

Tracking Managerial Conflict Adaptivity:
Introducing a Dynamic Measure of
Adaptive Conflict Management in Organizations

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Abstract

Since Darwin, adaptation to change has been associated with survival and fit. Yet despite this, leaders and managers often get stuck in dominating approaches to conflict, and few scholars have examined the role of adaptation in managing conflicts effectively over time and across changing situations. The goal of this paper is threefold. First, we develop a new measure for assessing conflict adaptivity of managers (the Managerial Conflict Adaptivity Assessment - MCAA), based on a situated model of conflict in social relations. We define conflict adaptivity as the capacity to respond to different conflict situations in accordance with the demands specified by the situation. The measure consists of 15 distinct work-conflict scenarios and provides 5 behavioral response options, which represent 5 primary strategies employed in conflict. Individuals who tend to respond to the conflicts in a manner consistent with the situations provided are considered to be more adaptive. Second, we test and find that managerial conflict adaptivity is related to higher levels of satisfaction with conflict processes at work as well as higher levels of well-being at work. Third, we test the MCAA's construct validity and provide evidence that the MCAA is positively related to behavioral flexibility and self-efficacy.

Tracking Managerial Conflict Adaptivity:

Introducing a Dynamic Measure of Adaptive Conflict Management in Organizations

Nelson Mandela, one of the world's great leaders, was a man of many contradictions (see Mandela, 1995). Born the son of a village community leader, he developed an abiding respect for authority. Yet beginning as a young man, he spent decades fighting doggedly against state authorities in South Africa. Having had consensus-based decision-making modeled by his father, he learned to collaborate and unite. However, having trained as a boxer and a trial lawyer, he also became a tenacious fighter. Sharing the African National Congresses' core value of non-violence, he became a master at methods of civil disobedience. Nevertheless, when these strategies were met with brutal violence on the streets of Johannesburg, he became a student of military strategy, munitions, sabotage and guerilla warfare. While a political prisoner he learned to use his lessor-power and the rules and laws of the authorities toward their undoing. However, when elected President, Mandela displayed the compassion, grace, and benevolence of a truly great human being. All through his struggle against Apartheid and journey towards a united, multiethnic South Africa, Mandela needed all of these competencies to adapt to shifting circumstances, his opponents' evolving tactics, and to a changing world.

Today's leaders can learn much from Mandela's capacity to adapt. Decades of research have documented the strong tendencies of those in positions of power to get stuck in dominating and controlling approaches to negotiations and conflict (Follett, 1973/1924; Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Rubin & Brown, 1975; Zartman & Rubin, 2002). People in power typically behave more exploitatively, use pressure tactics, offer fewer concessions, have higher aspirations and employ more contentious tactics in conflict (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Dwyer & Walker, 1981; Magee, Galinsky, & Gruenfeld, 2007; McAlister, Bazerman & Fader, 1986; Rubin & Brown, 1975; Zartman & Rubin, 2002). They also neglect attending to and

underestimate the resources of lower-power parties (Fiske, 1993; Salacuse, 2002). When leaders and managers operate from a sense of general dominance, they fare less well in negotiations, undermine relationships, foster less commitment to their decisions, and cultivate negativity and resentment of subordinates (Lewicki, Saunders, & Barry, 2006; Salacuse, 2002; Yukl, Kim, & Chavez, 1999; Yukl & Tracey, 1992; Zartman & Rubin, 2002). And as the saying goes, if your only tool is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail.

Scholarly approaches to conflict management of managers in organizations have largely neglected the importance of adaptation (Ployhart & Bliese, 2006). They typically measure dispositional or stylistic preferences to conflict at work (De Dreu, Beersma, Steinel, & Van Kleef, 2007; Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1984; Rahim, 1983; Thomas, 1976), or emphasize the importance of situational conditions such as cooperative task and reward structures for promoting constructive conflict (Johnson & Johnson, 2003, 2005; Tjosvold, 1991, 1985). While these components of conflict are important, they neglect the significance of *fit*; the fact that a specific conflict strategy will be more or less effective or ineffective under a particular set of conditions (see Deutsch, 1993). Despite recent trends in leadership research that have demonstrated the importance of adaptivity (Burke, Stagl, Salas, Pierce, & Kendall, 2006; Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009; Lord, Hannah, & Jennings, 2011; Ployhart & Bliese, 2006), cognitive, affective, and behavioral complexity (Hoojberg & Schneider, 2001; Kugler & Brodbeck, 2011; Zucarro, 2001) as well as ambidexterity (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004) for effective organizational administration and supervision, adaptation has been largely ignored in research on conflict management (for exceptions see Druckman & Mitchell, 1995; Thomas, 1992).

This paper presents a new approach to measuring the conflict competencies of managers through the assessment of conflict adaptivity. It is derived from a situated model of conflict in social relations (Coleman, Kugler, Bui-Wzosinska, Nowak, & Vallacher, 2012; Coleman, Kugler,

Mitchinson, Chung, & Musallam, 2010; Coleman, Kugler, Mitchinson, & Foster, 2013). Instead of emphasizing a set of predispositions or conditions determining positive conflict processes, the model stresses the necessity of adapting flexibly to diverse or changing situations in a manner fitting with the demands of each situation.

Building on this model, the current paper extends this work by developing and validating a measure of conflict adaptivity of managers at work. We conceptualize conflict adaptivity as the capacity in conflict to identify and respond appropriately to different or changing situations by employing distinct conflict orientations and behaviors in a manner consistent with the demands of the situation. This capacity is especially important for managers who are often asked to address diverse conflicts up and down the hierarchies of power in their work life. We suggest that managers with greater capacities for conflict adaptivity will enjoy higher levels of general satisfaction with conflict processes and enhanced well being at work.

This article has five sections. First, we outline the fragmented history of the study of conflict management in organizations and describe how the situated model of conflict in social relations (Coleman et al., 2012) and the idea of conflict adaptivity help to integrate these diverse strands. Next, we elaborate on the adaptive approach to conflict and on its particular importance for managers in work settings. Third, we outline the approaches and limitations of most standard methods of managerial conflict assessment. Fourth, we describe our assessment framework and present four studies aimed at developing and testing the new *Managerial Conflict Adaptivity Assessment* (MCAA). The studies include 1) a critical incident study where we collected and categorized work conflict scenarios for the measure, 2) a rating of the scenarios from subject matter experts which demonstrates their content validity, 3) two correlational studies which employed the MCAA to test its concurrent and construct validity. In closing, we discuss the MCAA and outline its limitations and implications for the management of conflict at work.

The Fragmented Origins of Organizational Conflict Management

Coleman et al. (2012) describe five approaches to conceptualizing interpersonal conflict resolution, which have been particularly influential in shaping organizational conflict management: 1) *social interdependence theory* (see Deutsch, 1973; Johnson & Johnson, 1989, 2005; Tjosvold, 1991), which focuses on how differences in cooperative and competitive goal interdependence effect conflict dynamics; 2) *social motivation theory* (see DeDreu et al., 2007; Van Lange, De Cremer, Van Dijk, & Van Vugt, 2007), which emphasizes how pro-social and pro-self motivational orientations influence conflict processes and outcomes; 3) *dual-concern theory* (see Blake & Mouton, 1964; Pruitt, Rubin, & Kim, 2004; Rahim, 1983, 1986; Thomas, 1976), which stresses how combinations of different types and degrees of self-other concerns in conflict situations influence different responses to conflict management; 4) *power dependence theory* (see Gerhart & Rynes, 1991; Kim & Fragale, 2005; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Mannix, Thompson, & Bazerman; 1989; Ng, 1980; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), which focuses on how differing degrees of relative interdependence effect power and conflict dynamics in negotiations; and 5) *game theory* (see Schelling; 1960; Von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1944), which formulates conflicts of interest in precise mathematical terms and emphasizes how the rational, interdependent nature of disputants' interests, behavior, and fates effect conflict outcomes.

