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An exploratory analysis of conflict dynamics in buyer-supplier relationships

Bouazzaoui, Meriem

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**AN EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS OF CONFLICT
DYNAMICS IN BUYER-SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIPS**

MERIEM BOUAZZAOU

A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
University of Bath
School of Management

September 2018

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I praise Allah SWT for giving me the strength and courage to complete this thesis

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ABSTRACT

Conflict in buyer-supplier relationships is a regular occurrence (Koza and Dant, 2007), and therefore, scholars have sought to understand its nature, its antecedents, and its outcomes (Bai *et al.*, 2016; Cai *et al.*, 2017; Leonidou *et al.*, 2017). While this literature has been valuable to our initial understanding of the phenomenon, conflict has largely been considered static, and the very nature of conflict as a process has been neglected (McCarter *et al.*, 2018; Krafft *et al.*, 2015). This theoretical limitation was reflected in a further methodological limitation where studies have used cross-sectional surveys to investigate a dynamic phenomenon. Theory on conflict dynamics, i.e. the process of emergence, management and resolution of conflict, remains significantly underdeveloped and poorly understood (Mikkelsen and Clegg, 2017). The present thesis addresses these gaps and aims at understanding longitudinal conflict and its resolution in buyer-supplier relationships.

This PhD thesis is structured around three separate, but interlinked, papers. Each study addresses different aspects of the main research objective, and provides its own theoretical and managerial contributions. *Study 1* is a systematic literature review that identifies gaps in the current literature that merit further investigation. It highlights four 'blind spots' (cf. (Lumineau and Oliveira, 2018)) including 1) conflict asymmetry, 2) conflict valence, 3) conflict single level of analysis, and 4) conflict over time, and proposes research opportunities within and between each. *Study 2* explores buyer-supplier conflict resolution and builds a context-dependent understanding of resolution tactics. This study also provides a nuanced picture on the timing and the evolving importance of resolution tactics over the conflict episode. *Study 3* aims at formulating a dynamic model of conflict processes to understand how conflict unfolds over time. It provides a phase-model with a particular focus on the dynamics of task and relationship conflict types.

The thesis seeks to contribute theoretically, methodologically and practically to the extant buyer-supplier conflict literature. Theoretically, the studies uncover dynamic complexities hidden within buyer-supplier conflict, which have hitherto been overlooked. Methodologically, the studies answer calls for more granular and longitudinal research both within the buyer-supplier (Krafft *et al.*, 2015; Lumineau and Oliveira, 2018; Terpend *et al.*, 2008), and more general operations management (Voss, 2010; Flynn *et al.*, 1990) literatures. Practically, the studies seek to offer managers a more nuanced picture of conflict, as stated by Mikkelsen and Clegg (2017, p. 10) "*for practitioners to feel that their experience of conflict is*

reflected in the theorization of conflict, such theorization must incorporate complex types of understanding'. Therefore, this study enhances managers' understanding of the complexities inherent to conflict and its resolution, which are crucial aspects to the success of their exchange relationships (Pfajfar *et al.*, 2017).

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I. Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the Research

Buyer-supplier relationships have been widely examined in the literature. Scholars have reported that these relationships are a source of competitive advantage (Bensaou, 1999; Wagner and Bode, 2014) because they enable increased synchronization of the supply chain (Monczka *et al.*, 1998), operational flexibility (Bowersox, 1990), and cost reduction (Saeed *et al.*, 2005). However, these relationships are not only characterised by collaborative activities, but also entail instances of conflict (Roehrich and Karam, 2015) that could bring either positive or negative change to the relationship. For instance, while conflict could intensify value-creation (Mele, 2011), refine the on-going relationship (Chang and Gotcher, 2010), and enhance partners' ability to work together in the future (Koza and Dant, 2007), it could also reduce satisfaction (Humphreys *et al.*, 2009; Lee, 2001), obliterate trust (Leonidou *et al.*, 2006), and ultimately lead to relationship termination (Johnsen and Lacoste, 2016).

Recognising this duality in conflict outcomes, scholars have examined both the type of conflict (Jehn, 1997; Rose *et al.*, 2007; Lee *et al.*, 2017) and the conflict resolution process (Bobot, 2011; Le Nguyen *et al.*, 2016) as two distinct mechanisms that determine conflict outcomes. While such research has provided valuable insights into antecedents and outcomes, cross-sectional research designs have simplified conflict rather than deepened our understanding of its complexity and dynamic nature (Thomas, 1992; Koza and Dant, 2007; McCarter *et al.*, 2018). Accordingly, we build on previous conflict and conflict resolution research, and argue in favour of theory development that explicitly deals with the process of conflict to unravel its dynamics, including the interplay between conflict types and the resolution process.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

This research explores buyer-supplier conflict dynamics over time. Specifically, the aim of the thesis is to contribute to the buyer-supplier conflict literature by providing a more complete view on how conflict and its resolution are manifested over time. Although researchers have come to acknowledge that conflict is a process, rather than an event, the

exact nature of conflict dynamics remains understudied. The following aims and objectives were developed for the present research:

1. *Examine the state of the art of the current supply chain conflict research.*

The first objective of this study is to use a systematic literature review (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003) to map out the current state of the literature, identify research gaps that merit further attention, and propose future research directions.

2. *Understand what and when conflict resolution tactics are used over the conflict episode.* The second objective of this study is to explore specific conflict resolution tactics and the context in which they are deployed in order to understand their efficacy at different points within the conflict episode.

3. *Examine the conflict process with a focus on the dynamics of task and relationship conflicts.* The third, and final, objective of this study is to investigate how conflict evolves towards functional or dysfunctional outcomes by specifically mapping the trajectories of both task and relationship conflicts over time.

1.3 Thesis Outline

This PhD research is structured as an article-based thesis, comprised of a context chapter that sets the scene for the study, and three separate articles that are written for publication in three separate journals. Each of these articles raises distinct research questions and presents independent contributions to the literature. Yet, they are closely interlinked and complementary as each addresses a specific aspect of the main objective of the thesis, which is exploring and understanding buyer-supplier conflict dynamics. The thesis ends with a general conclusion. The structure of the thesis is illustrated in Figure I.1

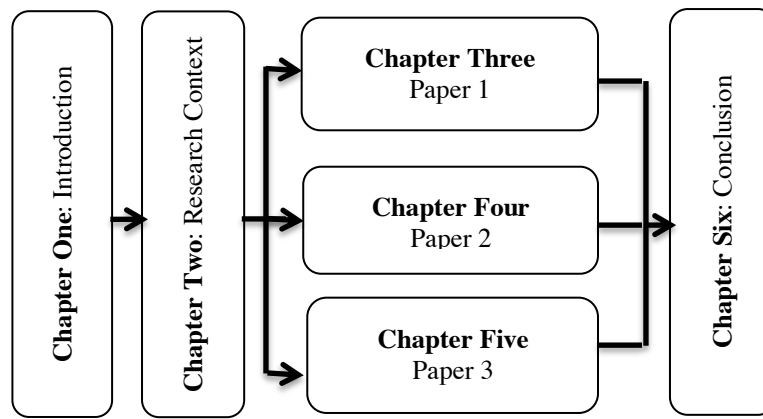


Figure I-1: Thesis structure

Chapter 2: *Research context* – Chapter 2 provides an overview of the evolution of conflict as a research area, and positions the research within the extant literature. This chapter also offers a brief overview of the study’s philosophical and methodological considerations, and describes the data collection context. The chapter concludes with extended abstracts of each of the three papers included in the thesis.

Chapter 3: *Paper 1*– Chapter 3 presents the first article, titled “*Buyer-supplier conflict: A Systematic Literature Review and Guide to Future Research*”. The purpose of this paper is to map buyer-supplier conflict research in order to identify research gaps that require further attention. Using a systematic literature review methodology (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003; Denyer and Tranfield, 2009), 115 articles were identified, and descriptive and thematic analyses were subsequently performed. The findings showed that the current literature focused on conflict antecedents’ and outcomes, and to a lesser extent on conflict resolution and the different types of conflict. In light of core assumptions underlying buyer-supplier relationships (cf. (Lumineau and Oliveira, 2018)), this paper proposes four key research avenues to advance conflict research: 1) conflict asymmetry, 2) conflict valence, 3) conflict single level of analysis, and 4) conflict over time. The paper will help researchers and practitioners better understand conflict and its resolution process.

Chapter 4: *Paper 2*– Chapter 4 presents the second article, titled “*Buyer-Supplier Conflict Resolution: Timing, Tactics, Resources, and Relationship Quality*”. It explores conflict resolution, and firstly aims at understanding the range of conflict resolution tactics and the context in which they are deployed; and second it reflects conflict resolution tactics over time. The findings highlights that conflict tactics can be classified along two dimensions: content and temporal orientation. In addition, two contextual variables emerged from the

data: relationship quality and resources. These two variables interact to buffer/activate the impact of resolution misalignment on conflict intensity. Finally, the data showed that different tactics are needed over the conflict episode depending on the level of conflict intensity.

Chapter 5: *Paper 3*– Chapter 5 presents the final article, titled “*A Dynamic Model Of Buyer-Supplier Conflict Processes*”. This study is the first (to the best of the researcher’s knowledge) to empirically investigate the dynamics of conflict processes in buyer-supplier relationships by breaking down conflict into task and relationship (Jehn, 1995, 1997; Amason and Schweiger, 1994). The findings indicate three phases: conflict initiation, task-relationship conflict spiral, and conflict outcomes, and propose empirically grounded mechanisms underlying intraphase and interphase dynamics.

Chapter 6: *Discussion & Conclusion*- Chapter 6 discusses the theoretical and managerial implications of this research, as well as research limitations and future directions.

1.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided an introductory overview of the thesis by presenting the research introduction, the purpose and objectives of the study, as well as the outline of the thesis structure. The following chapter introduces the background to conflict research and positions the thesis within it.

II. Chapter Two: Research Context

This chapter is divided into four sections that provide an overview of the research context. Section 2.1 highlights the research background, providing a definition of conflict, as well as an overview of theories, resolution approaches and outcomes within the conflict literature. Section 2.2 provides a brief introduction to conflict in buyer-supplier relationships (Chapter 3 examines this literature in greater depth through a systematic review). Section 2.3 describes the research philosophy and methodology used, and provides background information on the data collection context, including the country and the industry, as well as the four case studies. Finally, Section 2.4 presents abstracts of the papers included in this thesis.

2.1 Research Background

2.1.1 Conflict Definition

Conflict has a long-standing research history in various disciplines. It has therefore been studied from multiple perspectives, and this has resulted in a myriad of definitions. Early conflict definitions assumed that all cases of conflict would involve competition, and hence equated conflict to competition (Strauss, 1964; Boulding, 1957) (See Fink (1968) for a review). This conception of the conflict construct has been associated with a more negative view of conflict, where interaction patterns are circumscribed and competitive approaches to conflict resolution are mostly used (Walton and Dutton, 1969). However, these scholars have overlooked the fact that even when members are not in direct competition or have overlapping goals, they can be in conflict (Tjosvold, 1998). Kabanoff (1985, p. 114) illustrated this point and stated that individuals “*who believe they should be working together find that they are unable to do so effectively, that is...conflict develops primarily from people’s normal attempts to cooperate or coordinate their efforts*”. Consequently, researchers advocated that conflict and competition are distinct constructs.

Subsequently, scholars moved beyond the conflict vs. competition debate and attempted to define the conflict concept. Thomas and Schmidt (1976, p. 653) referred to 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*”. Similarly, Wall Jr and Callister (1995, p. 517) described conflict as “*the process in which one party perceives that its interests are being*

opposed or negatively affected by another party". Essentially, two elements are present in these definitions: a) conflict is a process involving two or more parties, and b) for conflict to exist, a party must perceive that its interests are opposed by the other party. In this research, the definition provided by Thomas and Schmidt (1976) is used because it fits the objective of the present study and has been used in previous buyer-supplier conflict research.

2.1.2 The Evolution of Conflict Theory

Conflict has received considerable attention from scholars from different disciplines including philosophy, sociology, and management. Three schools of thoughts have emerged with different views with regards to conflict: conflict as negative, conflict as positive, and conflict as neutral.

Philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle stressed the destructiveness of conflict and claimed that a just form of life in society can only be achieved in the total absence of conflict. To them, conflict has a pathological status because "*strife is a sign of imperfection and unhappiness*", while order has a benign status because it "*marks the good life*" (Rahim, 2017). Accordingly, there was a tendency to regard conflict as "*altogether bad*" (Fink, 1968, p. 445), and a threat to the success of the state that should ideally be removed. In a similar vein, sociologists, including Elton Mayo and Talcott Parsons, continued to view conflict as a dysfunctional phenomenon to the extent that it is fully capable of wreaking havoc on society (Rubin *et al.*, 1994). Similarly, in management, the classical organisational theorists, including Frederick Taylor, Henry Fayol, and Max Weber, assumed that conflict is destructive to efficiency and therefore organisations should develop procedures to minimize its occurrence (Rahim, 2017). On the other hand, Follett (2003, p. 67) argued that "*as we cannot avoid it, we should, I think, use it to work for us*", thereby highlighting that conflict is omnipresent in organisations and that managers should learn to accept it and learn how to use its possible benefits. She also highlighted "*We can often measure our progress by watching the nature of our conflicts. Social progress is in this respect like individual progress; we become spiritually more and more developed as our conflicts rise to higher levels*" (p. 35).

The assumptions of Follett have led other theorists to consider the benefits of organisational conflict and this has resulted in a modern view of conflict led principally by Litterer (1966) and Whyte (1967). Therefore, the authors established that a certain amount of conflict could be as essential as stability in achieving a proper functioning of groups, as

it “*energizes people to activity*” (Litterer, 1966, p. 180). Similarly, Pondy (1967) asserts that “*it is through conflict that teams can be productive and enhancing and leaders effective*” (p. 92). He viewed conflict as constructive and even posited conflict as a characteristic of “healthy organisations”. Essentially, scholars from this school emphasised that a system might lose its viability and become non-innovative if it is conflict-free, and therefore, they suggested that conflict should be stimulated in organisations for a better performance. This has subsequently aroused scholars’ interest and a new research era has emerged on the functionality of conflict.

Finally, a third theoretical position led by Kerr (1964) also emerged in organisational conflict. It is positioned within an interactionist philosophy, and hence differs from the two philosophies previously mentioned. Researchers within this tradition consider conflict as inevitable and inherently neutral, and underscore the importance of resolving conflict properly (Mikkelsen and Clegg, 2017). Consequently, the potential good or bad outcomes of conflict on individuals and organisations depend on the means through which conflicts are addressed (Brett *et al.*, 1990; Barki and Hartwick, 2004).

The different schools of thoughts that have emerged increased the importance of conflict as a research area. Unsurprisingly, interest into conflict, its outcomes, how it arises, and how it can be mitigated has substantially increased (McCarter *et al.*, 2018). This has not only been reflected by the proliferation of conflict studies but also by the formation of the International Association for Conflict Management and Conflict Management Division of the Academy of Management. These initiatives aimed at encouraging research, teaching, and training on managing conflicts within societies and organisations. Moreover, the creation and publication in 1990 of the *International Journal of Conflict Management* further emphasised the increased interest in conflict as a research stream (Rahim, 2017).

In conclusion, the original view of conflict as a detrimental aspect of society and organisations has progressively shifted to acknowledge its potential positive effects. Scholars emphasized the Janus-faced nature of conflict in a sense that it is not necessarily dysfunctional but could also be beneficial to organisations. Consequently, because conflict has been shown to be both inevitable and potentially constructive, researchers further examined the nature of the conflict construct including its types. This will be discussed next.

2.1.3 Conflict Types

Existing research recognises that conflict could have both beneficial and detrimental outcomes because it appears in different forms (Amason and Schweiger, 1994). Because individuals' interactions involve differences of opinion that are either substantive (i.e., cognitive) or personal (i.e., affective or emotional) in nature, early conflict researchers have made the conceptual distinction between conflict types (Wall Jr and Nolan, 1987; Priem and Price, 1991; Guetzkow and Gyr, 1954; Torrance, 1957). For instance, Wall Jr and Nolan (1987) differentiate between relationship issues that are people-centred, and issues that are related to the substantive content of an activity. Nonetheless, a formal common typology of conflict has only emerged in 1995.

The seminal work of Jehn (1995) has made a significant impact on the literature regarding conflict typology. The author found that individuals distinguished between two main types of conflict in a performance episode: Task conflict, which refers to disagreements rooted in the content and issues of the task that the group is performing, and relationship conflict, which derives from the emotional aspects of the interpersonal relation. Subsequently, Amason and Sapienza (1997) brought into focus a similar categorisation albeit using a different terminology, and highlighted cognitive and emotional conflicts to refer to task and relationship conflicts respectively. A further refinement of the conflict typology resulted in the addition of a third type: process conflict. Based on a qualitative study of six organisational work teams, Jehn (1997) introduced the concept of process conflict to refer to disagreements related to the procedures and the means for accomplishing the task (e.g. resources delegation and responsibilities). Table II-1 provides definitions of conflict types that are mostly used in the literature.

This conceptual distinction has made numerous contributions across multiple empirical investigations at the intraorganisational level, specifically with regards to the differential impacts of conflict types. Conflict theory suggests that task conflict represents the bright side of conflict, while relationship conflict illustrates its dark side. Several studies have demonstrated the benefits of task conflict, including team performance (Jehn, 1995), and decision quality and strategic planning (Amason and Schweiger, 1994). Because task conflict stimulates divergent cognitive processes within the team, it helps team members consider task-related issues from various perspectives, and come up with innovative ideas with regards to task completion. Conversely, relationship conflict negatively affects creative behaviour, member morale, and consensus building as it generates uncomfortable

feelings of frustration and anxiety, which are detrimental to team performance (Jehn and Bendersky, 2003).

Recent research has demonstrated that although there are two types of conflict, it is important to consider them in parallel rather than in isolation. Researchers demonstrated that the two types of conflict are closely intertwined and suggested that it is often difficult to get one without also getting the other (Mooney *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, because types of conflict were considered independently (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003), existing findings are to be considered with caution.

CONFLICT TYPE	EXISTING DEFINITIONS
Task conflict	<p><i>“Differences over work-related issues and ideas”</i> (Friedman <i>et al.</i>, 2000, p. 37)</p> <p><i>“Task conflict in team decision making refers to disagreements about the work to be done including issues such as the allocation of resources, application of procedures, and the development and implementation of policies”</i> (Janssen <i>et al.</i>, 1999, p. 119).</p>
Relationship conflict	<p><i>“Is directed toward the people within the team (i.e., questioning the competence of others, arguing ad hominem, struggling for leadership...and dealing with personality differences)”</i> (Sessa, 1996, p. 104)</p> <p><i>“Exists when there are interpersonal incompatibilities among group members, which typically includes tension, animosity and annoyance among members within a group”</i> (Jehn, 1995, p. 258)</p> <p><i>“Is based on negative affect and involves things like friction, tension, and dislike among members within the group”</i> (Pearson <i>et al.</i>, 2002, p. 114)</p>
Process conflict	<p><i>“It is defined as an awareness of controversies about aspects of how task accomplishment will proceed”</i> (Jehn and Mannix, 2001, p. 239)</p>

Table II-1 Definitions of conflict types

2.1.4 Conflict Resolution

Organisational conflict resolution research has taken two directions: the amount or level of conflict and conflict resolution strategies. Following the emergence of conflict categorization into task and relationship conflict, scholars argued that a moderate amount of task conflict is necessary for stimulating organisational effectiveness, whereas relationship conflict should be eliminated because it can have detrimental effect. Therefore, conflict resolution has been considered as an *“intervention to reduce conflict if there is too much, or intervention to promote conflict if there is too little”* (Brown *et al.*, 1983, p. 9). Hence,

the first tradition of conflict resolution considered conflict as an outcome. Scholarly research is normative and its purpose is to enhance conflict that is deemed positive, and to reduce conflict that is considered detrimental. However, one issue with this approach is that the two dimensions of conflict are positively correlated. Therefore, as noted by Amason and Schweiger (1997, p. 108), “*the danger of encouraging disagreement may yield results that are no better and may well be worse than avoiding conflict altogether The problem is that our ability to stimulate conflict outstrips our knowledge of how to manage its effects*”. Therefore, parties will see themselves facing a dilemma into how they can encourage task conflict without inadvertently stimulating relationship conflict.

The second approach to conflict resolution describes the strategies that individuals enact in a conflict situation. A number of theoretical frameworks have been employed to examine these strategies (Blake and Mouton, 1964; Rahim and Bonoma, 1979; Thomas, 1992). The majority of these frameworks are two-dimensional and offer similar categorizations, although they use different criteria and different strategy labels. One of the most prevalent conceptualizations is Thomas (1992), which considers strategies as a function of the individual’s degree of assertiveness and his/her willingness to cooperate with the other party. Five conflict resolution strategies were derived: competing (one party wins at the expense of the other), collaborating (parties try to seek maximum satisfaction of their concerns through high cooperation), avoiding (ignoring all concerns), accommodating (one party gives in to the desires of the other), and compromising (Both parties give and take so as to gain partial fulfilment of their desires).

2.1.5 Conflict Outcomes

Researchers found that conflict could be both positive and negative and this has been referred to in the literature as functional vs. dysfunctional conflict (Prince *et al.*, 2016; Bobot, 2011; Hunt, 1995; Skarmeas, 2006; Cheng and Sheu, 2012) or constructive vs. destructive conflict (Yang *et al.*, 2017; Rawwas *et al.*, 1997). However, these terms have not been properly defined, and therefore have, at times, been used in an arbitrary manner in extant research. While some researchers used the terms to refer to conflict outcomes (i.e. they assessed the impact of conflict on relationship performance after the conflict is resolved), other considered the functionality/dysfunctionality to refer to the conflict resolution process or the approach that is likely to result in positive outcomes. In addition, and to a lesser extent, others used this distinction to refer to conflict types (i.e. task conflict is considered as functional while relationship conflict is considered as dysfunctional

conflict). Table II-2 provides definitions related to each of the above-mentioned research perspectives.

Conflict can have a wide range of outcomes. Researchers have used various elements to evaluate conflict function and dysfunction in organisations, however no common framework has been developed. For instance, Brown *et al.* (1991) used satisfaction as a proxy for relationship performance, and Anderson and Narus (1984) referred to outcomes as the productivity of the relationship. Assael (1969) provided five constructive outcomes to channel conflict including “critical review of past actions”, “system communication and outlets for grievances”, “resource allocation”, “standardisation of conflict resolution”, and “balance of power”. According to the author, partners’ ability to review the organisational policies under disagreement is a positive outcome of conflict. Likewise, functional conflict outcomes manifest in increased communication and improved formal means of communication to redress accumulated hostilities. Moreover, conflict can create a more equitable allocation of power and resources. Finally, conflict results in standardised procedures for conflict resolution that will facilitate the management of future conflicts and establish a degree of stability. Similarly, Eckert and Rinehart (2005) suggested “releasing hostilities”, “adjustment of norms”, and “reassessment of activities” as potential functional outcomes. Finally, Song *et al.* (2006, pp. 344-345) provided more general definitions and referred to dysfunctional conflict as “*conflict in which [partners] disagree and do not feel good about their working relationships as a result of their conflict dynamics*”, and functional conflict as “*conflict in which [partners] disagree and feel better about their working relationships as a result of their conflict dynamics*”.

On the other hand, other researchers used function/dysfunction to refer not to the outcomes but to the practices used to resolve conflict (e.g. searching a variety of perspectives, openly discussing differences (Schweiger *et al.*, 1989; Kirchmeyer and Cohen, 1992)). A functional conflict in this sense is similar to a cooperative problem-solving approach, whereas a dysfunctional conflict reflects a competitive interaction (Deutsch, 1994) (See previous sub-section on conflict resolution). However, using constructive and destructive conflict to refer to the process of conflict resolution can further increase the inconsistency in the existing findings with regards to the role of conflict in organisations.

	DEFINITIONS	OUTCOMES	RESOLUTION	TYPE
Functional conflict	<i>“Constructive conflict has been labelled as discussion, bargaining, debate, or a win-win approach in which the participants agree through discussion on the best way to perform the current task”</i> (Yang <i>et al.</i> , 2017, p. 145)		x	x
	<i>“Conflicts are constructive to the extent that participants consider that overall they have gained more benefits than costs”</i> (Tjosvold, 2008, p. 20)	x		
	<i>“Functional conflict is the constructive challenging of ideas, beliefs, and assumptions, and respect for others’ viewpoints even when parties disagree”</i> (Massey and Dawes, 2007, p. 1119) (p. 1119)		x	
	<i>“An evaluative appraisal of the results of recent efforts to manage disagreements ”</i> (Rawwas <i>et al.</i> , 1997, p. 52)	x		
	<i>“Conflict where conflict aftermath or outcome results in long-term benefits to all (or both in the case of a dyad) channel members”</i> (Hunt, 1995, p. 419).	x		
Dysfunctional conflict	<i>“The result of the influence of strong forces that push the parties toward increasingly hostile behaviour”</i> (Rawwas <i>et al.</i> , 1997, p. 52).	x	x	
	<i>“Destructive conflict is usually regarded as involving domination and control, or a win-lose approach, which may result in harmful consequences such as feuding or the destruction of relationships”</i> (Yang <i>et al.</i> , 2017, p. 145)		x	
	<i>“Dysfunctional conflicts constitute unhealthy behaviours such as distorting information to harm other decision makers, interacting with each other with hostility and distrust, or forming barriers during the process of decision-making”</i> (Cheng and Sheu, 2012, p. 566).		x	

Table II-2: The definition of conflict function / dysfunction

Finally, scholars referred to task conflict and relationship conflict as constructive and destructive conflict respectively. However, this literature has focused on the source of conflict being either rooted in substantive or personal issues rather than on the outcomes of conflict. For instance, in the sales literature, Reid *et al.* (2004) used constructive conflict to refer to task conflict and destructive conflict to refer to relationship conflict. Along similar vein, Claro *et al.* (2018), in a multi-channel setting, used a similar distinction to study

the impact of conflict on improving supplier-reseller relationship performance. However, the description of conflict types as functional/dysfunctional is contradictory to initial conflict research where conflict is considered as a neutral phenomenon (Coser, 1956).

To sum up, this section has introduced the dominant theoretical assumptions underpinning conflict research to date. The premise of this section is that conflict theory has moved from a conceptualisation of conflict as a destructive phenomenon to acknowledge the potential for conflict as a constructive force within organisations. Next, buyer-supplier conflict will be briefly introduced.

2.2 Buyer-Supplier Conflict

Buyer-supplier relationship scholars recognise that conflict is a pervasive characteristic of buyer-supplier relationships (Yang *et al.*, 2017; Lee *et al.*, 2017; Johnsen and Lacoste, 2016; Skarmeas, 2006). Therefore, the initial focus of conflict research revolved around understanding the causes of conflict within buyer-supplier relationships.

Three causes have been initially studied by conflict scholars: goal disparity, domain dissensus, and perceptual differences (Rosenberg and Stern, 1971; Stern and Heskett, 1969). Goal incompatibility, defined as a situation where goals among vertically linked firms are different, has been considered as a necessary precondition for conflict to emerge (Eliashberg and Michie, 1984) because *“one firm's goals may comprise another firm's constraints so that conflict results”* (Rosenberg and Stern, 1970, p. 44). In addition, domain dissensus has also been suggested as a source of conflict (Shuptrine and Foster, 1976). A domain is broadly defined as *“a set of expectations for members of an organization and for others with whom they interact, about what the organization will or will not do. It provides, although imperfectly, an image of the organization's role in a larger system, which, in turn, serves as a guide for action in certain directions and not in others”* (Thompson, 2003, p. 29). Hence, when mutual expectations are incongruent, conflict is likely to emerge. In the context of channels of distribution, Stern *et al.* (1996) defined four elements of the domain: the population to be served; the territory to be covered; the role of each channel member; and the technology to be employed in marketing. The rising conflicts between buyers and suppliers also stem from perceptual differences (Zhou *et al.*, 2007; Ross and Lusch, 1982). Because of different perceptions of reality, supply chain partners would have dissimilar courses of action in responding to the same situation (Duarte and Davies, 2003), thereby creating conflict.

Moreover, power has also been considered as a major antecedent to conflict. This is not surprising because early conflict research has established that the understanding of conflict requires the understanding of power and its distribution within groups and organisations (Kabanoff, 1985). Buyer-supplier conflict research has therefore attempted to understand how sources of power are related to conflict (Gaski, 1984; Lusch, 1976a; Lee, 2001; Johnson *et al.*, 1990; Wilkinson, 1981; Rawwas *et al.*, 1997; Zhang and Zhang, 2013; Zhuang *et al.*, 2010). Typically, researchers distinguished between coercive and non-coercive power sources (Hunt and Nevin, 1974), and built the assertion that “*if A is likely to use (noncoercive) coercive sources of power when B does not cooperate with him, then B will have (less) more frequent and intense conflicts with A*” (Lusch, 1976b, p. 383). Empirically, however, researchers found different results. For instance, Zhang and Zhang (2013) and Zhuang *et al.* (2010) found that the use of coercive power increased conflict whereas the use of non-coercive power had no effect.

Finally, scholars also studied how buyer-supplier governance mechanisms were associated with conflict. Researchers examined contracts and contracts types as antecedents to conflict (Yang *et al.*, 2017; Lee *et al.*, 2017; Bai *et al.*, 2016). For instance, when an output-based contract governs the buyer-supplier exchange, a buyer has minimal involvement in the supplier’s processes, which in turn reduces conflict over how to perform the cooperating task. Conversely, the use of behaviour-based contract generates conflict because buyers have increased legitimate power to monitor the supplier’s operations, which may in some instances be considered as inappropriate and lead to conflict (Bai *et al.*, 2016). Essentially, previous research has demonstrated that conflict is indeed omnipresent in buyer-supplier relationships (an extensive review of conflict antecedents studies and their findings is provided in Chapter 3, Appendix 2) and therefore, an in-depth understanding of how it unfolds over time and how it is resolved is of theoretical relevance.

2.3 Research Philosophy and Methodology

2.3.1 Philosophical Considerations

Research philosophies, or paradigms, underpin all research. A paradigm is defined as the basic belief system that guides scientific enquiry, not only in terms of methodological choices but also in ontological and epistemological ways (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Accordingly, paradigms play an essential role in research, to the extent that they influence

the way knowledge is studied and interpreted (Mertens, 2010), and the way management theories are created and tested (Miller and Tsang, 2011).

Every paradigm is based on ontological and epistemological assumptions. Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality, and is defined as “*the claims or assumptions that a particular approach to social enquiry makes about the nature of social reality- claims about what exists, what it looks like, what units make it up and how these units interact with each other*” (Blaikie, 2007, p. 3). Two ontological positions can be distinguished: realism and relativism. On the other hand, epistemology is related to the way knowledge is generated, and is defined as “*the claims or assumptions made about the ways in which it is possible to gain knowledge of this reality, whatever it is understood to be, claims about how what exists may be known*” (Blaikie, 2007, p. 7). Two epistemological positions exist: objective and subjective.

Based on these assumptions, two major paradigms have emerged: positivism and interpretivism. Positivism is based on a realist ontology and objective epistemology. Proponents of this paradigm assert that there is a single reality, and that this reality is objectively measurable and inherently understandable (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988) independently of human behaviour and perceptions (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The explanation of phenomenon within this paradigm is based on explicitly stated theories. Contrary to positivism, interpretivism is based on a relativist ontology and a subjective epistemology. This paradigm claims that multiple realities exist and hence the aim of the researcher is to understand what is happening in a given context through the experiences of individuals (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Much has been written about the rhetoric of positivism versus interpretivism, and both paradigms were subject to various criticisms. The opponents of positivism contend that assumptions of objectivity do not hold because observations are theory-laden and interpreted by researchers (Anderson, 1983). On the other hand, critiques of the interpretivist philosophy claim that interpretivism-based research is subject to researchers and respondents’ biases (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988), and overlooks macroscopic features of the society that underlie individuals’ behaviour (Smart, 2013).

