving relations, communication and understanding between affected parties than imposing a solution. In situations where a third party exerts his/her authority, ends the conflict with a win-lose decision and abstains from tackling the incompatible issues that led to conflict, it can be beneficial for completing tasks/projects at hand but has detrimental effects for parties' relations. Other organisational studies have looked at certain aspects of third-party involvement such as informal and voluntary third-party interventions by peers (Zhang et al., 2018), third-party side-taking in interpersonal conflicts (H. Yang et al., 2018) and the role of leaders in group conflicts with regard to conflict instigation, engagement and management (Zhao et al., 2019). Taking insight from international conflict and mediation studies, and research on leadership (Bercovitch & Jackson, 1997, 2001; Kleiboer, 1998; Langenscheid, 2000; McKibben, 2017; Moore, 2003; Römer et al., 2012; Zhao et al., 2019) and on the basis of this research's findings, this research adds to organisational conflict studies by establishing that conflict parties are not the only parties involved in a conflict and that the level of involvement of third parties determines whether their attempt at conflict management is effective for settling incompatible issues and normalising interpersonal relations and performance. In line with Zhang et al. (2018), my findings revealed that third parties can be peers and do not necessarily have to be in a leadership position. Seeking a mutually satisfactory solution for both parties is (and the third party by extension) is ultimately to be the goal of third-party interventions in order for it to be successful in the long-term.

Sixth, this research adds new findings to the effects of conflicts and conflict management on interpersonal relations and performance in *establishing the significance of cooperative conflict management over individual-centred approaches for improving relations and performance*. Previous studies predominantly focus on the effects of conflicts on performance (Bendersky et al., 2014; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; de Wit et al., 2012; Farh et al., 2010; Jehn, 1995, 1997; Pelled et al., 1999; Simons & Peterson, 2000) and neglect, firstly, the effects of conflicts on interpersonal relations (with exception of Rispens et al., 2007, 2011; Rubin et al., 1994; J. Yang & Mossholder, 2004) and, secondly, how conflict management moderates between conflict and the outcome variables interpersonal relations and performance. Effects of conflicts on interpersonal relations and performance are, however, highly related. My findings revealed that the majority of assessed conflicts negatively affected both interpersonal relations and performance and still remained strained/affected post-conflict. Where

conflict parties had strained relations, they also did not work together well and tended to avoid interacting with the other. Cooperative conflict management played a role in reversing the conflict-related consequences: Improved performance and relations resulted from cooperative conflict management approaches in the last phase of conflict management, with and without third-party assistance. By comparison, individual-centred approaches fostered and sustained distanced relations, avoidance behaviours and reduced productivity. Thus, my research provides novel insight into (1) the negative effects of conflicts on the outcome variables interpersonal relations and performance, and (2) the role of cooperative-centred conflict management approaches in reversing these negative effects.

### ***8.3.2 Implications for methods***

This research was *able to provide an in-depth understanding of organisational conflicts and their management in following a qualitative research approach* to collect and analyse the data. The use of the critical incident technique and caricatures during semi-structured interviews helped to capture the interviewee's understanding of a conflict situation and its development through a detailed description in his/her own words and personal reflection on the experience. Furthermore, the research themes were derived from the data through qualitative content analysis and presented via graphic illustrations and direct quotations of the interviewees throughout the findings' chapters. By contrast, other organisational conflict studies predominantly use quantitative methods – for example, surveys, experiments, role plays - to examine conflicts and conflict management (Almost et al., 2010; Bruk-Lee et al., 2013; Rognes & Schei, 2010; Van de Vliert & Euwema, 1994). In taking a different approach to knowledge generation and focusing on individuals' experiences, this research provides novel insight into conflict situations that could not have been captured through quantitative methods.

### ***8.3.3 Implications for management***

As exemplified in **Section 8.3.1**, this research, firstly, *challenges the practice of emphasising the beneficial effects of some conflicts by highlighting that all conflicts pose challenges for interpersonal relations and task/project accomplishment*. This also

has consequences for management as it raises awareness for the negative effects of counterproductive behaviour and the need to actively manage conflicts in order to prevent conflicts from permanently affecting performance and relations.