Each of the five models have focused generally on understanding the conditions and processes that lead to constructive versus destructive conflict outcomes, have received considerable empirical support and refinement, and have contributed to the development of practical applications for conflict management (see De Dreu, 2008; Deutsch, 1973, 2002; Pruitt et al., 2004). However, the models all differ somewhat in their underlying assumptions and areas of emphasis; each focusing differentially on how different types of interdependence, degrees of interdependence, orientations, issue importance, and relative power influence conflict (see

Coleman et al., 2012 for elaboration). They also differ in their relative emphasis on external conditions versus individual differences as the drivers of conflict behavior. As a consequence, we are left with a rather fractured understanding of conflict management dynamics; with a series of mid- or micro-level models of conflict antecedents, processes and outcomes that remain somewhat piecemeal and incoherent.

A Situated Model of Conflict in Social Relations

In response to this fragmented state-of-affairs, Coleman et al. (2012) present a situated model of conflict in social relations, which offers an integrative framework for the study of social conflict (see also Coleman et al., 2010, 2013). Rather than isolating distinct variables and investigating their separate effects, it builds on prior research identifying the fundamental features of social relations (Deutsch, 2007, 2012; Wish, Deutsch, & Kaplan, 1976) and then employs them to create a prototypical context for the situated study of social conflict. The model (see Figure 1) suggests that there are three basic dimensions of social relations most relevant to experiences of conflict: the mix of goal interdependence (ratio of cooperative to competitive goal interdependences with the other party), relative distribution of power (high, equal and low power relative to the other party), and degree of interdependence (high versus low goal interdependence – or relational importance – with the other party). These three aspects of all social relations combine to create a basic *stimulus field* for conflict (Kelley, 1997): a perceiver's (conscious or unconscious) representation of his or her external environment. At each moment in time each party in conflict is located psychologically (i.e., "sees" themselves) in a specific region of the conflict stimulus field (i.e., a specific type of situation). Different regions tend to afford distinct psychological orientations to conflict, which research has shown induce particular emotions, values and behaviors that are fitting with that type of situation (Coleman et al., 2010, 2013).

Psychological orientations (POs) are defined by Deutsch (2007) as a more or less consistent complex of cognitive, motivational, moral, and action orientations to a given situation that serve to guide one's behaviors (Deutsch, 1982, 1985, 2007). Due to pressures for consistency, specific situations will tend to elicit appropriate POs that "fit" the situation, and similarly different types of POs will motivate people to move towards situations with consistent types of social relations. For example, the PO one employs when negotiating "up" with a member of the board of directors will differ drastically from that employed when arguing with a colleague over the preferred room temperature – or at least it probably should. However, when one becomes programmed to chronically employ a particular PO in conflict ("I'm the boss, don't question me"), he or she may start to gravitate toward relationships outside of work (with friends and romantic partners) that also elicit this PO. The more extreme a situation (i.e., extreme competition, power differences, etc.), the more the situation will afford a distinctive type of PO.

In defining the different POs for the situated model, Coleman et al. (2010, 2012, 2013) focused on the most extreme regions of the conflict stimulus field and identified through prior research the following five primary POs: 1) *benevolence* (afforded by high power, cooperative goals, high interdependence), 2) *dominance* (afforded by high power, competitive goals, high interdependence), 3) *support* (afforded by low power, cooperative goals, high interdependence), 4) *appeasement* (afforded by low power, competitive goals, high interdependence), and 5) *autonomy* (afforded by low degrees of interdependence).¹

¹ In situations of low interdependence the authors identified only one primary PO. Research has shown that under conditions of low degrees of goal interdependence (no, few, or weak goal linkages between parties), the importance of conflict engagement tends to dissipate (Deutsch, 1973; Kelley, 1997) and disputants' POs and behaviors become more uniform (Coleman et al., 2010, 2012, 2013). Thus, the four regions of the stimulus field operating under conditions of low interdependence tend to collapse to one (see Figure 1) and elicit one PO (i.e., autonomy).

Research testing the model in the context of organizational conflict has shown that when participants were presented with the same conflict (in terms of the issues involved), they described markedly different experiences – perceptions, emotions, values, and behavioral intentions – across the 5 situational regions (Coleman et al., 2010, 2012, 2013). When faced with a *‘high-power, cooperative, high interdependence’*-scenario, participants described a more active-cooperative PO to conflict than most other regions – where participants said they valued taking responsibility for the problem, listening to the other, and expressed genuine concern for their low-power counterpart (benevolence). In contrast, *‘high-power, competitive, high-interdependence’* scenarios were found to induce a more threatening and confrontational approach to the other party, less concern for the other and heightened concerns for their own power (dominance). *‘Low power, cooperative, high interdependence’*-scenarios afforded more of an PO of appreciative support than the other regions, where people respectfully sought clarification of roles and responsibilities, worked harder to make amends, and felt concern for their superior in the conflict (support). This was in contrast to the reactions observed to *‘low power, competitive, high interdependence’* scenarios, which induced higher levels of stress and anger, a strong need to tolerate the situation, and a desire to look for possibilities to sabotage the other party if the opportunity presented itself (appeasement). *‘Low interdependence’* scenarios of any kind when compared to the others, afforded a less intense experience of the conflict, where people preferred to simply act independently to meet their goals, move on or exit the dispute altogether (autonomy).

Each of the five POs outlined in the situated model has its particular utilities and benefits, costs and consequences, depending on the psychological makeup of disputants, the POs of other parties, and the nature of the situations faced. In fact, all of the POs, when chronic, have their associated pathologies (Coleman et al., 2012). Repeated experiences in situations with similar

structures are thought to give rise to habitual response patterns that on average yield good outcomes (Kelly, 1983; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). These habitual patterns can eventually reside within persons, particular relationships, and/or group norms and therefore lead to more automatic, chronic conflict responses. When this occurs, people may find it emotionally distressing when situations change and require that they adopt a different approach (McClelland, 1975; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). Ironically, this is particularly true for people in positions of high-power such as upper managers, who become increasingly comfortable with domineering approaches to disputes (Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Rubin & Brown, 1975; Zartman & Rubin, 2002).

Conflict Adaptivity

Scholars have studied processes of adaptation in many arenas, including evolution (Darwin, 1859), economics (Adger, Dessai, Goulden, Hulme, Lorenzoni et al., 2009), human development (Erikson, 1963; Piaget, 1937), identity development (Kegan, 1995), cultural adaptation (Bierbrauer & Klinger, 2005; Moran & Keen, 2009), organizational adaptation (Gulati, Lawrence, & Puranam, 2004; Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985), team adaptation (Burke et al., 2006), leadership (Heifetz et al., 2009; Lord et al., 2011), and cognitive control (Clayson & Larson, 2011). In essence, *adaptation* is the developmental or evolutionary process by which a unit (amoeba, brain, person, group, organization, population, species, etc.) becomes better suited to its habitat or environment. Thus, adaptation equals modifications toward fit.

Several approaches to the study of POs have stressed the importance of adaptive processes (Deutsch, 1985; Kelley, 1997; McClelland, 1975; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003; Van Lange et al., 2007). According to Deutsch (1982), people develop the capacity to employ different types of POs as they become necessary in different situations. However, if people develop strong, chronic POs, they may employ POs that are somehow inconsistent with the

situation. In the context of conflicts this implies that individuals can tend to approach conflicts in an unswerving manner regardless of what may be considered appropriate in any given situation (Coleman et al., 2010). Although specific POs may be useful and more fitting in particular situations, problems typically arise for people when they become fixated on any one PO, or when an individual's chronic PO(s) fits poorly with the specific demands of situations (Deutsch, 1985; Kelley, 1997; McClelland, 1975; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003; Van Lange et al., 2007).

Therefore, we suggest that a critical competency for leaders and managers working in the ever-evolving, mixed-motivated world of work (Burns, 1961) is *conflict adaptivity*: the capacity to identify and respond appropriately to different conflict situations or relevant changes in conflict situations by employing the different POs of the situated model and their related strategies in a manner consistent with the demands of the presenting situation.