Positivism and interpretivism represent two extreme sides of a paradigm continuum (Creswell *et al.*, 2003; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003) where other middle ground paradigms have emerged. One of these philosophical positions in this continuum is post-positivism. Post-positivism has ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions that distinguish it from positivism and interpretivism. First, post-positivism

is founded on a critical realist ontology. Post-positivist researchers argue that a reality exists “out there”, however, unlike positivists, they believe that this reality can only be imperfectly detected because of individuals’ biases in perceiving reality. Post positivists recognise that all scientific observations are fallible and all theories are revisable (Kwan and Tsang, 2001). Second, the epistemology within the post-positivist paradigm values objectivity. Nonetheless, unlike positivism, it accepts that it is not possible to maintain distance from the research, and hence absolute objectivity is unattainable (Crotty, 1998). Post-positivists, are assumed as modified dualists and objectivist, where dualism means “*a tendency to see divide the world into binary opposites: reason and emotion, culture and nature, body and mind and so on*” (Benton and Craib, 2010, p. 180). Researchers adopting this philosophy believe that knowledge is subjective and theory-laden, however, unlike interpretivism, they are concerned about “real” economic dimensions of businesses (Hunt, 1991). Essentially, while positivists are “value-free” and interpretivists “value-laden”, post-positivists are said to be “value-aware” in a sense that they recognise human interactivity but they control for it as much as possible to attain objectivity (Gray, 2013). Consequently, post-positivism has become a hegemonic philosophy of research in social sciences (Guba and Lincoln, 1994) as it circumvents the shortcomings of both positivism and interpretivism.

The current thesis subscribes to a post-positivist philosophy. Assuming a critical realist ontology, post-positivism holds that business relationships represent a reality “out there” independent of researchers’ beliefs about them; they are real because they constrain and enable events to occur and are hence capable of influencing what individual managers can do within business relationships (Ryan *et al.*, 2012). At the same time, under post-positivism accounts, the activities of those actors are required for the continued existence of business relationships (Ryan *et al.*, 2012; Peters *et al.*, 2013), and therefore their perceptions are necessary for understanding the reality of business relationships. However, considering participants’ perception does not mean accounting for multiple realities, but it is only a “window” to accessing reality (Healy and Perry, 2000). In order to understand conflict dynamics as an organisational phenomenon, this thesis investigates empirically observed events over the conflict episode, and moves to the general mechanisms that govern such dynamics through conceptual abstraction. Although knowledge generated this way only indicates likely truth and may never be accepted with perfect certainty, researchers falsify and corroborate possible explanations by controlling for their effects in the real world (Crotty, 1998). Methodologically, post-positivism could underlie many of the methodologies adopted by business researchers including case research (Healy and Perry,

2000), which is the design chosen for the present study.

2.3.2 Case Study Research

A case study is a powerful and relevant methodology in supply chain research (Barratt *et al.*, 2011; Voss, 2010; Stuart *et al.*, 2002; Mahapatra *et al.*, 2010; Ketokivi and Choi, 2014). Case-based approaches typically involves the investigation of the phenomenon and the context in which it is occurring (Meredith, 1998). As such, researchers are able to move beyond a reductionist approach to investigate the nature and the complexity of the phenomenon including its why, what and how (Benbasat *et al.*, 1987; Voss *et al.*, 2002; Meredith, 1998; Easton, 2010; Mahapatra *et al.*, 2010), and to substantiate potential causal links between cause and effect (Boyer and Swink, 2008; Benbasat *et al.*, 1987). Case studies also offer researchers the opportunity to “*obtain new holistic and in-depth understandings, explanations and interpretations about previously unknown practitioners’ rich experiences*” (Riege, 2003, p. 80), thereby enhancing their understanding of the body of knowledge through the experience of managers. Essentially, through a close connection with empirical reality, valid theories could be developed.

In this thesis, the choice of the case study as a research strategy is justified by the theoretical paucity observed in the buyer-supplier conflict literature and the necessity to capture conflict as a dynamic and complex phenomenon (Lumineau *et al.*, 2015; Mikkelsen and Clegg, 2017). The case study approach enabled the researcher to engage with the phenomenon and offered “*the opportunity to tease out and disentangle a complex set of factors and relationships*” (Easton, 2010, p. 119). Moreover, it enabled a rich picture on the dynamics of conflict-related phenomenon by documenting how and why processes unfold over time and illuminating time-dependent relationships (Edmondson and McManus, 2007). Essentially, the case study has been useful to explore and model conflict in buyer-supplier relationships, to have access to the rich interaction and events that produce the unfolding of the conflict episode, to understand the mechanisms driving the process forward, and to clarify any contextual factors and contingencies under which these mechanisms operate. This allowed the researcher to make inferences about real-life experiences and increase the relevance of the research findings for practical application (Barratt *et al.*, 2011). In the light of these qualities and characteristics, the case study represents a suitable design for our research.

2.3.3 Research Validity and Reliability

This study adopted several tactics to improve *construct validity*, *internal validity*, *external validity* and *reliability* of the case study methodology (Flint *et al.*, 2002; Stuart *et al.*, 2002; Ellram and Edis, 1996; Tate *et al.*, 2009). Various tactics were employed throughout the data collection and analysis processes, and are summarised in **Table II-3** and further discussed below.

Construct validity refers to “*the issue of establishing the theoretical territory that goes with the defined construct and ensuring consistency between it and other recognized constructs*” (McCutcheon and Meredith, 1993, p. 245). Construct validity was ensured through clear definitions of constructs, and by involving the supervisory team to challenge and improve construct definitions for emerging concepts. Study findings were also shared with the supervisory team to allow them to react to and influence the interpretation of the data, and ensure that “*the interpretation is drawn in a logical and unprejudiced manner*” (Riege, 2003, p. 81).

Internal validity describes “*whether the conjectured relationships actually exist... the extent to which we can establish a causal relationship, whereby certain conditions are shown to lead to other conditions as distinguished from spurious relationships*” (Stuart *et al.*, 2002, p. 430), and was first ensured through the selection of cases by leveraging the replication logic underlying the research sampling frame (Eisenhardt, 1989). In addition, through the data analysis, visual illustrations have been used to enhance the coherency of the findings, and illustrate their underlying logic (McCutcheon and Meredith, 1993; Huberman and Miles, 2002). Finally, case respondents were contacted to check the data, and confirm the consistency of the information provided during the interviews and the validity of emerging findings (Creswell and Miller, 2000).

External validity / Generalization: External validity refers to the “*extent to which findings drawn from studying one group are applicable to other groups or settings*” (McCutcheon and Meredith, 1993, p. 246). Case studies enable researchers to be close to the data and gain in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, thereby improving the accuracy of the findings, but may also impede abstraction and act against generalisability (Ketokivi and Choi, 2014). Hence, researchers recommend transcending the empirical context and using abstraction to build a broader understanding of the investigated phenomenon (Gioia *et al.*, 2013). As stated by Ketokivi and Choi (2014), “*the contextual idiosyncrasy in case research must be balanced with an examination of the more general theoretical implications*” (p. 234). Therefore,

conceptual abstraction was achieved by comparing emergent findings with contrasting or confirming literature (Barratt *et al.*, 2011; Eisenhardt, 1989). External validity was also addressed through the theoretical sampling frame used in the study.

Reliability: Reliability describes “*the extent to which a study’s operations can be repeated with the same results*” (Stuart *et al.*, 2002, p. 430). To this end, a case study protocol and database (including documentation, original data recordings, and transcripts) were maintained throughout the time of study (Voss *et al.*, 2002). Moreover, a computer-aided tool (Nvivo) was used to meticulously structure and examine the data. Transcripts were stored within the software and a coding structure was created, which increased the interpretability across cases through the comparison/contrast of responses.

TEST	DESCRIPTION	TACTIC	IMPLEMENTATION IN CASES
Construct validity Credibility	The validity of research conduct, coherence of findings, consistency with existing theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple sources of evidence • Establish a chain of evidence • Key informants review draft of report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of multiple respondents with differing internal perspectives. • Research team members (student and supervisory team) gave input during data collection process. • Summary of preliminary findings discussed with supervisory team who acted as auditors. • Methods and emerging interpretations presented at departmental seminars. • Emerging interpretations discussed with some respondents and academic colleagues. • On-going presentation of findings to colleagues
Internal validity Integrity	Credibility that causal relationships actually exist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pattern matching • Explanation building • Rival explanations • Logic models 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigated patterns, similarities and differences, across the case studies. • Follow-up interviews by the same researcher with the same informants • Emergent themes uncovered in initial interviews included in subsequent ones.
External validity, transferability	Applicability of findings to other contexts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of replication logic in multiple case studies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theoretical sampling • Conceptual abstraction
Reliability Dependability	Consistency in the research process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use case study protocol • Develop case study database 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview protocol refined and implemented with all firms • Establishment of a case study database.

Table II-3: Research quality (Source (Ellram and Edis, 1996; Flint *et al.*, 2002; Yin, 2017; Tate *et al.*, 2009))

2.3.4 Data Collection Context: the Moroccan Automotive Industry

The Moroccan Automotive Industry was chosen as the research setting for this thesis. Therefore, the aim of this section is to provide an overview of the country's economic and social situation, as well as a history of the evolution of the automotive industry. Data sources include both publically available information and insights garnered from 5 interviews conducted with industry experts (members of the Moroccan Association for Automotive Industry and Trade, with some occupying senior level positions within automotive firms, referred to hereafter as R1-R5) to understand the industry structure, its major development phases, and the interactions taking place among various players. These interviews also revealed insights into conflict issues within this industry.

2.3.4.1 Country Profile: Background Information

Morocco, officially known as the “Kingdom of Morocco” is located in the western North Africa, bordering the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. With an area of 172,317 sq. miles, Morocco shares land borders with Algeria and Mauritania, and lies directly across the Strait of Gibraltar from Europe. According to the UN estimates, the current population of Morocco is approximately 36 million (April, 2018), accounting for 0.47% of the total world population. As of 2016, the GDP per capita was \$8400. The Moroccan economy is composed of three categories: services sector, industrial sector, and agricultural sector. According to MarketLine 2016 estimates, the services sector is the biggest contributor to the economy making 57.78% of the GDP, followed by the industrial sector (29.30%) and the agriculture sector (12.92%). Morocco is the 60th largest export economy in the world. Its top export destinations are Spain, France, Italy, and the United States. Cars, insulated wires, mixed minerals or chemical fertilizers, phosphoric acid are the products mostly at the top of Morocco's export products. Moroccan imports are mainly refined petroleum, cars, wheat, and petroleum gas, coming mostly from Spain, France, China, Germany, and the US (The Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2017).

Morocco has been continuously deploying efforts to improve its business climate, to attract foreign investments, and to become an industrial gateway linking America and Europe to the African continent (US Bureau Of Economic And Business Affairs Report, May, 2015). The country ranked 69 out of 190 countries in the World Bank's Doing Business Report 2018, leading the ranking among North African countries. In comparison to the greater MENA region, Morocco's performance in “ease of doing business” was only

surpassed by some of the Gulf countries including the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain (World Bank, 2018). According to the UN Conference on Trade and Development report (2014), Morocco was the largest recipient of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in North Africa in 2013, attracting a total of \$3.5 billion. As a result, *“the competition within the Moroccan industrial sector has heightened, and close relationships between manufacturers and suppliers have been extensively reported by Moroccan investment agencies”* (R2; 11.10.2016). In terms of FDI structure, the manufacturing sector has received a large inflow of FDI mainly in the automotive, aeronautic, electronic equipment, food and pharmaceutical industries (KPMG Morocco, 2015, Q2).

2.3.4.2 Industry Profile: Inception and Evolution

The Moroccan automotive sector dates back to 1960 with the creation of SOMACA (Société Marocaine de Construction Automobile) in Casablanca. *“SOMACA was founded with the purpose of performing the CKD (Complete Knock Down), which was based on importing individual vehicle components and assembling them into a finished product locally”* (R4; 05.10.2016). Initially, the company’s products portfolio comprised models from two of its shareholders (four models of Fiat and two models of Simca), and later extended its portfolio to include the Renault 4 and 16 following an agreement with Renault in 1966 (The Ministry of Economy and Finance, 2015). In subsequent years, SOMACA signed an agreement with two other car manufacturers, Austin and Opel, and increased its vehicle production. Besides SOMACA, two other assembly line factories were created including Berliet-Maroc for heavy Berliet vehicles and Star Auto for heavy Volvo vehicles (Belhaj, 2002). A second wave of industrial development started in 1995 with the signature of a new agreement between Morocco and Fiat. This collaboration aimed at the production of an inexpensive vehicle for local production, and therefore was at the origin of the emergence of an array of automotive industrial activities. A number of European, Japanese, and American multinationals located their manufacturing plants in Morocco and this fostered and enhanced local integration (Layan and Lung, 2007). However, the agreement only lasted eight years, as it was not extended in 2003. A turning point in the automotive industry was the acquisition of the SOMACA by the French manufacturer Renault in 2005 to produce its car Logan (Layan and Lung, 2007). The first exports of these cars took place in 2007 towards MENA region countries, Spain, France, and Germany. The sector has flourished and experienced strong growth since, and this development has been attributed to various factors. First, Morocco enjoys a very strategic location (only few miles away from Spain

via the Strait of Gibraltar) which enables deliveries within 24 hours (Layan and Lung, 2007). Second, inspired by the success of “maquiladoras” in Mexico, Morocco has created free zones including the Casablanca Industrial Zone, Tangier Med Zone, Kenitra Free Zone, and Recently Meknes Free Zone (Domański and Lung, 2009). These special economic zones reduce companies’ initial investments to set up facilities in Morocco, and provide them with tax incentives (corporate taxes are 0% for the first 5 years and 8.75% until the 25th year), and exemption from export fees. Moreover, companies located in these zones receive financial aid towards building costs and equipment investment. Consequently, the Moroccan automotive industry is strongly concentrated in these locations. Third, the Moroccan government has been making investments to support FDI in the sector and constantly attract further investments. Morocco opened up training centres (IFMIA) close to manufacturing clusters to support skills development and to provide trained labour. Finally, Morocco enjoys a stable political environment, and has free-trade agreements with Europe, America and MENA countries, which facilitates the exportation of the automotive production abroad.

Essentially, Morocco has been one of the countries that took advantage of changes in global value chains to develop an automotive industry (Vidican-Auktor and Hahn, 2017). The industry represents one of the most developed and established sectors, with exports approaching 7 billion euros and making 44% of industrial Moroccan exports (Morocco World News, 28 April, 2018). To date, the “*Moroccan automotive market is leading the way in the MENA region as the best performer*” (R1; 28-09-2016), and has joined the world’s top seven auto manufacturing countries (CIPS, 2017, October 24). Renault is currently the only foreign OEM with local production facilities. Ford is also currently sourcing parts and components locally through a local office. From 2019 onward, PSA Peugeot Citroen will join the list of OEMs, along with the Chinese electric vehicle maker BYD. Other supply Tier companies are structured into 5 ecosystems including: Wiring harness, metal stamping, engine and transmission, seating systems, and batteries (Office des Changes, 2016), and include multinationals such as SNOP, GMD, Lear, Delphi, Yazaki, SEWS, Faurecia, Leoni, Saint-Gobain, TE Connectivity.

2.3.5 Data Collection

Companies were accessed through the Moroccan Association for Automotive Industry and Trade (AMICA¹), which is the relay between the Government and automotive companies. Several meetings were held with experts from the Association to identify potential cases and potential contacts within these companies. This provided the researcher with the opportunity to select from a well-structured sample (Voss *et al.*, 2002). Once cases were identified, an “invitation letter” was addressed to the firm’s General Director or Purchasing Manager. When an affirmative response was received, a meeting was therefore scheduled to discuss the research in more details as well as the data collection approach. Furthermore, the researcher had the opportunity to attend a B2B event, AMT, Automotive Meetings Tangier-Med², where companies from the automotive industry come together to do business. This offered an opportunity to meet with both suppliers and customers, and deal directly with the prime contacts who are responsible for managing these exchanges.

The present study is based on a multiple case study design and includes four cases (described next) with each case representing a matched buyer-supplier dyad (the selection and the theoretical sampling are explained in each of the papers). A multiple case study design provides varied empirical evidence whereby similarities and differences are delineated, and hence it makes it possible for the researcher to identify whether the results obtained are specific to a single case or apply across multiple cases (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). Accordingly, through the use of multiple cases, the researcher is more likely to build more robust theory (Barratt *et al.*, 2011), and increase external validity (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007).

Data collection was conducted over a 12-month period. An initial phase took place from October 2016 to January 2017 to collect data from the first two dyads. A second phase took place from June 2017 to September 2017 to collect data from the remaining two dyads. When necessary, a second interview with some managers was conducted outside of these time periods to fill the gaps in the understanding of the conflict episode. The respondent-driven Critical Incident Technique (Wang *et al.*, 2014; Reimann *et al.*, 2017;

¹ AMICA: Association Marocaine pour l'Industrie et le Commerce de l'Automobile

² AMT is an annual event organised by the AMICA under the High Patronage of His Majesty King Mohammed VI and aims at boosting partnerships and business between OEMs, automotive suppliers, and subcontractors (<http://www.mcinet.gov.ma/en/content/automotive-meetings-tangier-med-2016-conclusion-investment-contracts-automotive-sector>)

Flanagan, 1954) and semi-structured interviews were used in a complementary manner. The semi-structured questions enabled the researcher to obtain a macro case description, whereas the CIT enabled the researcher to capture the particularities of the conflict episode and how it was resolved, as experienced by individual respondents (Chell and Pittaway, 1998). Data on the conflict episode were retrospectively collected to capture changes over time (Pettigrew, 1997; Pentland, 1999). Although using a retrospective data collection approach is criticized for respondents' biased perceptions of past realities (Zahra and Covin, 1995), doing a real-time longitudinal research was not feasible. First, identifying cases that reflect either success or failure in conflict resolution could only be achieved in retrospect (Voss *et al.*, 2002). Second, a real longitudinal research requires the researcher to spend a certain amount of time on noncritical incidents and in building relationships with the people involved, which in turn pose a danger of losing objectivity (Leonard-Barton, 1990). Moreover, the time constraint on the completion of the PhD did not allow for such approach.

2.3.6 Cases Description

Given the limited length of each of the empirical papers, this section provides greater detail for each case, including firms' and respondents' demographics, as well as the dyads' relationship history.

2.3.6.1 Case 1: WiringCo - ElectroCo

Case 1 is a relationship between *ElectroCo* and *WiringCo*. *ElectroCo* is a leader in electronic components manufacturing. It operates 95 manufacturing sites around the world and sells 450,000 types of components in 150 countries. *WiringCo* is one of the world's largest automotive parts makers, its product lines include connection systems, fuel cells, and electric vehicle parts among others. It has operations in 44 countries with 160 sites and a diversified customer portfolio including GM, Ford, and VW (Hoover's, 2017).

	Supplier (ElectroCo)	Buyer (WiringCo)
Ownership Structure	Subsidiary	Subsidiary
Creation in Morocco	2009	2000
HQ location	USA	USA
Annual turnover (£)	17B	14B
Primary industry	Semiconductor & Other Electronic Component Manufacturing	Automobile Parts Manufacturing
Employees (All sites)	90,000	140,000
Number of informants	8	8
Total interviews	9	10

Table II-4: Case 1 description

Acronyms	Position	Interview Length (min)	Years of experience
BUYER			
C1B-CPD	Country Purchasing Director	90	25
C1B-PM (2)	Purchasing Manager (2)	75 / 75	14
C1B-RMB	Raw Material Buyer	30	9
C1B-MPS (2)	Material Planning Supervisor (2)	70 / 50	7
C1B-QM	Quality Manager	35	9
C1B-PE	Production Engineer	30	16
C1B-RMP	Raw Material Planner	40	3
C1B-SDPC	Supplier Delivery Performance Coordinator	60	9
SUPPLIER			
C1S-CSM	Customer Service Manager	90	12
C1S-CSC	Customer Service Coordinator	50	4
C1S-SR	Sales Representative	40	5
C1S-NASM (2)	North Africa Sales Manager	60 / 75	18
C1S-CSS	Customer Service Supervisor	50	6
C1S-NAOD	North Africa Operations Director	30	25
C1S-CRE	Customer Resident Engineer	45	10
C1S-NALM	North Africa Logistics Manager	30	20

Table II-5: Case 1 interviews

The companies started to do business together about 20 years ago. When *WiringCo* set up production facilities in Morocco in 2000, relationships continued and *ElectroCo* delivered to *WiringCo* from their warehouse in Europe. However, this geographical distance between both companies posed several challenges, particularly in terms of supply chain optimization and market responsiveness. First, *WiringCo's* inventory management was not efficient and did not give them enough flexibility particularly in the event of huge demand fluctuations, which in turn limited their responsiveness capability. This caused several conflicts between *ElectroCo* and *WiringCo* “(...) *We had these critical cases with [ElectroCo], where the plant in Morocco clearly suggested change [ElectroCo], we had very strained relations with [ElectroCo]*” (C1B-Country Purchasing Director). Second, for *ElectroCo*, the distance posed an enormous risk because of the fierce competition in the market and the tight price margins. Subsequently, to preserve and grow the business with *WiringCo*, *ElectroCo* established a new assembly facility in Morocco. The proximity to the customer

provided two main advantages. First, it simplified the supply chain process for the customer in terms of inventory management, as well as delivery frequency, cost, and time. Second, it enabled *ElectroCo* to have a real competitive advantage over their competitors. Essentially, the new configuration positively impacted *ElectroCo* delivery performance; customer satisfaction, and therefore their annual turnover with *WiringCo* “*It’s still an experience that is wonderful, and today for the Sales, this resulted in a sales growth with [WiringCo], which went from 15% in the past few years...for last year we were practically at 21%...*” (C1S-North Africa Sales Manager). The geographical proximity between *ElectroCo* and *WiringCo* enabled the development of better relationships through increased communication and better understanding between both parties “*This location has already changed the type of communication or the type of relationship, there are Moroccans working here, so it is the same culture, the same language, the same way of proceeding. So, relations with [ElectroCo] were before, I will not say tense, but very very formal, okay. But some four years ago, a more collaborative relationship has developed between us*” (C1B-Material Planning Supervisor).

2.3.6.2 Case 2: *AutoElecCo - CableCo*

Case 2 is a relationship between *CableCo* and *AutoElecCo*. *CableCo* is a leader in current-carrying wiring device manufacturing. It is ranked among the top 3 in the world and operates in more than 10 countries. *AutoElecCo* is one of the world's largest automotive parts makers; it has manufacturing plants in various countries over the 5 continents and serves major car manufacturers worldwide (Hoover’s, 2017).

	Supplier CableCo	Buyer AutoElecCo
Ownership Structure	Subsidiary	Subsidiary
Creation in Morocco	2010	2011
HQ location	Portugal	USA
Annual turnover (£)	2B	12B
Primary industry	Electrical Products Manufacturing	Automobile Parts Manufacturing
Employees (All sites)	4500	9300
Number of informants	8	6

Table II-6: Case 2 description

Acronyms	Position	Interview Length (min)	Years of experience
BUYER			
C2B-PE	Production Engineer	30	10
C2B-LM	Logistics Manager	30	8
C2B-PM	Purchasing Manager	30	25
C2B-QM	Quality Manager	35	12
C2B-SPB	Single Point Buyer	35	14
C2B-SQE	Supplier Quality Engineer	60	9
SUPPLIER			
C2S-GM	General Manager	40	25
C2S-SM	Sales Manager	75	4
C2S-CQM	Country Quality Manager	60	8
C2S-GQM	Global Quality Manager	75	18
C2S-PE	Production Engineer	45	6
C2S-LM	Logistics Manager	90	12
C2S-PEng	Process Engineer	30	10
C2S-MM	Maintenance Manager	30	6

Table II-7:Case 2 interviews

The relationship between *AutoElecCo* and *CableCo* is strong and has a long history with various positive and negative events that enabled the development, the dissolution and the repair of the relationship at the HQ level. As quoted by the GM of *CableCo* “*Our relationship was a marriage relationship that ended in a divorce and that continued in cohabitation*” (C2S-General Manager). Although the business divorce happened, the relationship between *AutoElecCo* and *CableCo* remained a very close relationship and it is thanks to *AutoElecCo* that *CableCo* made its evolution in the automotive industry. Therefore, *CableCo* aims to gain more business with *AutoElecCo* and to make higher profits through a close geographical location, an excellent customer service, and by going beyond *AutoElecCo*’s expectations. *AutoElecCo*, in turn, aims to increase efficiency through high purchasing volume and low margins with *CableCo*. It also aims at increasing flexibility by utilizing the supplier’s manufacturing capability and geographical proximity. “*What [AutoElecCo] appreciates about [CableCo] is their geographical proximity, they follow [AutoElecCo] everywhere and so besides a product they offer a service*” (C2B-Supplier Quality Engineer). As explained by a manager from the supplying firm “[*AutoElecCo*’s] prices are the cheapest market prices, so we are really on the limits, sometimes we fall of the prices’ cliff to satisfy [*AutoElecCo*] because [*AutoElecCo*] is a strategic customer for us” (C2S-General Manager).

2.3.6.3 Case 3: SeatCo - TextileCo

Case 3 is a relationship between *TextileCo* and *SeatCo*. *TextileCo* is a specialist in automotive interiors and the acoustic environment. It has a global footprint in 15 countries, with a total of 8 technical centres and 15 production plants close to their Tier 1 and major OEM customers. *SeatCo* is a leader in automotive seating and interior systems including seat

covers and surface materials, seat structures and mechanisms, seat foam, and headrests. It operates from 245 facilities in 36 countries. Its largest customers include VW Group, Ford, Renault-Nissan, and Peugeot S.A. (Hoover’s, 2017).

	Supplier TextileCo	Buyer SeatCo
Ownership Structure	Subsidiary	Subsidiary
Creation in Morocco	2011	2007
HQ location	UK	USA
Annual turnover (£)	0.8B	15B
Primary industry	Automobile Parts Manufacturing	Automobile Parts Manufacturing
Employees (All sites)	4500	148,400
Number of informants	8	6

Table II-8: Case 3 description

Acronyms	Position	Interview Length (min)	Years of experience
BUYER			
C3B-PC	Procurement Coordinator	65	10
C3B-ODNA	Operations Director North Africa	45	25
C3B-PM	Production Manager	30	12
C3B-QM	Quality Manager	50	6
C3B-LM	Logistics Manager	60	7
C3B-EM	Engineering Manager	45	10
SUPPLIER			
C3S-GM	General Manager	65	30
C3S-LM	Logistics Manager	45	12
C3S-QM	Quality Manager	45	8
C3S-QC	Quality Coordinator	40	4
C3S-L&PC	Logistics & Production Coordinator	45	6
C3S-CRC	Cost Recovery Coordinator	25	7
C3S-IPM	Industrial Projects Manager	50	7
C3S-PM	Plant Manager	45	13

Table II-9: Case 3 interviews

The relationship between *SeatCo* and *TextileCo* was initiated back in 2011. *TextileCo* is a customer-directed supplier, which means that the relationship was not self-initiated but rather the OEM required *SeatCo* to purchase their raw material from *TextileCo*. The product purchased from *TextileCo* is laminated textile for car seat covers. The business relationship between both companies began on good grounds but since *TextileCo* and *SeatCo* are competitors in some business activities, i.e. they are both suppliers of carmakers; the relationship became very competitive. As described by the Logistics Manager at *SeatCo*: “Uh, another issue with [*TextileCo*] is, our supplier is a rival, they have shared customers with us, and so sometimes one issue under dispute can touch other aspects that are not part of the dispute itself. Sometimes this competitive aspect of the relationship prevents a fluid communication between us. Moreover, it creates an atmosphere of ambiguity, there is no transparency” (C3B-Logistics Manager). The relationship

is characterised by a lack of trust “*there is mistrust, and a lack of confidence, and this lack of confidence in the automotive industry and even in an American company when we speak of trust, it represents virtually everything, if there is no confidence there is nothing*” (C3B-Operations Director North Africa).

2.3.6.4 Case 4: AutoTechCo - ConnectorCo

Case 4 is a relationship between *ConnectorCo* and *AutoTechCo*. *ConnectorCo* is a leading provider of electronic components and solutions in a wide range of industries. It has a large geographical presence and offers a large portfolio of products ranging from antennas to industrial automation. *AutoTechCo* is one of the world's largest automotive parts makers; its product lines include wiring harnesses, electronic components, and hybrid electric products. Its main customers are Toyota, Nissan, Honda, and Land Rover (Hoover’s, 2017).

	Supplier ConnectorCo	Buyer AutoTechCo
Ownership Structure	Subsidiary	Subsidiary
Creation in Morocco	2009	2010
HQ location	USA	UK
Annual turnover (£)	17B	20B
Primary industry	Semiconductor & Other Electronic Component Manufacturing	Electrical Products Manufacturing
Employees (All sites)	90,000	110,900
Number of informants	8	9
Number of interviews	9	9

Table II-10: Case 4 description

Acronyms	Position	Interview Length (min)	Years of experience
BUYER			
C4B-PM	Purchasing Manager	50	15
C4B-ProdM	Production Manager	40	10
C4B-PC	Procurement Coordinator	45	8
C4B-CQS	Customer Quality Supervisor	35	5
C4B-RMP	Raw Material Planner	45	5
C4B-B	Buyer	50	4
C4B-PC	Planning coordinator	30	1
C4B-LM	Logistics Manager	60	7
C4B-LC	Logistics Coordinator	40	5
SUPPLIER			
C4S-CSM	Customer Service Manager	50	15
C4S-CSC	Customer Service Coordinator	50	5
C4S-A&SS	Allocation & Shortage Supervisor	120	18
C4S-SCMNA	Supply Chain Manager North Africa (2)	40/30	25
C4S-DSCM	Deputy Supply Chain Manager	35	11
C4S-LMNA	Logistics Manager North Africa	70	25
C4S-A&SM EMEA	Allocation & Shortage Manager EMEA	30	10
C4S-QM	Quality Manager	50	15

Table II-11: Case 4 interviews

ConnectorCo is a customer-directed supplier, it is chosen by the OEM. The relationship between both companies has always been a collaborative relationship since its inception in 2010. There has been mutual attractiveness; the supplier has a large presence in the industry, and an excellent geographical presence, and the buyer has a growing business and a future expansion plan “*They are influential because they are a very well-known supplier in the industry, they are located all over the world, they are experts in their fields, I think they have the highest market share*”(C4B-Procurement Coordinator). Another manager continued “[*AutoTechCo*] *has a massive development plan, they are opening new plants, they will have new businesses in the future and so we want to be their preferred supplier*” (C4S-Customer Service Coordinator). However, a few years ago *ConnectorCo* have been going through a capacity crisis (for certain components) triggered mainly by a shortage in metal supply, increased orders, and suppliers’ inflexibility. Consequently, *ConnectorCo* has not been able to offer an uninterrupted flow of deliveries, which resulted in several production lines shutdown at *AutoTechCo*, and sometimes the impact reached the OEM. The recurrence of the disruptions and their high frequency has generated a lot of frustration and tainted the relationship “*We have been experiencing a crisis in our production. What happened is that since early 2016 we have been in a delivery crisis (...). The problem is that at this point we still cannot get out of this crisis because it has had a snowball effect, why? Because we started to accumulate the backlog, very important backlogs (...). So for [AutoTechCo] it translated into chain stops, huge shortages, a big backlog, (...) and this caused chain stops, disruptions and extra costs to the customer, and this of course impacted in a negative way our relationship*” (C4S-Supply Chain Manager North Africa). Accordingly, *AutoTechCo* were no longer satisfied with *ConnectorCo* services, their trust and even their commitment to the relationship have been impaired “*Already, after what happened, somehow we no longer trust them, there is always doubt*” (C4B-Logistics Coordinator).