Secondly, this research *provides a model framework for handling conflicts that includes a dynamic understanding of conflict and conflict management and demonstrates the consequences conflict management has on interpersonal relations and performance*. It shows that an understanding of conflicts' dimensions and dynamics is essential for finding a solution to the incompatible issues at hand and exemplifies the negative consequences of following an individual-centred approach to conflict management. In practice, an increased focus, therefore, has to be on tackling the incompatible conflict issues and seeking a cooperative solution to conflicts. Thereby, conflict-related strain on interpersonal relations and performance can be reversed, seeking normalcy in how individuals relate and work together post-conflict.

This research, therefore, provides management practice with guidance on how to resolve organisational conflicts in, firstly, acknowledging the challenges conflicts pose to interpersonal relations and performance; secondly, seeking an active solution to the interpersonal conflicts within its organisation due to the negative conflict-related consequences for employees and the organisation; and thirdly, supporting cooperative conflict management approaches between employees and in third-party attempts to settle differences between affected conflict parties. Organisations need to focus on proactively managing conflicts before they reach a higher escalation stage of conflict where it is more difficult to settle them amicably, with dire consequences for interpersonal work relations and accomplishment of tasks and projects during and post-conflict. This is in line with Saundry et al.'s (2016) report that uncovers the negative implications of conflicts and predominantly reactive conflict management of organisations when conflicts have already escalated, involving disciplinary issues or employment tribunal applications. In order to counter the costs and potential long-term negative consequences of conflicts to organisations, an early proactive intervention is therefore recommendable.

#### **8.4 Study limitations**

**Source of information.** A limitation of this research is that the conflict experiences were only related by one of the conflict parties, thereby solely presenting one party's

perception of conflict involvement and management. As this research focuses on the interactional level of conflict, it can, however, be assumed, in line with Glasl (2013) and Rubin et al. (1994), that conflict behaviour is reciprocated, with one party's actions being followed by counteractions by the other. The conflicts, therefore, developed as a result of two parties interacting with each other (or more parties in the case of multi-party conflicts). Therefore, the relations of one party were sufficient for replicating the conflict process. Despite that, it would have been of interest to hear the other side's recollection of the conflict experience.

As the related conflict experience could not be verified with the other party, the researcher had to trust that the interviewee was accurately describing and recollecting the conflict experience. To assist the interviewees in relating and accurately describing a conflict incident, the researcher informed them at the beginning of the interview what constitutes a conflict (see **Appendix 1** for the interview structure, p. 345) and what the purpose of the research is. The caricatures further helped as a tool for the interviewees to visually describe the conflict development, and to differing extents, the conflict behaviour, attitudes and emotions during the conflict process, and remember the events as they unfolded. During the interviews, the interviewees in general opened up more and in some instances were surprised about aspects they themselves described and had not previously reflected upon. This included surprise about why both parties had behaved as they did and not settled the issues sooner, and how the relationship developed post-conflict.

Furthermore, apart from the conflict experience, interpersonal relations and performance, the respective organisation's conflict management was also related from the perception of the interviewee and not backed up by organisation's management and other organisation's employees. However, this research's aim was not to explore how particular organisations handle conflicts; the focus was on gathering insight into conflict involvement and conflict management between individuals within the work context, and how conflict experiences were similar and differed between cases.

***Nature of the organisations.*** This research involved interviewing individuals from different organisational sizes and sectors. One limitation of this research could be whether the findings are comparable as the conflicts occurred in different organisational settings. However, the results indicate that the most salient conflict-related challenges for involved individuals and organisations were the same for large,

and small and medium-sized companies (see **Appendix 4**, p. 357). Irrespective of company size and sector, all assessed conflicts, furthermore, involved an escalation and affected interpersonal relations and performance in the course of conflict (see **Fig. 34** on Conflict Development/Escalation Overview, p. 215). Although third parties got involved in large as well as small and medium-sized organisations in the assessed conflicts in this research, an interesting approach for future research could be the assessment of third-party interventions in different organisational settings. As related by participants and in line with other research (e.g., Saundry et al., 2016, 2019), large organisations are more likely to have formal procedures and bodies in place to handle arising conflicts, whilst small and medium-sized organisations rely more on ad-hoc conflict management. Despite that, small and medium-sized organisations are generally more close-knit and thereby have a higher interest in settling conflicts as conflicts may more adversely affect work operations and relations than in a large organisation (Saundry et al., 2016). This can also be deduced from three interviewees' relations of top management not getting actively involved to tackle conflict issues which all occurred in large organisations.