Past research offers support for the positive effects of adaptivity in conflict. Case-based research on interstate negotiations found that parties tended to be more effective in negotiations to the extent that they were able to adjust their POs and behavior to the relative power of the other side (Zartman & Rubin, 2002). Druckman and Mitchell (1995) suggest that the very nature of conflict requires such flexibility, with resolution often depending on one or more parties moving away from their preferred tactics to find new ways of addressing problems. Others contend that “firm flexibility”- or showing firmness with respect one's ultimate interests in conjunction with flexibility with respect to the means for achieving those interests – is a most effective negotiation strategy (Fisher et al., 1981; Pruitt et al., 2004). Similarly, “logrolling,” or holding a strong position with regards something that is important to oneself but unimportant to the other, while accommodating on something that is more important to the other party, has also been shown to lead to more mutually beneficial outcomes for both parties (Lax & Sebenius, 1986; Mannix, Thompson, & Bazerman, 1989; Rackman & Carlisle, 1978; Raiffa, 1982).

Research by Van de Vliert (Van de Vliert, 1997; Van de Vliert, Euwema, & Huismans, 1997) has found that effective individuals rarely employ single conflict handling styles; instead employing more blended or “conglomerated” approaches. Research with attorneys (Williams, 1983, 1993) supports this, demonstrating that effective attorneys (as rated by their peers) use a pattern of behaviors in negotiations that do not neatly fit any one of the conflict-style categories.

Furthermore, preliminary research on work conflict suggests a relationship between conflict adaptivity and satisfaction with conflicts at work (Coleman, Mitchinson, & Kugler, 2009). Thus, higher levels of effectiveness in conflict management and the concomitant satisfaction with conflict processes have been found to be associated with more adaptive processes.

Conflict adaptivity is especially important for managers as they are often situated mid-hierarchy and face conflicts up, down and across the org chart; spending between 25-40% of their time at work managing conflicts (Wayne, 2005). Thus, handling conflict effectively has been found to be central to managers’ personal sense of wellbeing (e.g., De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Spector & Bruk-Lee, 2008; Tjosvold, 1998, 2008). In this paper we focus on three main aspects of well being at work: satisfaction with coworkers, emotional well-being and intentions to quit the organization.

H1: Managerial conflict adaptivity will be positively associated with satisfaction with conflict processes and well-being at work (i.e., conflict adaptivity will be positively related to satisfaction with coworkers and job-related affective well-being, and negatively related with intentions to quit the job).

However, as no measure for conflict adaptivity can be identified currently, we pursue another objective in addition to exploring the relationship between conflict adaptivity and desirable outcomes: to develop and validate a measure of conflict adaptivity – the Managerial Conflict Adaptivity Assessment (MCAA).

Construct Validity of Conflict Adaptivity

In order to develop a valid measure of managerial conflict adaptivity, we first need to consider the concept's place in the nomological network of related concepts and determine how it is simultaneously convergently and discriminantly related to these concepts (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Cronbach & Meehl, 1995; Smith, 2005).

Conflict adaptivity requires disputants to be oriented to the demands of situations, and capable of gleaning what is relevant and irrelevant to the conflict (Coleman et al., 2012; Zaccaro, Foti, & Kenny, 1991). Kang and Shaver (2004) found that *emotional complexity* (the degree to which an individual has a broad range of emotional experiences and the capacity to make subtle distinctions within emotion categories) leads individuals to be oriented to and empathize with the feelings of others and thus have greater degrees of *interpersonal adaptability*. In addition, high *self-monitoring* (Snyder, 1974), or the tendency for people to closely monitor themselves in social situations and behave in a manner that is highly responsive to social cues and situational context, should also logically play a role in conflict adaptation.

However, even when situations are perceived accurately, the adaptive individual must then be able to respond in a way that is fitting with the situation. Zaccaro et al. (1991) suggested that *behavioral flexibility*, defined as the ability and willingness to respond in significantly different ways to correspondingly different situational requirements, is a critical component of adaptive leadership. The *Battery of Interpersonal Capacities* (BIC; Paulhus & Martin, 1987) is a commonly employed measure of behavioral flexibility and so will be employed in this validity study. Capabilities in this context refer to the ease of carrying off a particular response when required by the situation. In addition, higher degrees of *self-efficacy* (Bandura, 1977), or the degree of confidence one holds in his/her competence to achieve a task – such as implementing diverse conflict strategies and tactics – should also be positively associated with the use of more

adaptive conflict behaviors. In sum we aim to explore the nomological network of the new Managerial Conflict Adaptivity Assessment (MCAA) by identifying its relationship to related but not-identical constructs (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Hinkin, 1998).

H2: Managerial conflict adaptivity will be positively associated with emotional complexity, self-monitoring, behavioral flexibility and self-efficacy.

Even though we expect positive relations between the MCAA and the constructs listed in H2, we expect it to be sufficiently distinct from those constructs as well. Managerial conflict adaptivity is a construct that addresses behaviors of managers specific to conflict situations, whereas the other constructs address more general personality traits. Thus we assume that people's adaptivity in conflicts will be related to the outcome variables specified in H1 (conflict satisfaction and well-being), over and above any effects caused by their dispositions regarding self-efficacy, self-monitoring, emotional complexity, and behavioral flexibility. In addition to these traits, we also plan to control for broader, higher order personality traits associated with job satisfaction. For the purpose of our study we chose the measure of *core self-evaluations* (Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1997; Judge, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003), a combination of self-esteem, general self-efficacy, low neuroticism, and external locus of control found to be a significant predictor of job satisfaction and job performance (Judge et al., 2003). Thus we aim to show the distinctiveness of the MCAA from related (but not identical) constructs in relation to our main criterion (i.e., satisfaction with conflicts at work). This procedure offers a first test of the MCAA's discriminant validity (Cronbach & Meehl, 1995; Hinkin, 1998).

H3: Managerial conflict adaptivity will contribute to satisfaction with conflict at work over and above the effects of emotional complexity, self-monitoring, behavioral flexibility and self-efficacy and more general personality traits like core self-evaluations.

Assessing Conflict Management in Organizations: P or E?

Today, most organizational conflict management assessments measure dispositional, stylistic or behavioral preferences (i.e., P) to conflict at work, such as cooperative or competitive (Raider, Coleman, & Gerson, 2006; Tjosvold, 1985, 1991), constructive or destructive (Coleman & Lim, 2001; Davis, Capobianco, & Kraus, 2004), prosocial or proself (De Dreu et al., 2007), or integrative or distributive styles (Fisher et al., 1984; Johnson & Johnson, 2003). However, empirical research on the effects of individual differences on conflict management presents contradictory findings, suggesting that such differences are unstable, misunderstood, or highly reactive to situational differences (Lewicki et al., 2006). Many in the field have long acknowledged the importance of situational contingencies in determining the choice of conflict strategies (Walton & McKersie, 1966; Deutsch, 1993; Lewicki et al., 2005; Pruitt et al., 2004) and research has supported the value of employing different – even contradictory – behavioral strategies within the same conflict episode (Euwema, Van de Vliert, & Bakker, 2003; Van de Vliert, Euwema, & Huismans, 1995). Thus while it has been argued that a collaborative, problem solving approach to conflict may be the most effective in the long run (Bennis, 1969; Blake & Mouton, 1964; Brown, 1983; Fisher et al., 1991; Likert & Likert, 1976; Pruitt et al., 2004), it is necessary to consider the relative strengths and weaknesses of each conflict-handling approach as they are relevant to the situation at hand (Deutsch, 1993; Thomas, 1992).