2.4 The Three Papers

The final section of the context chapter presents extended abstracts for each of the three papers that compose this thesis (2.4.1). The abstracts provide an overview of the studies' objectives, methods, findings and contributions. This section also discusses the relationship among the three papers (2.4.2).

2.4.1. Papers' Abstracts

2.4.1.1. *Paper 1: Buyer-supplier conflict: A Systematic Literature Review and Guide to Future Research*

Despite the growing importance of conflict as an omnipresent feature of buyer-supplier relationships, the understanding of buyer-supplier conflict remains incomplete (Lumineau *et al.*, 2015). We therefore contend that to achieve a coherent view of conflict in supply chain relationships, a systematic review of the relevant literature is timely and seeks to analyse the state of the current knowledge and identify research gaps that require further attention (Chatha *et al.*, 2015).

We identified 115 articles and subsequently undertook descriptive and thematic analyses. The analysis of the articles showed that four themes typify current conflict research. First, a large proportion of the research has looked at *conflict antecedents* and provided insight into conditions that lead to conflict. Second, scholars have investigated conflict outcomes. Although organisational conflict research has pointed to the Janus-faced nature of conflict, inter-firm conflict researchers have resoundingly investigated the destructive *effects of conflict*. Third, a small number of studies have examined *conflict types* and their impact on supply chain relationships. Finally, although the *conflict resolution process* was an important determinant of conflict impact (i.e. researchers found that the process explains as much variance in outcomes as do conflict types (DeChurch *et al.*, 2013)), research on conflict resolution is limited.

Based on the interorganisational relationship assumptions framework (asymmetry, valence, level of analysis, time) (Lumineau and Oliveira, 2018), we identified four 'blind spots': (1) conflict asymmetry (single party focus), (2) conflict valence, (3) conflict single level of analysis, and (4) conflict over time. The conflict asymmetry blind spot suggests

that parties may not share similar perceptions regarding the conflict type (across conflict asymmetry) or the conflict intensity (within conflict asymmetry), and we encouraged researchers to further consider asymmetry in studying conflict. The second blind spot relates to the consideration of conflict as one aspect of a broader overall relationship, therefore we encourage researchers to embrace a more encompassing approach to account for the conflict-collaborative valences and the resulting ambivalence in conflict episodes. The third blind spot is concerned with the focus on the interorganisational dyadic level at the expense of lower/higher levels where relationships are embedded. Finally, the fourth blind spot discusses the static conceptualisation of conflict. We suggest that researchers include temporal dynamics to study the conflict process and its resolution over time.

In sum, we contribute to the conflict literature by advancing a pluralistic perspective that exposes researchers to a new way of profiling key themes and their relationships in conflict research. We identified four major blind spots, and discussed how targeting each blind spot could advance our knowledge on conflict. The results presented will help academia and practitioners better understand contemporary supply chain conflict and its resolution process.

2.4.1.2. Paper 2: Buyer-Supplier Conflict Resolution: Timing, Tactics, Resources, and Relationship Quality

Conflict is a regular occurrence in buyer-supplier relationships (Koza and Dant, 2007; Van der Maelen *et al.*, 2017). A growing number of researchers highlights that it could have a detrimental impact on the exchange relationship if not properly resolved, and therefore recognise that effective conflict resolution is essential to sustain buyer-supplier cooperation (Griffith *et al.*, 2006; Koza and Dant, 2007). The tendency in extant conflict resolution research has been to analyse conflict resolution as general dispositions that business partners have towards conflict, e.g. confrontation or collaboration (Le Nguyen *et al.*, 2016; Kozan *et al.*, 2006; Lin and Germain, 1998). However, although this approach has made significant contributions to the literature, using a “strategy” conceptualisation does not illustrate specific conflict resolution interventions that parties use to manage conflict (Carton and Tewfik, 2016). Moreover, researchers within this tradition based their research on static levels of conflict, largely ignoring the “the twists and turns” over a conflict episode. Yet, the resolution of different degrees of conflict intensity represent a core theoretical and managerial concern that should be dealt with adequately to advance conflict research (Ellegaard and Andersen, 2015). Specifically, two research questions

guide this research paper: **1) What are the tactics used to resolve buyer-supplier conflict? 2) When and why are they used over the conflict episode?**

The paper is based on a multiple case study design, which is particularly useful when the research aims to answer “why” and “how” questions (Yin, 2017). We specifically explore how supplier-induced problems are resolved by focusing on the entire conflict episode. Paired retrospective data from both sides of multiple dyads were collected. We found that the resolution process is driven in part by an appraisal of suppliers’ actions wherein a misalignment drives conflict intensity. The misalignment has two characteristics: tactics misalignment and speed misalignment. We also found that two contextual factors - relationship quality and buyers’ resources impact this link. These two variables interact and give rise to four archetypes: “complete buffer”, “complete activation”, “rapid escalation”, and “conflict persistence”. We also explored the range of tactics deployed to resolve conflict, and distinguished among four categories based on the tactics’ content and tactics’ temporal orientation: “Psychological reactive”, “tangible reactive”, “psychological prospective”, and “tangible prospective”. We finally mapped the evolving usefulness of resolution tactics based on conflict intensity and contextual factors.

This research has implications for both supply chain management theory and practice. Our research findings are expected to extend our understanding of conflict resolution in buyer-supplier conflict settings by developing a typology of conflict resolution interventions (tactics) beyond the conventional behavioural strategies. In doing so, we respond to the calls for incorporating a more fine-grained view of conflict resolution research (Ellegaard and Andersen, 2015). The second contribution of our research stems from the integration of the conflict context to understand the interaction of key constructs, relationship quality and resources, thereby emphasising the importance of a multi-level view of conflict resolution. Finally, the study unpacks the prolonged conflict resolution process and deals with time-sensitive elements of conflict resolution that are not accessible through traditional quantitative methods (e.g. illuminate how certain resolution tactics lose/gain effectiveness over time). On a managerial level, this knowledge enriches managers’ understanding of the specific tactics to resolve conflicts of different intensities, and as such provides managers with valuable information on how to maintain their supply chain relationships (Ganesan *et al.*, 2009).

2.4.1.3. Paper 3: A Dynamic Model of Buyer-Supplier Conflict Processes

Theoretically, conflict has always been considered to be dynamic (Koza and Dant, 2007), yet theorising regarding the mechanisms and time-related processes involved in conflict remains underdeveloped (Mikkelsen and Clegg, 2017; Lengers *et al.*, 2015). This has been hampered by use of methodologies (e.g. cross-sectional surveys) that preclude the examination of changes in conflict over time. Moreover, little empirical attention has been directed towards the different conflict types (task and relationship) (Srinivasan *et al.*, 2018; Pfajfar *et al.*, 2017) despite empirical evidence in intraorganisational conflict suggesting the importance of such distinction (DeChurch *et al.*, 2013; De Dreu and Weingart, 2003). In this article, we address these limitations and bring dynamism to the fore of conflict theory building by emphasising dynamic processes and conflict types. We seek to answer the following research questions: 1) ***How does a conflict episode unfold over time?*** 2) ***What is the interplay between task conflict and relationship conflict over the conflict episode?***

For this purpose, we drew on empirical evidence from four case studies in the automotive sector. We specifically chose this research design because it is useful when attempting to understand why observed phenomenon occur (Easton, 2010); it offers a holistic and rich explanation through direct interaction with subjects of interest (Mahapatra *et al.*, 2010). We collected dyadic retrospective data through in-depth semi-structured interviews over a twelve-month period. A total of sixty-five informants were interviewed face-to-face across the four dyads. Data was analysed through open, axial, and selective coding (Huberman and Miles, 2002) leading to an overarching model of conflict processes.

We propose a phase-based model of buyer-supplier conflict that is composed of conflict initiation, conflict spiral, and conflict outcomes. Furthermore, we identify intraphase and interphase dynamics and their underlying mechanisms. Initiation reflects the start of the conflict episode; the moment buyers express their disagreement to the supplier and initial resolution processes take place. The conflict spiral phase reflects the cyclical relationship between task and relationship conflicts as the conflict episode evolves. The initial occurrence of the spiral is explained by task conflict resolution misalignment and is then perpetuated through negative attributions and an inability to achieve goals (pathway from task to relationship conflict). This creates increased rigidity, salience of suppliers' deficiencies, and impaired communication (pathway from relationship conflict to task conflict). The dynamics within the spiral continue until a conflict tolerance

threshold is reached. Conflict outcomes refer to the (un)successful resolution of the conflict and its impact on the buyer-supplier relationship. Unless some impetus triggers a disruption (change in direction) in the spiralling pattern, the conflict episode would have dysfunctional outcomes. Alternatively, the spiral self-correction begins with buyers' perception of high shadow of the future, which triggers ambivalent feelings towards the supplier. Buyers then consciously disregard their negative feelings, and suppliers provide the right resolution tactics in order to achieve functional outcomes.

2.4.2. Relationships Among Papers

The topic of conflict has been studied in various disciplines wherein researchers found that it could have both positive and negative outcomes (McCarter *et al.*, 2018). The supply chain conflict literature is no exception. Scholars have shown that conflict is omnipresent in those relationships and that it has a double-edged nature (Leonidou *et al.*, 2006; Leonidou *et al.*, 2017; Mele, 2011; Skarmeas, 2006; Eliashberg and Michie, 1984). Although this indicates that the pathway to achieving positive or negative outcomes is ambiguous and complex, a holistic understanding of this phenomenon remains limited (Lumineau *et al.*, 2015; Pfajfar *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, scholars have emphasised this research stream as worthy of scholarly inquiry, and called for further investigation of conflict (Lumineau *et al.*, 2015) to unpack and clarify its complexities (McCarter *et al.*, 2018; O'Neill *et al.*, 2018).

Accordingly, the first step in the present research was to systematically review the literature and identify mature and emerging research trends, inconsistencies in findings, and gaps that require further attention. Based on the analysis, four major themes were identified (conflict antecedents, conflict outcomes, conflict types, and conflict resolution), and building on interorganisational relationship assumptions (Lumineau and Oliveira, 2018), four blind spots were derived: conflict asymmetry, conflict valence, conflict single level of analysis, and conflict over time.

This thesis particularly focuses on the last two blind spots as scholars highlighted their importance and emphasised the need for such investigation in advancing the more general buyer-supplier relationship literature (Krafft *et al.*, 2015; Terpend *et al.*, 2008). Specifically, within the buyer-supplier conflict literature, although researchers established conflict as a multi-level phenomenon (Lumineau *et al.*, 2015), research integrating a multi-level lens is limited. Moreover, conflict has been treated as an atemporal phenomenon although it has been defined as a dynamic process (Gaski, 1984; Pondy, 1967). Researchers

focused on static levels of conflict and largely ignored dynamic changes in conflict as it unfolds over time. Accordingly, the researcher considered research oriented towards filling these gaps is timely.

As such, each of the papers provides a theoretical contribution to fill these gaps and to advance the understanding of buyer-supplier conflict. The first empirical paper explores buyer-supplier conflict resolution and sits at the intersection of the two blind spots. It focuses on multi-level interaction of key constructs involved in conflict resolution. We sought to delineate the range of actions that are used to resolve the conflict beyond the conventional resolution strategies (Blake and Mouton, 1964; Rahim and Bonoma, 1979; Thomas, 1992) and to understand contextual factors that “buffer” or “activate” their effect on conflict intensity. Furthermore, in this study, temporal and processual aspects have emerged, and an examination of how tactics are used over the conflict episode has been reported. However, given the exploratory nature of the research, we haven’t looked at the dynamics of the entire process from the beginning of the conflict to its resolution (outcomes) and the mechanisms involved in such dynamics. Equally, we have considered conflict using one overarching construct in this paper (conflict intensity), and we haven’t distinguished between conflict types (task and relationship). Therefore, in the second empirical paper, we sought to address these limitations by providing an in-depth examination of conflict processes.

Consequently, the second empirical paper digs more deeply in conflict dynamics by examining the entirety of the conflict episode to understand the mechanisms driving the process from the initial occurrence of conflict to its resolution outcomes. Because previous research have found mixed findings with regards to conflict outcomes and attributed these results to the types of conflict and their interaction (Choi and Cho, 2011; De Wit *et al.*, 2012; De Dreu and Weingart, 2003; Rose *et al.*, 2007), in this paper, the distinction is made between both types of conflicts. The objective was to understand the phases of the conflict process, and the dynamics of both task and relationship conflict within each phase, in order to delineate a model incorporating both interphase and intraphase processes.

2.5 Chapter Summary

The objective of this chapter was threefold. First it aimed at presenting an overview of the theoretical development of the conflict literature. Second, it highlighted the philosophical

and methodological underpinning of the thesis, and also shed light on some elements pertaining to the data collection process. Finally, the chapter provided extended abstracts of the papers included in the thesis, and also highlighted the interrelationship among them.

III. Chapter Three: Buyer-Supplier Conflict: Systematic Literature Review and Guide to Future Research

3.1 Abstract

The need for a systematic review of the buyer-supplier conflict literature comes from the growing research interest regarding whether conflict leads to functional or dysfunctional outcomes in these relationships. Based on the analysis of 115 papers and drawing upon core assumptions underlying supply chain relationships (Lumineau and Oliveira, 2018), we identified four research gaps that merit further attention: 1) conflict asymmetry, 2) conflict valence, 3) conflict single level of analysis, and 4) conflict over time. Each of these gaps is discussed and future research directions, within and across gaps, are suggested to address core questions about supply chain conflict research. The paper will help researchers and practitioners better understand conflict and its resolution process.

Keywords: conflict, conflict resolution, buyer-supplier relationship, and systematic literature review.

3.2 Introduction

Conflict, defined as “*the process that begins when one party perceives that its goal attainment is being impeded by another, with stress or tension the result*” (Gaski, 1984, p. 11), is an inherent characteristic of buyer-supplier relationships. Scholars argue that conflict has a double-edged nature in that it could act as a cohesive force that brings partners closer or as a disruptive force that threatens the stability of the relationship. Researchers demonstrated that conflicts among supply chain partners could block their ability to gain the resources that are necessary to advance their goals (Leonidou *et al.*, 2006), and may potentially increase product development time and costs (Lam and Chin, 2004). Contrarily, researchers have reported that a certain degree of conflict between parties in a relationship may intensify value-creation efforts (Mele, 2011), provide an opportunity to refine the on-going relationship (Chang and Gotcher, 2010), and enhance future purchase intentions (Skarmeas, 2006).

The mixed findings regarding conflict and its management implications requires diving deeper into and summarising the existing knowledge about conflict and its influence on supply chain relationships. Some scholars attempted such reviews, but they were seldom all encompassing, and a systematic review of the literature has not been reported since the inception of this research area. Lumineau *et al.* (2015) provided only a narrative review of the conflict literature focusing particularly on the difference between conflict at the intra-organisational and conflict at the interorganisational levels. As clearly stated by those authors “*our intent is not to conduct an exhaustive review of the literature, but rather highlight key studies of interorganizational conflict*” (p. 45). Moreover, Johnsen and Lacoste (2016) developed a systematic review of conflict, power, and dependence but they only examined the dark side associations of these constructs, largely overlooking other aspects of conflict including the “conflict resolution” stream, which is considered a crucial component of conflict research (DeChurch *et al.*, 2013).

Consequently, the purpose of this paper is to present a comprehensive review of the evolution of conflict within a supply chain context. In particular, this paper attempts to answer the following research questions: ***What is the current state of buyer-supplier conflict research? What are the gaps in buyer-supplier conflict research?*** To answer our research questions, we draw on a synthesis of 115 conflict-related articles published in the supply chain relationships literature.

Several contributions to the field of supply chain conflict are introduced. This study offers

the first systematic foundational review of the buyer-supplier conflict literature and identify essential areas that, to date, have received little attention. We examine key theoretical, methodological and empirical aspects of existing research, and build on core structuring assumptions of supply chain relationships (Lumineau and Oliveira, 2018) to propose four research areas that would help advance conflict theory including: 1) conflict (a)symmetry, 2) conflict valence, 3) conflict level of analysis, and 4) conflict over time. We propose a coherent agenda for future research opportunities to address each of the identified blind spots, as well as research avenues at their intersection. This serves as a source of reference for future researchers, and provides theoretically based future research that guides managerial decision-making.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: Section 3.3 provides the methodology used for the systematic review of the literature. Descriptive and thematic analyses of the extracted papers are presented in Sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2, respectively. Section 3.5 presents the research blind spots and the propositions for future research.

3.3 Methodology

This paper adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology based on the three-phase approach defined by Tranfield *et al.* (2003). Unlike conventional narrative reviews, this methodology is more systematic, structured, and explicit in the selection of the studies. It ensures that the review respects the basic quality principles of SLR including transparency, clarity, equality and accessibility (Crossan and Apaydin, 2010). This methodology has been successfully used in previous literature review papers in the Supply Chain and Operations Management research (Colicchia and Strozzi, 2012; Delbufalo, 2012). The systematic review approach as applied in the current study is diagrammatically presented in Figure III.1,

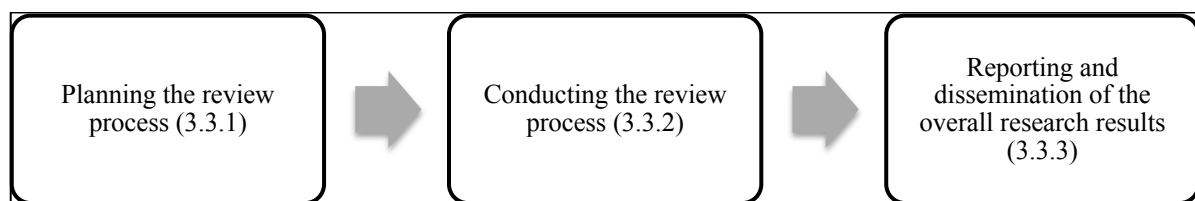


Figure III-1: Systematic review process (Adapted from (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003))

3.3.1 Planning the Review

Establishing a guiding analytical review scheme is a stepping-stone for evaluating the contribution of a given body of literature (Ginsberg and Venkatraman, 1985). Hence, the objective of this phase is to determine the scope of the search and to develop the search protocol. Similar

to recent systematic reviews in buyer-supplier relationships, this paper considers “*horizontal and vertical inter-firm relationships involving suppliers, manufacturers, distributors, and retailers*” (Delbufalo, 2012, p. 379). The domains for the research synthesis are empirical (both qualitative and quantitative) and conceptual papers that examine conflict in these relationships. Papers’ substantive relevance was ensured by requiring that the term “*conflict*”, “*disagreement*”, “*tension*” (De Wit et al., 2012), “*conflict management*”, “*conflict resolution*”, “*conflict handling*”, “*conflict strategy*” (DeChurch et al., 2013; Ma et al., 2008) in the Topic category, combined with at least one of the following terms in the title of the articles including “*cooperat**” or “*interfirm*” or “*inter-firm*”, “*inter-organizational*” or “*interorganizational*” or “*inter-organisational*” or “*interorganisational*”, or “*supply chain*” or “*buyer*” or “*supplier*” or “*alliance*” or “*network*” (Delbufalo, 2012). Because conflict research was initially conducted in a distribution channel context, the term “*distribution channel*” was also added to tap into the interorganisational level of conflict. Considering these elements, inclusion and exclusion criteria have been made.

3.3.2 Conducting the Review:

Keywords and database: ISI Web of Knowledge Social Citation Index was defined as the source of research (Crossan and Apaydin, 2010). Keywords were built into search strings and entered into the database with no restriction for the date of publication. This search resulted in 1749 papers (Research conducted in December, 2017). Figure III.2 summarises the review process.

Filtering for quality and research domain: Articles published in English in peer-reviewed journals with a management focus were considered. The “gray literature”, representing conference papers, master's theses, doctoral dissertations, textbooks, news reports, and unpublished working papers, was excluded to focus our synthesis on rigorous academic research (Giunipero *et al.*, 2008; Spina *et al.*, 2013; Wetzstein *et al.*, 2016). Only journals included in the Chartered Association of Business Schools (ABS) list were retained to ensure that the papers selected have been subject to assurance systems for academic quality and rigor (Lockett *et al.*, 2006; Giunipero *et al.*, 2008; Johnsen and Lacoste, 2016). This procedure resulted in a short-list of 319 relevant articles.

Abstract review: 319 abstracts were reviewed and only papers where conflict is the emphasis, or papers where conflict/conflict management have been used as a variable to predict certain attitudinal and behavioural outcomes in supply chain relationships were retained. Articles that were out of scope including mathematical modelling and operational research papers dealing with internal channel conflict and organisational or cross-functional team conflict, finance decision-making conflict, and dispute management (litigation) were excluded. Furthermore, articles where

conflict has been used as a second-order construct for the concept of relationship quality were rejected as well. With this additional restriction, the number was reduced to 110 papers.

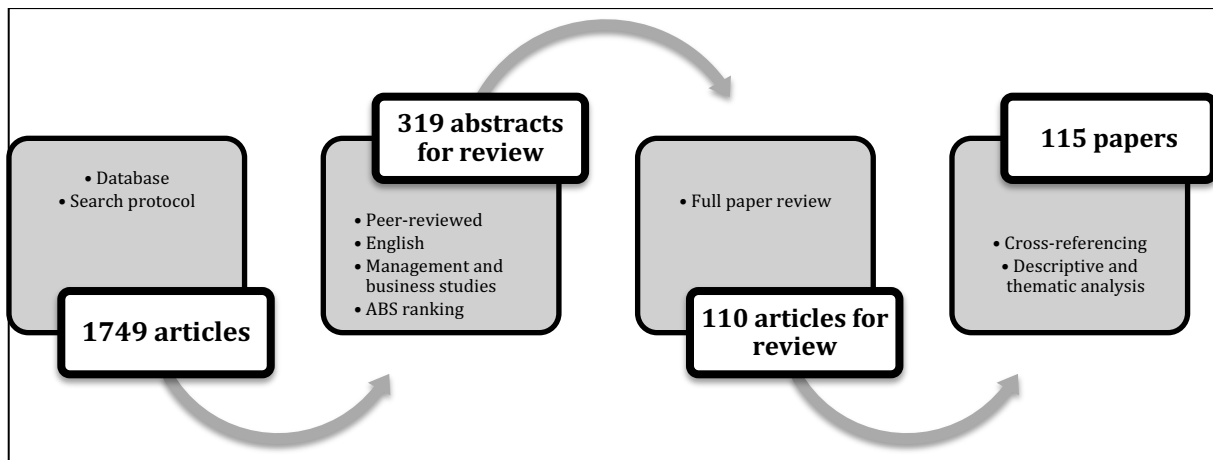


Figure III-2: Summary of the review process

Finally, all articles were read in their entirety, and cited references were used as a secondary source to ensure the comprehensiveness of the review. The results from this cross-referencing did not yield many additional papers (5 papers), and therefore it can be taken as an indication of the search validity (Seuring and Müller, 2008). The final set of papers was 115.

3.3.3 Reporting and Dissemination of the Results

The articles were analysed through both descriptive and thematic analyses (Delbufalo, 2012). Using an Excel database, the researchers classified the articles into different headings including general information about the paper (title, author, publication details etc.), as well as other specific features (methods, variables...etc.) (Hoppner and Griffith, 2015). This helps reduce human error and bias during the analysis stage of the review (Denyer and Tranfield, 2009). Figure III-3 illustrates the categories included in each analysis section.

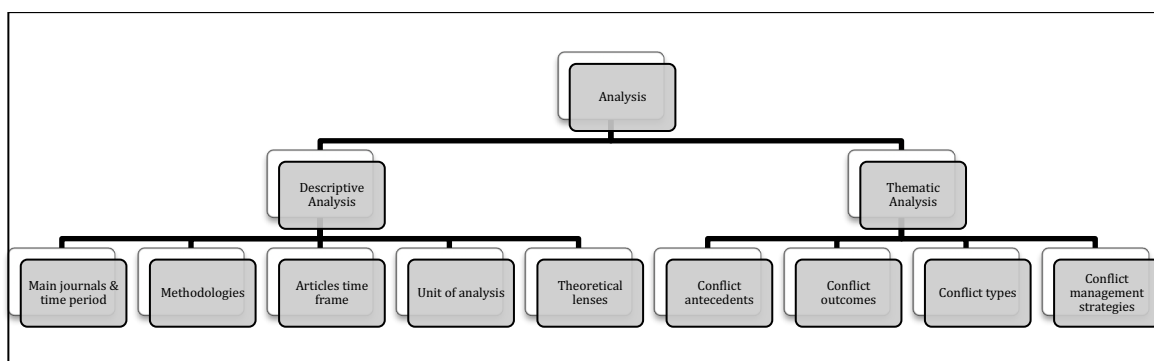


Figure III-3: Descriptive and thematic analyses headings

3.4 Analysis

3.4.1 Descriptive Analysis

3.4.1.1 *Distribution Across Main Journals and Across Time*

Since supply chain relationships have been empirically investigated within various social sciences disciplines including operations and supply chain management, marketing, and strategic management (Autry and Golobic, 2010), a large number of conflict management publications have proliferated in various journals across these disciplines. The top six journals in terms of their coverage of conflict are Industrial Marketing Management, Journal of Business Research, Journal of Retailing, Journal of Marketing, Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing, and Journal of Marketing Research. Marketing journals are predominant because the majority of studies focused on channels of distribution relationships. However, a cross-section on journal/field and time (Appendix A) showed that conflict studies are growing in importance within the operations and supply chain literature. The remaining journals and their frequencies are presented in Appendix A.

Regarding the distribution across years of publication, Figure III.4 noticeably highlights an overall increasing trend of journal publications, which illustrates the importance of this research area among scholars and practitioners. From the bar chart, two major periods can be distinguished: 1969-2002 and 2003-2017. 40 papers have been published in period 1 (over 33 years), while this figure has increased by more than 50% in period 2 (over 14 years only). The resurgence of interest in the field (from 2003 onwards) is justified by the refinement of the conceptualisation of the conflict construct, and the emergence of two paradigms for approaching conflict: conflict as a problem to be removed and conflict as a resource for improvement (Samaha *et al.*, 2011; Halinen and Tähtinen, 2002). This conceptual clarity urged a vigorous and renewed attention to studying the underlying psychological, structural or environmental factors that induce, support, and diminish conflict.

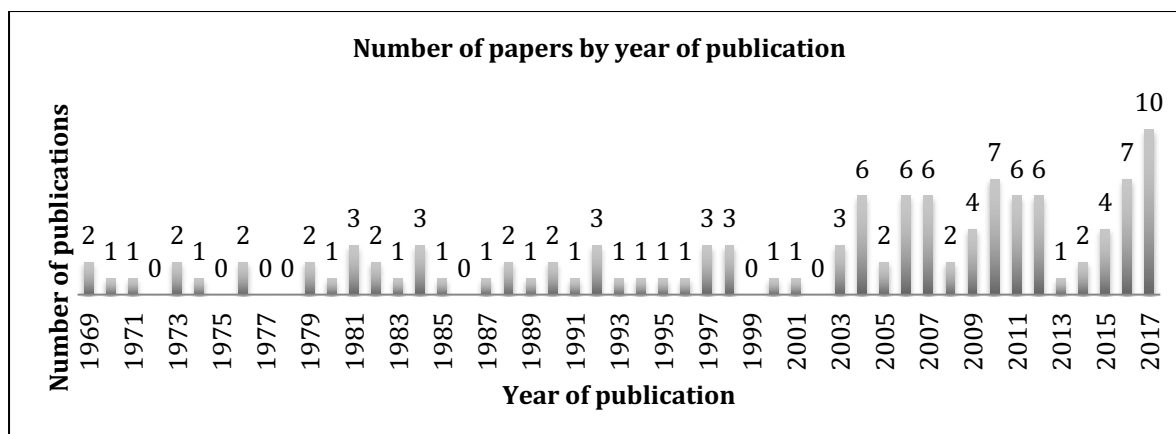


Figure III-4: Papers distribution by year of publication

3.4.1.2 Research Methodologies Applied

Scholars have proposed several classifications of research methods (Dwivedi and Mustafee, 2010; Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991; Palvia *et al.*, 2007; Avison *et al.*, 2008). We have partly adopted these classifications to include case studies, interviews, secondary data, laboratory experiments, field experiments, survey, frameworks and conceptual models, and literature analysis. Figure III.5 presents the frequency of the various research methodologies used. The three primary research methods that emerged from this analysis were surveys, case studies, and frameworks and conceptual models.

Surveys were clearly the dominant research method in this sample (75%). Within the specific context of buyer-supplier conflicts, survey research provided insights into antecedents that might explain variance in the amount of conflict within a dyad, as well as conflict outcomes using a wide range of industrial and national contexts (Griffith *et al.*, 2006). However, practicalities of a survey methodology also mean that dynamics are overlooked; surveys provide little insights of how and why conflict levels change, and do not illustrate how firms make decisions throughout the conflict resolution process. Moreover, surveys do not indicate the sequence of events making it impossible to infer causality (Krafft *et al.*, 2015; Rindfleisch *et al.*, 2008). More generally, survey research, if not properly designed, can generate flawed results because of single respondent bias and common method bias (Flynn *et al.*, 2018).

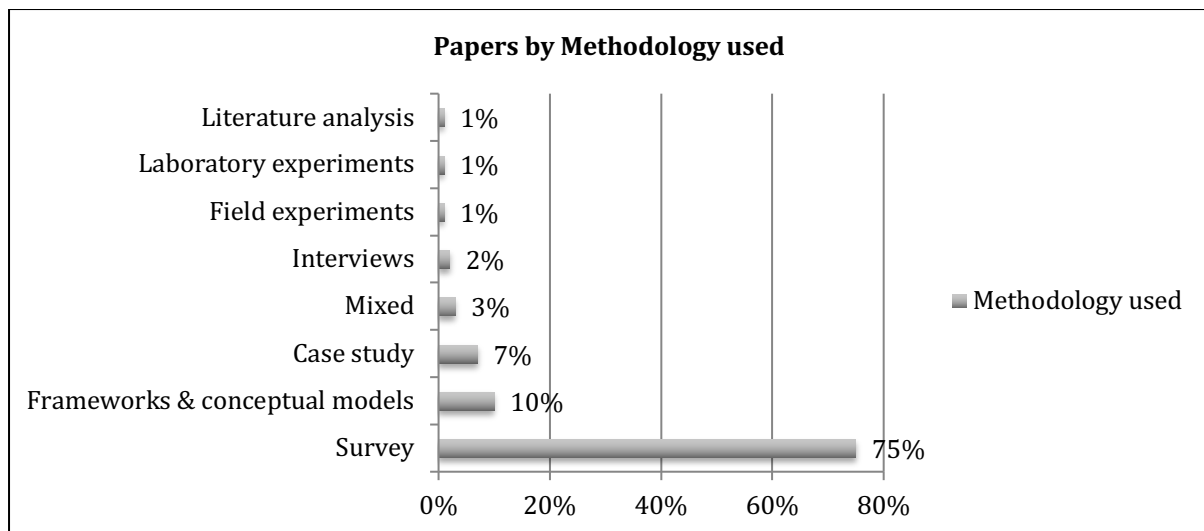


Figure III-5: Publications by methodology used

Case studies accounted for 7% of the empirical subset. Yet, given that conflict is defined as a process, case studies are particularly valuable in substantiating the evolving nature of conflict and unravelling the complexities inherent in the resolution of the conflict episode including its why, what, when, and how (Benbasat *et al.*, 1987; Meredith, 1998; Voss *et al.*, 2002). However, confidentiality issues that researchers encounter when investigating sensitive phenomenon such as conflict (Lumineau *et al.*, 2015) may have prevented the use of case studies within this particular context.