**Gender.** There might be the possibility that gender influences conflict behaviour and how conflicts are being dealt with. Rahim and Katz (2019) found that male employees use more competing strategies than female employees who generally seek to avoid conflict due to their concern for others. Similarly, Brewer et al.'s (2002) findings revealed a preference of male individuals to use a dominating conflict style whilst female individuals opted for the avoiding style. By comparison, in Brahnham et al.'s (2005) study, male individuals opted to avoid conflicts while women sought a collaborative conflict management style. In my findings, the scenarios that ended with individual-centred conflict management involved only male conflict parties, while cooperative-centred approaches included either only female individuals or a combination of male and female individuals. Therefore, these findings with regard to male/female preference of certain conflict management approaches are in line with other organisational conflict studies. Nonetheless, gender was not addressed during my research which could be a limitation of this research. As the focus was on interpersonal relations and not on the personality characteristics of the conflict parties, it was beyond the scope of this research and could be further assessed in future research.

**Researcher bias.** Having knowledge of other authors' conflict research and self-experience of conflicts constitutes the possibility of influencing the research due to researcher bias. Acknowledging that organisational life and life in general is not free of conflicts, it cannot be avoided that the researcher has previously experienced conflicts. To mitigate this bias, the researcher sought to assure that data collection and analysis stay close to the research questions and the descriptions of the interviewees as not to deviate from their conflict perceptions. Furthermore, the researcher's background in international relations, and peace and conflict studies was an asset in working interdisciplinarily, using insight from this field for extending the existing conflict conceptualisation and understanding of conflict management.

**Generalisability.** This research resorted to interviewing 12 individuals from different German private sector organisations. One limitation of this research could be whether these findings are generalisable to other cultural contexts. This especially refers to the expression of conflict and how conflicts are handled. The main focus was, however, on seeking an answer to what effects conflict management implementation has on interpersonal relations and performance and not on generalisability. Whereas other conflict management approaches might be more often utilised in other cultural contexts, it could be of interest to explore in future research whether cooperative and individual-centred approaches have the same effect on interpersonal relations and performance as in this research.

Research in other cultural contexts point towards the same effect. Longe (2015) found in his assessment of conflicts in a Nigerian manufacturing organisation that integrative conflict management strategies had a positive relationship with organisational performance whereas non-integrative conflict management strategies had a negative effect on organisational performance. With regard to employee well-being, Kuriakose et al. (2019) identified in their study of the IT sector in India that avoiding, yielding and forcing conflict management approaches amplified the negative effect of process conflict on employee well-being, and cooperative conflict management reduced conflict-related strain and enhanced well-being. Similarly, Tommy and Oetzel's (2019) study of conflicts between Papua New Guinea employees and Chinese managers established that the avoidance behaviour of the former and the latter's competitive conflict management approach led to distrust and dissatisfaction. Finally, Lawless and Trif's (2016) findings of a study of Irish subsidiaries of

multinational companies revealed that collaborating and compromising conflict management strategies were mostly used by line managers in conflict situations. It was of interest that avoidance behaviour was mainly chosen by those of individualistic culture background although such behaviour is generally considered as counterproductive in Western individualistic countries. According to Lawless and Trif (2016), the strong organisational culture therefore weighed more than the national culture of the interviewees (11 Irish, 8 non-Irish nationals). Based on the review of these studies, the implementation of conflict management approaches and their effects, thus, were similar across different cultural contexts and, in line with Lawless and Trif (2016), the organisational culture could be more significant in determining which conflict management approaches are generally pursued at the respective workplace.

## 8.5 Future research potentials

***Research methods and conflict management model.*** To complement and extend the findings of this research, other research methods could be applied in future research. For example, the collection of longitudinal data in selected organisations could assist to explore the arising of conflicts between individuals, their interpersonal relations and performance over time. This would include observing and interviewing multiple individuals involved in these conflicts – either directly as a conflict party or indirectly as a third party or fellow group member. Taking a longitudinal approach would further assist to explore how the experience of conflicts affects interpersonal relations and performance in the long term and what measures individuals and organisations take to curb these effects. Combining a qualitative approach with, for example, a quantitative survey method could additionally be utilised to test the conflict management model derived in **Chapter 7** (see **Figure 66**, p. 291), thereby validate qualitative data through cross verification and gather a larger data.