An alternative, but less common approach to conflict assessment in organizations emphasizes the importance of situational conditions (i.e., E) such as task and reward interdependence structures (Johnson & Johnson, 2003, 2005; Tjosvold, 1991; 1985), organizational interfaces (Brown, 1983), conflict climate (Coleman & Lim, 2001), conflict culture (Gelfand, Leslie, Keller, & De Dreu, 2012), organizational culture (Lewis, French, & Steane, 1997) and dispute resolution systems (Constantino & Merchant, 1996; Ury, Brett, &

Goldberg, 1988) for promoting constructive vs. destructive conflict at work. While providing evidence of the role these situational factors' play on conflict dynamics (for summaries see Tjosvold, 2008; De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008), these approaches miss two points. First, organizations typically present their inhabitants with environments that are both cooperative and competitive in nature (Burns, 1961). Second, despite the muddled findings on individual differences, people do often differ in the degree to which they chronically view work relationships and conflicts as win-lose or win-win, and thus will respond differently (Kelley & Stahelski, 1970; Schlenker & Goldman, 1978; Tjosvold, 1982, 1985), regardless of conditions.

This P vs. E divide in approaches to conflict assessment reflects a long-standing debate over causality in social psychology (Allport, 1969; Coleman, Vallacher, & Nowak, 2012). Lewin (1948) took on this issue, suggesting that neither instincts nor situations account wholly for behavior, but rather that behavior (B) is ultimately a function of both the person (P) and the environment (E) in interaction [$B=f(P, E)$]. This general framework influenced the theorizing of many conflict and peace scholars after Lewin (Morton Deutsch, Harold Kelly, John Thibaut, Albert Bandura, David Johnson & Roger Johnson, Dean Tjosvold, Caryl Rusbult, Paul Van Lange, etc.), but has rarely influenced approaches to conflict management assessment. In this article, this interactive perspective provides the foundation for our approach to assessing conflict adaptivity of managers.

The Managerial Conflict Adaptivity Assessment (MCAA)

While the conceptual framework of the MCAA is derived from a situated model of conflict in social relations (Coleman et al., 2010, 2012, 2013), the methodological approach to assessment has similarities with Vroom and Yetton's assessment of leadership behaviors following their contingency model (Vroom & Yetton, 1973; Vroom & Yago, 1978).

The MCAA is based in the following idea: When conflict situations change or people face different types of situations in terms of the dimensions of the situated model, different psychological orientations (POs) and strategies are required and are likely to be more effective in reaching one's goals. Individuals who are able to respond across different situations with conflict behaviors consistent with the demands of each situation are thought to be more adaptive. If a specific PO fits with the specific situation according to the model, it is considered more feasible. In the MCAA we will focus primarily on the behavioral component of POs and thus we will refer to situationally-determined *feasible behaviors*.

More formally, our approach to assessment is based on the following set of assumptions which are derived from the situated model of conflict in social relations (cf. Coleman et al., 2010): 1) It is possible to distinguish qualitatively different types of conflict situations in the conflict stimulus field of the model. In the MCAA, we focus on the most extreme regions (which are labeled Region 1 - 5 in the situated model of conflict in social relations, see Figure 1); 2) The different types of situations commonly afford distinct POs to conflict; these distinct POs are thought to best fit the specific situations, whereas other POs fit the situations less well. In the MCAA, we focus on the behavioral components of the five POs afforded by the most extreme regions of the situated model of conflict in social relations: benevolence, dominance, support, appeasement, and autonomy (see Figure 1); 3) The situated model of conflict in social relations (see Figure 1) provides a framework that describes which types of POs correspond to which types of situations. The more a PO fits the situational type, the more feasible it is. No one PO is feasible in all situations. In the MCAA a behavior is most feasible if it corresponds to the situation on all three dimensions (e.g. dominance corresponds to high-power, competition and high-interdependence). A behavior is less feasible if it corresponds to the situation on only two

out of the three dimensions, and is least feasible if it corresponds to the situation on one dimension only.²

The goal of the measure is to assess managers' capacities to be adaptive when dealing with conflicts at work. In other words the MCAA assesses whether managers chose behaviors in different conflict situations that fit the demands of the situations. This is implemented by asking participants to imagine themselves in 15 categorically different conflict situations (3 scenarios for each of the 5 regions of the model; see Figure 1). Then the participant is asked to indicate how he/she would respond to the situation, choosing one of 5 behavioral strategies. The behavioral strategies represent the 5 distinct behavioral responses that correspond to the 5 regions (see Figure 1): benevolence, dominance, support, appeasement, and autonomy. From this data an overall *conflict adaptivity score* for each participant is calculated: First the degree to which a behavior selected by the participant fits a given situation is determined (i.e. on how many dimensions does the behavior fit the situation?). The average across all scenarios constitutes the *conflict adaptivity score*. As behaviors can fit on 1-3 dimensions, the average conflict adaptivity score ranges from 1.00 (low levels of conflict adaptivity) to 3.00 (high levels of conflict adaptivity). [An example scenario and the 5 behavioral strategies are provided in the Appendix.](#)

Development of the MCAA

² Please note that a behavior always fits on at least 1 of the dimensions for the following reason: Individual's POs in situations of low interdependence become uniform and differences in relative power or type of goal interdependence (i.e., Region 5) become dispensable (for more details see section on the situated model of conflict in social relations) - thus relative power and type of goal interdependence do not influence the degree of feasibility. Similarly the behavioral choice of "autonomy" does not differentiate between high or low power as well as cooperation or competition and thus always fits on those dimensions.

The measure required the generation of work-place scenarios and behavioral response items. We conducted Study 1 in order to generate the scenarios and then assessed their content validity in Study 2. The behavioral response items are based on previous research described by Coleman et al. (2010, 2013) and each behavioral response option (benevolence, dominance, support, appeasement, and autonomy) is measured with one forced-choice item ([see Appendix](#)).

Study 1: Gathering and Assessing the Scenarios

The main goal for Study 1, which was administered with an online questionnaire, was to generate conflict situations that managers encounter at work, and then to have the participants categorize the scenarios along the three dimensions of the situated model of conflict in social relations (degree and type of interdependence and power distribution). In order to generate a diverse set of scenarios, half of the participants were asked to think of a very positive conflict and half of the participants to think of a very negative conflict (cf. critical incident method, Flanagan, 1954). Given that we elicited both positive and negative conflict scenarios and approaches to resolution, we additionally tested whether more positive conflicts were associated with employing more feasible (i.e., fitting or adaptive) resolution behaviors and more negative conflicts with less feasible behaviors. Even though this analysis cannot directly test H1, it can provide us with some sense of the evaluative impact of conflict adaptivity on satisfaction.

Method. We recruited 192 participants (29% male) through graduate courses and advertisements at a large northeastern university in the U.S., as well as through online advertisements in 18 large U.S. cities. Participants were diverse with respect to their age (Min=18 years, Max=62 years, M = 32.77 years, SD = 10.92 years), educational background (22% High-school Degree, 12% Associate's Degree, 41% Bachelor Degree, 18% Master Degree, 3% Doctorate Degree, 4% Other) and ethnic background (12% Asian, 7% African , 6% Latin, 71% White , 4% other). As participants were asked to think of a conflict at work, the study was

restricted to participants with work-experience. As an incentive, participants were offered one chance in a lottery for \$250 (1 prize for every 50 participants).