A small percentage of the selected articles (3%) used a mixed-method approach by combining mainly interviews and surveys. In the supply chain context, the combination of multiple methodologies allows the researcher to obtain a more multi-faceted understanding of a phenomenon (Eckerd, 2016) and achieve convergence of results from different methods through triangulation (Jick, 1979). Finally, experiments as a method of investigation represented only 1% of the papers under review. Through controls and random assignments to treatments, experiments provide researchers with the ability to isolate specific effects, to observe directly the impact of a change in a factor (i.e., the treatment) on an outcome variable, and to consequently develop strong inferences of causality (Boyer and Swink, 2008; Eckerd, 2016).

3.4.1.3 Study Time Frame

Papers in this review are classified according to four categories: timeless, methodologically temporal, conceptually temporal, and fully temporal (Roe, 2008). Timeless papers refer to the category where there is no reference to time (cross-sectional). The “methodologically temporal”

category encompasses papers that provide data about the phenomenon at several time intervals in a longitudinal design, but make no reference to processual mechanisms (e.g. longitudinal survey). Conceptually temporal papers incorporate papers in which time is illustrated at a conceptual level. Finally, the “fully temporal” category comprises papers that consider time both conceptually as well as methodologically, and reflect the dynamics of the phenomenon by focusing on processual issues (Van de Ven and Huber, 1990). To analyse papers’ temporal coverage, conceptual papers were removed from the review (as none of them had a temporal perspective) leaving 104 papers for time period analysis.

As shown in Figure III.6, timeless is the dominant category in our sample accounting for 91% of the total papers reviewed. This reflects the dominance of surveys as a research design (Malhotra and Grover, 1998). These findings are similar to those found by Terpend *et al.* (2008) in their analysis of two decades of organisational research. The researchers concluded “...*the research is almost exclusively cross-sectional and assumes that relationships are static in nature*” (p. 42). Therefore, despite the long-term nature of inter-organisational relationships (Roehrich and Caldwell, 2012) and the importance of investigating conflict dynamics over time (Frazier, 1999; Geyskens *et al.*, 1999; McCarter *et al.*, 2018), there is only limited evidence of publications adopting a longitudinal or a processual research perspective. Although cross-sectional research provides insight into a given phenomenon, it only offers a partial picture and impedes finding meaningful effects (Krafft *et al.*, 2015). Consequently, researchers should move beyond variance theory and embrace process theory to provide an explanation of the sequences of events (Abbott, 1988; Pettigrew, 1997; Langley, 1999), and delineate the underlying mechanisms causing the evolution of conflict over time, as well as the conditions under which these mechanisms operate (Tsoukas, 1989; Van de Ven and Huber, 1990). Additional insights on the integration of time in specific conflict research streams will be highlighted in the discussion section.

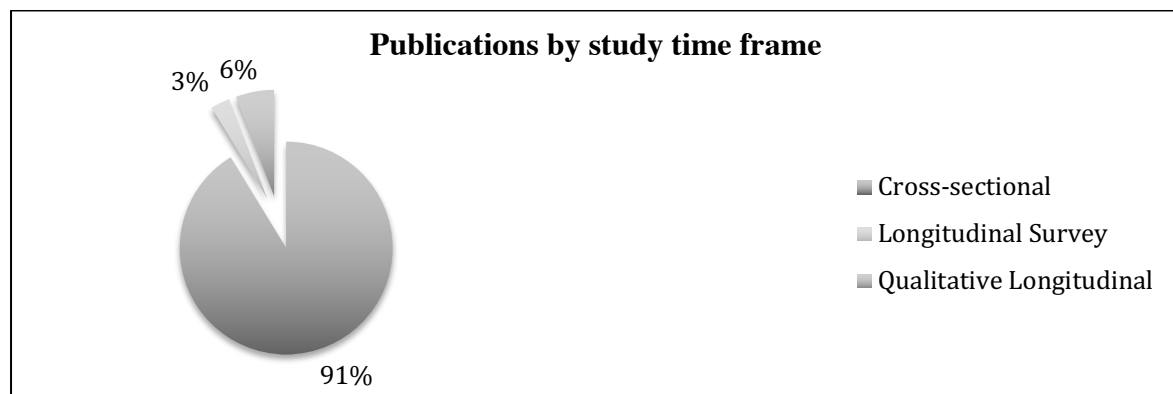


Figure III-6: Publications’ time frame

3.4.1.4 Unit of Data Collection

Figure III.7 illustrates that the majority of the empirical papers included in this review represent studies where researchers examined the perspective of a focal company (80%) within the dyad, and to a lesser extent the perspective of both sides of the dyad (matched dyads (16%); not matched dyads (4%)). This is consistent with recent results of Krafft *et al.* (2015) who found that, based on a sample of 362 studies in marketing channels, dyadic empirical research is fairly low relative to non-dyadic design studies. Dyadic research designs enable researchers to measure both the magnitude of the phenomenon in the dyad and the (as)symmetry in partners' perception (Liu *et al.*, 2012; Klein *et al.*, 2007). However, dyadic studies reviewed in this paper either used dyadic data for triangulation purposes (Ellegaard and Andersen, 2015; Lynch *et al.*, 2014; Doherty *et al.*, 2014), for understanding different perspectives (e.g. how the position in the dyad impact the hypothesised relationships) (Pfajfar *et al.*, 2017), and for determining magnitude by measuring the mean value score from paired dyads (Cai *et al.*, 2017; Luo *et al.*, 2009; Zhou *et al.*, 2007; Liu *et al.*, 2017), leaving “*conflict asymmetry*” largely understudied. Therefore, the advancement of conflict research requires moving beyond a single firm's perspective, as conflict episodes involve partners with different perceptions (Nyaga *et al.*, 2010) where symmetry is not a typical state (Hingley, 2001).

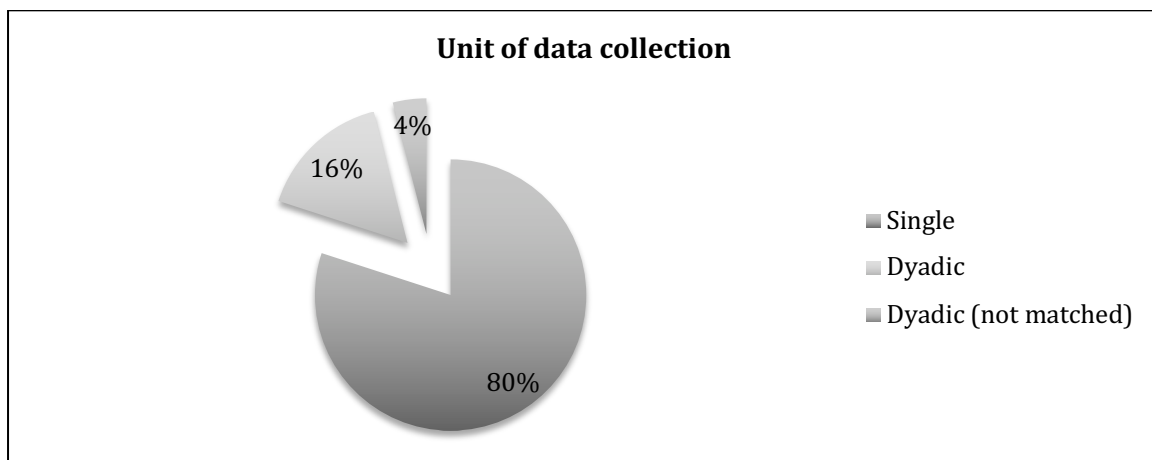


Figure III-7: Publications by unit of data collection

3.4.1.5 Theoretical Lenses Adopted

There is considerable academic discourse as to what constitute a theory and no consensus has been reached as to which theories should be applied to explain SCM issues (Chicksand *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, in coding the reviewed papers for the theoretical lens(es) adopted, we followed the categorisation used by previous systematic reviews in a supply chain context (Shook *et al.*, 2009; Carter and Easton, 2011; Halldorsson *et al.*, 2007; Chicksand *et al.*, 2012). These include:

Transaction Cost Economics, Resource-based view/Knowledge-Based view, Institutional Theory, Resource Dependency Theory, Agency Theory, and Social Exchange Theory. In addition, a “Other” category was added to give enough flexibility for emergent theories that were not predefined in the coding process. These included a diverse set of theories from multiple fields, such as information processing theory, self-determination theory, and boundary-spanning theory.

The most striking result among the selected papers is that only 37 make reference to explicit theories, meaning that the vast majority of articles are not grounded in consolidated theories. This is surprising because the need for extensive use of theory in the supply chain and operations management research has long been advocated (Schmenner and Swink, 1998). The analysis of theories’ frequency indicates that Social Exchange Theory and Transaction Cost Economics share the dominant theoretical perspectives. This is not surprising as these two theories have been fundamental in explicating the nature of interorganisational relationships (Spina *et al.*, 2013). The other category includes a diverse set of theories from multiple fields (Figure III.8). Essentially, conflict studies were linked to a particular theoretical lens, and studies integrated theories pertaining for instance to the dyad, i.e. mono-level theories (e.g. power dependence and relational exchange theories). Yet, supply chain relationships are complex phenomena (Parmigiani and Rivera-Santos, 2011), and hence an integration of theories that span different levels would explicate level-connecting mechanisms. Blending different theories provides rich insights to the interpretation of the findings and facilitates new theory generation about the complexities inherent to conflict (Carter and Easton, 2011).

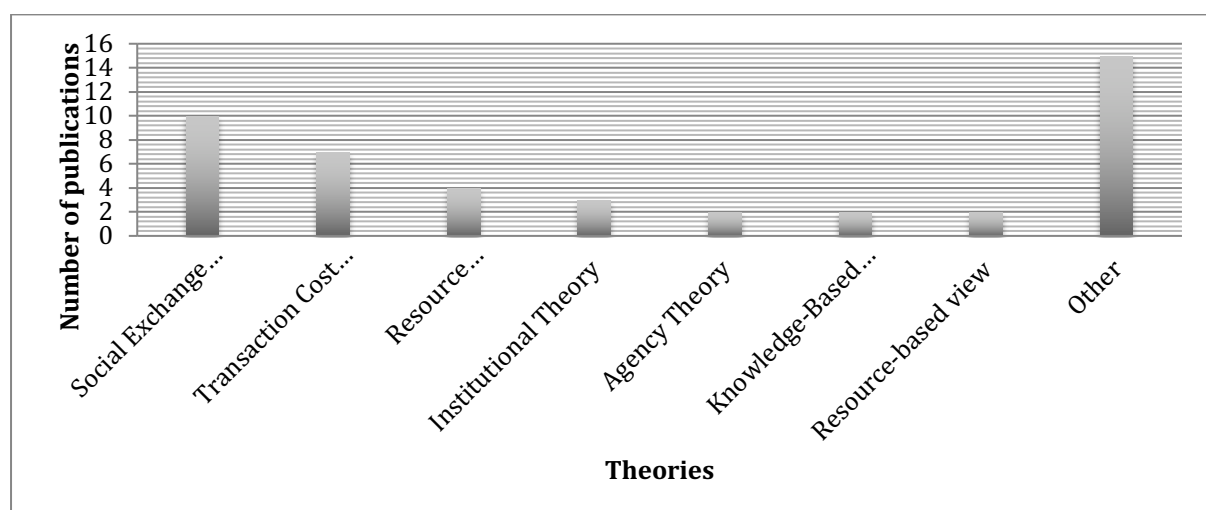


Figure III-8: Publications by theories used

3.4.2 Thematic analysis

The previous section provided a descriptive analysis of the papers analysed. The following section will highlight the main themes that were mostly investigated in the existing literature. Essentially, we found that four streams of research typify most of the academic work on conflict: 1) *conflict antecedents*, 2) *Conflict outcomes*, 3) *Conflict types*, and 4) *conflict resolution strategies*.

3.4.2.1 Conflict Antecedents

A considerable amount of the literature has been published on conflict antecedents to highlight causes to the occurrence of conflict. The antecedent that has been investigated by far and large is power. The relationship between power and conflict was reported in the first studies by Lusch (1976a), who found that coercion tend to increase the frequency of conflict whereas non-coercive power leads to fewer disagreements (Lee, 2001), but these findings were not consistent across subsequent studies. Inconsistencies in results emerged from the measurement of the conflict construct, which was based on frequency (Lusch, 1976a; Wilkinson, 1981; Lee, 2001), intensity (Zhang and Zhang, 2013; Zhuang *et al.*, 2010), or a combination of frequency and importance (Schul and Babakus, 1988). Other antecedents that have been investigated included contracts (Brown *et al.*, 2006; Lee *et al.*, 2017; Yang *et al.*, 2017; Bai *et al.*, 2016), and opportunism (Prince *et al.*, 2016; Skarmeas, 2006).

Three major limitations can be distinguished in this research stream: 1) a predominance of relationship-related factors, 2) a consideration of each level of analysis separately, and 3) a lack of replication across studies. First, conflict involves mechanisms from other levels of analysis besides relationship level factors (Lumineau *et al.*, 2015). Consequently, by focusing on one level of analysis while ignoring the other, researchers only provide a partial picture of conflict. Moreover, by considering each level separately, conflict researchers might miss the interaction between levels, and might therefore attribute effects from the dimensions of one level to those of another level, thereby causing a cross-level fallacy (Rousseau, 1985). Accordingly, a multi-level theoretical lens encompassing the dynamic interplay between different levels' factors could provide insightful description of the conflict phenomenon. Finally, few replication studies have been published. Yet, replication is essential to the extent that it enables researchers to confirm past findings, to examine a phenomenon from various points of reference (e.g. different context, timing, perspective...etc.), and grant original theories greater legitimacy (Goldsby and Autry, 2011). Specifically, replication studies are "interesting" as per Davis (1971, p. 318) because they could reveal that what is believed to be "*a local phenomenon is in reality a general phenomenon*", or "*what seems to be a stable and unchanging phenomenon is in reality an unstable and changing phenomenon*".

3.4.2.2 Conflict Outcomes

Researchers distinguished between functional outcomes, which are positive performance results that conflict generates, and dysfunctional outcomes, which are adverse effects on partners' performance. Most evident are the negative consequences. Murfield *et al.* (2016) found that conflict is associated with supplier's perception of lower levels of relationship quality and decreased motivation to accommodate buyers' request in the future. Other detrimental effects of conflict include relational betrayal (Leonidou *et al.*, 2017), opportunism (Kang and Jindal, 2015), lack of cooperation and flexibility (Samaha *et al.*, 2011), decreased relational investment (Luo *et al.*, 2009), reduced trust and commitment (Leonidou *et al.*, 2006), dissatisfaction (Humphreys *et al.*, 2009; Vinhas and Gibbs, 2012; Lee, 2001), and decreased performance (Ding, 1997). Conversely, few studies have shown that a certain degree of conflict between parties in a relationship may strengthen partners' efforts towards value-creation (Mele, 2011), provide an opportunity to refine the on-going relationship (Chang and Gotcher, 2010), and decrease switching intentions (Skarmeas, 2006).

Based on the analysis of conflict outcomes (See Appendix 3 for a complete overview of conflict outcomes dimensions and the findings of previous research), two main observations could be made: 1) predominance of conflict dysfunctionality, and 2) focus on firm or dyadic level outcomes. Empirical evidence about conflict benefits in supply chains is actually limited, and this could be explained by the conceptualisation of the conflict construct. Researchers used a uni-dimensional conceptualisation containing "conflict", "incompatibilities", "tensions", which tend to be interpreted negatively by respondents (O'Neill *et al.*, 2015; L. Loughry *et al.*, 2014). As stated by Menon *et al.* (1996, p. 300), the "*general tendency to define and conceptualize conflict in negative terms, but all forms of confrontation, intense discussion, dialogue and debate are treated as negative conflict*". These conceptualizations indicate not only the degree of conflict between partners, but also imply dysfunctional outcomes (Leckie *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, a single conceptualization of conflict fails to capture the true effect of conflict on relationship outcomes (Ren *et al.*, 2009). Furthermore, scholars theorised the conflict-outcome link as linear, and hence an investigation of the mechanisms through which conflict has (dys)functional outcomes (Mediating variables), and the contextual factors that could moderate these relationships has been lacking.

In addition, conflict outcomes measures considered in existing research focused largely on the firm or dyadic outcomes. However, as previously mentioned, supply chain relationships are nested phenomena (Lumineau and Oliveira, 2018) involving various levels (e.g. individuals, network...etc.). Therefore, conflict outcomes could pertain to interorganisational issues as well as

to other lower/higher levels (See discussion section 3.5.3 on single level of analysis).

3.4.2.3 Conflict Types

Single Vs. Multiple Conceptualization

Conflict gained importance as a research area and scholars further sought to refine its conceptualisation (Amason, 1996; Amason and Schweiger, 1994; Jehn, 1995). Two types have initially emerged – task and relationship. Task conflict refers to “*disagreements among group members about the content of the tasks being performed, including differences in viewpoints, ideas, and opinions*”. Relationship conflict, on the other hand, refers to “*personal incompatibilities among group members, which typically includes tension, animosity, and annoyance among members within a group*” (Jehn, 1995, p. 258).

Although this categorization has gained resonance in the organisational behaviour literature over the last few decades, the review of the supply chain conflict literature showed that 85% of the studies considered conflict as a single construct that combines factors pertaining to both task and relationship conflicts. A handful of studies have considered either task conflict or relationship conflict (4% for task conflict and 1% for relationship conflict), and other studies included both conflict types in one study (10%) (Figure III.9). However, this is a significant gap because this conceptualisation has been recognized as constituting a critical theoretical distinction in several meta-analysis (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003; DeChurch *et al.*, 2013) as conflict types have differential impacts on conflict outcomes.

Further refinement of the conflict construct resulted in the addition of a third dimension referred to as process conflict and defined as “*how task accomplishment should proceed in the work unit, who’s responsible for what, and how things should be delegated*” (Jehn, 1997, p. 540). Yet, this type of conflict has not been empirically used in previous supply chain conflict studies. Scholars failed to obtain discriminant validity because of the strong overlap between task and process conflict (Behfar *et al.*, 2011) with a high inter-correlation ranging between .44 and .90 (Shaw *et al.*, 2011; Behfar *et al.*, 2011; Jehn and Mannix, 2001). Accordingly, researchers argue that process conflict is merely one kind of task conflict (Barki and Hartwick, 2004). Consequently, task versus relationship has been the basis of much conflict research but not process conflict.

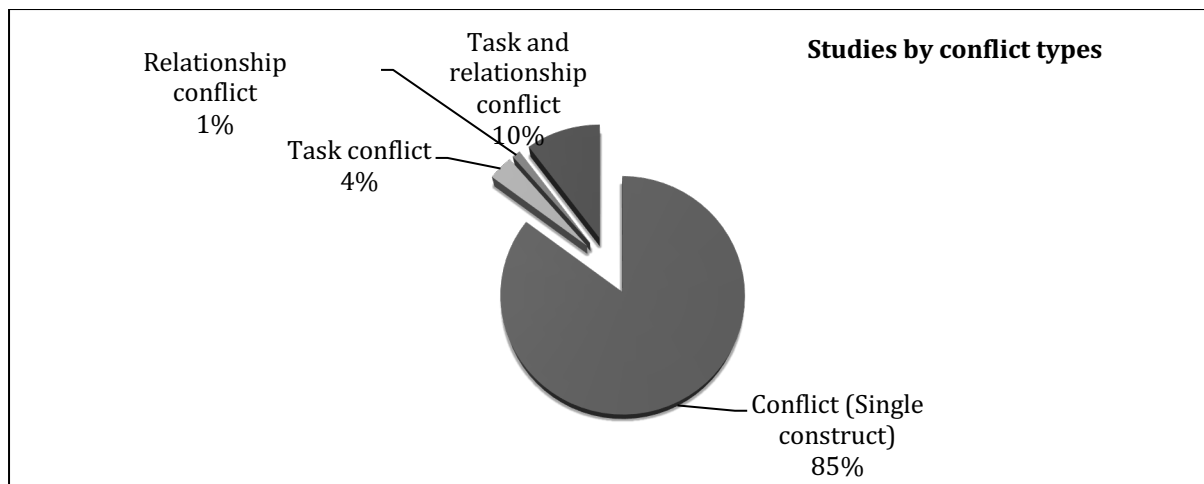


Figure III-9: Distribution of studies by conflict types

The Link Between Conflict Types And Outcomes

Following the development of conflict categorizations, scholars began mapping the impact of specific conflict types on performance. Generally, scholars argue that task conflict has a positive impact whereas relationship has a negative impact on outcomes (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003). This is explained by the fact that relationship conflict is associated with negative emotions; it disturbs harmony (Choi and Cho, 2011), and distracts attention from high-quality knowledge exchanges and decision-making (Amason, 1996; Shaw *et al.*, 2011). Task conflict, however, stimulates original and divergent viewpoints (De Clercq *et al.*, 2009) and helps groups avoid “conformity traps” (Choi and Cho, 2011). However, a recent meta-analysis demonstrated that the effect of task conflict is highly variable, sometimes beneficial and sometimes detrimental (De Wit *et al.*, 2012), hence challenging this assumption.

In a supply chain context, findings regarding the effects of conflict types have been inconsistent. The impact of task conflict was negatively associated with the quality of strategy (Rose and Shoham, 2004) and network member satisfaction (Bradford *et al.*, 2004), but positively related to knowledge sharing (Tang *et al.*, 2017), and had no significant impact on economic performance (Pfajfar *et al.*, 2017). On the other hand, relationship conflict had a negative impact on the quality of strategy (Rose and Shoham, 2004), network member satisfaction and network continuity (Bradford *et al.*, 2004), but did not have an impact neither on trust/commitment (Bobot, 2011) nor on economic performance (Pfajfar *et al.*, 2017).

Supply chain conflict scholars made initial attempts to explain the inconsistencies across results by including potential moderators. The variables examined included mostly conflict

resolution strategies³ (Bobot, 2011; Bradford *et al.*, 2004; Pfajfar *et al.*, 2017), task conflict intensity and relationship quality (Tang *et al.*, 2017), and task type (Parry *et al.*, 2008). For instance, Tang *et al.* (2017) found that the positive effect of task conflict on knowledge sharing is amplified when relationship quality is high, but weak under high conflict frequency. Furthermore, Parry *et al.* (2008), found that R&D task conflict had a positive and significant effect on performance, whereas the impact of marketing task conflict was negative and significant. A similar reasoning was followed in organisational psychology wherein researchers demonstrated that routine task conflict was detrimental to performance whereas non-routine task conflict had a positive or neutral effect (Simons and Peterson, 2000; Amason, 1996; Jehn, 1997; Van de Ven and Ferry, 1980). However, these findings were inconsistent with De Wit *et al.* (2012) meta-analyses where they provided evidence of the non-significant moderation of task type.

Taken together, the previous discussion emphasises that the conflict-outcomes relationship is complex and differ across situations. Appendix 4 highlights the state of current research, and suggests that more research is needed on the contingencies and the mechanisms related to the impact of conflict types on conflict outcomes.

The Interplay Between Conflict Types

Past conflict research and theory has primarily focused on the antecedents and outcomes of conflict types in isolation, neglecting a more complete conceptualization of their interaction. However, As stated by Baron (1984, p. 272) “*often what starts as a rational exchange of opposing views deteriorates into an emotion-laden exchange...in which strong negative feelings are aroused*”. Consequently, task conflict is tightly connected to relationship conflict, and research has empirically shown that task and relationship conflict are positively correlated (Rose and Shoham, 2004) with an average correlation of 0.54 (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003).

From task to relationship conflict

Small groups and intraorganisational conflict scholars empirically investigated the link from task to relationship conflict. Task conflict triggers relationship conflict as a result of social judgment and misattribution (Mooney *et al.*, 2007; Bradley *et al.*, 2015), such that negative attributions of task conflict would lead to the emergence of relationship conflict. Accordingly, researchers explored factors that may decrease the likelihood that task conflict would relate to relationship conflict. Scholars have predominantly investigated the role of trust (Choi and Cho, 2011; Curşeu and

³ This aspect will be further explained in the following section

Schruijer, 2010; De Clercq *et al.*, 2009; Peterson and Behfar, 2003; Simons and Peterson, 2000; Tidd *et al.*, 2004), and argued that high trust inhibits the transformation of task conflict into relationship conflict. Another mechanism considered is the conflict resolution process (Mooney *et al.*, 2007; Simons and Peterson, 2000; Maltarich *et al.*, 2018; Pluut and Curşeu, 2013; DeChurch *et al.*, 2007), such that the relationship between task and relationship conflict will be weaker for teams, which engage in a cooperative rather than a competitive approach to resolving conflict (Huang, 2010).

In an interorganisational context, investigation of the link from task conflict to relationship conflict is almost absent with the exception of Rose *et al.* (2007). The authors found a mediation function; a strong relationship between task and relationship conflict, in which task conflict negatively impacts economic performance and satisfaction through its impact on relationship conflict. Hence, additional research opportunities lie at developing a better understanding of the task conflict-to-relationship conflict linkage.

From relationship to task conflict

While previous research empirically demonstrated the task conflict to relationship conflict link, they have neglected the potential of a reversed causality, assuming less reasonable the probability of relationship conflict triggering task conflict (Mooney *et al.*, 2007). However, a concept from psychology research, the *halo effect*, supports this argument. Nisbett and Wilson (1977, p. 250) state that “*global evaluations of a person can induce altered evaluations of the person's attributes, even when there is sufficient information to allow for independent assessments of them*”. Therefore, these evaluations induce one party to disagree or reject another party’s opinions or ideas, thereby reducing collaborative task behaviours (Manata, 2016). De Wit *et al.* (2013) found that teams characterized with high relationship conflict exhibited rigidity in changing their opinions despite the presence of various views. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to argue that relationship and task conflicts are reciprocally related, but such investigation has not been yet undertaken and the underlying causal mechanisms remain speculative.

In sum, however important the interplay between conflict types may have been stressed in previous research, review of the supply chain conflict literature shows this is not yet the case. Accordingly, potential future research in supply chain conflict would be the investigation of the mechanisms and the conditions under which reciprocal relationship between conflict types occur in conflict situations. This is crucial because if both conflict types are interrelated, a lack of understanding of these factors will drag parties in a negative conflict spiral characterized by

escalating task and relationship conflicts, as relationship conflict would deter partners' collaborative behaviour towards task conflict resolution (Manata, 2016; Choi and Cho, 2011), which would ultimately impact conflict outcomes.

3.4.2.4 Conflict Resolution Strategies

Conflict resolution is defined as “*strategies oriented toward the intensification, reduction, and resolution of the tension*” (De Dreu *et al.*, 1999, p. 371). Researchers attempted to classify these strategies and hence various models have emerged (Figure III.10). These frameworks differ in the terms used to describe the strategies but their classifications are broadly based on two dimensions reflecting people's concerns for their interests and their concerns for the other party. Generally, five conflict resolution strategies were derived: (a) collaborating is oriented towards achieving maximum satisfaction of both parties' concerns through high cooperation; (b) accommodating implies offering help and giving in to the desires of the other party; (c) forcing involves imposing one's will on others; (d) avoiding involves ignoring all concerns and reducing the importance of the issue; and (e) compromising presumes a mutual give and take so as to gain partial fulfilment of one's desires (De Dreu *et al.*, 2001).

Concern for other/Concern for people/ Cooperativeness	High	Smoothing (Blake and Mouton, 1964) Accommodating (Thomas, 1976) Obliging (Rahim, 1983)	Problem-solving (Blake and Mouton, 1964) Collaborating (Thomas, 1976) Integrating (Rahim, 1983)
		Sharing (Blake and Mouton, 1964) Compromising (Thomas, 1976; Rahim, 1983)	
	Low	Avoiding	Forcing (Blake and Mouton, 1964) Competing (Thomas, 1976) Dominating (Rahim, 1983)
	Low	Concern for Self/Concern for	High

Figure III-10: Conflict resolution strategies frameworks

Conflict resolution has not been sufficiently investigated. Of the 115 papers reviewed, only 27 recognised conflict strategies as part of their theoretical framework. Figure III.11 represents the focus of these 27 articles. The majority (73%) explored the direct relationship between strategies and outcomes, followed by a group of researchers that added conflict (single construct) in the model (19%), and only a few combined conflict types and the resolution strategies (8%). This is a significant limitation in existing research, as recent studies have found that the resolution process explains as much variance in outcomes as do the nature and the level of conflict (DeChurch *et al.*, 2013).

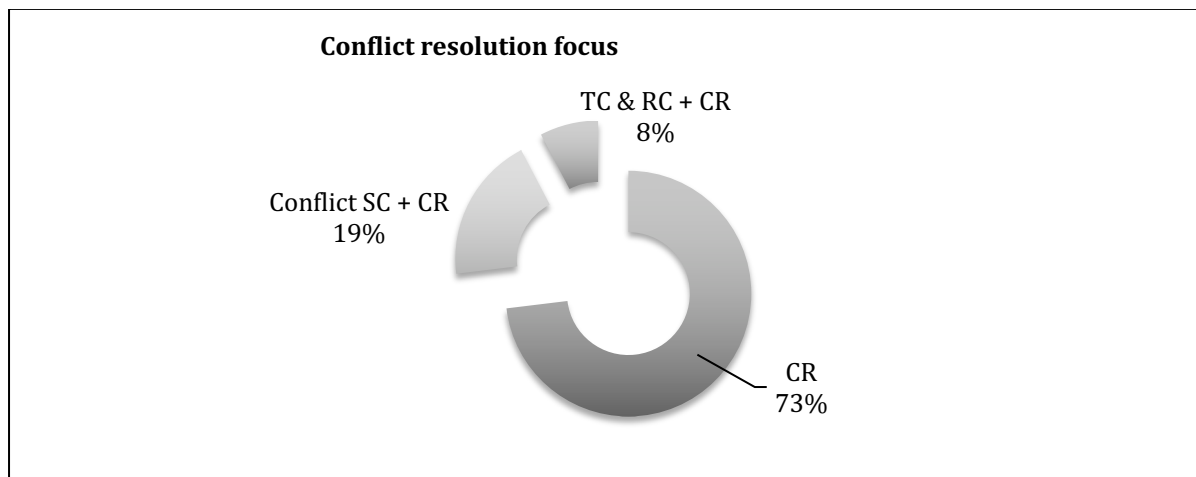


Figure III-11: Focus of Conflict resolution papers (SC=Single construct; TC=Task conflict; RC=Relationship conflict; CR=Conflict resolution)

Studies related to conflict resolution strategies covered various theoretical domains. First, prior research suggested that various factors could impact the use of a conflict strategy. Antecedents, for instance, include relational e.g. power (Lam and Chin, 2004), mutuality (Dant and Schul, 1992), fairness (Strutton *et al.*, 1993), and project-related aspects e.g. product technological complexity (Lam and Chin, 2004). Second, another stream looked at the effectiveness of conflict resolution strategies (Bobot, 2011; Ndubisi, 2011; Bradford *et al.*, 2004; Kozan *et al.*, 2006; Lin and Germain, 1998) through the investigation of their positive or negative outcomes. However, few studies tackled the conditions that could influence the relationship between the conflict resolution strategy and conflict outcomes (Moderators).