***Interpersonal relations.*** Compared to performance, the way conflicts impact interpersonal relations has received less attention in organisational conflict studies. As this research has shown, both performance and interpersonal relations get affected during conflict, regardless of their status prior to the conflict. This research therefore suggests for future research to not neglect interpersonal relations but further explore,



for example, the linkages of strained interpersonal relations with performance, job satisfaction and turnover intentions.

***Conflict dimensions.*** Another aspect of interest could be further exploring the dimensions of conflict. On the one hand, this could involve assessing in detail how the dimensions' characteristics change and influence each other during conflict. On the other hand, the particular characteristics of the dimensions could be examined further. For example, personality traits of involved individuals may affect and shape interactions. This could help to explain why some conflicts in this research could not be settled despite several conflict managements. If individuals due to their personality traits do not get along, reverting to avoidance behaviours might be the only way to coexist within the organisation and in the worst-case scenario lead to their leaving the organisation.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1: Interview Guideline**

#### **1. Information for Interviewee**

- I want to assess the development of conflicts in organisations, how they are handled and what effects they have on the people and work processes.
- I am conducting this interview with you to understand conflicts in your organisation, which data I will then use to compare with data from other organisations. Based on the data, I will derive recommendations on how these conflicts could be handled.
- I understand conflict as a dysfunctional process that involves at least two people, an incompatibility with regard to interests, goals or values, a certain disposition and relationship with the other party, and an expression of conflict through verbal and or non-verbal behaviour in the parties' interactions.
- I would like to record the interview as it will be easier for me to listen to your responses without writing at the same time. After I have analysed the data, I will delete the recording. No other person will have access to the recording.
- I will summarise the information you give me and include in my thesis. I will not mention your name, names that you mention and your organisation.

#### **2. Context Question**

- In which department do you work?
- What are your tasks in the organisation?
- What is your job title and position in the company?
- How many employees does your organisation have?

#### **3. Conflict**

Please describe a conflict that occurred between you and another staff within your organisation. You may start with how it began.

- What was the conflict about?
- Who was the other person in the conflict? (Team, department, position)
- How would you describe the other person?
- How was your relationship with that person before the conflict? Any previous conflicts?

- How did you know there was conflict? How did it show in your behaviour and the other person's behaviour? (Verbal & non-verbal communication; interaction)

Conflict escalation model - **pictures:**

- Which picture do you believe represents the conflict you had?
- Why did you choose this one?

Conflict escalation model - **pictures:**

- Please pick a picture that represents how the conflict further developed.
- Why did you choose this one?
- Did you behave differently towards each other? (Communication; interaction)
- How did it affect your relationship and what you thought of the other person?  
(Image)
- How did it affect how you worked together?
- Was the conflict still about the issue that started the conflict?
- Did more parties get involved?

#### 4. Conflict Management

Please describe how the conflict was handled.

- What attempts were made to resolve the differences (if any). (At different conflict stages)
- Was it done openly and involve other persons, or just between the two of you?
- What was your behaviour? What was the other person's behaviour?
- Did the two of you avoid the confrontation, stick to your own position or find a solution together, or other behaviour?
- Was there a consensus to settle the conflict?

#### 5. Conflict Outcome

Conflict de-escalation model - **pictures:**

- Which picture do you believe represents how the conflict ended?
- Why did you choose this one?
- How was your relationship after the settlement (if any)?
- How did you work together after the settlement? Did it affect your performance, of your team, and work processes? Did it affect your motivation and your colleague's?



## **6. Concluding Part**

- How are conflicts generally handled in your team? (Similar or different to the one described)
- Are there any other important aspects you would like to mention that have not been considered in the interview?
- Thank you for giving me the opportunity to do this interview with you and thank you for your time.

**Appendix 2: Contact Summary Examples**

**Name: I2**

1) Short summary of conflict incidence (main issues or themes).

Their common boss gave them the same task to accomplish, without them knowing. The task was to organise the farewell party for a common colleague. Both worked on the preparations separately. When they found out that the other colleague was working on the same task, one persisted that she had already put in a lot of effort in the preparations and that’s how they should do it. The other colleague then flipped and said she should ‘do her shit alone then’ which she in effect did. After a day where they tried to avoid each other and spoke only what was necessary, there was a tacit agreement to go back to normal relations.

Important note: The interviewee attributed the raised tension to a lot of stress at work during this period. There was a lot of customer traffic and tasks to accomplish. If not that current workload, they might not have reacted to the situation as they did. They usually have a good relationship.