First, participants were asked to reflect on a conflict they had experienced at work. Depending on the condition, participants were asked to either think of a very negative (“Please think of a time when you were involved in a conflict at work - one you found to be especially negative, difficult, or long-lasting and which was not resolved to your satisfaction. It should be a conflict in which your own strategy of dealing (or not-dealing) with the conflict did not work out and made you unhappy and unsatisfied about the resolution (or non-resolution)”) or a very positive conflict (“Please think of a time when you were involved in a conflict at work – one you found to be especially positive and which was resolved to your satisfaction. It should be a conflict in which your own strategy of dealing with the conflict worked well and made you happy and satisfied about the resolution”). Participants were then prompted to describe the conflict in an open ended question. Next participants rated the conflict along the dimensions of the situated model of conflict in social relations using one item per dimension: relative power (“In this conflict I had: 1=less power; 2=equal power; 3=more power than the other party”), type of interdependence (“This conflict was: 1=win-lose, 2=a mix of win-win and win-lose, 3=win-win), and degree of interdependence (“In this conflict the relationship with the other party was: 1=unimportant to me, 2=of medium importance to me, 3= important to me”). Finally, participants indicated their behavioral responses to the conflict using five subscales (Coleman et al., 2013), which capture the behavioral responses to the 5 extreme regions of the situated model of conflict in social relations (Coleman et al., 2012): benevolence ($\alpha=.75$, 3 items, 7 point scale), dominance ($\alpha=.71$, 3 items, 7 point scale), support ($\alpha=.84$, 3 items, 7 point scale), appeasement ($\alpha=.64$, 3 items, 7 point scale), and autonomy ($\alpha=.75$, 3 items, 7 point scale). Example items include: “I tried to use my power responsibly to resolve the situation in a fair manner”

(benevolence), “I threatened the other” (dominance), “I tried to ensure the continued support of the other” (support), “I avoided the other as much as possible” (appeasement), and “I didn’t do anything because the conflict was unimportant to me” (autonomy).

A manipulation check, which was included at the end of the questionnaire, confirmed the effectiveness of the manipulation (negative versus positive conflict): when asked to indicate their satisfaction with the process, outcome, and relationship in the conflict situation (Kugler, Coleman, & Fuchs, 2011; $\alpha=.94$) participants in the negative condition reported significantly less satisfaction ($M=3.01$, $SD=1.80$; 1=very low satisfaction, 7=very high satisfaction) than participants in the positive condition ($M=5.29$, $SD=1.34$; $t=9.97$, $p<.001$, $d=1.44$).

Results and discussion. The scenarios varied along all three dimensions: relative power (Min=1, Max=3, $M=1.73$, $SD=0.73$), type of goal interdependence (Min=1, Max=3, $M=1.97$, $SD=0.71$), and degree of interdependence (Min=1, Max=3, $M=2.07$, $SD=0.73$). For the MCAA measure we chose 3 scenarios for each of the 5 extreme regions of the situated model of conflict in social relations (totaling 15 scenarios). The following criteria were used for selecting the scenarios: 1) The scenarios represented one of the 5 extreme regions from the participant’s point of view. For example a scenario, which was rated 3 regarding relative power, 1 regarding type of interdependence, and 3 regarding degree of interdependence, was rated a scenario of Region 2. 2) The protagonist of the scenario was a manager. 3) The description of the scenario was sufficiently engaging and comprehensible. The selected scenarios were then adapted in order to be similar with regard to language, length and wording as well as to ensure anonymity.

In this study we asked 50% of the participants to think of a positive conflict in which their behavioral strategy was effective and 50% of the participants to think of a negative conflict in which their behavioral strategy was ineffective. Therefore, this study allowed us to explore whether the more effective / ineffective strategies were those that fit / did not fit the situation in

terms of the situated model of conflict in social relations. For the analysis, the behavioral response-type (dominance, appeasement, etc.) on which each participant had scored highest was used as an index of his/her primary PO (if a participant scored highest on more than one scale, each of them were counted as their primary PO). Using each participant's rating of the conflict situation along the three dimensions of the situated model of conflict in social relations (i.e., relative power, type of goal interdependence, and degree of goal interdependence) and their primary response option, we were able to assess a conflict adaptivity score for each participant. Using the logic of the MCAA, we assessed how many dimensions a participant's behavior fit with the respective conflict situation. Each behavior could fit on 1 dimension (i.e., low conflict adaptivity), on 2 dimensions (i.e., medium conflict adaptivity), or on all 3 dimensions (i.e., high levels of conflict adaptivity). Participants in the positive-conflict condition were expected and found to be more adaptive ($M=2.36$ $SD=0.60$) than participants in the negative-conflict condition ($M=2.14$, $SD=0.71$; $t=2.26$, $p=.025$, $d=.33$).

The results of Study 1 provide preliminary support for H1, which suggests that being adaptive in conflict situations is associated with more satisfaction with conflict processes. Participants who were asked to reflect on a positive conflict (i.e., higher satisfaction with the conflict) reported using more feasible behaviors that were more often in accordance with the situational demands they faced than participants who reflected on negative conflicts. Thus, Study 1 provides preliminary support for H1 and helps begin to build a case for the positive value of behavior-situation fit in situations of work conflict. However, the role of conflict adaptivity was not directly investigated in this study, as only one situation at one point in time was considered. Study 3 and Study 4 focused on assessing conflict adaptivity more formally.

Study 2: Content Validity of the Scenarios

The content validity of the scenarios that were gathered in Study 1 and are the basis for the MCAA was assessed by subject matter experts (SMEs) in Study 2.

Method. Fifteen SMEs rated all 15 scenarios. The SMEs were familiar with the situated model of conflict in social relations, but were not familiar with this specific series of studies, the scenarios or the purposes of the study. SMEs varied regarding gender (17% male, 83% female), age ($M=29.50$, $SD=8.63$), ethnicity (33% Asian, 58% White, 9% other) and educational background (42% Bachelor's Degree, 50% Master's Degree, 8% Doctorate Degree). All SMEs had experience working in organizations. After reading each scenario, SMEs were asked to rate the situation from the viewpoint of the main character (i.e., the manager). The SMEs were given 6 choices: the five most extreme regions of the model and another choice representing a mixed-motive, equal-power, medium interdependence option.

Results and discussion. The content validity was calculated with the Content Validity Ratio (CVR; Lawshe, 1975) = $\frac{n_e - N/2}{N/2}$. Where n_e is the number of SMEs who chose the correct answer (i.e., answers which correspond to our categorizations of the scenarios based on participants' rating in Study 1) and N is the total number of SMEs. It is suggested that the content validity is sufficient when 75% of SMEs identify the correct answer (Lawshe, 1975). As 75% of 15 SMEs is 11.25, we set the minimum at 11 SMEs, which equals a CVR of .47. In this study all scenarios had a content validity of $CVR \geq .47$ (Min=.47, Max=1.00, M=.68, SD=.18).

Test of the Hypotheses

After having developed a measure of conflict adaptivity - the MCAA - we conducted two studies in which we used the new measure to test H1-H3 (for reasons of feasibility we could not include all variables specified in H1-H3 in one questionnaire).

Study 3: MCAA, Satisfaction with Conflict Processes, Well-Being at Work, Self-Efficacy

The objective of this study was to test the relationship between adaptivity, as measured by the MCAA, and satisfaction with conflict processes and well-being at work. Thus, Study 3 addressed H1 and tested the concurrent validity of the new measure. In addition, we included a measure of self-efficacy - a concept that logically is related to conflict adaptivity as specified in H2 and H3.

Method. This study was administered using an online questionnaire which took participants 40 minutes to complete. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. Part one included the MCAA, assessing the conflict adaptivity-score. Part two consisted of a set of scales assessing satisfaction with conflict processes and well-being at work (satisfaction with coworkers, job-related affective well-being, and intentions to quit their job). The questionnaire also included a scale measuring self-efficacy. In order to thank participants for their participation, they were offered an individualized feedback profile report based on their answers to the questionnaire, which was sent to them via email within 3 days of their completion of the survey (email-addresses were deleted immediately afterwards).

Participants. Eighty-nine students or alumni of a large university in the Northeast of the USA completed the questionnaire. Participants were diverse regarding gender (35 % male), age (Min=21 years, Max=61 years, M=36 years, SD=10 years), ethnicity (7% Asian, 10% African, 10% Latin, 67% White , 6% other) and educational background (1% Associate's Degree, 53% Bachelor's Degree, 38% Master's Degree, 8% Doctorate Degree). The questionnaire was restricted to individuals with work experience (6% 0-1 years, 9% 1-3 years, 17% 3-5 years 68% more than 5 years); 80% reported having managerial responsibilities.

Measures. *Conflict adaptivity* was assessed with the newly developed MCAA. The MCAA was also used to measure *the frequency of cooperative behaviors* (see supplemental analysis): the percentage of cooperative behaviors (benevolence and support) across all scenarios.