Scholars have investigated the relationship between conflict management strategies and relationship outcomes. Except for a collaborative management strategy that was in all studies positively related to relationship outcomes, results for other strategies were inconsistent across studies. For instance, whereas Bobot (2011) found a negative relationship between accommodation and trust and commitment, Ndubisi (2011) showed a positive relationship. A forcing strategy was negatively related to trust and commitment (Bobot, 2011), and network continuity (Bradford *et al.*, 2004). Similarly, while the study of Kozan *et al.* (2006) showed a positive relationship between compromising and overall satisfaction, this relationship was not supported by Lin and Germain (1998), and Bobot (2011) reported a negative relationship. Finally, the hypotheses concerning the avoiding strategy were not supported in any of the studies (Kozan *et al.*, 2006; Lin and Germain, 1998). This could be explained by the fact that the “avoiding strategy” fails to address the root causes of conflict, as the conflicted problem remains if parties ignore it (Le Nguyen *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, this strategy tend to undermine the relationship’s goal of mutual gain, and therefore it seems inconsistent with the norms and values advocated in supply chain relationships and (Mohr and Spekman, 1994; Tjosvold, 2008).

Although this research provided insights into conflict resolution, several limitations could be noted. First, only few papers considered conflict types in conjunction with conflict resolution strategies, although few studies provided strong evidence to the necessity of combining both conflict types and conflict strategies to understand conflict outcomes. For instance, Bobot (2011) found that when retailers use collaboration, but not confrontation, the relationship between task conflict and relationship quality is amplified. Second, while a “strategy” approach is useful, recent studies have criticized its applicability, and have advocated the use of a more fine-grained approach based on specific tactics oriented towards the lessening of conflict (Thiel *et al.*, 2018; Behfar *et al.*, 2008; Carton and Tewfik, 2016). Another limitation of the existing studies is their cross-sectional nature, which largely overlooks changes in conflict intensity and the ensuing conflict resolution changes.

3.5 Discussion and Synthesis

The systematic literature review has provided an effective method for mapping thematically the current state of interorganisational conflict and for allowing this research stream to be viewed holistically. In the discussion section, we will use the framework established by Lumineau and Oliveira (2018) as a framing device to discuss gaps in the conflict themes highlighted. Based on core assumptions pertaining to interorganisational relationships, the authors identified four blind

spots including the single party focus, the single valence perspective, the single level of analysis, and time. We will expand on each of these blind spots within the specific context of supply chain conflict, and discuss each blind spot's related research opportunities, as well as research opportunities at the intersection of the four blind spots (Table III.1).

3.5.1 Blind Spot #1: Conflict Asymmetry

Past research on supply chain relationships has often acknowledged the idea that supply chain partners do not share similar perceptions and expectations (Nyaga *et al.*, 2010). Specifically, these relationships “*undergo a continual balancing act where symmetry is not a typical state*” (Hingley, 2001, p. 850), as exchange partners possess an asymmetry in their perceptions of various relational constructs such as trust (Korsgaard *et al.*, 2015), dependence (Gulati and Sych, 2007), justice (Liu *et al.*, 2012), and knowledge (Sharma, 1997). These asymmetries have been argued to significantly impact the behaviour of relationship partners (Gundlach and Cadotte, 1994).

Accordingly, extending this view to the context of conflict signifies that partners might exhibit perceptual differences regarding a conflict situation. Recent organisational studies have touched upon this aspect under the theme of “*conflict about conflict*” to describe situations where there is a perceptual incongruity among team members about the conflict episode (Jehn *et al.*, 2015; Jehn *et al.*, 2010; De Wit *et al.*, 2012; Jehn and Chatman, 2000; Sinha *et al.*, 2016; Chen *et al.*, 2017). Two types of asymmetries could emerge: “*within conflict types*”, wherein partners do not share the same perception of the intensity of task (relationship) conflict, or “*across conflict types*”, wherein parties perceive the conflict issue differently (one party perceives the conflict is task-related and the other perceives the same issue is relationship-related). Yet, past research on supply chain conflict has often ignored the notion of asymmetry and assumed that buyers and suppliers work together on a task as if they had similar perceptions. Consequently, we still do not know much about the “perceptual convergence/divergence” regarding conflict within supply chain relationships.

This line of research is particularly relevant because researchers argued that potential conflict asymmetry predicts conflict outcomes (Ma *et al.*, 2018). Empirical results demonstrated that asymmetrical task conflict perceptions decreased performance and creativity of interacting employees (Jehn *et al.*, 2010). Similarly, Jehn *et al.* (2015) findings revealed a positive relationship between symmetric conflict perceptions and performance, irrespective of the absolute amount of conflict that was expected within the dyad. Taken together, these initial findings clearly show that conflict asymmetry is central to understanding conflict outcomes.

Consequently, to advance buyer-supplier conflict research, rich areas of research could be explored in understanding the antecedents of conflict asymmetry, particularly the factors that amplify, attenuate, or obfuscate incongruence in conflict perceptions among exchange partners. The investigation of asymmetry is important because the existence of asymmetries might drive inappropriate and inefficient conflict resolution process (i.e. if a supplier perceives the conflict as task conflict, they would deploy tactics targeted towards the resolution of the task. However, if the buyer perceives the same conflict episode as relationship conflict, they would perceive the supplier's actions as inappropriate, which will in turn negatively impact their relationship) leading to dysfunctional outcomes. In addition to understanding the antecedents of asymmetry, further research might also explore the impact of asymmetries on conflict outcomes. For instance, it would be interesting to see whether there exist differences or similarities across task and relationship conflict asymmetries in predicting outcomes in supply chain relationships (e.g. high task conflict asymmetry is less/more negatively related to outcomes than relationship conflict asymmetry). Another fertile research direction involves studying the impact of asymmetry on conflict features (including intensity and duration) and outcomes using a degree-symmetry approach (Liu *et al.*, 2012). Further research opportunities also relate to the study of asymmetries over time, more specifically the timing of asymmetries emergence, as well as the dynamics of conflict as(symmetry) over time.

3.5.2 Blind Spot #2: Conflict Valence

Valence refers to the degree of positive or negative feelings an entity has towards a specific situation, an event, or another entity (Lerner and Keltner, 2000). In the context of supply chain relationships, valences arise from tensions and contradictions that typically characterise those relationships (Das and Teng, 2000). Valences could either be negative or positive, including for instance, collaboration vs. conflict and trust vs. distrust. These valences are not opposite end of a single continuum (Petty *et al.*, 1997), where the existence of one valence rules out the existence of the other, but they prevail simultaneously. For instance, while convergent interests provide incentives to trust an exchange partner, relationships have other divergent facets that provide simultaneous foundations for distrust (Lewicki *et al.*, 1998). This indicates that certain combinations of trust and distrust exist within a relationship. Consequently, supply chain relationships are not “univalent” but entail a mixture of positive and negative valences, and therefore “*attention to both positive and negative valences is essential for understanding how [supply chain relationships] operate and ultimately attain specific outcomes*” (Lumineau and Oliveira, 2018, p. 18).

Evidence suggests that the coexistence of valences impacts interorganisational

relationships. Vlaar *et al.* (2007) proposed that increases in trust reduce the need for formal control in the presence of distrust. Similarly, De Rond and Bouchikhi (2004) demonstrated that the co-existence of trust and vigilance in early stages of the collaborative relationship creates synergies between entities. In addition, in studying collaboration among NGOs in Palestine, Hardy *et al.* (2003) found that collaboration and conflict operate jointly, in a productive manner, in predicting outcomes of these collaborative ties. Another study by Polidoro Jr *et al.* (2011) also showed how positive and negative valences affect tie formation and dissolution among firms. Essentially, this suggests that “*the creative and synergistic outcomes, which many writers associate with collaboration, may also follow from conflictual interorganizational relationships*” (Hardy and Phillips, 1998, p. 218).

In the context of supply chain relationships, conflict–collaboration valences is increasingly frequent (Lumineau and Oliveira, 2018). Supply chain relationships are not either characterised by conflict or collaboration, but “*both together constitute the group as a concrete, living unit*” (Simmel, 1955, p. 20). Alter (1990, p. 479) emphasises “*if either conflict or cooperation is absent from the collective experience, a system [e.g., a supply chain relationship] is unlikely to have the capacity to develop effective operations*”. Therefore, a comprehensive theory of relationships must address both valences as key elements of a single social space, because they are interdependent in determining the nature of subsequent interorganisational interaction (Sytych and Tatarynowicz, 2014; Das and Teng, 2000).

Taken together, we suggest that future conflict research should consider a conflict episode as embedded in the relationship context. Reasoning for the simultaneous existence of conflict and collaboration may bolster relationship ambivalence (e.g. Petriglieri (2015); (Rees *et al.*, 2013)), impact how partners work out their disagreements, and produce potentially different ranges of conflict resolution strategies than those so far considered in the conflict resolution literature. For instance, an anticipation of future collaboration, a high shadow of the future, would create a disincentive to further escalate conflict because such conflict could substantially diminish access to the partners’ resources and otherwise threaten the continuity of the exchange. Essentially, the simultaneous experience of both valences and the ambivalence that emerges invites further investigation into the antecedents, forms, and consequences of conflict-collaboration ambivalence.

3.5.3 Blind Spot #3: Conflict Single Level of Analysis

Supply chain conflicts inherently are considered cross-level phenomenon (Lumineau *et al.*, 2015). Therefore a “*robust understanding of [conflict] dynamics requires attention to higher as well as lower levels of analysis*” (Hackman, 2003, p. 905) in order to mitigate against “cross-level fallacy” (Rousseau, 1985) and advance theory on conflict. In the following discussion, we will provide potential future

research directions at both lower levels (e.g. individual, firm) and higher levels of analysis (institution, network, etc.) by theorising multiple layers of supply chain conflict.

Human agents play a major role in explaining idiosyncratic behaviours in buyer-supplier relationships, specifically in developing trust (Zhang *et al.*, 2011), exercising power (Meehan and Wright, 2012), reducing opportunism (Tangpong *et al.*, 2010), and preventing relationship dissolution (Rogan, 2014). For instance, Tangpong *et al.* (2010) found that the interaction of agent cooperativeness (an individual personality trait) and relationship norms (an organizational level factor) mitigates opportunism in buyer supplier relationships. Similarly, Rogan (2014) demonstrated how executives' mobility affects exchange relationships retention. She found that multiple ties at the individual level provide greater enforcement of behavioural norms, which in turn makes the interorganisational exchange less likely to dissolve.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that individuals at the interface of supply chain relationships may have an essential impact on conflict. An exemplary study by Cai *et al.* (2017) demonstrated how guanxi between boundary spanners mitigates interorganisational conflict through the reciprocal exchange of favours between exchange partners. Another study by Ren *et al.* (2010) suggested that trust in supplier's representative negatively impact conflict at the interorganisational level. Therefore, interpersonal relationship dynamics merit further investigation in the supply chain conflict area. Besides interpersonal relationships characteristics, another fertile research opportunity relates to the characteristics of individuals and their impact on the conflict resolution process. For example, by applying personality trait theory (Weiss and Adler, 1984), conflict scholars could investigate how different personalities or characteristics that explain behavioural difference among individuals (e.g. attitude towards risk, cooperativeness, temporal orientation...etc.) interact with other interorganisational factors to mitigate or amplify conflict.

A further research opportunity that stems from overcoming the single level blind spot is to theorise the role of the relationship network in dyadic conflict. For instance, in the context of multinational corporations with centralized purchasing and sales centres, relationships in a given country are embedded within the relationship between the regional offices (Narasimhan and Carter, 1990). An interesting avenue is therefore to investigate how multiplex ties operate and constrain relationship management in general (Bals *et al.*, 2018; Juha and Pentti, 2008), and conflict in particular. Team conflict research has embraced such reasoning. For instance, Ren (2008) demonstrated that network bridging ties act as a buffer against conflict. Along similar lines, Li and Hambrick (2005) investigated international joint ventures groups and found that parent company affiliations can generate fault lines (a dividing line that may split a group into subgroups) and lead

to relationship conflict.

Moreover, relationships are influenced by the external environment including institutional, political, economic, cultural, environmental, and historical contexts (Lumineau *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, the study of conflict between organizations should take into consideration the environment in which the relationship is embedded. An exemplary study by Bai *et al.* (2016) integrated the macro-level (institutional environment: legal enforceability and government support) and the interorganisational level (contract structure) to provide a more refined picture on the impact of contracts on conflict, thereby circumventing blind spot #3. The researchers found that interorganisational control that is based on an output-based contract was negatively related to buyer-supplier conflict when legal enforceability was high but not when legal enforceability was low. An extension of this research would consider other institutional characteristics including environment stringency, regulatory ambiguity, and regulatory interference (Luo *et al.*, 2009). In addition, future research might also explore how the characteristics of the environment including complexity and dynamism (Dess and Beard, 1984) impact conflict. For instance, a study by Kang and Jindal (2015) demonstrated how the attractiveness of alternatives, a characteristic of the external environment, positively impacts conflict. Taken together, the research that overcomes the investigation of factors from one level of analysis is particularly relevant to advance theory on conflict and its resolution.

Research opportunities to overcome the single level blind spot concern also conflict outcomes, which might pertain to various levels as well. While supply chain conflicts are often conceptualized on a firm level, the resolution process is inherently an individual-level activity with potential consequences for managers involved. For instance, a research opportunity would be the investigation of whether the successful conflict resolution is prized by upper management and lead to managers' advancement (Mathews and Redman, 2001; John and Weitz, 1989). Service recovery research has embraced such perspective in combining recovery metrics with employee rewards systems (Michel *et al.*, 2009), and could therefore provide a basis for developing research propositions in the context of supply chain conflict.

Another research direction that is worth examining is "conflict contagion" (Sinha *et al.*, 2016). For instance, in the context of civil conflicts, researchers have shown how conflict in one country develops to other countries (Metternich *et al.*, 2017). Similarly, based on emotional contagion theory (Barsade, 2002), organisational team researchers demonstrated that dyadic conflict spills over to the team (Jehn *et al.*, 2013; Sassenberg *et al.*, 2007), and team conflict in turn carries over to the interteam level (Van Bunderen *et al.*, 2018). Accordingly, since supply chain

relationships are embedded in a network of relationships, this “spillover” or “contagion” process is worth investigating. For instance, it would be interesting to investigate conflict contagion across tiers of the supply chain over time.

In sum, we have drawn on several conflict studies to illustrate the gaps pertaining to the “single level of analysis”, and have afforded insights into future research opportunities. Specifically, linking different levels of analysis provides a multi-directional view based on the interplay between factors from different levels.

3.5.4 Blind Spot #4: Conflict Over Time

Based on the descriptive analysis in the current paper, the majority of supply chain conflict research is time insensitive. Studies appear to consider a conflict episode as invariant over time using particularly cross-sectional surveys. However, “*if we want to acknowledge the dynamic nature of conflict, our theorisation must allow for time and not ignore it*” (Mikkelsen and Clegg, 2017, p. 9). Therefore, we suggest three research areas where a temporal perspective merits specific inquiry and understanding.

Time & patterns of conflict types: Existing conflict research has demonstrated that conflict types are interrelated. However, their temporal change patterns have not yet been investigated. Research in psychology, marriage, marketing, and strategic management has introduced the concept of velocity to refer to changes in a construct (McCarthy *et al.*, 2010; Davis *et al.*, 2009; Palmatier *et al.*, 2013). Velocity represents the rate and direction of change over a specified period of time. While the rate of change refers to the amount of change, the direction of change refers to the degree of continuity-discontinuity, where a continuous change reflects an extension of past development, and a discontinuous change illustrates a shift in direction (McCarthy *et al.*, 2010). Building on the multi-dimensional conceptualization of conflicts and on the above-mentioned concept of velocity, each type of conflict could exhibit a particular velocity at a specified period of time. Accordingly, scholars could study the differences and relationships among “task conflict velocity” and “relationship conflict velocity”. Researchers could follow McCarthy *et al.* (2010) three dimensions of velocity including velocity homology (the similarity between the rate and direction of change of conflict types), velocity coupling (the extent to which the velocities of conflict types are causally connected); and finally velocity regimes (the various patterns that emerge from differences in velocity homology and velocity coupling).

Essentially, integrating a temporal perspective will enable understanding of periods of time in a conflict situation when task and relationship prevail versus when they do not occur

simultaneously, while linking these patterns to particular mechanisms throughout the conflict process. Examining changes in conflict types will advance our understanding of how conflict types in supply chain settings emerge and evolve singularly, in parallel or interactively (e.g. the emergence and transition over the conflict episode). It will also inform conflict theory by temporally examining the direction and rate of change in conflict types, which could eventually lead to a better understanding of functional or dysfunctional outcomes.

Time & conflict resolution: The tendency in conflict resolution research has been to analyse conflict strategies at a single point in time. However, conflict resolution is characterized by an interaction process where two parties act and react to each other, wherein individuals alter their behaviour to adapt to the situation, and achieve the best possible outcomes (Munduate *et al.*, 1999; Coleman and Kugler, 2014). Therefore, individuals tend to adopt more than one strategy depending on how the resolution process unfolds, and hence using a combination of strategies throughout a conflict episode seems to be the rule rather than the exception (Van de Vliert, 1997; Speakman and Ryals, 2010; Euwema and Van Emmerik, 2007). Integrating a temporal perspective to the conflict resolution process will provide a more fine-grained understanding of precisely what happens in a conflict situation in terms of parties' behaviours and conflict intensities, and how these dynamics evolve within the buyer-supplier relationship over the conflict situation, and over the relationship life-cycle. This will allow researchers to better concentrate on conflict resolution strategies and their utility under different organisational settings. Understanding conflict resolution as it occurs would draw a more complete picture of the conflict resolution trajectory by highlighting factors which contribute to resolving the conflict or if not, continue moving the relationship towards the termination phase (Johnsen and Lacoste, 2016).

Time & conflict outcomes: The debate on conflict outcomes has been on going for decades in the intraorganisational and interorganisational conflict research. Results across studies have been inconsistent – sometimes positive, sometime negative. Researchers included various factors to unpack such paradox, including conflict types and conflict resolution strategies. However, a universal finding has not been achieved. De Wit *et al.* (2012) highlight that one way to further understand conflict outcomes is to distinguish between distal and proximal outcomes. Proximal outcomes refer to short-term effects, i.e. emergent states including the cognitive, motivational, and affective states of individuals (Marks *et al.*, 2001). Distal outcomes refer to long-term effects, and include performance outcomes such as innovation, productivity, and effectiveness. Through their meta-analysis, they found that conflict types are more negatively related to proximal group outcomes than to distal group outcomes. Consequently, we believe that

one way to advance theory on conflict outcomes is to conduct studies through a temporal lens to assess both short- and long-term effects of conflict types. This approach will better explain how conflict disrupts relationship functioning and how partners can overcome conflict to improve relationship performance.

To sum up, we have presented four blind spots in the current conflict literature and we have provided guidance about future research opportunities within each blind spot. However, the four blind spots are not mutually exclusive, and many research opportunities lie at the crossroads of multiple blind spots. These are summarized in Table III-1.

	Conflict asymmetry	Conflict Valence	Conflict Over Time	Single Level of analysis
Conflict Over Time	<p>When do asymmetries occur?</p> <p>When do asymmetries matter?</p> <p>What are the dynamics of (as)symmetries over time?</p>	<p>What are the temporal transitions of valences patterns?</p> <p>What are the patterns of conflict-collaboration valences over time?</p>	<p>What are the patterns of conflict types over time?</p> <p>What is the effectiveness of conflict resolution tactics over time?</p> <p>What are the short-term and long-term consequences of a conflict episode?</p>	<p>How do events at multiple levels and their timing over the conflict episode impact conflict dynamics?</p>
Conflict Valence	<p>What are the differences in valences between exchange partners?</p>	<p>How does the coexistence of valences impact conflict resolution?</p> <p>How does one valence determine another valence?</p> <p>How do parties react to mixed valences (ambivalence)?</p>		<p>How does managers' valence weighting bias impact conflict outcomes?</p>
Single Level of analysis	<p>What are the factors that enhance the impact or the occurrence of asymmetries?</p> <p>How do cross-level differences influence asymmetries?</p>			<p>What are cross-level factors that impact conflict and conflict resolution?</p> <p>What is the impact of dyadic conflict on different layers of the supply chain relationship?</p>
Conflict asymmetry	<p>What are the types of asymmetries in a conflict situation?</p> <p>What are the antecedents of conflict asymmetries in supply chain relationships?</p> <p>How do asymmetries impact conflict outcomes?</p>			

Table III-1: Summary of future research opportunities based on the four blind spots

3.6 Limitations

The conclusions drawn in this paper should be considered in light of the following limitations. We have used exclusion criteria in the papers' selection process, which has an impact on the comprehensiveness of the study. First, although it may be that other articles covering conflict exist under different labels (Lumineau et al., 2015), we only used the terms "task conflict" and "relationship conflict", which have commonly been used in previous conflict reviews (De Wit et al., 2012; De Dreu and Weingart, 2003; Ma et al., 2018). We believe that the sample examined in the current paper is representative of the existing buyer-supplier conflict literature. Second, only articles in peer-reviewed journal articles have been included, leaving out other heterogeneous set of publications from other sources such as conference papers, books, thesis, business magazines...etc. For instance, scholars have encouraged the consultation of business magazines to compare scholars' and practitioners' perspectives or by involving the latter in the review and interpretation of the literature (Spina et al., 2013).

3.7 Conclusion

The basic challenge for conflict research remains the same; it is to understand the impact of conflict on supply chain relationship-related outcomes. Although we have learned much about conflict and its various antecedents and consequences in supply chain relationships, there remains much about it that we do not understand. This is the first attempt at synthesizing the body of supply chain conflict knowledge. Building on four major assumptions of interorganisational relationships (Lumineau and Oliveira, 2018), we proposed four research areas that would help advance conflict theory including: 1) conflict (a)symmetry, 2) conflict valence, 3) conflict single level of analysis, and 4) conflict over time. We highlight research questions pertaining to each blind spot as well as at the intersection of multiple blind spots. We are hopeful that our work will contribute to this literature by spurring new efforts and moving the field forward.

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3.9 Appendices

Appendix 1: publications by journal

Journal	Abbreviation	ABS	Impact factor	Number of articles	%
MARKETING				72	61.21
Industrial Marketing Management	IMM	3	3.166	27	22.4
Journal of retailing	JR	4	3.772	9	7.76
Journal of Marketing	JM	4*	5.318	7	6.03
Journal of business-to-business marketing	JBBM	2	1.312	6	5.17
Journal of marketing research	JMR	4*	3.654	5	4.31
Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing	JBIM	2	1.371	5	4.31
European Journal of Marketing	EJM	3	1.333	3	2.59
Journal of International marketing	JIM	3	3.725	3	2.59
International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management	IJRDM	2		2	1.72
Journal of the academy of marketing science	JAMS	4	5.888	2	1.72
International Marketing Review	IMR	3	1.672	1	0.86
Journal of Marketing Management	JMM	2		1	0.86
Journal of Global Marketing	JGM	1	0.73	1	0.86
Marketing Letters	ML	3	1.818	1	0.86
General Management, Ethics and Social Responsibility				20	17.24
Journal of Business Research	JBR	3	3.354	12	10.3
Administrative Science Quarterly	ASQ	4*	4.929	2	1.72
Academy of Management Journal	AMJ	4*	7.417	2	1.72
Journal of Management Studies	JMS	4	3.962	1	0.86
Journal of Business Ethics	JBE	3	2.354	1	0.86
Scandinavian Journal of Management	SJM	2	1.45	1	0.86
Business Horizons	BH	2	2.157	1	0.86
Operations and technology management				11	10.34

International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management (previously IJPDMM)	IJPDLM	2	2.577	3	2.59
Journal of Supply Chain Management	JSCM	3	5.789	2	1.72
Supply Chain Management: An International Journal	SCMIJ	3	4.072	2	1.72
Journal of Operations Management	JOM	4*	5.207	2	1.72
Journal of Business Logistics,	JBL	2	2.878	1	0.86
IEEE transactions on engineering management	IEEE Trans. Eng. Manag.	3	1.188	1	0.86
International business and Area studies				6	5.17
Journal of International Business Studies	JIBS	4*	5.869	2	1.72
Journal of World Business	JWB	4	3.758	1	0.86
International Business Review	IBR	3	2.476	1	0.86
Management International Review	MIR	3	1.516	1	0.86
Journal of International Management	JIM	3	2.600	1	0.86
Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management				2	2.59
Journal of business Venturing	JBV	4	5.774	2	1.72
Strategy				2	1.72
Strategic Management Journal	SMJ	4*	4.461	2	1.72
Innovation				1	0.86
Creativity and Innovation Management	CIM	2	1.423	1	0.86
Operations Research and Management Science				1	0.86
Decision Sciences	DS	3	1.595	1	0.86

Table III-2: Publications by journal

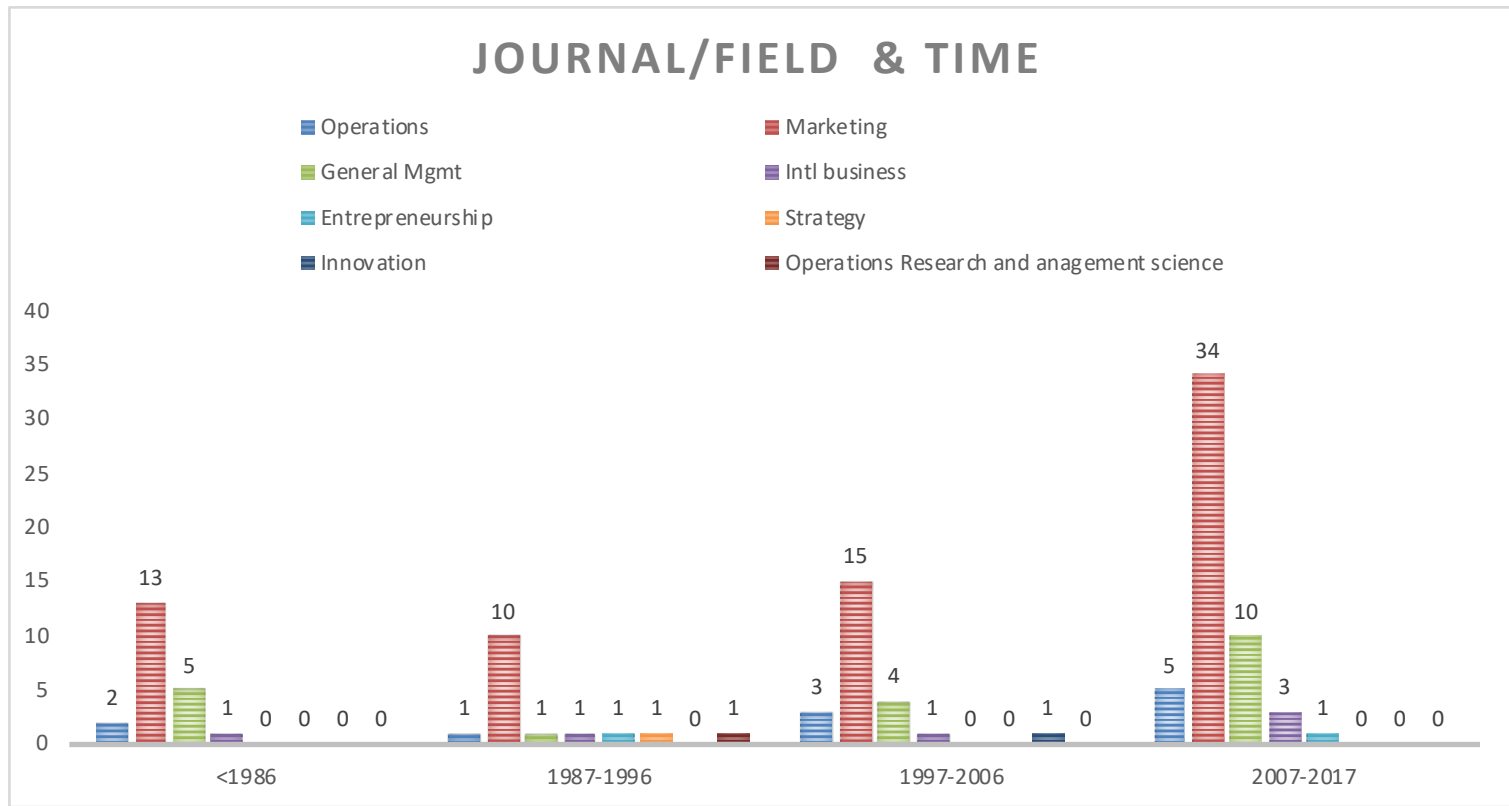


Figure III-12: Cross-analysis: Journal vs. Field over time

Appendix 2: Conflict antecedents

	Contracts	Satisfaction	Communication	Opportunism	Asset specificity	Decision structure	Favour exchanges	Coercive Power	Non-coercive power	Domain dissensus	Long-term orientation	Relational behaviour	Goal incongruity	Unfairness	Perceptual differences	Interdependence asymmetry	Guanxi	Trust in supplier' s Rep.	Alternative attractiveness	Service characteristics	NPD project factors	Cultural sensitivity	Flexibility norms	Cooperation	Solidarity norms	Information exchange	Coordination	Control	Dependence
Alter (1990)																				+									
Balabanis (1998)			NS					NS															-	-	-	NS			
Brown <i>et al.</i> (1983)								+	-																				
Brown <i>et al.</i> (1991)		-																											
Brown <i>et al.</i> (2006)	NS	-												+															
Cai <i>et al.</i> (2017)							-										NS												
Eliashberg and Michie (1984)													+																
Frazier and Rody (1991)								+	+																				
Griffith <i>et al.</i> (2006)											-	-																	
Hirshberg and Shoham (2017)								+	-																				+
Johnson <i>et al.</i> (1990)								NS	-																				
José Sanzo <i>et al.</i> (2007)			+																										
Kang and Jindal (2015)													+	+					+										
Lam and Chin (2004)																					+								
LaBahn and Harich (1997)			NS																			NS							
Lee (2001)								+	-																				
Lee <i>et al.</i> (2017)	x																												

Appendix 3: Conflict outcomes

	Satisfaction	Relationship quality	Relationship effectiveness	Relational commitment	Supplier willingness to accommodate	Betrayal	Opportunism	Cooperation	Flexibility	Relationship performance	Adaptation	Dissolution intention	Trust	Exporter performance	Relationship length	Lost suppliers	Supplier oriented purchasing	Understanding	Communication	Economic performance
Balabanis (1998)															-	NS				
Brown <i>et al.</i> (1991)	-																			
Hirshberg and Shoham (2017)		-																		
Humphreys <i>et al.</i> (2009)	-																-			
José Sanzo <i>et al.</i> (2007)																				
Kang and Jindal (2015)							+													
LaBahn and Harich (1997)										-										
Leckie <i>et al.</i> (2017)	NS													-						
Lee (2001)	-																			
Leonidou <i>et al.</i> (2006)	-	-		-				-			NS		-					-	NS	
Leonidou <i>et al.</i> (2008)													-							
Leonidou <i>et al.</i> (2017)						+														
Luo <i>et al.</i> (2009)										-										
Lusch (1976a)																				-
Murfield <i>et al.</i> (2016)			-	-	-															
Osmonbekov <i>et al.</i> (2009)											NS									
Ren <i>et al.</i> (2010)										-										
Samaha <i>et al.</i> (2011)								-	-											
Skinner <i>et al.</i> (1992)	-							-												
Vinhas and Gibbs (2012)	-	-																		
Wilkinson (1981)	-																			
Yang <i>et al.</i> (2012)												+								
Zhuang <i>et al.</i> (2010)								-												

Table III-4: Conflict outcomes: findings from existing studies

Reid <i>et al.</i> (2004)			T C- R C-	T C- R C-	T C- R C-						RC- TC-					
Rose <i>et al.</i> (2007)	TC(ns) RC(ns)	T C- C-	TC- RC(ns)								TC(ns) RC- ns)	TC(ns) RC(ns)	TC(ns) RC- ns)	TC +		
Tang <i>et al.</i> (2017)						T C In d.	T C In d.							TC +	x	x
Yang <i>et al.</i> , 2017)																

Table III-5: Antecedents and outcomes of conflict types: findings from existing studies

IV. Chapter Four: Buyer-Supplier Conflict Resolution: Timing, Tactics, Resources, and Relationship Quality

4.1 Abstract

In buyer-supplier relationships, buyers are often faced with instances of conflict emanating from suppliers. Literature on conflict resolution has primarily explored aggregate conflict resolution strategies using cross-sectional surveys. However, little is known about specific resolution tactics and their effectiveness over time. This research deepens insights offered by previous conflict resolution studies by exploring a more fine-grained taxonomy of tactics throughout the entire conflict episode. Using a multiple case study and collecting retrospective data to capture the resolution of the entire conflict episode, we identify a) factors that impact conflict resolution dynamics including resolution misalignment, relationship quality, and buyers' resources availability, b) a taxonomy of resolution tactics deployed based on tactics' content and temporal orientation, and finally c) the effectiveness of these actions over the conflict episode. Our study adds to the buyer-supplier conflict resolution literature by increasing our understanding of the resolution tactics and their effectiveness over time.