2) Salient points:

Salient Points	Nodes
For a day, it was ‘somewhat stupid’. It was more on the factual level, no longer ‘cordial’. Everyone just focused on her job. It was a bit strange for a day but after a few days, we could laugh over it.	OC_Changed work atmosphere
It was not as it used to be as they did not relate with each other as usual. They did not pull together as they used to and were consequently not as productive.	OC_Continued impact on working relationships and tasks
She is a person interested in having a harmonious relationship with other people, and she does especially not like having a conflict with a person she likes. When they were going through the conflict situation, it quite affected her: she was a bit unconcentrated as it was always at the back of her mind.	OC_Dissatisfaction of employees
When they met and had to discuss business-related matters, it was not as productive as they were very distanced.	OC_Inadequate communication and coordination
They tried to avoid each other and gave each other silent treatment. The conversation was restricted to essential matters.	CM_Avoiding interactions

<p>It is important to her that an issue does not linger on for long, and one tells each other one's mind. One can also agree that one does not have be of the same opinion.</p>	<p>CM_Discussing incompatible issues</p>
<p>It was then done with. Everyone swept in front of their own door and reflected on it by themselves that it was not worth all that. Then they reconciled and all is well. It was a tacit agreement. They related again normally with each other and like each other again.</p>	<p>CM_Tacit agreement</p>
<p>Leading the department, she is a the one who has to put down her foot or make decisions when there are conflicts between other staff, and they cannot settle it on their own. She wants it to be a fair decision. But when she makes the decision, the conflict is over for her, and it also has to be over for the other staff. E.g., this year one staff takes the vacation around this time and the next year it will be the other staff who can have time off during that period.</p>	<p>CM_Third-party decision-making</p>
<p>It was strange for a day but a few days later, we could laugh about it. Now they tease each other with it: not that you will flip again. They can relate to each other again on a friendly level, and all is well. The relationship was only affected for a short-term.</p>	<p>EIR_No change</p>

### 3) Caricatures:

Interviewee chose two caricatures to describe how the conflict developed: 2 -> 6.

Description: The conflict started off as an open dialogue as in picture 2. At one point, they stood in front of each other and told each other their respective positions in a short and explicit fashion (caricature 6). And then they went their own ways sulkily.

Interviewee chose two caricatures to describe how the conflict ended: 4b -> 6b.

Description: There was a 'cleaning-up' from both sides (caricature 4b): both swept in front of their own door and processed and reflected upon what had happened, that it was not worth all the fuss. So, they kind of tidied up and got rid of unnecessities. Then they reconciled and now all is well (caricature 6b). It was not one person approaching the other to reconcile but it was a tacit agreement to go back to normal relations.

**Name: I4**

1) Short summary of conflict incidence (main issues or themes).

The interviewee employed the other conflict party and they interacted on a friendship basis nearly daily. From one day to the next, the other conflict party changed and started attacking the interviewee during phone conversations, spoke bad about her behind her back and discouraged her team members from interacting with the interviewee. Initially, this highly affected the interviewee as she also did not understand the reason for the sudden change. She attributed it to envy as she was more successful than the other party and had a higher position although the other person was much older than her. She made that attribution as the other party always told her that she was only successful because of her work contributions.

2) Salient points:

Salient Points	Nodes
They liked each other at the beginning. They spoke to each other nearly daily, just like in a friendship. But the interviewee realised soon that it was all 'show'. She tried to weaken the interviewee with 'poisoned arrows' by telling her on the telephone that she had done this or that. It was 'quite evil' because she wanted to reduce her strength so that she would be better off. The interviewee was getting more and more successful, and she was lacking behind (envy).	OC_Changed work atmosphere
On the business level, the interviewee wants harmony in the company, but it is no longer possible with the other woman as too much is damaged. One day she wanted to approach her during an event, but the other's body language made her to keep her distance. But if the other person would need something from her in terms of business resources, she would lend it to her as she is still part of the company.	OC_Continued impact on working relationships and tasks
At the beginning the interviewee cried and was also disappointed. During phone calls, the other person had a lot of power over her, and every time she put the phone down, she had to cry. The interviewee got high blood pressure and anxious whenever the other person called because it was never anything pleasant but accusations and the like.	OC_Dissatisfaction of employees
There was a financial impact: the turnover reduced. However, the interviewee noted that if the other person had not had the conflict with her, she would have had it with someone above her. Generally, when there are conflicts in one of the teams, she sees it when looking at the financial numbers.	OC_Financial impact