Self-efficacy was assessed with the scale by Schwarzer, Bäßler, Kwiatek, and Schröder (1997, 10 items, $\alpha=.87$). To measure participant's *satisfaction with conflict processes at work* we used the respective subscale from the Subjective Value Inventory (SVI; Curhan, Elfenbein, & Xu, 2006). In our questionnaire the 4 items referred to the participants' general experience of conflict processes at work and formed a reliable scale ($\alpha=.85$). Further measures assessed well-being at work: their *job-related affective well-being* (JAWS; Van Katwyk, Fox, Spector, & Kelloway 2000; 30 items); their *satisfaction with their coworkers* (Bishop & Scott, 2000; 4 items; $\alpha=.86$) and *intentions to quit their job* (Spector, Dwyer, & Lex, 1988; 1 item).

Results and discussion. The correlations shown in Table 1 provide evidence that conflict adaptivity as measured with the MCAA is positively related to satisfaction with conflict processes as well as well-being at work, assessed with: satisfaction with coworkers (positive correlation with the MCAA), and job-related affective well-being (positive correlation with the MCAA) and intentions to quit (negative correlation with the MCAA). The correlations fully supported H1. Further results showed that conflict adaptivity is positively related to self-efficacy, supporting H2.

In addition we conducted a regression analysis where we tested whether conflict adaptivity explained unique parts of the variance of satisfaction with conflict processes and well-being at work above self-efficacy and control variables like sex and age as well as work and managerial experience. The results (see Table 2) support H3.

A supplemental analysis indicated that a higher frequency of use of more cooperative behaviors (assessed by the percentage of cooperative strategies employed across all scenarios in the MCAA; i.e., the percentage of benevolence and support) was not related significantly to satisfaction with conflict processes and well-being at work (see Table 1). This result contradicts many theoretical and empirical approaches highlighting cooperation as the best choice in conflict

situations (see Deutsch, 1973; Johnson & Johnson, 1989, 2005; Tjosvold, 1981, 1991, 2008), and provides an important area for future research.

Study 4: MCAA, Emotional Complexity, Self-Monitoring, and Behavioral Flexibility

The purpose of this study was to test the relationship between managerial conflict adaptivity and other related concepts: emotional complexity, self-monitoring, and behavioral flexibility (see H2). In order to explore the unique part of variance explained by managerial conflict adaptivity above and beyond self-monitoring, emotional complexity and behavioral flexibility as well as more broad personality traits like core-self evaluations (as specified in H3), we also included the measure for satisfaction with conflict processes at work, which was used in Study 3.

Method. The design of the study was similar to the design of Study 3. We asked individuals who had experience working in organizations to answer an online questionnaire which included the MCAA in addition to measures for self-monitoring, emotional complexity, behavioral flexibility, core self-evaluations, and satisfaction with conflict processes at work.

Participants. We recruited 126 participants from MA-classes of a large University in the Northeast of the US. Participants were diverse regarding sex (41% male), age (Min=21 years, Max=75 years, M=35.75 years, SD=9.55 years), and ethnicity (11% Asian, 14% African, 6% Latin, 63% White, 6% Other). We only recruited participants with substantial working experience (15% more than 2 years, 85% more than 5 years).

Measures. In addition to the MCAA, several scales were included in the questionnaire. *Self-monitoring* was assessed with the subscale “ability to modify self-presentation” (Lennox & Wolfe, 1984; 7 items; $\alpha=.80$). In order to assess *emotional complexity* we used a scale developed by Kang and Shaver (2004; 14 items; $\alpha=.90$). In addition we used the *Battery of Interpersonal Capacities* (BIC; Paulhus & Martin, 1987) to assess participants’ *behavioral flexibility*.

Capabilities refer to the ease of carrying off a particular response when required by the situation. The instrument asks individuals about 4 difficult behaviors (e.g., arrogant) and assesses how likely they would act that way, how difficult it would be for them, how anxious they would be and how likely they would avoid acting that way. Therefore 4 subscales are obtained with 4 items each: BIC “likely” ($\alpha=.65$), BIC “difficult” ($\alpha=.74$), BIC “anxious” ($\alpha=.82$), BIC “avoiding” ($\alpha=.79$). As conflict adaptivity refers to the fact that individuals show different behaviors in different situations, we expected a correlation between the MCAA and the BIC “likely” as well as BIC “avoiding”. Despite individuals showing different behaviors, they still might feel anxious about showing a particular behavior. Therefore we did not expect a relationship between the MCAA and BIC “difficult” or BIC “anxious”. Furthermore, we included the *core self-evaluations scale* (Judge et al., 2003); 12 items; $\alpha=.82$). Participant’s *satisfaction with conflict processes at work* was assessed with the respective subscale from the Subjective Value Inventory (SVI; Curhan et al., 2006; 4 items; $\alpha=.81$).

Results and discussion. Table 3 includes the correlations for the variables of this study. Individuals, who were adaptive in conflict situations displayed difficult behaviors in interpersonal situations (i.e., positive correlation between MCAA and BIC). Conflict adaptivity was not found to be related to the subscales regarding the difficulty of showing difficult behaviors or the anxiety around showing difficult behaviors. This is consistent with the idea of adaptivity, which suggests that responding to the demands of a situation might not be easy or pleasant but might lead to the preferred outcomes and therefore will be displayed. However, conflict adaptivity was found not to be correlated with self-monitoring or emotional complexity, which was inconsistent with our H3 hypotheses. This may indicate that people showing adaptivity in conflict and those “modifying self-presentation” have altogether different aims. For instance, adaptivity might have

practical implications for achieving goals in conflict, while modifying one's presentation might be the result of a need to manage one's image socially.

In order to assure that conflict adaptivity was sufficiently distinct from the other variables in this study, we conducted a stepwise regression. The MCAA remained significantly related to satisfaction with conflict processes even when our control variables, (sex, age, working, and managerial experience) core self-evaluations, self-monitoring, emotional complexity, and the battery of interpersonal capacities were included, which supported H3 (see Table 4).

General Discussion and Conclusion

The model and studies described here highlight the importance for managers of being adaptive in conflict in order to achieve more constructive forms of conflict resolution and higher levels of satisfaction and well-being at work. Instead of emphasizing a set of predispositions or conditions, the necessity of adapting flexibly to new or changing situations is stressed.

The objectives of the studies were threefold: First a measure for managerial conflict adaptivity - the MCAA - was developed and initially validated. Conflict scenarios for the measure were generated and categorized in Study 1, and their content was subsequently validated by subject matter experts in Study 2. The measure consists of 15 scenarios which vary along the three dimensions of the situated model of conflict in social relations (see Figure 1), and includes 5 behavioral response options after each scenario, which represent the 5 primary POs of the situated model of conflict in social relations. Participants who responded to the conflict situations in a more feasible manner according to the situated model of conflict in social relations were considered to be more adaptive.

Second, we tested whether managerial conflict adaptivity was associated with satisfaction with conflict processes and well-being at work and thus demonstrated the measures concurrent validity. Study 1 provided preliminary support, finding that participants who were asked to

reflect on a positive conflict reported using behaviors that were more often in accordance with the situational demands they faced than participants who reflected on negative conflicts. Study 3 provided more direct support as the newly developed MCAA was found to be positively related to satisfaction with conflict processes at work as well as well-being at work assessed through measures of satisfaction with coworkers, job-related affective well-being, and intentions to quit the job (i.e., positive correlation between the MCAA and the first two variables; negative correlation between MCAA and the latter).