Keywords: conflict resolution tactics, relationship quality, resources, time, and conflict intensity

4.2 Introduction

Whatever the benefits of cooperation (Villena et al., 2011), buyer-supplier exchanges always include the potential for conflict (Deutsch, 1994) that, if not properly managed (Griffith et al., 2006), can generate significant dis-benefits for all parties. For instance, in 2016, the German automaker, Volkswagen (VW), experienced a major conflict with two of its critical suppliers: CarTrim, which makes seats, and ES Automobilguss, which produces cast iron parts essential to making gearboxes. VW cancelled orders without providing any justifications, thereby affecting suppliers' revenues. As a reaction, suppliers withheld their deliveries to VW, thereby affecting six of VW's 10 German factories where production has been halted for a week, costing VW over £86m (Reuters, August 23, 2016). Consequently, this conflict impacted companies' profitability and severed the exchange relationships. This anecdotal evidence suggests that effective conflict resolution should be seen as an essential component of purchasing and supply management.

To date however, the conflict resolution process has not been sufficiently studied, and studies “*only scratch at the surface of what is critical to consider when examining the conflict and conflict resolution processes in interorganizational exchanges*” (Lumineau et al. (2015, p. 52). Most extant research has adopted a macro perspective on conflict resolution; analysing general dispositions (e.g. partners seek confrontation or collaboration: (Koza and Dant, 2007; Bobot, 2011; Le Nguyen et al., 2016)). Although this approach has made significant contributions to the literature, using a “strategy” conceptualisation does not illustrate specific conflict resolution interventions that parties use to manage conflict (Carton and Tewfik, 2016). Therefore, it could make it difficult to understand the complexities of the conflict resolution process (Davis et al., 2004; Folger et al., 2017). Further, although prior research emphasised the dynamic nature of conflict (Frazier, 1999), prior studies have mainly based their research on static levels of conflict, largely ignoring the “the twists and turns” in a conflict episode. Nevertheless, we argue that conflict may move in an escalatory direction, and that an examination of conflict intensity is necessary. The resolution of different degrees of conflict represent a core theoretical and managerial concern that should be dealt with adequately to advance conflict research (Ellegaard and Andersen, 2015)

In an effort to fill the above gaps in the buyer-supplier conflict literature, this paper proposes and then, using multiple case studies of buyer-supplier conflict in the Automotive

sector, refines a model of the factors that determine the level of intensity of a conflict, and the contingent mechanisms that moderate the dynamics (i.e., escalation/de-escalation) of the conflict. Specifically, we investigate a series of (supplier-originated) exchange problems that resulted in varying levels of conflict intensity over the entire conflict episode; from the moment it emerges until it is perceived as resolved. This helps us unpack the prolonged conflict resolution process and to deal with process elements of conflict resolution that are not accessible through traditional quantitative methods (e.g. illuminate how certain resolution tactics lose/gain effectiveness over time). In so doing, we respond to calls for more dynamic exchange conflict research (Koza and Dant, 2007; Ellegaard and Andersen, 2015; Johnsen and Lacoste, 2016). For practitioners, understanding the specific mechanisms (e.g. specific resolution actions to deploy in different circumstances) that determine conflict intensity will offer significant benefit to supply relationship management over time.

The next section presents the conceptual background to buyer-supplier conflict resolution. The second and third sections describe the methodology and case findings respectively. The final section presents the main implications of the study and directions for future research.

4.3 Conceptual Background

The paper was motivated by three limitations in the current conceptualisation of exchange conflict and conflict resolution. First, conflict is not a binary construct and yet relative intensity (Brown and Day, 1981) has received limited attention (Ellegaard and Andersen, 2015; Lynch et al., 2014; Jehn and Bendersky, 2003). Second, although the appropriateness and effectiveness of conflict resolution approaches varies as a function of conflict intensity levels (Andrews and Tjosvold, 1983), previous studies considered only static levels of conflict and no assessments have been made of the contingent effectiveness of various mechanisms according to conflict intensities (Thiel et al., 2018). Finally, although conflict is a dynamic process (Duarte and Davies, 2003) most research presents exchange conflict resolution as a 'one-off' event, meaning there is a need for investigation of concurrent and sequential resolution strategies (Le Nguyen et al., 2016).

In order to better conceptualise exchange conflict intensity, we propose that – as other exchange conflict researchers have noted - conflict reflect buyers and suppliers differences in expectations or actual performance (Emiliani, 2003). Specifically, conflict

will exist as long as there is a gap (cf. (Kim et al., 1999; Parasuraman et al., 1985)) between the initiating (supply failure event) issue and perceived efficacy of the resolution intervention and, further, the extent of this misalignment determines the level of perceived conflict intensity (O'Neill et al., 2015). Salient or large discrepancies will generate high conflict levels, whereas minor discrepancies will result in low conflict. This means our model is essentially independent of the type and scale of the causal event (Figure IV.1). A simple concern that is poorly managed can engender higher levels of conflict, just as a major concern that is well handled can minimize conflict. Moreover, this gap model allows us to address both direction of change in conflict but also in the rate or speed in conflict intensity.

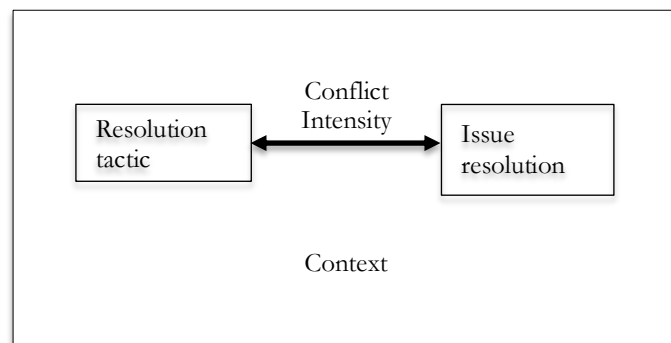


Figure IV-1: Preliminary conceptual model

4.3.1 Conflict Intensity

Conflict intensity is an important dimension of a conflict episode. In the broader organisational behaviour literature, conflict intensity has been characterised by two constructs (Yu and Zellmer-Bruhn, 2018; Tsai and Bendersky, 2016), oppositional intensity and emotionality. Oppositional intensity is defined as “the degree of strength with which opposition is conveyed by the sender during a conflict event” (Weingart et al., 2015, p. 240). For instance, a conflict may be expressed in variety of ways, from "tongue-in-cheek" comments to verbal abuse or even physical violence (Brown and Day, 1981). Emotionality refers to the degree of negative emotionality exhibited and felt during the conflict (Jehn, 1997) including annoyance, irritation, anger, rage, resentment, and dislike (Russell and Fehr, 1994; Jehn, 1997). They are tightly coupled; oppositional intensity impacts the degree of activation, the level, and the valence of emotions (Barsade, 2002; Weingart et al., 2015), which in turn means that negative consequences may occur (Adam

and Brett, 2018). The critical point however is the varying degree of conflict intensity and, consequently, different exchange conflict intensities are likely to exhibit different dynamics (e.g., conflict spirals: (Emiliani, 2003)) and require different resolution mechanisms (Barker et al., 1988).

4.3.2 Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution is defined as “*strategies oriented toward the resolution of the tension*” (De Dreu et al., 1999, p. 371). Researchers attempted to classify these strategies and hence various models have emerged (Figure IV.2). These frameworks differ in the terms used to describe the strategies but their classifications are broadly based on two dimensions reflecting people's concerns for their interests and their concerns for the other party. Generally, five conflict resolution strategies were derived: (a) Collaborating is oriented towards achieving maximum satisfaction of both parties' concerns through high cooperation; (b) accommodating implies offering help and giving in to the desires of the other party; (c) forcing involves imposing one's will on others; (d) avoiding involves ignoring all concerns and reducing the importance of the issue; and (e) compromising presumes a mutual give and take so as to gain partial fulfilment of one's desires (De Dreu et al., 2001).

Essentially, the focus of this literature has been on examining conflict resolution strategies at an aggregate level, and not on the complexities and details that need to be addressed when resolving conflict episodes. Therefore, this research provides little guidance on how to apply these strategies in (supply) practice. Specifically, there is a need to move beyond generalized resolution strategies (Thomas and Schmidt, 1976; Rahim and Bonoma, 1979; Blake and Mouton, 1964) so far proposed in the conflict literature (Ellegaard and Andersen, 2015).

A key aspect of the model is the choice of specific exchange conflict resolution tactics. There is some relevant research (Behfar et al., 2008; Champenois et al., 2016) and, albeit to a lesser extent, in a buyer-supplier relationships. For instance, Ellegaard and Andersen (2015) suggested that inter-organisational communication by non-actors, inter-organisational communication by higher ranking executives, and the replacement of the core actor in the buyer-supplier exchange are effective interventions to resolve severely conflicting relationships. Despite the repeated acknowledgement of the importance of effective conflict resolution in buyer-supplier relationships, there has been limited study of the details of conflict resolution (Lumineau et al., 2015; Bobot, 2011; Koza and Dant, 2007;

Pfajfar et al., 2017).

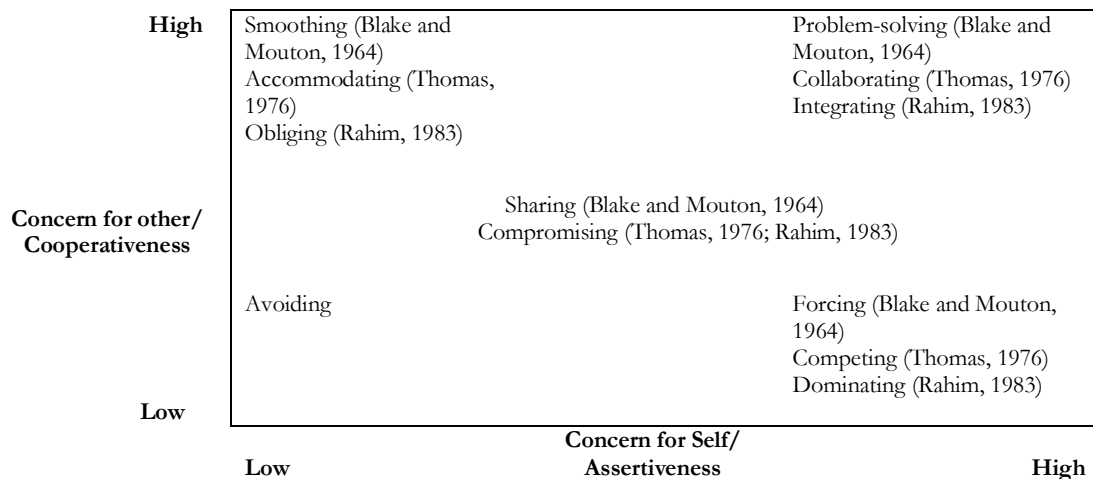


Figure IV-2: Conflict management strategies frameworks

4.3.3 Conflict in Context

Finally, exchange processes between buyers and suppliers do not exist in a vacuum (Leonidou *et al.*, 2002), the context in which issues emerge, conflict develops and resolution mechanisms are (successfully/unsuccessfully) applied plays a role in the severity and dynamics of conflict. Previous research has highlighted the impact of few variables that could potentially impact the choice of partners' strategies when resolving conflict including communication strategy (Koza and Dant, 2007) and national/organizational culture (Le Nguyen *et al.*, 2016; Kozan *et al.*, 2006). However, to the best of the authors' knowledge, factors and contextual conditions that impact recipient's reaction (conflict intensity as experienced by buyers) to resolution tactics (provided by the supplier) have not been delineated in the literature.

4.4 Methodology

In this paper, we take the perspective of the buyer (recipient of conflict resolution tactics) and investigate what factors and how these factors combine to impact buyers' perception of conflict intensity following suppliers' deployment of resolution tactics. To accomplish this, we look at supplier-induced conflicts.

The research uses a multiple case study method. A case study is particularly useful when attempting to understand complex phenomenon in their natural contexts (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007), as it offers a holistic and rich explanation through direct

interaction with subjects of interest (Mahapatra *et al.*, 2010; Gibbert *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, we chose multiple cases as they “offer the researcher a deeper understanding of processes and a better picture of “locally grounded causality” than do single case studies” (Huq *et al.*, 2016, p. 24). A multiple cases design also increases external validity through the application of a replication logic, and supports the creation of a more robust theory (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007).

4.4.1 Case Selection

Our selection of the dyads was guided by the following factors. First, we focused on a single industry – the Moroccan automotive industry – to control for industry specific contingencies and minimize extraneous variation (Eisenhardt, 1989) that might be derived from industry characteristics (Mohr and Spekman, 1994). Globally, the automotive industry has always been subject to dynamic change, and the role of suppliers has undeniably increased over the last 30 years (Wilhelm, 2011; Wagner *et al.*, 2009). Manufacturers have been seeking to simplify the supply chain and improve efficiency through outsourcing (Collins *et al.*, 1997), and this has consequently resulted in cooperative working relationships with suppliers in various functional areas including logistics, manufacturing, and product development (Howard *et al.*, 2006; Takeishi, 2001). As these interdependencies between supply chain players increase conflict potential (Frazier, 1999), this industry has been identified as a rich context in supply chain conflict (Johnson and Sohi, 2016), and therefore a suitable context for examining our research question. Moreover, a second factor that we controlled for was that of supply chain tier, because the tier position may differentiate the nature and outcomes of exchange relationships (Inemek and Matthyssens, 2013). A final and practical factor for case selection was access to informants. Because we aimed at obtaining a dyadic view of the phenomenon under study, we needed both buyers and suppliers from each dyad to agree to participate.

Within this reduced pool of cases, we selected dyads purposively. A theoretical sampling providing distinct contrasts along two dimensions of relationship quality pre-conflict episode (low vs. high) and conflict duration (short vs. long) has been used. Relationship quality refers to “the depth and climate of interfirm relationships” (Johnson, 1999, p. 6) based on the level of trust, commitment, and satisfaction in the relationship (Athanasopoulou, 2009). Conflict duration refers to the amount of time for the conflict to be resolved (Chen and Ayoko, 2012). We used conflict duration as a proxy for conflict intensity as researchers asserted that shorter conflicts are easily resolved whereas longer

conflicts escalate in intensity (Jehn, 1995). This sampling frame enabled us to identify cases of different intensities and different dynamics, and resulted in four matched dyads. A sample size of four to six cases has been considered appropriate for case study based research, because researchers would not be able to process the qualitative data if the number of cases is higher (Eisenhardt, 1989). Moreover, these four cases were enough to reach a satisfactory level of theoretical saturation (Pagell and Wu, 2009). Determining theoretical saturation is a difficult process (Obodaru, 2017), based on a “*combination of the empirical limits of the data, the integration and density of the theory, and the analyst’s theoretical sensitivity*” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 62). We based our assessment of saturation on the following factors: Repeating the sampling pattern no longer yielded theoretical insights. We interviewed 4 managers from two additional cases, and responses did not contribute to significant new information about the process of conflict resolution. Therefore, we concluded that these four cases had reached the point of theoretical saturation (McCutcheon and Meredith, 1993; Vanpoucke et al., 2014). The companies and individuals are disguised to ensure confidentiality, but descriptive details are provided in Appendix 1⁴.

4.4.2 Data Collection

Introductory interviews were conducted with prime contacts from the selected cases (Voss *et al.*, 2002) to ascertain firms’ willingness to participate in the study and to obtain their consent. The purpose of the study was phrased broadly as to understand how buyers handle conflicting situations with their suppliers. Upon agreement, we asked managers to select one of their “core product” supplier with whom they recently experienced a conflict situation, as well as potential respondents.

Conflict resolution data was collected retrospectively. Although retrospective accounts suffer from drawbacks (Golden, 1992), they have been successfully used in a large number of case study process investigations in a wide variety of organisational contexts (Bourgeois III and Eisenhardt, 1988; Vanpoucke *et al.*, 2014; Hollmann *et al.*, 2015; Halinen and Tähtinen, 2002). Interviews were conducted with multiple informants belonging to various functional departments (See Appendix 1) from both sides of the dyad. This enabled us to mitigate the biases of a single respondent (Pagell and Wu, 2009) and to circumvent the memorability bias of retrospective studies (Van de Ven and Huber, 1990). Furthermore, having respondents from both sides of the dyad allowed us to capture a

⁴ For confidentiality purposes, the information provided about the firms is limited and the numbers are rounded up or down to the nearest suitable number.

more complete representation of the conflict episode (Ellegaard and Andersen, 2015), and to increase the richness of the information obtained (Mahapatra *et al.*, 2010; Barratt *et al.*, 2011).

We designed the interview tool based on the Funnel approach (Voss *et al.*, 2002) starting with broad and open-ended questions towards more specific and detailed questions (The interview tool is attached at the end of this paper in Appendix 2). For consistency purposes, interviews were carried out through personal visits at each company's premises by one researcher (Johnson and Sohi, 2016). An introductory letter and the interview protocol were communicated to each interviewee prior to the interview so that they are properly prepared (Voss *et al.*, 2002). We asked respondents to account for the entire conflict episode starting from the first signs of conflict until it was believed to be resolved, in order to capture "*stories about what happened and who did what when – that is events, activities, and choices ordered over time*" (Langley, 1999, p. 692). None of the informants had any difficulty recalling many small details of the conflict episode, reinforcing the validity of the retrospective approach used here. Interviews were recorded unless informants objected. Voice recordings were subsequently transcribed and any novel or meaningful concepts that arose were added to the protocol and taken into consideration in future interviews. This enabled us to disregard elements that were perceived to have little relevance to the research question, and to reflect upon interesting themes that emerged spontaneously (King, 1994). Interviews were carried out in a sequential manner until a state of information saturation was reached. In our coding iterations, additional interviews did not necessarily provide additional codes but rather confirmed existing theoretical categories (Glaser *et al.*, 1968). Hence, the codes delineated were sufficiently rich to capture and explain the observed phenomenon. This data collection process is described in details in Figure IV.3.

Overall, interview recordings resulted in more than 500 pages of textual material. Once this process was accomplished, the write-ups were then translated into English (See Appendix 3 for the translation process), and imported into the qualitative data analysis tool QSR NVivo 10 for systematic coding and cross-case comparisons. Using computer-assisted analysis approach ensured data organisation and transparency by providing an audit trail (Huq and Stevenson, 2018).

4.4.3 Data Analysis

The first stage of the analysis process consisted of developing summaries of each conflict resolution process. We constructed a chronological description of each conflict, describing how it arose, when it happened, and how it was resolved. To ensure accuracy and consistency of the collected data, we conducted member checks (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and requested from interviewees to verify our transcripts. Additionally, any ambiguities were clarified through follow-up e-mails, phone calls, or a second round of on-site interviews. Subsequently, we coded each case description based on the hierarchical coding approach –open, axial, and selective coding– as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990). The first author conducted a line-by-line analysis and assigned important quotations in vivo codes, using mainly the respondents’ language. A coding frame was then developed after discussion with the research team members who acted as auditors throughout the data analysis process (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Auditing consisted of “*verifying both the process (the steps followed by the coder) and the product of data coding (the maps and tables derived from the interview data)*” (Yan and Gray, 1994, p. 1487). This approach enabled us to achieve a high level of reliability and dependability in the study. The data analysis continued with axial and selective coding, and we concluded the process by constructing a model of conflict resolution (Figure IV.5). Figure IV.4 summarises the output of the data analysis process including first-order concepts, second-order themes, and aggregate theoretical dimensions. Appendix 4 provides sample quotations from informants supporting the second-order themes we identified in the analysis. We show the results of within-case and cross-case analyses in the next section.

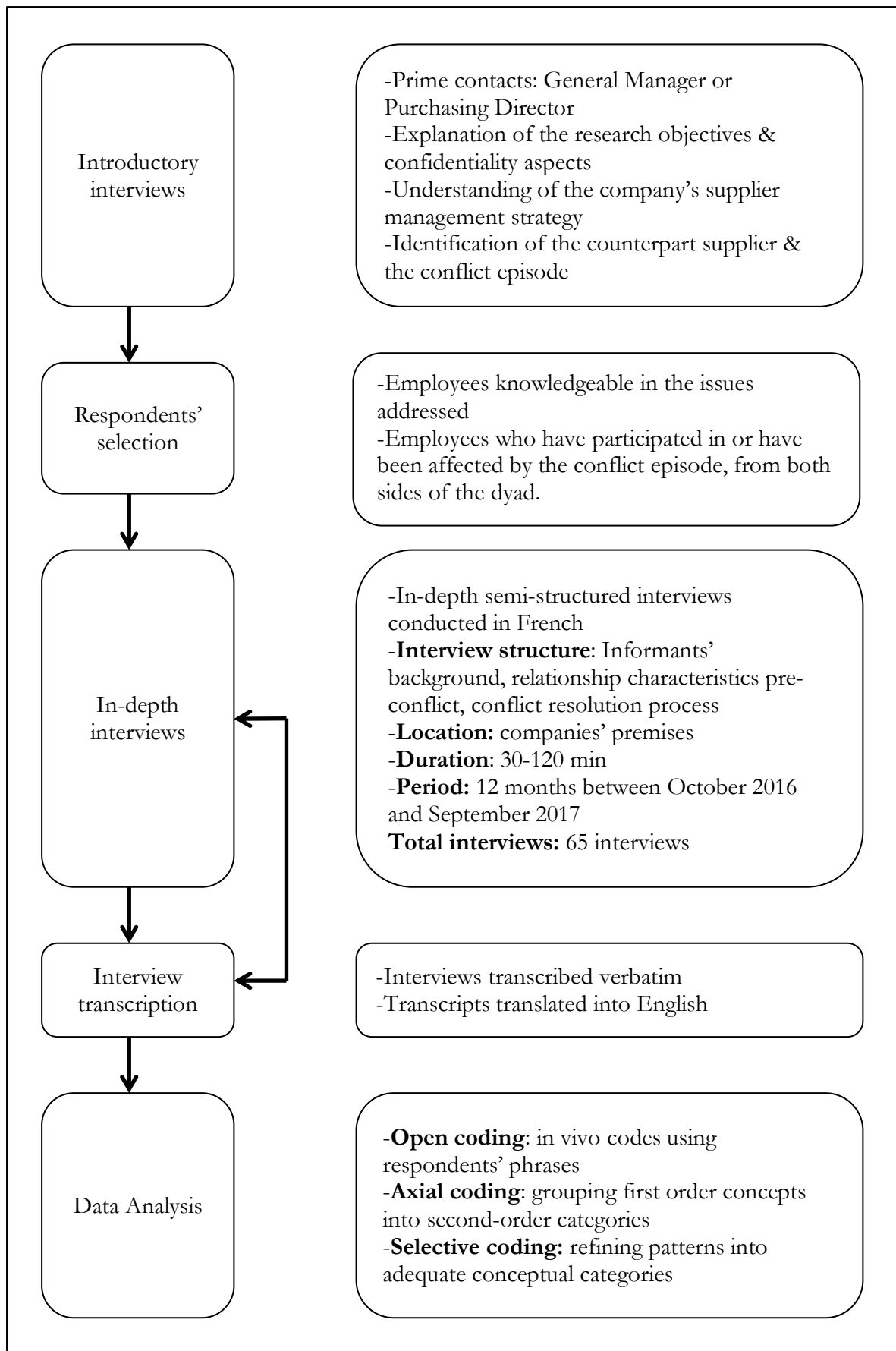


Figure IV-3: Data collection and analysis process

Case	Relationship history	Conflict episode description	Resolution tactics & their sequence over time
1 WiringCo (C1B)-ElectroCo (C1S)	Case 1 is a relationship between <i>ElectroCo</i> (supplier) and <i>WiringCo</i> (Buyer). A strong, highly committed, and trustful relationship exists between both partners.	Triggering event: delivery issue Duration: 4-5months	Apology, promise to deliver, explanation of why the issue happened, responsibility acknowledgment. Securing supply by premium freight, compensation for lost resources Securing supply by premium freight, compensation for lost resources, presentation of a prevention plan, Investment in new production site, explanation of how the issue will be avoided in the future
2 AutoElecCo (C2B) – CableCo (C2S)	Case 2 is a relationship between <i>CableCo</i> (supplier) and <i>AutoElecCo</i> (Buyer). The relationship was initially an IJV that dissolved following some structural and organisational issues. Yet relationships between the “divorced” entities remained strong. <i>CableCo</i> and <i>AutoElecCo</i> enjoy a solid relationship locally, based on continuous communication, mutual trust, and high satisfaction.	Triggering event: quality issue Duration: 3 months	Promise to resolve the issue, efforts to understand the issue, responsibility acknowledgment, visit to the buyer Complaint rejection, visit to the buyer, compensation for lost resources, product improvement efforts Compensation for lost resources, product improvement efforts
3 SeatCo (C3B)- TextileCo (C3S)	Case 3 is a relationship between <i>TextileCo</i> and <i>SeatCo</i> . <i>SeatCo</i> ’s customer has imposed <i>TextileCo</i> as the only raw material provider for the production of their seat covers and headrests. Moreover, <i>TextileCo</i> and <i>SeatCo</i> are competitors on some business activities, i.e. they are both suppliers of carmakers; and therefore their relationship is very competitive.	Triggering event: quality issue Duration: 12 days	No actions Responsibility acknowledgment, sorting out of defective products, Product replacement; Contract amendment, revision of product specifications, explanation of how the issue will be avoided in the future,
4 AutoTechCo (C4B) – ConnectorCo (C4S)	Case 4 is a relationship between <i>ConnectorCo</i> and <i>AutoTechCo</i> . Since its inception in 2011, the relationship between <i>ConnectorCo</i> and <i>AutoTechCo</i> has been growing, and both partners gradually became committed to the relationship. However, in early 2016, a series of major disruptions tainted the relationship, and the level of trust and satisfaction has significantly decreased.	Triggering event: delivery issue Duration: 15 days	Complaint rejection, no compensation, imprecise communication, No explanation Partial product delivery, Compensation for lost resources, delayed response, no visibility about the future.

Table IV-1: Cases description

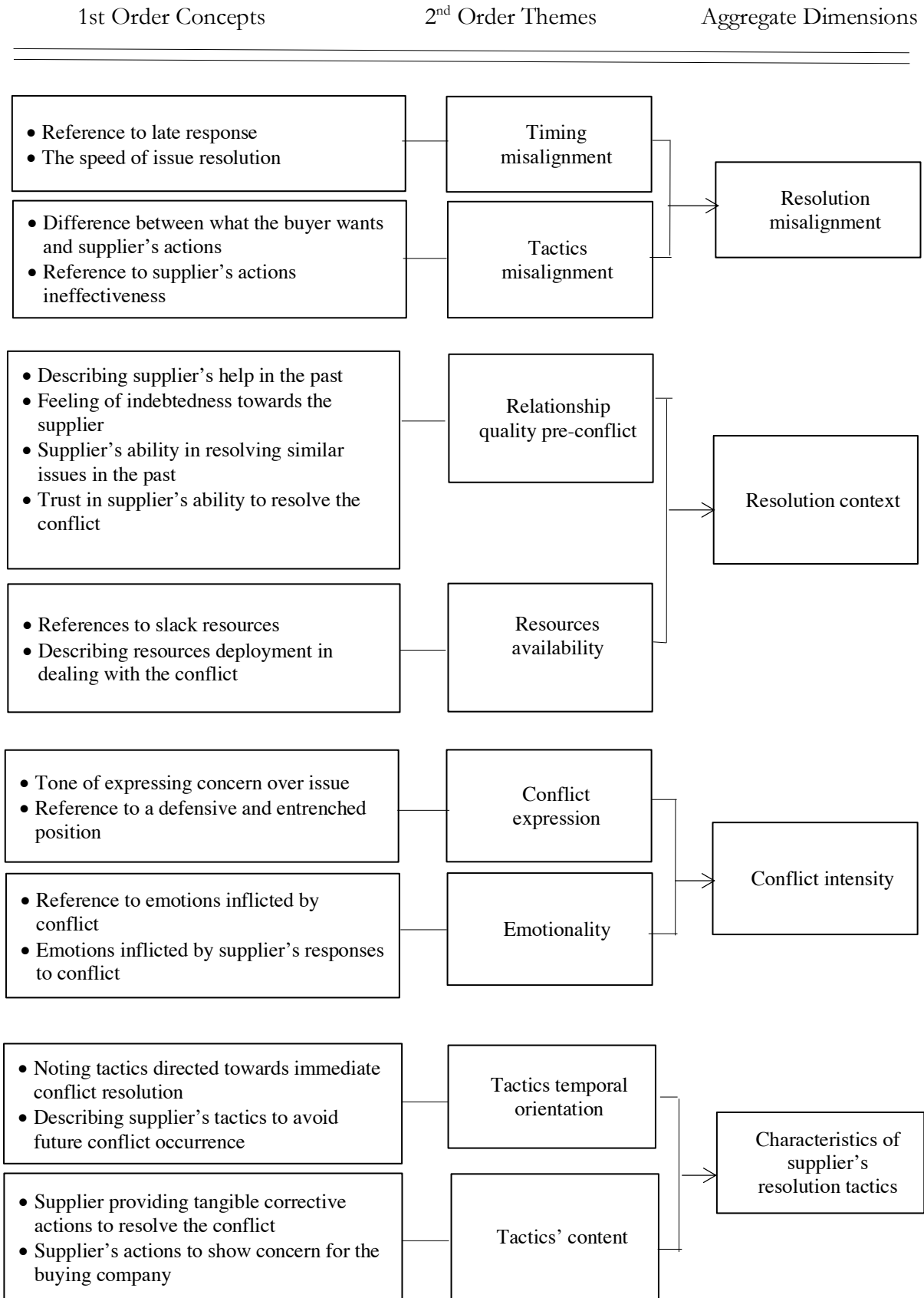


Figure IV-4: Data structure

4.5 Within-Case analysis

For the within-case analysis, we describe the resolution process of the conflict episode. An overview of the dyadic relationship can be found in Table IV-1

4.5.1 Case 1: WiringCo - ElectroCo

The conflict in this case was triggered by a delayed delivery. Initially, *ElectroCo* attempted to resolve the issue but failed to keep their promise and a second disruption occurred. Managers at *WiringCo* were disappointed and requested an explanation from the supplier. The supplier representatives explained their constraints and promised to ensure deliveries by airfreight and to pay for any losses *WiringCo* experienced. Still, in the following series of events, resolution actions were frequently delayed, delivery promises were not kept, and *ElectroCo* managers were unable to provide a clear answer on when the issue will be resolved. Therefore, the level of conflict further escalated, thereby triggering a great deal of suspicion, tension, and anger, to the extent that a state of disliking the exchange relationship with the supplier emerged. Finally, the supplier proposed a novel solution to the issue – the establishment of a new production site- besides the actions that were already in place in order to solve the root cause of the issue and prevent similar conflicts in the future.