<p>At the moment the other party's network is not unified. At the beginning, the other party can influence others very well and win them over. But sooner or later they all leave because of the way she is. Either they leave after 5 months, or she promises them things she cannot keep. Possibly when the next generation takes over, then the team will have potential again. That is when the interviewee can also influence things again in the other's team.</p>	<p>OC_Inadequate communication and coordination</p>
<p>The other person forbade her team members to contact the interviewee and told them evil things about her. People that the other person had employed were avoiding her and giving her strange responses. It was a strange atmosphere, a bit like mobbing. When they then met her in person, they apologised and said that she was not as they had thought she was. When one of the other's team members then attended one of her events, the other person blocked them straight away from their social media groups.</p>	<p>OC_Multiple persons and or teams affected</p>
<p>Initially, the interviewee was afraid when meeting her but now she is more afraid of her and walks away. According to the interviewee, the conflict will not end; it has been persistently silenced. The interviewee realised that she cannot change the other person. She can only change her attitude to the person or the situation.</p>	<p>CM_Avoiding interactions</p>
<p>The last confrontation was about three years ago where she attacked her in front of all colleagues. The interviewee was completely shocked and swamped by the situation. There also had talks but there were also quarrels – more from the other side as the interviewee is not a person to fight or flip. Whenever the interviewee had a meeting, the other person also arranged a meeting on the same day and forbade her team members to attend the other person's meetings. When they did, they were taken from all lists the next day.</p>	<p>CM_Bullying into submission</p>
<p>After they had left the emotions behind, they tried in a personal conversation to converse only on a business level. It worked out for some time until members of the other person's team liked her as a coach or entrepreneur more than the other. Another time the interviewee told her that what she was spreading was lies and that she should put the record straight. The other person left angrily.</p>	<p>CM_Discussing incompatible issues</p>
<p>The interviewee got external help from a neutral coach who opened her eyes and strengthened her. She told her to count to three whenever the other person attacks her and then move on to another topic. The interviewee did that and was proud that she had done that. It helped her to distance herself and not let the attacks overwhelm her.</p>	<p>CM_External coaching</p>

Within the company, there is at times acrimony between the women. Whenever the interviewee realises it, she does not allow this backbiting again and intervenes in the form of personal talks before it turns into a conflict.	CM_Third-party attempts at mediation
If the other person were to call tomorrow, the interviewee would have an increased heart rate and think of whether she had done anything wrong. But as she is in a leadership position, she would answer the phone call professionally, with the thought in mind that what she does, she does with good intent. One time she wanted to approach her because of the other's expertise in two areas but as soon as the other saw her, she looked away. She therefore decided not to go through with it.	EIR_Dominated by negative emotions
When they see each other, they do no longer hug but just stretch out the hand or wave from far. They can sit at the same table during events, but they do not interact with each other.	EIR_Keeping distance
Whenever there is a conflict in a team, the interviewee sees it immediately when switching on the computer: the turnover is reduced and then she knows immediately that there is trouble.	EIP_Less productivity
The other person does a lot of things very well but then she destroys it again with other things. She is very controlling and possessive. Whenever her team members do not do things as she wants them to do, she blocks them.	EIP_Not working well with others
If the other person were to contact her today that she needed something, she would assist her. There is now proper distance between them for her to deal with her in a professional manner.	EIP_Support others in task execution

### 3) Caricatures:

Interviewee chose two caricatures to describe how the conflict developed: 3 -> 1.

Description: The other person always looked up, pointing with her finger and saying, you have, you have not done this and the like (caricature 3). Then there were also talks or clashes with the other person where the confrontation was more from the other party. Now at meetings, they can sit together at a table without conversing with each other (caricature 1).

Interviewee chose two caricatures to describe how the conflict ended: non-applicable (conflict ongoing).

Description: According to the interviewee, none of the other caricatures depicted how the conflict ended as the conflict did not end. Caricature 1 rather depicted how they avoid interacting with each other.