Third in Studies 3 and 4, we assessed the construct validity of the MCAA. The MCAA was found to be positively associated with self-efficacy and behavioral flexibility (assessed with two subscales of the BIC) and to contribute to conflict and work satisfaction over and above these variables. However, conflict adaptivity was not found to be significantly correlated with self-monitoring or emotional complexity. The first result suggests that the participants' experience of their ability to modify the self-presentation component of self-monitoring may not be seen as directly relevant to adapting to perceived changes in the environment when in conflict. Perhaps modification of self-presentation is viewed as more internally motivated (I wish to appear a certain way), and adaptation as externally motivated (I should respond to this situation in a manner that fits and is effective). This distinction could be tested in subsequent research. The lack of a relationship between conflict adaptivity and emotional complexity might be explained by the fact that emotional complexity was measured as a general trait whereas conflict adaptivity was measured in relation to specific conflict situations. Assessing emotional complexity in the context of the same specific situation might be better suited to test the relationship between behavioral adaptivity and emotional complexity in conflict situations.

It is interesting to note that higher use of pure cooperative approaches to conflict (benevolence and support) did not show significant relations to satisfaction and well-being.

Future studies should examine the relationship between chronic, purely cooperative POs and conflict adaptivity. Perhaps the relationship is a temporal one, such as described by Thomas (1992):

I now realize that these two perspectives – the ‘collaborative ethic’ and contingency theories – are answers to different questions involving long-term and short-term goals, respectively. Contingency theories in conflict management have tended to provide answers to the short-term question of how best to cope with current conditions. They are grounded in the reality of the current situation and are therefore relatively pragmatic in flavor. However, this very pragmatism necessarily restricts contingency theories to the search for a short-term, local optimum, and makes them in essence reactive to these conditions. To move beyond the limitations of present conditions requires addressing the longer-term issue of how to improve conditions. It seems terribly important to recognize that trying to cope within some system of forces and constraints, while vital, is not the whole answer to conflict management. (p. 271)

In the short-term, adaptation may allow for a contingency-based approach to conflict where the goal is to achieve fit by acting in a manner appropriate to the nature of the situation. However, in order for constructive relations to be maintained, the adaptive individual must also hold the capacities to act in a cooperative manner more likely to lead to positive outcomes for all parties, such as higher levels self-esteem, trust, respect, affection, and more open exchange of information at the organizational level (Johnson & Johnson, 2005; Thomas, 1992; Tjosvold, 1991). To this end, as other scholars have proposed, perhaps adaptive individuals must ultimately be principled and pragmatic (O’Toole, 1995), firm with their goals but flexible with their means (Pruitt, 1995). This temporal relationship between cooperation and adaptation is another area ripe for future research.

Although the results of these studies are promising, several limitations should be mentioned. In Study 3 we provided evidence of the association of some positive work variables to higher MCAA scores. Study 4 provided some insight into the nomological network of the construct of the MCAA, however its relationships to other constructs should be examined as well. For instance, its relation to *cognitive complexity* (i.e., the capacity to adopt and to apply a variety of perspectives and in turn recognize connections and similarities across these perspectives; Bieri, 1955; Streufert & Streufert, 1978), *social complexity* (i.e., the ability to “differentiate the personal and relational aspects of a social situation and integrate them in a manner that results in increased understanding or changed action-intention valences”, Hooijberg, Hunt, & Dodge, 1997, p. 382), *social intelligence* (a concept which incorporates the ability to engage in adaptive social interactions among other things; for a review see Kihlstrom & Cantor, 2000), and *emotional intelligence* (a concept, which incorporates the recognition and control of emotions but also the ability to successfully cope with environmental demands and pressures; for a review see (Joseph & Newman, 2010) should be investigated.

Common-method and common-source biases are other limitations of our studies. Even though the MCAA is not a scale like the other variables included in the studies, which should lower the common-method variance, future research should explore the relationship between the MCAA and outcome variables assessed through other-ratings or objective measures. In addition, we cannot draw any causal conclusions from Studies 3 and 4 due to their correlational and cross-sectional nature. Experiments and longitudinal studies will be required to provide more insights into the directionality and mechanisms involved in the hypothesized relations.

Despite these limitations, the studies provide preliminary support for the idea that conflicts can be effectively managed to the parties' satisfaction when the disputants are able to move between different orientations, strategies, and tactics as the evolving situation requires.

This is similar to what Harvard Professor Joseph Nye refers to in foreign affairs as *smart power* (Nye, 1990), and what we label in the context of organizational disputing as *conflict intelligence* (Coleman & Ferguson, 2014). Research has found that although many negotiators and leaders tend to get stuck in one approach to negotiating conflict (often domination), our more effective leaders and managers are more nimble (Hooijberg & Quinn, 1992; Lawrence, Lenk, & Quinn, 2009; Zartman & Rubin, 2002). They read situations more carefully, consider their short and longer-term objectives, and then employ a variety of different strategies in order to increase the probabilities that their agenda will succeed (Coleman & Ferguson, 2014; Dörner, 1997). Like Nelson Mandela, leaders and managers of all types would benefit from learning to skillfully employ every strategy available to them – hard and soft, public and private, overt and covert, short-term and long-term – to achieve their objectives in conflict.

Furthermore, the conceptualization and operationalization of conflict adaptivity developed here are representative of a broader trend in conflict research; away from the more static concepts and models of conflict research (defining conflict as a *perceived divergence of interest*; see Pruitt et al., 2004) and toward the new world of *conflict dynamics*. This approach to social conflict builds on the thinking of greats such as Kurt Lewin and Morton Deutsch, but incorporates contemporary calls to view conflict not at a moment-in-time, but rather as a process unfolding in relationships and different situations across time (Coleman, 2011; De Dreu 2010; De Dreu & Gelfand 2008; Pondy, 1967). Our focus on conflict adaptivity is aligned with the view of conflict as a *relational process that is influenced by the perception of incompatible activities* (Coleman, et al., 2012), but recognizes that these processes typically occur in a relational context with a sense of history, a normative trajectory, and changing circumstances. In other words, conflicts, or incompatible activities, often only perturb the flow of ongoing psycho-social processes. This re-orientation of our field toward more fluid dynamics could not come at a better time.

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Appendix: The Managerial Conflict Adaptivity Assessment (MCAA)

Sample Scenario out of the 15 scenarios of the MCAA. This scenario represents Region 3, see Figure 1: *“You are a middle manager at a large soft drink distribution company. You and your boss are responsible for the roll-out of a new product, which is very important to the company and for both of your future careers. You always work well together and it is important to both of you that this project is a success. Lately, however, you find yourself needing to fill-in and cover for your boss, as he has not been doing his job. You sometimes feel overwhelmed because of this. How would you react towards your boss?”*

The 5 response options provided to participants after each scenario. *“Choose the one strategy that best describes how you would respond to each situation, even if you would not employ all the behaviors included in the strategy:”* 1) Support: *“You obtain assistance and support from others to solve the problem through tactics like asking for help from those with relevant authority or power, or by attending more carefully to those you depend on in the situation in order to gain a better understanding of what’s going on.”* 2) Autonomy: *“You disengage from the situation or the relationship in which you are experiencing the problem and try to find some other way to achieve your goals and meet your needs by yourself.* 3) Dominance: *“You use your authority directly to get others to behave as you believe they should in order to solve the problem, including if necessary warning and threatening them with consequences.”* 4) Benevolence: *“You model how to behave constructively and responsibly in the situation by inviting those involved with the problem to discuss the matter cooperatively and sharing your concerns.”* 5) Appeasement: *“You tolerate the situation for now and try to smooth things over as best you can – as you know there is little you can do to make the situation better other than accepting it for now and waiting for opportunities to employ more subtle, coercive tactics later, if you feel you can get away with it.”*

Table 1

Correlations between the variables of Study 3

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Sex	0.65	0.48	—										
2. Age	36.02	10.03	-.07	—									
3. Working experience	4.48	0.88	.03	.46**	—								
4. Managerial experience	0.80	0.40	-.08	.19	.25*	—							
5. Satisfaction with conflict processes	4.85	1.15	-.08	.08	.12	.16	(.85)						
6. Job-related affective well-being scale	3.38	0.61	-.11	.06	.14	.36**	.52**	—					
7. Satisfaction working with coworkers	5.38	0.98	.03	-.00	.03	.12	.53**	.57**	(.86)				
8. Quitting	3.35	2.06	.17	.12	.05	-.15	-.39**	-.66**	-.34**	—			
9. Self-efficacy	5.54	0.70	-.06	.05	.17	.01	.26*	.16	.32**	.06	(.87)		
10. Frequency of cooperative behaviors	61.44	17.00	.12	.23*	.15	-.03	-.14	-.19	-.13	.18	-.01	—	
11. Managerial Conflict Adaptivity Assessment (MCAA)	2.30	0.18	-.23*	-.03	.09	.08	.26*	.31**	.27*	-.24*	.26*	-.58**	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. $N = 89$. Coefficient alphas are presented in parentheses along the diagonal.