4.5.2 Case 2: AutoElecCo - CableCo

The triggering event was a quality failure. The purchased product was a new business line developed by both partners following *AutoElecCo's* switching from a former supplier. Upon reception of the first delivery, the buyer had difficulty using the cable in their production lines. The supplier promised to find out the root cause of the issue, and deliver a compliant product. Both companies worked through the issue and *CableCo* improved the product, but another failure occurred when deliveries resumed. This triggered frustration and annoyance especially when *CableCo* did not acknowledge responsibility for the failure. The supplier's representatives visited *AutoElecCo* to visualise the issue and later apologised and explained the cause of the issue. They promised to send replacement products that are compliant with the specifications but failed to do so. In the meantime, they suggested to *AutoElecCo* to use an alternative supplier and they took in charge all the expenses. However, despite these efforts, *CableCo* did not respect their issue resolution timeline, resulting in increased dissatisfaction and tension. Following this, despite apologies, explanations, and *CableCo's* efforts to improve the product, *AutoElecCo's* managers were

firm and had a very aggressive reaction to the extent that they decided to switch to the former supplier.

4.5.3 Case 3: SeatCo - TextileCo

The conflict episode in this case was triggered by a quality failure. Upon reception of defective products, *SeatCo* put up a complaint on their supplier management portal. The supplier denied responsibility and refused any containment actions to resolve the issue. *SeatCo's* managers felt resentful and disgusted and therefore sought the involvement of the OEM. The latter arbitrated between both parties and clearly identified who was responsible for the issue. The supplier then accepted to carry out all the necessary actions but attempted to negotiate another solution with *SeatCo*. This has resulted in impaired communication as *SeatCo* refused any discussion with *TextileCo*, to the extent that the involvement of a third party was necessary to air the tension. Following lengthy discussions, both parties decided on a new way of doing things. *TextileCo* presented a preventive plan about measures that will be taken internally, and both parties agreed upon new product specifications, and signed a new logistics protocol to avoid similar conflicts in the future.

4.5.4 Case 4: AutoTechCo - ConnectorCo

The conflict in this case emerged from a delivery failure. The supplier informed *AutoTechCo* that they would not be able to deliver on time, and attributed their incapacity to *AutoTechCo's* volume increases in another plant in China. *ConnectorCo's* managers promised to deliver the products before the stoppage date if *AutoTechCo* agreed to pay for the premium transportation costs. Although *AutoTechCo's* managers gave in to *ConnectorCo's* wishes, they haven't received any update from *ConnectorCo* regarding the delivery despite their requests. They had no visibility on how the issue would be resolved, and therefore they escalated the issue and requested the intervention of their top management to obtain a better course of action from the supplier. *ConnectorCo's* managers confirmed a delivery date, but again broke their promise, and did not provide any further explanation. This consequently triggered aggressiveness in the relationship. *AutoTechCo's* managers had an entrenched position, and even threatened the supplier that the OEM would be informed about their poor performance. They asked for certain actions that were rejected by the supplier, hence they refused any further discussion and again escalated the issue. After some time, the supplier accepted to carry out the buyer's requested actions and delivered the products, but they couldn't provide any preventive actions to avoid issue reoccurrence

in the future, and this has left them in a state of high tension.

4.6 Cross-Case Findings

4.6.1 Resolution Misalignment - Conflict Intensities

The data revealed that misalignments in conflict resolution impacted changes in conflict intensity. Misalignments manifested either in the resolution tactics provided (a mismatch between the tactic and issue resolution) or the resolution time (a delay in response).

Tactic misalignment. Findings indicate that a gap existed between the requirement of issue resolution and the provided response. For instance, it was apparent from case 1 that when buyers expressed their concern over the conflict issue, they were expecting the supplier to deliver the product following their complaint. However, the supplier only promised that the product would be delivered before the production line stoppage date. Hence, while buyers were focused on a tangible delivery of products, suppliers only offered an explanation of the issue and a promise of issue resolution. A manager mentioned “(...) *the supplier explained to us that the OEM has made changes that resulted in an overcapacity, and so the buffer stock they had was not enough to meet the needs of all their customers?*” (C1B-Logistics Supervisor), “*so of course, there was a little bit of pressure because you feel that you are unable to do your work properly and as scheduled?*” (C1B-Purchasing Manager). A similar comment was expressed “*there was a lack of reactivity from the supplier, they did not provide any containment actions (...) and this got on our nerves?*” (C3B- Quality Manager).

Time misalignment. Similar to a misalignment in tactics, cases also highlighted that a misalignment manifested in a delay of response. An interviewee echoed how the time taken to resolve the conflict impacted conflict intensity “*we had not received the goods on time, it is true that there was an effort from their side, but it was not timely, it was very irritating (...) and so it was a pure confrontation, the subject was escalated?*” (C4B-Logistics Manager). This was also supported by another manager “*and their attempt to solve the issue took couple of weeks. For us, they took so long to resolve the problem (...) and that was it! It was absolutely last straw?*” (C2B-Supplier Quality Engineer). A comment from a partner supplier also confirmed this “*so clearly, at that time, it triggered tension, tension in meetings, in calls, and even face-to-face, you feel that your customer of each day is not the same (...) we could not provide them with the information needed at the moment they requested it?*” (C1S-North Africa Sales Manager). Thus, across all cases, buyers seem to have come to view misalignment as impacting conflict intensity.

They described how conflict resolution misalignment negatively affected some of their resources, thereby generating resources loss. One respondent explained how the supplier response had an impact on their inefficient use of production and personnel resources *"there was a production shutdown, which means that we were paying wages without having something in return, a workforce that was paid but that was not productive. There was also an impact on the committed resources to manage communication, i.e. that people who were originally dedicated to do work on a regular basis, as standard, they had to be entirely dedicated to analyse the incident and to manage the communication with stakeholders"* (C3B-Logistics Manager). Another manager explained how they wasted time because the discrepancy in resolution *"but I could say that the supplier did not react properly, we had a lot of problems, and we lost a lot of time in making improvements...In the automotive industry you don't have this "time luxury", every minute counts"* (C2B-Logistics Coordinator). As another manager put it *"when there was no feedback from the supplier and our security stock was decreasing, of course, stress increased, it was tense, the communication was tenser, the problem escalated..."* (C4B-Purchasing Manager). The passages above and many like them present evidence of the importance of misalignment on conflict intensity dynamics.

4.6.2 Buyers' Resources, Relationship Quality, And Conflict Intensities

Across the four cases, we observed the differential impact of the availability of buyers' resources and relationship quality as contingency factors that impact changes in conflict intensity.

Buyers' resources availability. A constant theme of the interviews was buyers' resources availability. Consistent with Größler and Grübner (2006, p. 460), resources are defined as *"something a firm possesses or has access to (...) resources can be tangible, for example, specialized production systems, and intangible, for example, level of training of workers"*. Resources are sources of valued benefits (Hobfoll, 2002) that entities use to respond to stressful demands and to obtain centrally valued ends (Taylor and Stanton, 2007). The interviews suggest that buyers invested resources throughout their interaction with suppliers to resolve conflict *"these problems required a lot of time, a lot of effort in inventory management, in transport monitoring, in production lines management, it required increased coordination among departments (...)"* (C1B-Supplier Delivery Performance Coordinator). Tangible resources referred, for instance, to operational slack, equipment, production tools, and intangible resources referred to the buying firms' relationships with their customers, time, knowledge, reputation. In cases 1 and 2, when conflict occurred, possessing resources buffered escalation resulting from misalignment because buyers mobilised resources to reduce the discrepancy. A manager

reported “*at the beginning, everything was fine [with the supplier]. Although the supplier couldn’t replace the material, on our side we used the stock from the cables we used to buy from the former supplier. So we continued to work with the stock we had, the old product that we purchased from the former supplier, and that’s how we unblocked the situation and carried out production activities*” (C2B-Supplier Quality Engineer). Another manager pointed to how they used slack resources to adjust to the resolution misalignment “*let me explain, because these components were terminals. In [our company], a terminal goes through a process. The first step in the process is cutting, that is, the electrical wire is cut, and in a second step, the crimping, it is attached to the terminal (...) so what we did, the plant operators identified the critical lines, and they adjusted the length of the wires so as not to stop the production chains*” (C1B-Production Engineer). Accordingly, access to these resources enhanced buyers’ capabilities in dealing with conflict, and hence we suggest that buyers’ resources buffer the impact of resolution misalignment, i.e. the impact of any discrepancy should be significantly attenuated in high as opposed to low resource availability situations. However, in cases 3 and 4, possessing resources escalated conflict as explained by one manager “*unbeknownst to the supplier of course, we had some room for manoeuvre. Here the terminal does not go into the production process, but in the process of wire cutting, and therefore you always have a stock of crimped wires, a semi-finished product. So certainly the cutting operation was interrupted and the chains stopped, but also we found a quantity available at a competitor and we brought it here to unlock the situation, and not to stop the lines for a long time. (...) So not only we were having problems because of their inappropriate reaction, but we also had to deploy extra resources (Deep breath), it was frustrating*” (C4B-Purchasing Manager). Accordingly, the availability of resources had an impact on conflict intensity dynamics.

Relationship quality. Respondents’ stories also provided clear descriptions of how the quality of the relationship prior to the conflict episode impacted conflict resolution dynamics. In cases of low relationship quality (case 3 and 4), conflict rapidly escalated “*so with [TextileCo], we had a lot of bad situations in the past, and really frequently, that the relationship became very tense (...) So when the supplier rejected our claim, and our relationship with them was already very strained, there was no room for discussion, and this increased friction and animosity towards them*” (C3B-Operations Director North Africa, SeatCo). Referring to the same episode, another manager echoed “*[TextileCo] are always problematic, and, it is not a supplier that is supportive, like they never offer a helping hand, so we had to be firm with them*” (C3B- Logistics Manager).

Conversely, in cases of high relationship quality (case 1 and 2), the data revealed that relationship quality has both suppressed and activated conflict escalation. First, a high

relationship quality, reflected in supplier's benevolent motives, came along with feelings of gratitude towards the supplier, which in turn increased buyers' tolerance for conflict. As the Purchasing Director from *AutoElecCo* explained "*[CableCo] were very helpful previously, they accommodated our orders' fluctuations, they satisfied our requests, they did more than what the contract stipulated. So we cannot simply shrug it off, we should not neglect their support during different time periods, they were always flexible, and responded favourably to our requests, so in a way or another we owe them our competitiveness and our responsiveness to customers, we don't forget that when they have a problem, and so we decided to solve the issue?*" (C1B-Country Purchasing Director). When buyers felt more grateful, they were more lenient towards their suppliers, and were more willing to explore various alternatives to resolve the issue. However, the interviews revealed that although when relationship quality was high, conflict escalated and this was explained by reference to resources availability. One manager emphasized "*(...) we could not work on a stressful mode until the issue is resolved. We didn't want to have issues with our customer, because if we have recurrent issues our customer won't be lenient, our customer would not understand! So we were putting pressure on them, pushing our requirements regardless of what they were going through*" (C1B-Purchasing Manager). Reflecting on this matter, a manager explained "*(...) we were not expecting another quality failure from [the supplier]. They knew that we couldn't afford it, they knew that we did not have any stock left, and so any issue would directly impact our efficiency and our deliveries to the customer (...)*" (C2B-Logistics Coordinator). Another manager continued "*(...) and so it created tension and nervousness with [the supplier]*" (C2B-Purchasing Director). These stories highlight the role of relationship quality in driving conflict resolution dynamics.

4.6.3 Conflict Dynamics and Sequence of Tactics

Suppliers' conflict resolution tactics that shaped the direction of conflict were numerous and varied based on the conflict level. The term conflict resolution tactic refers to actions carried out by the supplier to resolve the conflict situation. A mild conflict situation involved discussing the conflict issue as a debate, and was characterized by low entrenchment in the buyers' position. Supplier offered an apology, an explanation, and a promise to resolve the issue, in order to motivate the buyer to accept the situation and reinterpret it in their favour. These actions laid down positive expectations, and confirmed buyer's thoughts about the supplier's integrity and their ability to alleviate conflict. One manager recalled "*the supplier justified why this happened, and informed us that they would deliver this quantity with the next scheduled delivery. So we let it go, we knew that the supplier did not have bad intentions...*" (C1B-Purchasing Manager). Similarly, another respondent remembered "so

initially, they tried to find the root cause of the issue, they explained to us what caused the defect in the product. So they went back to their production plants and tried to improve the product, and us in the meantime, we used the safety stock we had” (C2B-Logistics Coordinator).

As conflict unfolded, buyers built expectations with regards to future behaviour in the next micro-episode. However, as a misalignment occurred, the dyad moved to moderate levels of conflict. A Purchasing Manager reflected on this *“we actually discussed the issue with the supplier, we listened to the supplier, and we shared our concerns. It happened in a very friendly atmosphere. However, when it happened that the supplier did not respect what he has communicated to us, and the risk was increasing, tension and aggressiveness increased, we had to be firm, we had to make a point”* (C1B-Purchasing Manager). In this case for example, a broken promise signalled an unsuccessful resolution, and hence the buyer experienced more frustration and conflict escalated. At this point, suppliers attempted to cover for all the potential losses generated by the conflict situation to prevent further escalation. This suggests that explaining the conflict issue or making promises lost credibility and therefore the buyer ceased to accept such tactics as valid for resolving the conflict situation. As the following quote suggests *“the supplier insisted and promised that they would solve the issue shortly, they would mobilize resources to work on the improvement of the cable (...) but this was not enough, how long are we going to wait for product improvements? So most importantly, in the meantime, they proposed that we could continue supplying from the previous supplier and they would continue to pay all the charges generated from this quality issue until the issue is completely resolved. So we accepted this. There was the logistical team who ensured the availability of the raw material, they brought from the former supplier as a temporary action”* (C2B-Purchasing Director). At a moderate level of conflict, a promise or an apology were of limited effect unless they were accompanied by some form of tangible actions to offset the losses generated by the conflict situation.

Our data also showed that high levels of conflict intensity represented cases where the misalignment was persistent and was perceived so large that it impinged on the buyers’ ability to continue the relationship, as illustrated in the following quote *“in this period, we had a lot of problems, they started to improve the product ... every time they confirmed that the issue would be resolved. When they sent us new coils to see if the problem was resolved...it wasn’t! (...) We had internal discussions that we should not buy this product from [them]”*(C2B-Supplier Quality Engineer). There was high uncertainty with regards to the effectiveness of resolution tactics, and the ensuing potential conflicts. As explained by one manager *“we could not continue like that, it’s true that the supplier covered all the costs, but they didn’t have a convincing response to when and how the*

issue would be resolved. So, there was a lot of doubt (...)” (C2B-Single Point Buyer). Therefore, when conflict reached a high level of intensity, tactics targeting the resolution of the current issue were no longer sufficient. Consequently, suppliers deployed further actions that showed their credible commitment to the relationship, and that reduced uncertainty about conflict occurrence in the future. For instance, in case 3, the supplier clearly explained what they did to show how such conflicts would be avoided in the future “*at the end we explained to them our preventive plan. We explained the adjustment method and the control range that would be controlled*” (C3S-Quality Supervisor), and “*we’ve established a new working process, a new logistics protocol with specified clauses in order to avoid such conflicts in the future*” (C3B-Quality Manager). Similarly, in case 1, the supplier invested in a new production site to avoid such conflicts in the future “*so we had to invest in new equipment, new production lines in a closer region for a better delivery service (...) it was a duplication of the production chains*” (C1S-North Africa Sales Manager). Consequently, these actions were deployed along with other tactics (e.g. airfreight delivery, financial compensation), in order to reduce the likelihood of future conflict and to incentivise buyers to accept the conflict situation and to accommodate to the current circumstances.

4.7 Discussion and Implications for Theory

In examining the four cases, we have presented evidence for the dynamics of conflict resolution. Building on these findings, we offer a model in Figure IV.5 with the concepts of resolution misalignment, relationship quality, and buyers’ resources at its centre. In this section, we draw out the identified relationships between core variables (as illustrated in the figure below). As we move forward, we discuss implications for buyer-supplier conflict resolution theory.

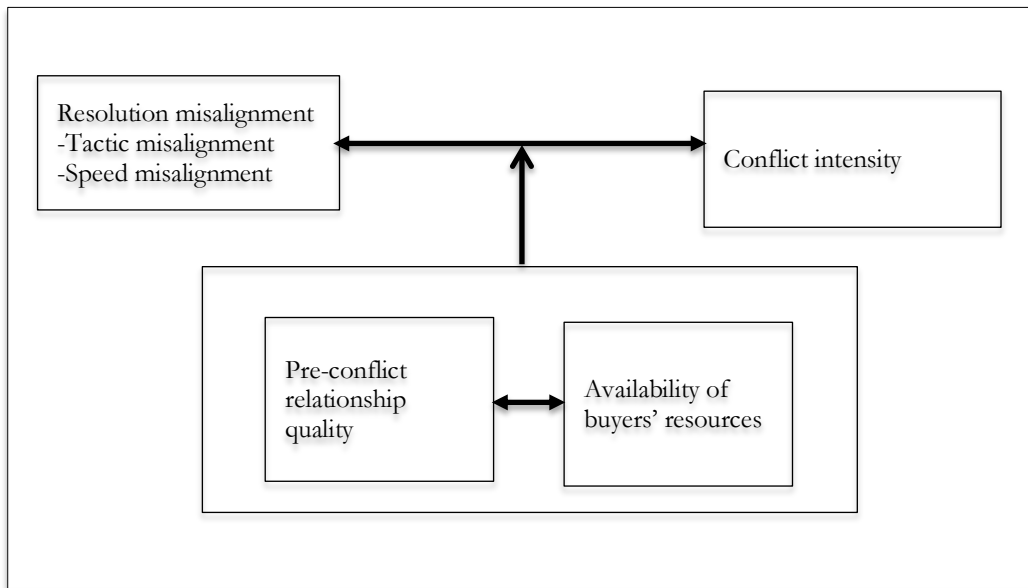


Figure IV-5: Revised conceptual framework

4.7.1 Dynamics Of Conflict Escalation

4.7.1.1 *Resolution Misalignment and Conflict Intensity*

Our model shows that resolution misalignment is central to conflict escalation. Tactic misalignment generates feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction (Chen *et al.*, 2018) thereby leading to increased conflict intensity. Similarly, the speed of suppliers' resolution efforts is equally critical as it tracks how the dyad is moving towards conflict resolution. A tardy response triggers negative emotionality, whereas a prompt resolution prevents further frustration and conflict escalation (Rousseau *et al.*, 2018; Johnson *et al.*, 2013; Chang *et al.*, 2009). Essentially, when there is a misalignment in conflict issue resolution, buyers fail to obtain the expected outcomes (Smith *et al.*, 1999), lose resource, and therefore experience increased conflict. Therefore, conflict of different intensities occurs when valued resources are threatened, lost, or insufficiently gained as a result of conflict resolution misalignment (Surachartkumtonkun *et al.*, 2015). This supports the propositions of organisational behaviour research that resource exhaustion and an anticipation of a net resource loss act as a proximal cause of individuals' aggression (DeWall *et al.*, 2007) and leaders' abusive supervision (Byrne *et al.*, 2014).

4.7.1.2 *The Interaction Effect of Buyers' Resources Availability and Relationship Quality*

Our model in Figure IV-5 positions buyers' resources in combination with relationship

quality, wherein both interact in impacting conflict resolution dynamics. Four combinations have been derived from the data (See Figure IV-6 below). Buyers assess resolution misalignment based on their perception of the association between the two conditions. Given the dynamic nature of the conflict resolution process, relationship quality and buyers' resources change, but may not always move in the same direction. Thus, because initial levels of both relationship quality and buyers' resources may change over time, we suggest that subsequent levels would have an influence on conflict escalation. For instance, trust, a key construct of relationship quality, is fragile and can be easily lost (Morrison and Robinson, 1997), therefore if trust erodes during the conflict resolution process, conflict is likely to escalate at a higher rate. Similarly, the same reasoning applies to resources. High relationship quality levels coupled with low resources are likely to result in escalating conflict.

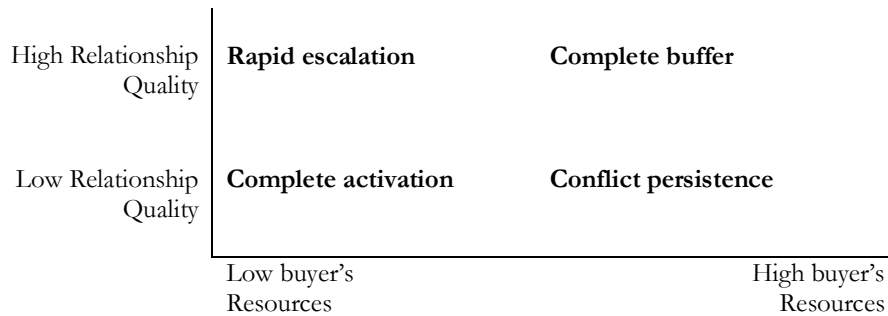


Figure IV-6: The interaction of buyers' resources and relationship quality

Complete buffer

A “complete buffer” situation is characterized by high resources availability and high relationship quality. Under these conditions, conflict escalates steadily, because buyers will have greater tolerance for resolution discrepancies. For instance, what is apparent from case 1 and case 2 is that misalignment did not trigger high conflict. Possessing resources enabled buyers to absorb the lack of supplier’s responsiveness to conflict (misalignment), and this was enabled by the relationship quality, which provided a psychological safety atmosphere where risk-taking was safe (Edmondson, 2002). Specifically, when relationship quality is high, buyers perceive misalignment as less threatening, and deploy more resources to reduce the discrepancy. Buyers who have a strong existing relationship with their suppliers as well as high resources availability would express low valence emotions; they would have a behaviour that supports the business relationship, and would be more tolerant of the conflict situation. Specifically, access to strategic resources cause buyers to

accept greater suppliers' performance risk (Combs and Ketchen, 1999; Anderson *et al.*, 2016) resulting from conflict resolution misalignment. Therefore, we suggest that, in a conflict situation, favourable conditions may offset the negative consequences of discrepancies.

Rapid escalation

Low resources lead to poorer conflict tolerance even though relationship quality is high. In the case of low resources availability, buyers have fewer resources to offset the resources loss. Therefore, conflict escalates wherein buyers display a defensive and hostile stance to conserve their remaining resources and avoid further losses (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014; Lam *et al.*, 2017). This is consistent with previous research in organisational leadership that demonstrated, for instance, that when depleted from resources, leaders are susceptible to counterproductive and damaging interactions with subordinates (Wang *et al.*, 2010). Essentially, even though buyers and suppliers enjoy a strong relationship, a lack of buyer's resources triggers a high rate of conflict escalation when there is a resolution misalignment, because buyers have higher expectations (Hess *et al.*, 2003), and expect their partners to be concerned about their needs. Therefore, a misalignment in conflict resolution is considered as a suppliers' failure to fulfil their obligations in the relationship, and thus generates negative feelings and doubt about suppliers' reliability (Grégoire *et al.*, 2009). Accordingly, when resources are low, the quality of the relationship may backfire and intensify conflict in the exchange dyad, rather than buffer against conflict escalation.

Conflict persistence

When the relationship is weak, the possession of resources does not dampen the effects of resolution discrepancy, as the state of the relationship does not motivate buyers to mobilise resources and adjust to the situation (Ellegaard *et al.*, 2003; Davis, 2016). In this case, buyers are obliged to resolve the issue unilaterally, and this further heightens conflict. Consequently, although buyers' activities secure fulfilment of their performance goals, it further contributes to the escalation of conflict with suppliers (Reimann *et al.*, 2017) because the unilateral deployment of resources increased buyers' perception of resource loss. Additionally, the lack of responsiveness from the supplier further confirms buyers' beliefs about the exchange relationship, i.e. suppliers are misguided and are acting opportunistically.

Complete activation

A complete activation situation is characterized by low relationship quality, and low resources availability. Therefore, a resolution discrepancy is chaotic as the contextual conditions are not sufficient for absorbing any misalignments. Any misalignment is perceived with suspicion because relational ties are not sufficiently strong, and buyers are attempting to avoid further resources losses. Under such conditions, doubts linger close to the surface, and this could be costly and damaging to the buyer-supplier relationship (Emiliani, 2003). As such, conflict escalates steeply as buyers have an aggressive and a hostile behaviour.

4.7.2 Resolution Tactics

4.7.2.1 Tactics Bundles

The findings from the field interviews suggest that resolution tactics can be classified along two dimensions - content and temporal orientation, as presented in Figure IV-7. With regards to content, these tactics can be classified by whether they are psychological or tangible fixes. Psychological tactic conveys politeness, concern, effort, and empathy to buyers (Hart *et al.*, 1990). In contrast to psychological tactics, tangible fixes refer to actions that the supplier deploy to resolve the task issue at the essence of the conflict (Miller *et al.*, 2000). The data suggest furthermore that these two categories of actions can have a different temporal orientation. We distinguish “Reactive curative” tactics, wherein the focus is oriented towards the present, i.e. resolution of the immediate issue, and “prospective preventive” tactics, wherein the focus of the resolution is oriented towards the prevention of conflict reoccurrence in the future. Each of these tactic bundles could be employed separately or in combination depending on conflict intensity and contextual conditions.

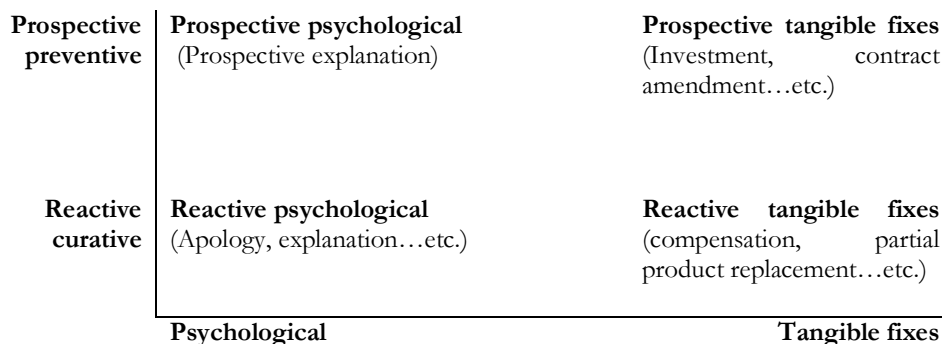


Figure IV-7: Categorization of conflict resolution tactics

4.7.2.2 *Conflict Intensities and Resolution Tactics*

Figure IV-8 illustrates the resolution tactics that are used based on the four conditions explained above. In the case of a “*complete buffer*” situation, conflict is mild and psychological tactics are sufficient to resolve conflict. In such situations, offering a psychological response is completely effective, and this holds even though no tangible fixes are offered. This finding is consistent with the fair process effect (Collie *et al.*, 2000), and also with Tomlinson *et al.*'s (2004) evidence of the strength, for instance of an apology, in buyer-supplier exchanges. In “*rapid escalation*”, the use of psychological actions alone loses effectiveness because more resources have been lost or were being threatened. A number of examples in the cases showed that the endurance time of a psychological tactic is short and tapers off quickly because it is not sufficient to compensate for the continuous resources loss. Therefore, tangible fixes are deployed to complement the decay in the effect of psychological tactics, and are therefore more reliable when buyers make their judgments about the conflicting situation (Leventhal, 1980). In cases of “*conflict persistence*” exchanges are characterized by profit-seeking motives rather than social obligations (Robinson *et al.*, 1994), and hence the deployment of well-targeted tangible fixes is effective in resolving the conflict. Finally, in cases of “*complete activation*”, the deployment of prospective tactics that act as “prophylactic” measures against future conflict occurrence is necessary, specifically in cases where the relationship is to continue in the future. Although there was misalignment between conflict tactics and issue resolution (insufficiency of reactive tangible fixes), suppliers deployed complementary tactics to illustrate future resource gain. Consequently, these actions did not remove the problem itself, but they were aimed at reducing the goal incongruence of the aversive situation (Latack, 1986). Future-oriented thinking has been shown to substantially affect people's current behaviour (Taylor and Pham, 1996), because explaining the likelihood of future conflict occurrence induces a reappraisal of the respective conflict, and provides a basis for continued interaction in the buyer-supplier relationship (Basso and Pizzutti, 2016). For instance, in line with this argument, Bolton and Drew (1991) found that perception of future service improvement had a strong influence on customer's evaluation of present service quality. Therefore, as the probability of future conflict becomes smaller, buyers' expectations to access important resources increase and current conflict decreases (Wheaton, 1985). Consequently, at high conflict intensity, time orientation has a strong influence on conflict intensity.

High Relationship Quality	Rapid escalation Tangible fixes + psychological (Reactive)	Complete buffer Psychological tactics (reactive)
Low Relationship Quality	Complete activation Tangible (Reactive) + prospective	Conflict persistence Tangible fixes (Reactive)
	Low buyers' Resources	High buyers' Resources

Figure IV-8: Conflict tactics vs. conflict intensities

4.8 Conclusions

This research provides the groundwork for a holistic depiction of the interconnections between conflict intensity levels, conflict resolution tactics, and conflict resolution context. In this way, we respond to recent call from conflict scholars to “*study the development of a conflict from moderate to severe and then on to resolution or dissolution for instance, along with the resolution methods applied over time and their effects*” (Ellegaard and Andersen, 2015, p. 466). Based on our analysis, we provide an empirically grounded taxonomy of conflict resolution tactics beyond the conventional categorisation of conflict resolution strategies (Blake and Mouton, 1964). Based on two characteristics, content and temporal orientation, we proposed four categories representing the range of resolution tactics suppliers have at their disposal including reactive psychological, reactive tangible fixes, prospective psychological, and prospective tangible fixes. While reactive tactics have been identified in other literature streams (Van Vaerenbergh and Orsingher, 2016), to the best of the authors’ knowledge prospective tactics haven’t been explored in the literature so far. The importance of prospective tactics is a novel finding, and they are important specifically in high conflict intensity situation because they cater to buyers’ expectations about what the supplier would do to prevent conflicts in the future (Johnston and Fern, 1999). For instance, a specific investment by the supplier (as a conflict resolution tactic) holds the promise for future benefit (Wagner and Bode, 2014), and hence induces a reappraisal of the respective conflict.

As a second contribution, we introduced “resources availability” as a factor unrecognized in conflict research. Extant research has shown that firms’ behaviour

depends on organisational constraints (Janowicz - Panjaitan and Krishnan, 2009), but this was not considered in a conflict context. Our findings add to the conflict literature that organizational constraints, in the form of firm's tangible and intangible resources, influence buyers' adaptability to and tolerance of conflict. Therefore, they cause differential impact on the resolution dynamics. We also contributed to the literature by highlighting the role of relationship quality pre-conflict in the conflict resolution process. Specifically, relationship quality could have both an activating and a buffering impact depending on the level of buyers' resources to resolve the conflict. By highlighting this interaction effect, we show the strength of a multi-level view (Klassen and Menor, 2007) as the interaction explained more fully the impact of resources and relationship quality than each separately. This also clarifies inconsistent findings in existing research in other field e.g. customer service recovery. While some found that relationship quality has a buffering effect (Hess *et al.*, 2003; Tax *et al.*, 1998), others found that it has an activating effect following service recovery or recovery failure (Aaker *et al.*, 2004; Grégoire and Fisher, 2008).