### Appendix 3: Overview of Generated Codes

Name	Description
Conflict Management	Referring to Q2: How are conflicts dealt with in selected organisations? Conflict management entails accommodating others' needs, avoiding interactions, changing workflows as well as bullying others into submission.
Accommodating others' needs	The conflict parties concede part of their self-interest and accommodate the other party's needs. This could either be achieved through discussions or tacit agreement.
Avoiding interactions	Due to the conflict and affected work atmosphere and relationship, the conflict parties avoid speaking and interacting with each other, unless it is absolutely necessary for the work or project at hand.
Bullying into submission	Acts of harassing and personal attacks by one or more persons, in order to make one colleague to submit to directives, procedures or no apparent reason.
Changing workflows and or team members	When a project or task gets stalled, conflict parties or third parties might decide to change the way a task or project is executed, or team members might be reassigned to other teams.
Discussing incompatible issues	The conflict parties discuss the incompatible issues that stand between them and thereby voice their opinions and possibly, the way out of the conflict situation.
External coaching	A conflict party seeks external coaching help, to be able to deal with the conflict at hand.
Non-tackling of issues	Incompatible issues are not being addressed by the conflict parties which in consequence likely causes the conflict to continue as a cold, lingering conflict and affects the work atmosphere and relationships.
Resignation	Due to the conflict, the conflict parties or one conflict party displays resigned indifference to work or the project at hand and is not interested in resolving the conflict with the other conflict party.
Tacit agreement	Conflict parties silently agree on ending the conflict, without further discussions on incompatible issues.
Third-party attempts at mediation	Either colleagues or boss attempt to mediate between the conflict parties: by approaching the conflict parties directly face-to-face or as part of a panel.

Name	Description
Third-party decision-making	A third party, most of the time the boss to the conflict parties, decides on how the conflict issue is to be managed or resolved.
Effects of conflict management implementation	Referring to Q3: How does the implementation of conflict management methods to internal organisational conflicts affect interpersonal relations and performance? Depending on the implemented conflict management method, it has different consequences on future interpersonal relations and performance. However, it has to be taken into account what the previous interpersonal relations and performance were before as well as during the conflict.
Effect on interpersonal relations	Interpersonal relations can either not be affected or be characterised by a greater understanding of the other party, greater caution in interactions and/or deteriorated relationship.
Being cautious in interactions	Due to conflict experience, individuals are more cautious in post-conflict interactions in terms of what information they reveal to the other person and general openness.
Closer relationship	The individuals have a closer relationship post-conflict as they have got to know each other better and may even spend private time with each other (going out for lunch).
Dominated by negative emotions	The relationship is being dominated by negative emotions such as hatred, mistrust, envy, amongst others.
Drifting apart	Relations are no longer as cordial as before the conflict due to the conflict experience, and the personal focus and interests might have changed and are no longer compatible.
Greater understanding	The involved individuals have come to know each other better through the conflict experience and are now better able to handle interactions with the other.
Improved relations	The individuals relate better with each other post-conflict due to the implemented conflict management method.
Keeping distance	The individuals seek to avoid communicating or interacting with each other post-conflict.
No change	The relationship did not change due to the conflict - neither positively nor negatively.
Only work discussions	The individuals only relate with each other on work-related matters and not on personal level.



Name	Description
Effect on performance	Performance might be improved, not affected, or worsened by given conflict management method.
Avoiding working with others	Individuals avoid in working with others post-conflict and relate with each other when necessary.
Improved coordination and cooperation	Individuals coordinate and cooperate tasks better post-conflict, resulting in a better team effort.
Less productivity	The individuals and/or teams are less productive due to the adverse post-conflict conditions.
Loss of motivation	The conflict experience has led to a loss of motivation, energy, and zeal to execute tasks and projects.
New motivation	Individual(s) has new motivation and/or goals to pursue post-conflict.
Not working well with others	Individuals are not working well with others post-conflict such as not supporting each other's efforts and not communicating effectively.
Support others in task execution	Individuals support each other in executing tasks to drive projects forward.
Working well with others	Individuals are working well with others post-conflict such as supporting each other's efforts and communicating effectively.
Organisation's challenges due to conflict	Referring to Q1: What are the challenges enterprises face in manifest conflict scenarios? These challenges can be distinguished as relating to company level, team level and/or interpersonal work relationships/activities.
Changed work atmosphere	The way employees relate with each other changes in terms of friendliness, less frequent communication, avoiding each other, amongst others.
Continued impact on work relationships and tasks	The conflict did not only have an immediate effect on the task/project that triggered or experienced the conflict but also on subsequent tasks/projects and working relationships.
Dissatisfaction of employees	Employees are not happy with the current situation at work due to the conflict and related factors. It can range from being interested in having harmonious relations with colleagues to avoiding or fearing to meeting the other person up to considering changing jobs because of the conflict situation at hand.