High values correspond to higher levels of the named concept.

Sex: 0=male, 1=female; age: years; working experience: 1= no experience, 2=0-1 years, 3=1-3 years, 4=3-5 years, 5= more than 5 years; managerial experience: 0= no, 1= yes; satisfaction with conflict processes: 7-point scale; job-related affective well-being scale: 5-point scale; satisfaction working with coworkers: 7-point scale; quitting: 7-point scale; self-efficacy: 7-point scale; pure cooperation: percentage; MCAA: scale ranging from 1= low levels of conflict adaptivity, 3= high levels of conflict adaptivity.

Table 2

Stepwise regression analysis for Study 3 showing standardized coefficients (β)

Variables	Satisfaction with conflict processes at work			Job-related affective well-being			Satisfaction with working with coworkers			Intentions to quit the job		
<i>Step 1</i>												
Sex	-.06	-.04	.02	-.07	-.06	.02	.05	.08	.14	.17	.18	.11
Age	.02	.03	.06	-.04	-.04	.00	-.02	-.00	.03	.15	.16	.13
Working experience	.08	.03	-.00	.07	.04	.01	.00	-.06	-.09	.03	.02	.04
Managerial experience	.13	.14	.12	.34**	.35**	.33**	.12	.13	.11	-.16	-.16	-.15
<i>Step 2</i>												
Self-efficacy		.25*	.20		.15	.08		.33**	.28*		.06	.10
<i>Step 3</i>												
Managerial Conflict Adaptivity Assessment (MCAA)			.23*			.30**			.25*			-.24*
R ²	.04	.10	.14	.14	.16	.23	.02	.12	.18	.07	.07	.13
ΔR^2		.06*	.05*		.02	.08**		.11**	.05*		.00	.06*
F	0.77	1.76	2.26*	3.23*	3.01*	4.12**	0.34	2.26	2.85*	1.47	1.24	1.92

Note. *p<.05, **p<.01.

Table 3

Correlations between the variables of Study 4

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Sex	0.59	0.49	—												
2. Age	35.75	9.55	-.08	—											
3. Experience working	4.85	0.36	-.04	.24**	—										
4. Managerial experience	0.90	0.31	-.18**	.15	.15	—									
5. Satisfaction with conflict processes	3.16	0.70	.08	-.02	-.15	.02	(.81)								
6. Core self-evaluations scale	3.89	0.58	-.17	.20*	.06	.15	.21*	(.82)							
7. Self-monitoring: modify self-presentation	3.77	0.66	.10	-.06	-.06	-.02	.15	.09	(.80)						
8. Emotional complexity	3.70	0.70	.27**	.02	.08	-.04	.06	-.05	.22*	(.90)					
9. Battery of interpersonal capacities: "likely"	3.57	0.50	-.21*	-.13	.02	.18*	.13	.01	.24**	.00	(.65)				
10. Battery of interpersonal capacities: "difficult"	2.57	0.44	.11	.00	-.03	-.21*	-.08	-.14	-.26**	-.07	-.52**	(.74)			
11. Battery of interpersonal capacities: "anxious"	2.60	0.52	.10	-.13	-.03	-.12	-.11	-.32**	-.23**	-.03	-.20*	.53**	(.82)		
12. Battery of interpersonal capacities: "avoiding"	2.54	0.45	.07	.05	.05	-.12	-.21*	-.18*	-.24**	-.03	-.52**	.53**	.56**	(.79)	
13. Managerial Conflict Adaptivity Assessment (MCAA)	2.28	0.19	-.14	-.01	.07	.05	.22*	.03	-.10	.05	.19*	-.05	.10	-.22*	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. $N = 126$. Coefficient alphas are presented in parentheses along the diagonal.

High values represent high levels of the named construct.

Sex: 0=male, 1=female; age: years; working experience: 1= no experience, 2=0-1 years, 3=1-3 years, 4=3-5 years, 5= more than 5 years; managerial experience: 0= no, 1= yes;

satisfaction with conflict processes: 5-point scale; core self-evaluations scale: 5-point scale; self-monitoring: 5-point scale; emotional complexity; 5-point scale; battery of

interpersonal capacities: 5-point scale; MCAA: scale ranging from 1= low levels of conflict adaptivity, 3= high levels of conflict adaptivity.

Table 4

Stepwise regression analysis for Study 4 showing standardized coefficients (β)

Variable	Satisfaction with conflict processes		
<i>Step 1</i>			
Sex	.09	.12	.15
Age	.02	.01	.01
Working experience	-.16	-.15	-.17
Managerial experience	.06	.02	.02
<i>Step 2</i>			
Core self-evaluations scale		.22*	.21*
Self-monitoring		.07	.10
Emotional complexity		.03	.01
Battery of interpersonal capacities: "likely"		.09	.08
Battery of interpersonal capacities: "difficulty"		.07	.07
Battery of interpersonal capacities: "anxiety"		.05	-.03
Battery of interpersonal capacities: "avoiding"		-.17	-.08
<i>Step 3</i>			
Managerial Conflict Adaptivity Assessment (MCAA)			.23*
R ²	.03	.13	.17
ΔR^2		.10	.04*
F	0.99	1.53	1.96*

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

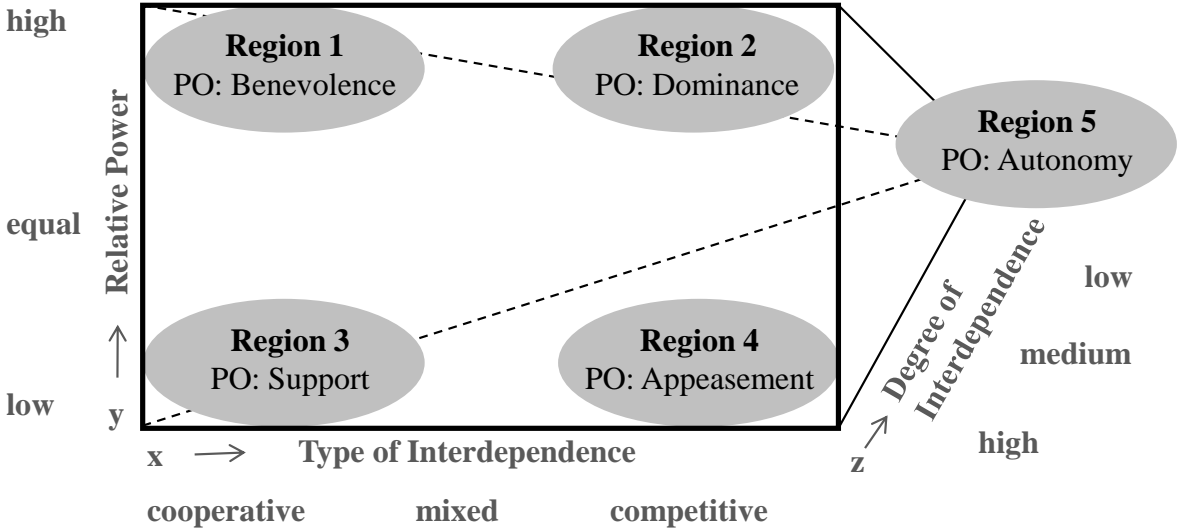


Figure 1. The situated model of conflict in social relations. PO = Psychological Orientation.