Name	Description
Duplicated job	Due to a lack of communication and coordination between employees at loggerhead, the same job may be executed by both. That amounts to less productivity and loss of time for the company.
Employees leaving company	Employees leave the company due to conflict-related issues at work for which reason continued employment at present company is no longer conducive, healthy and or feasible.
Errors	Employees in conflict correspond less with each other and errors are more likely to occur when highly interdependent employees and or teams do not coordinate activities.
Financial impact	Conflict has an effect on the turnover of the company and or leads to other financial losses of the company.
Inadequate communication and coordination	Due to the conflict at hand, employees tend to avoid each other and communicate and coordinate less with each other which will in turn affect their performance and output.
Multiple persons and or teams affected	The more persons are affected by the conflict, the more adverse are the consequences for the projects and tasks they are working on - from planning and coordination to execution.
Projects and or tasks delay	Projects and or tasks get delayed due to the conflict at hand. Employees spend longer on a project or task than planned which restricts their ability to move on to other projects or tasks (time wasted waiting for instruction or resources, or delayed decision-making). It is also a financial loss for the company (higher labour costs, amongst others).

#### Appendix 4: Most Salient Organisational Challenges – Company Size and Length of Relationship Considered (Own Table)

Person	Company Size = Small (2)		Company Size = Medium (2)		Company Size = Large (8)		Total (12)
	Length of Relationship at Time of Conflict = Less than 1 year (1)	Length of Relationship at Time of Conflict = More than 1 year (1)	Length of Relationship at Time of Conflict = Less than 1 year (1)	Length of Relationship at Time of Conflict = More than 1 year (1)	Length of Relationship at Time of Conflict = Less than 1 year (3)	Length of Relationship at Time of Conflict = More than 1 year (5)	
Changed work atmosphere	1	0	1	1	3	4	10
Continued impact on work relationships and tasks	1	0	1	1	3	4	10
Dissatisfaction of employees	1	0	0	1	3	4	9
Duplicated job	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Employees leaving company	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
Errors	1	0	0	1	0	0	2
Financial impact	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Inadequate communication and coordination	1	0	0	1	2	4	8
Multiple persons and or teams affected	0	0	1	0	3	2	6
Projects and or tasks delay	0	1	0	0	2	0	3
<b>Total</b>	1	1	1	1	3	5	12

### Appendix 5: Most Salient Organisational Challenges – Position in Company and Gender Considered (Own Table)

Person	Position in Company = Shopfloor (7)		Position in Company = Line Management (3)		Position in Company = Top Management (2)		Total (12)
	Gender = Male (2)	Gender = Female (5)	Gender = Male (2)	Gender = Female (1)	Gender = Male (1)	Gender = Female (1)	
Changed work atmosphere	2	5	0	1	1	1	10
Continued impact on work relationships and tasks	1	5	1	1	1	1	10
Dissatisfaction of employees	2	4	0	1	1	1	9
Duplicated job	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Employees leaving company	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Errors	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Financial impact	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Inadequate communication and coordination	1	3	1	1	1	1	8
Multiple persons and or teams affected	1	3	0	0	1	1	6
Projects and or tasks delay	1	1	1	0	0	0	3
<b>Total (unique)</b>	2	5	2	1	1	1	12

## Appendix 6: Most Salient Organisational Challenges – Work Type and Age Considered (Own Table)

Person	Work Type = Project based work (5)		Work Type = Non-project-based work (7)		Total (12)
	Age = Younger than 35 (3)	Age = Older than 35 (2)	Age = Younger than 35 (3)	Age = Older than 35 (4)	
Changed work atmosphere	3	0	3	4	10
Continued impact on work relationships and tasks	3	1	2	4	10
Dissatisfaction of employees	3	0	2	4	9
Duplicated job	1	0	0	0	1
Employees leaving company	1	0	0	1	2
Errors	1	0	0	1	2
Financial impact	0	0	0	1	1
Inadequate communication and coordination	2	1	1	4	8
Multiple persons and or teams affected	2	0	2	2	6
Projects and or tasks delay	2	1	0	0	3
<b>Total (unique)</b>	3	2	3	4	12