A third contribution is the empirical evidence of tactics effectiveness over time. We found that conflict intensity does warrant different types/combinations of tactics, and thus we contribute to the debate on the effectiveness of resolution tactics (Gillespie and Dietz, 2009). For instance, while researchers consider psychological tactics as "cheap talk" in buyer-supplier relationships (Kaufmann *et al.*, 2018), we showed that the deployment of psychological tactics could be effective in mild conflict intensities where both buyers' resources and relationship quality are high. Hence, under these conditions, a psychological action is no second-best solution but an adequate substitute for tangible fixes in keeping conflict at low levels of intensity (Gelbrich, 2010). However, "reactive tangible fixes" are necessary for moderate levels of conflict, and their use in combination with "prospective preventive" tactics is effective when conflict intensity is high. Resolution tactics that may work for mild conflict situations are clearly not effective for intense conflicts (Ellegaard and Andersen, 2015). Essentially, by expanding our understanding of tactics employed, our research sheds light on the effectiveness of conflict resolution tactics over time, paving the way for scholars to understand the pitfalls of certain tactics and the untapped potential of others as the conflict episode evolves.

In sum, we provided an interaction model linking buyer's resources and relationship quality. Resources are protective against conflict rapid escalation, but in certain cases they may have no effect (e.g. low relationship quality). This interaction appears to be

as important as supplier's conflict resolution tactics in predicting the escalation of conflict. We thereby answer a crucial to conflict research as to whether it is the resolution tactics employed by the supplier or the interaction between contextual factors that are key drivers to conflict escalation. Therefore, getting the right mix of actions conscious of the state of resources and relationship quality is necessary.

4.9 Managerial Implications

Investigating the dynamics of conflict resolution tactics in buyer-supplier relationships is critical to managerial practice. Therefore, our study holds several implications for supply chain managers. We provide managers with an understanding of key considerations in the conflict resolution process, as well as highlight a finer-grained understanding of the resolution tactics over time. We not only illustrates the initial reaction of suppliers but also explain how the followed tactics shift over time in accordance with the level of conflict, and the interaction of relationship quality and buyers' resources. Essentially, it is critical for managers to identify how and under what conditions conflict would escalate, consequently enabling them to redirect the course of the conflict resolution toward a more productive process. Suppliers must be vigilant towards the changes in the resolution process and continuously perform a "*conditions orchestration*" to find the fit among conflict resolution tactic, context intensity, and contextual factors. Understanding the phenomenon of conflict resolution interventions in buyer-supplier exchanges provides a comprehensive picture on how to resolve conflict in order to avoid negative turning points in the resolution process, to assuage the severity of conflict impact on buyers and suppliers, and to build long-lasting close collaborative relationships (Pfajfar *et al.*, 2017; Johnsen and Lacoste, 2016).

4.10 Limitations and Future Research Directions

The findings of the current research should be viewed in light of the study's limitations, which provide avenues for further research investigations. First, we limited our study to supplier-induced conflicts. As such, we did not examine instances of conflicts emanating from the buyer (Johnson and Sohi, 2016). Future research should adopt such approach to understand whether different or similar dynamics occur. Moreover, although we sought to generate a comprehensive understanding of the conflict resolution process by collecting interviews from both sides of the dyad, our investigation focuses on the perspective of the buying company. Since buyers' and suppliers' perspectives differ (Nyaga *et al.*, 2010),

further research could extend our findings by incorporating suppliers' attitudes and perceptions as well. This research has shown that buyers' resources play a key role in the (de) escalation of conflict. However, we considered resources as an overarching construct, and hence we haven't distilled the differential impact of various resources types. Future research can deepen our understanding of the role of the specific resources (e.g. internal resources: operational slack, vs. external resources: relationship with customers) (Surachartkumtonkun *et al.*, 2015) in driving conflict resolution dynamics. In addition, although the dyads chosen included subsidiaries of multinational companies, we did not recognise the impact of the parent–subsidiary links (Luo, 2003; Doz and Prahalad, 1981) nor the relationship between parent companies (HQ buying company–HQ supplier company) on the investigated dynamics. Future research therefore should investigate and recognize these multiplex relationships and how they play out within the dyadic buyer–supplier conflict resolution dynamics. A final limitation of our study is related to our data collection approach. We have chosen to collect data on a limited number of cases and this may limit the generalizability of our findings. However, focusing on four cases gave us the opportunity to gain deep understanding of the conflict from both sides of the dyad and interview multiple informants, and therefore we believe our findings are not idiosyncratic but indicative of more generalizable patterns. Furthermore, we gathered retrospective longitudinal data, which might have, to some degree, restricted our understanding of the dynamics at play (Reimann *et al.*, 2017; Vanpoucke *et al.*, 2014), despite our efforts to guard against retrospective bias. Hence, a real time study involving observations of the parties' interactions would perhaps be ideal.

4.11 References

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4.12 Appendices

Appendix 1: descriptive details of research cases.

	Case 1		Case 2		Case 3		Case 4	
	Supplier	Buyer	Supplier	Buyer	Supplier	Buyer	Supplier	Buyer
Alias	<i>ElectroCo</i>	<i>WiringCo</i>	<i>CableCo</i>	<i>AutoElecCo</i>	<i>TextileCo</i>	<i>SeatCo</i>	<i>Connector</i>	<i>AutoTechCo</i>
Creation in Morocco	2009	2000	2010	2011	2011	2007	2009	2010
Annual Turnover	17B	14B	2B	12B	1B	15B	17B	20B
Primary industry	Semiconductor & Other Electronic Component Manufacturing	Automobile Parts Manufacturing	Electrical Products Manufacturing	Automobile Parts Manufacturing	Automobile Parts Manufacturing	Automobile Parts Manufacturing	Semiconductor & Other Electronic Component Manufacturing	Automobile Electrical Products Manufacturing
Market position information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leader in electronic components manufacturing. Operates about 95 manufacturing sites around the world Sells about 450,000 types of components in some 150 countries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> World's largest automotive parts makers (connection systems, fuel cells, and electric vehicle parts among others. Has operations in 44 countries with more than 160 sites A diversified 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leader in current-carrying wiring device manufacturing. Ranked among the top 3 in the world Operates in more than 10 countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> World's largest automotive parts makers; Has manufacturing plants in various countries over the 5 continents Serves major car manufacturers worldwide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specialist in automotive interiors and acoustic environment. Has global footprint in more than 15 countries, with a total of 8 technical centres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leader in automotive seating and interior systems Operates from 245 facilities in 36 countries. Its largest customers include VW Group, Ford, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leading provider of electronic components and solutions in a wide range of industries. Has a large geographical presence Offers a large 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> World's largest automotive parts makers; Its product lines include wiring harnesses, electronic components, and hybrid electric products.

		customer portfolio GM, Ford, VW.			and 15 production plants	Renault-Nissan, and Peugeot S.A.	portfolio of products ranging from antennas to industrial automation.	Its main customers are Toyota, Nissan, Honda, and Land Rover
Nb. of employees (worldwide)	90000	140000	4500	9300	4500	148400	90000	110000
Nb. of respondents	8	8	8	6	8	6	8	9
Informants' position	Customer Service Manager, Customer Service Coordinator, Sales Representative, North Africa Sales Manager, Customer Service Supervisor, North Africa Operations Director, Customer Resident Engineer, North Africa Logistics Manager	Country Purchasing Dir., Purchasing Manager, Raw Material Buyer, Material Planning Supervisor, Quality Manager, Production Engineer, Raw Material Planner, Supplier delivery Performance Coordinator	General Manager, Sales Manager, Country Quality Manager, Global Quality Manager, production Engineer, Logistics Manager, Process Engineer, Maintenance Manager	Production Engineer, Logistics Manager, Purchasing Manager, Quality Manager, Single Point Buyer, Supplier Quality Engineer	General Manager, Logistics Manager, Quality Manager, Quality Coordinator, Logistics & Production Coordinator, Cost Recovery Coordinator, Industrial Projects Manager, Plant Manager	Procurement Coordinator, Operations Director North Africa, Production Manager, Quality Manager, Logistics Manager, Engineering Manager	Customer Service Manager, Customer Service Coordinator, Allocation & Shortage Supervisor, Supply Chain Manager North Africa, Deputy Supply Chain Manager, Logistics Manager North Africa, Allocation & Shortage Manager EMEA, Quality Manager	Purchasing Manager, Production Manager, Procurement Coordinator, Customer Quality Supervisor, Raw Material Planner, Buyer, Planning Coordinator, Logistics Manager, Logistics Coordinator
Average years of experience	13	12	11	13	11	11	13	7
Total interviews	9	10	8	6	8	6	9	9

Appendix 2: Interview protocol

Interviewees' background information

- For how long have you been in the current position?
- What is your role and responsibility in the organization?

General Questions

- How long have you been working with this supplier?
- How important is this supplier to your company? (Purchasing volume, change over time, alternative suppliers).
- Could you trace the major phases of your relationship development?
- What do you perceive to be the main benefits of this relationship? What are the key challenges?
- Could you please describe your relationship with this supplier? (Prompt: trust, satisfaction, commitment, interpersonal relationship).

Incident-related Questions

Please recall one major/critical incident that occurred in your relationship with a core component supplier during the past 12 months and whose response process involved difficulties with the supplier.

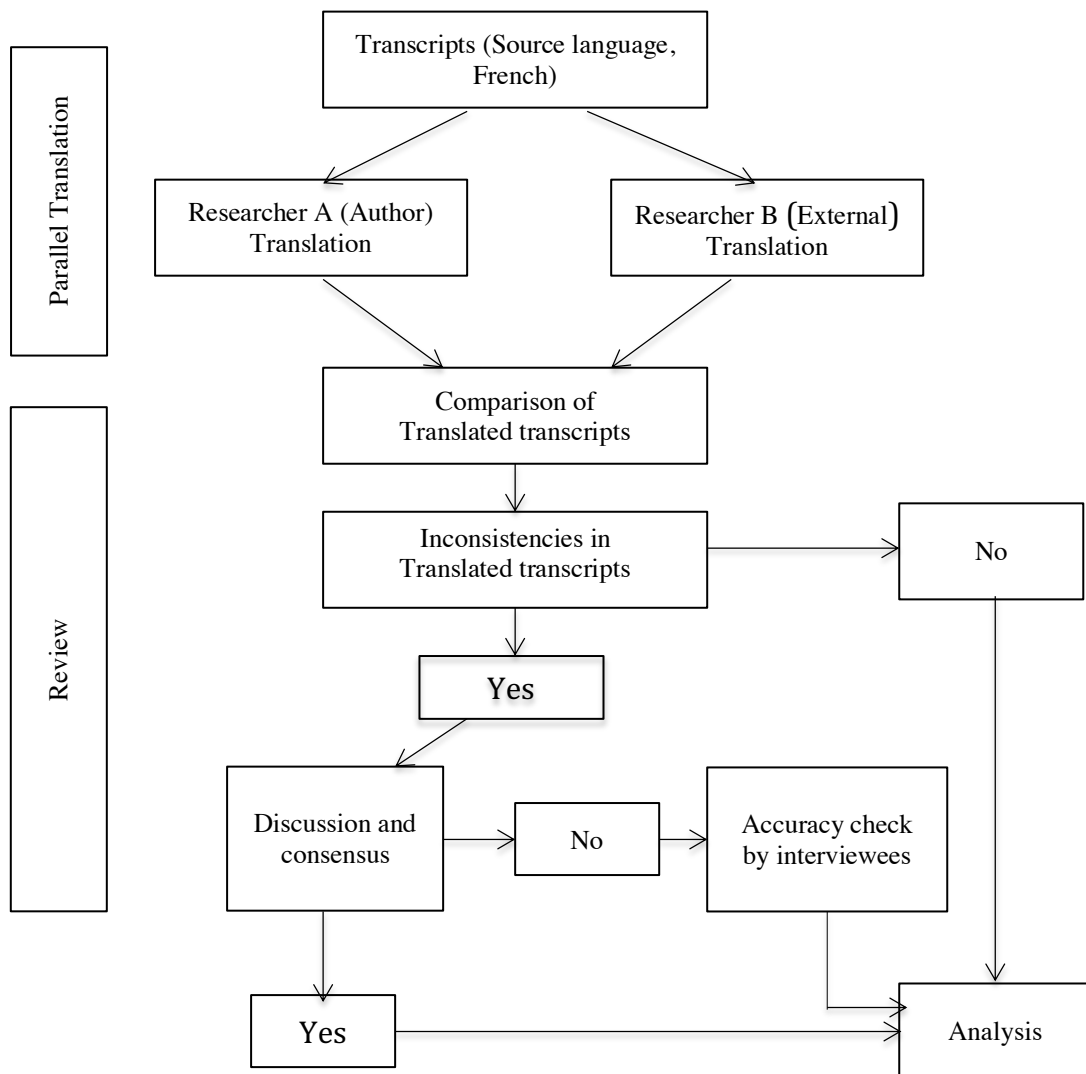
- Could you please provide a description of this incident? (Prompt: impact on performance, length, decisions)
- Could you please describe with details how you interacted with the supplier? (Prompt: supplier efforts, social interaction, information sharing process, actors involved)
- What were the constraints/difficulties in the incident resolution process? (Prompt: causes, mitigation efforts, trade-offs)

Concluding Questions

- Do you have anything to add?
- Are there other aspects that you have thought of during our interview that you think might be important for me to know about justice in your relationship?

Appendix 3: Transcripts' translation process

Interviews were carried out in the native language of respondents. In Morocco, French, is the language used in business. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and the transcripts were translated from French into English. The translation process, as reported by cross-cultural researchers, is of crucial importance to the validity and reliability of the data (Twinn, 1997). In this research, the translation process followed a collaborative translation approach (Douglas and Craig, 2007). A bilingual researcher was involved in the translation process. The researcher was familiar with the subject-specific terminology, had an awareness of style and grammar, nuances, and idiomatic expressions of both the source and target language. The researcher was also aware of and understood the linguistic or social context within which the interviews have taken place. In order to ensure that the translation was as accurate as possible and to resolve the inconsistencies between researchers, when possible, the translated transcript was returned to bilingual respondents for accuracy checks. Alternatively, both researchers discussed the gaps until a consensus was reached. The translation process is depicted in the figure below.



Appendix 4: Representative Supporting Interview Data for Each Second-order Theme

Second-order themes	Representative first-order data			
	CASE 1	CASE 2	CASE 3	CASE 4
Resources availability	<p><i>"We had a safety stock here and so we decided to use what we had (...)" (C1B-Purchasing Manager).</i></p> <p><i>"After, we could not take the risks, we were running out of stock, so even though the supplier is a strategic one, even though we had good relationship with them, at a certain point you start even questioning the effectiveness of the supplier's actions (C1B-Purchasing Manager).</i></p>	<p><i>"Because why [the buyer] will react in one way or another, it depends on the available safety stock they have, the time left to customer delivery" (C2S-Quality Manager)</i></p>	<p><i>"No. We had a reduced safety stock of finished goods and a safety stock of raw material (we keep a safety stock because we really don't trust the supplier much, nor can we take their support for granted, and the industry is very volatile) so we continued our production but obviously we did not inform the supplier. For them, our production lines were stopped" (C3B-Quality Manager)</i></p>	<p><i>"We had three days of coverage and we did not have a date on the component availability or on the next delivery. So we did not have any visibility, but still we had a safety stock" (C4B-Purchasing Manager)</i></p>
Gratitude	<p><i>"Sometimes we do have fluctuations and they support us, and this time it was our turn to support them. We accepted the situation" (C1B-Purchasing Manager).</i></p>	<p><i>"They were very helpful previously, they accommodated our orders' fluctuations, they satisfied our requests, they did more than what the contract stipulated. So we should not neglect their support during different time periods" (C2B-Purchasing Director)</i></p> <p><i>"(...) As I said they are one of our best suppliers, they did a lot, they deployed many efforts in the past, and honestly in some projects it is thanks to them that we offered our customer a competitive market offer. We really appreciate that" (C2B-Single Point Buyer).</i></p>	<p><i>"And also, they would never go one step ahead with you, they are going to gain something out of it ok, but to help you and do a gesture of niceness...never! so you give them a taste of their own medicine" (North Africa Operations Director, Buyer).</i></p>	

<p>Trust</p>	<p><i>"We had certainty that it is something temporary and that the supplier will solve the issue shortly"</i> (C1B-Purchasing Manager).</p> <p><i>"With [this supplier], what really characterizes the relationship is trust, something that we do not have with every other supplier. There is strong trust between us, whatever we say is true, and whatever they say is true"</i> (C1B-Raw Material Planner).</p>	<p><i>"Another advantage with [supplier] is their professional deontology, they are serious people"</i> (Purchasing Director, Buyer).</p>	<p><i>"There is mistrust, and a lack of confidence"</i> (C3B- Operations Director North Africa)</p>	<p><i>"Every time something happens, we question the supplier's credibility, you see what I mean?"</i> (C4B-Purchasing Manager)</p>
<p>Conflict expression</p>	<p><i>"But also they breathed fire over the issue"</i> (C1S-Sales Representative)</p>	<p><i>"We discussed with the supplier to understand what happened exactly and how we could solve the issue. We had meetings together and we discussed options."</i> (C2B-Purchasing Manager).</p>	<p><i>"They had a very aggressive reaction, they were like "You are going too far, we are getting browned off with you having the same problem, if only we could stop this project with you, or change the reference...This is just too much! Go find a solution with the manufacturer, we don't want to have this problem again, work this out internally or with your supplier... It's your problem! ... etc."</i> (C3S-Quality Supervisor).</p>	<p><i>"They had a reaction, it is clear, they did not sympathize with us...there was no empathy, AutoTechCo were less open, less receptive to our arguments ...the tension has moved up a notch!"</i> (C4S-Customer Service Manager).</p> <p><i>"So the discussion between us and the supplier was like ping pong, I accuse you, you accuse me, each one gives a sense of responsibility, a hot discussion"</i> (C4B-Logistics Manager)</p> <p><i>And so we rode roughshod over them, we were aggressive; things were not going the way we wanted</i> ((C4B-Logistics Manager)</p>
<p>Emotionality</p>	<p><i>"(...) At some point we were disgusted"</i> (C1B-Supplier Delivery Performance Coordinator).</p>	<p><i>"(...) And so it created tension and nervousness with [the supplier]"</i> (C2B-Purchasing Director)</p>	<p><i>"The supplier resisted, and their behaviour was not appropriate, we got really worked up, and so our reaction was very hostile, it was very tense"</i> (C3B-Logistics)</p>	<p><i>"At this moment, we were really outraged. Frankly, it was very critical"</i> (C4B-Purchasing Manager).</p>

	<p><i>"When they did not deliver again, we were disappointed" (C1B-Country Purchasing Director).</i></p>		<p>Manager)</p>	<p><i>"This response generated great frustration, because we were stuck" (C4B-Purchasing Manager).</i></p>
<p>Resolution misalignment</p>	<p><i>"The supplier deployed some efforts, but these actions were not sufficient (...) because when you see that although some actions are put in place, you still have the same issue, it means that something is going on, that something is wrong" (C1B-Logistics Supervisor)</i></p> <p><i>"Well, initially, when the problem occurred, we thought that it was a matter of few days, as the supplier told us at the beginning. But afterwards, time was passing by and the issue was not yet resolved, so we started getting nervous because it was a lack of seriousness, and we told the supplier that this is not what they explained to us. While we expected that the issue would be resolved quickly, it was not the case, it was still the same situation" (C1B-Country Purchasing Director).</i></p>	<p><i>"And their attempt to solve the issue took couple of weeks. For us, they took so long to resolve the problem (...) this was absolutely the last straw" (C2B-Supplier Quality Engineer).</i></p>	<p><i>"And so the supplier has been contacted to do the necessary, in order to give us explanations, replace the goods, do the sorting, and give us a realization plan. But the supplier was against our claim, and denied any defect that may exist without even doing a proper diagnosis. However, normally, before rejecting our claim they should either visit us or ask us for a sample to do their analysis. And at the same time it was necessary to ensure the corrective actions to mitigate the situation and not cause damage in our production performance." (C3B-Procurement Coordinator)</i></p>	<p><i>"The customer then requested a hand carry delivery, but on our side we insisted that this component was under a global increase and so they had to assume responsibility (..) Here again it became tense, and the logistics manager refused to arrange a hand carry transportation, he blamed us for the late delivery, he was firm in his email and insisted that we must fly the parts because now we have a quality issue and we are 100% liable." (C4S-Customer Service Representative).</i></p> <p><i>"They did not give explanations on the quality problem, nor how it will be resolved to deliver us, they caused the problem but they did not discuss with us a solution" (C4B-Logistics Manager)</i></p>
<p>Tactics temporal orientation</p>	<p><i>"The supplier explained how the issue will be phased out in the future and gave us strong indicators" (C1B-Purchasing Manager).</i></p> <p><i>"So action has been taken, and this time it was a colossal investment for a new production site that has now helped us avoid many similar issues..." (C1B-</i></p>		<p><i>"We amended the logistics protocol (...) I could say that now we are more aligned with the supplier, we share the same understanding of quality specifications. This reduces the probability of future incidents, or in case they happen they would be easily managed as responsibility can be easily verified" (C3B-</i></p>	

	Country Purchasing Director).		Procurement Coordinator).	
Tactics' content	<p><i>"They organized visits to our plant, they came here to visualise the impact on our production, on our lines, to see how many people are working, how many shifts a day so they can write it down in order to quantify the impact, to simulate the costs..."</i> (C1B-Raw Material Planner)</p>	<p><i>"They promised that the problem would be resolved in couple of days as they have a strong R&D department"</i> (C2B-Supplier Quality Engineer)</p> <p><i>"They proposed that we could continue supplying from the former supplier and they will continue to pay all the costs"</i> (C2B-Supplier Quality Engineer)</p>	<p><i>"So the supplier admitted the defect, that's good..."</i> (C3B-Quality Manager).</p> <p><i>"So as I said, there was a lack of reactivity from the supplier, and they did not provide any containment actions."</i> (C3B-Quality Manager)</p>	<p><i>"But they could not explain what was going on, they were checking the problem. And so here it became tense, even tenser than before and we were more firm and rigid."</i> (C4B-Logistics Manager)</p> <p><i>"We had given official messages that we were not going to cover premium freight charges for that reference"</i> (C4S-Customer Service Manager)</p>

V. Chapter Five: A dynamic Model of Buyer-Supplier Conflict Processes

5.1 Abstract

Studies examining the temporal dynamics of conflict are scarce despite emphatic calls for investigating conflict as a dynamic process. This research takes an initial step and examines the trajectory of conflict towards functional or dysfunctional outcomes, by specifically investigating the interplay between task and relationship conflict. Towards this end, dyadic case studies each with multiple respondents were used. The interviews were semi-structured and paired retrospective data from both sides of multiple dyads were collected. We propose a phase-based model of conflict process, wherein conflict moves from a conflict initiation state, to a conflict spiral phase where task and relationship conflicts impact each other in a continuous feedback loop until a conflict tolerance threshold, and then to conflict outcomes. We propose mechanisms that trigger the transition among phases (interphase) and mechanisms leading to intraphase dynamics (intraphase). In formulating a dynamic model of buyer-supplier conflict process, this paper offers new insights by incorporating a temporal perspective into the study of conflict. Our findings suggest that conflict unfolds over time and is more complex than originally recognised in the literature.

Keywords: task conflict, relationship conflict, process dynamics, spiral, buyer-supplier relationships

5.2 Introduction

Recent work within buyer-supplier relationships acknowledges that conflict is a regular occurrence in these relationships (Hoppner *et al.*, 2015; Geyskens *et al.*, 1999; Bobot, 2011) that has a double-edged nature. In this view, conflict could be functional and help “*stimulate a genuine concern or interest in preserving the relationship*” (Koza and Dant, 2007, p. 279), but it could also be dysfunctional and erode trust (Leonidou *et al.*, 2006), increase opportunism (Kang and Jindal, 2015), and lead to relationship termination (Yang *et al.*, 2012; Johnsen and Lacoste, 2016). Therefore, supply chain scholars have long recognized the importance of investigating the nature and the impact of conflict in buyer-supplier relationships.

However, despite efforts to understand conflict in buyer-supplier relationships (Bai *et al.*, 2016; Cai *et al.*, 2017; Tang *et al.*, 2017), the conflict literature remains in need of more elaborate time-sensitive theorising (Lumineau *et al.*, 2015). One feature shared by most conflict definitions is its conceptualisation as a process. Somewhat counterintuitively, the process feature is so prevalent in the current debate that it appears to be taken for granted and largely immune to explicit theorisation (O'Neill and McLarnon, 2018; Lengers *et al.*, 2015; Johnsen and Lacoste, 2016). It is against this backdrop that we argue that the process of conflict has emerged as an important blind spot that impedes further progress in the field. In particular, the lack of theorization of the conflict process is likely to obstruct the much-needed scholarly effort to explicate the dynamic nature of conflict in particular (Westman and Thorgren, 2016), and buyer-supplier relationships in general (Terpend *et al.*, 2008; Lumineau and Oliveira, 2018).

Furthermore, conflict typology has also lacked sufficient consideration in the extant buyer-supplier conflict literature (Srinivasan *et al.*, 2018). Organizational behaviour scholars have demonstrated that two conflict types emerge in groups – task and relationship - (Amason, 1996; Jehn, 1995), and that these types co-exist within a conflict episode (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003; DeChurch *et al.*, 2013; Greer *et al.*, 2008). On the other hand, buyer-supplier conflict research has tended to focus on conflict as a unidimensional construct, with few exceptions (Rose *et al.*, 2007; Bobot, 2011; Pfajfar *et al.*, 2017; Srinivasan *et al.*, 2018). Yet, these authors examined conflict types in isolation and have not attempted to understand how task and relationship conflicts are related to each other over time. These deficiencies must be addressed if scholars and practitioners are to fully comprehend the dynamics of the conflict process.

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to conceptually and empirically address gaps in the buyer-supplier conflict literature by unpacking the conflict process from the beginning of the conflict episode until its resolution. We seek to develop an integrated framework that explains 1) how the conflict process unfolds over time in buyer-supplier relationships, by specifically identifying the interplay between task and relationship conflict, and 2) how task conflict is cyclically impacted by changes in relationship conflict throughout the conflict episode, such that a spiralling pattern could be exhibited as amplifying and/or self-correcting cycles (Lindsley *et al.*, 1995).

Overall, this study contributes to the literature in three important ways. First, it advances theoretical knowledge by building a process theory of conflict in buyer-supplier relationships. Second, instead of conceptualizing conflict as a single construct, both task and relationship conflict types are considered in terms of how they evolve over the conflict episode, thereby extending past research that examined the interrelationship among conflict types. This approach is important because it is only by investigating how conflict evolves over time that one would understand the mechanisms that drive outcomes of the conflict episode. Finally, another contribution of this research stems from the use of an in-depth qualitative research methodology. Although conflict has been examined widely, studies providing longitudinal explanation of the entirety of the conflict episode from beginning to resolution are rare. Instead, the study of buyer-supplier conflict has been dominated by studies using quantitative research designs using large samples and building on statistical analyses.

In addition to the academic relevance of this research, there is also a clear and strong managerial relevance attached to the processual examination of conflict. Previous research has shown that supply chain agents spend one in every six hours of their time dealing with conflict (Bobot, 2011). Therefore, the interactional knowledge involved in managing conflicts is effective to build strong and stable relationships with a supply partner (Johnson *et al.*, 2004; Anderson and Weitz, 1992). The results of this study will help increase managers' knowledge on the elements involved in a conflict episode, and would subsequently improve their approach to maintaining their supply chain relationships (Ganesan *et al.*, 2009). Essentially, investigating conflict from a processual lens is crucially important for both organizational researchers and practitioners, in a sense that it provides "*a link for moving from abstract conceptualization to organizational application*" (Kochan and Verma, 1982, p. 21).

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. The next section describes the literature review on buyer-supplier conflict. Section three presents the methodology followed to answer the research questions including case selection, data collection protocols, and analytical

techniques. Following this, the within and then cross-case analyses are presented. The manuscript concludes by outlining both the theoretical and the managerial contributions, and finally by discussing the research's limitations and avenues for future research.

5.3 Conceptual Background

5.3.1 Conflict in Buyer-Supplier Relationships

Conflict, defined as “*the process in which one party perceives that interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party [with stress or tension the results]*” (Wall Jr and Callister, 1995, p. 517), is a pervasive feature of buyer-supplier relationships. Global competition has driven changes in the nature of buyer-supplier relationships (Hunt, 1995; Mahapatra *et al.*, 2010), and has stimulated collaborative activities between the exchange partners. Yet, when buyers and suppliers cooperate, interdependencies arise and so does the potential for conflict (Deutsch, 1994; Frazier, 1999). Conflict scholars have primarily focused on identifying the antecedent conditions (Yang *et al.*, 2017; Prince *et al.*, 2016; Lee *et al.*, 2017; Zhuang *et al.*, 2010; Zhang and Zhang, 2013) and/or outcomes of conflict (Murfield *et al.*, 2016; Bobot, 2011; Ndubisi, 2011; Humphreys *et al.*, 2009; Koza and Dant, 2007). However, analysis of conflict within buyer-supplier relationships is primarily conceptual or cross-sectional in nature, and therefore fails to empirically capture the conflict process, even though an insightful group of papers has identified the need to gain a detailed and broad understanding of conflict dynamics over time (Lengers *et al.*, 2015; Jehn and Mannix, 2001; O'Neill and McLarnon, 2018). Our approach aims at filling these gaps, and is in the “opening the black box” tradition (Parada *et al.*, 2009) to capture the dynamics of the conflict process empirically. The conflict process that this research seeks to unpack begins with the observable expression of a conflict, when the buyer and supplier communicate their disagreements to each other until its resolution.

5.3.2 Conflict Typology

Past research proposed that two types of conflicts may surface in an organizational setting—relationship and task⁵ (Amason and Sapienza, 1997; Jehn, 1995), and this conceptualization has been recognized as constituting a critical theoretical distinction in several meta-analysis (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003; DeChurch *et al.*, 2013). *Task conflict*, labelled using a wide terminology (cognitive, substantive, content, realistic conflict), is consistently defined as “*disagreements about the work to be done*” (Janssen *et al.*, 1999, p. 119). It exists when individuals disagree about goals and

⁵ Although some researchers complemented the two-dimensional typology by adding a third conflict type (Jehn 1997), process conflict, it has not been widely researched because it is also centred on disagreements about tasks to be done (Barki and Hartwick, 2004). Therefore, most of the conflict research is based on the task vs. relationship distinction.

interests (De Dreu and Gelfand, 2008), group procedures and distribution of resources (Pelled *et al.*, 1999), as well as the content of task performance (De Wit *et al.*, 2012). Hence, task conflict is focused on substantive issues about the cooperating tasks between buyers and suppliers. *Relationship conflict*, on the other hand, is conceptualised by a presence of negative affect as its defining characteristic (Barki and Hartwick, 2004). It includes personal and affective dimensions involving animosities and incompatibilities in the dyadic relationships (Mo *et al.*, 2012; Rose and Shoham, 2004).

Multiple investigations within firms have demonstrated that these conflict types have differential effects on performance outcomes. Researchers have consistently found that task conflict leads to a positive impact, whereas relationship conflict has a negative impact (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003; Tjosvold, 2008). This duality has emerged from the tendency of prior research to consider these conflict types in isolation. However, recent theorizing has pointed out that the two types of conflict are strongly entangled (Tekleab *et al.*, 2009; Rispens *et al.*, 2011; Van Bunderen *et al.*, 2018; Jehn *et al.*, 2013) because every task-related exchange relays personal information (Wittenbaum *et al.*, 2004). Therefore the high correlation between task and relationship conflict is to be considered in predicting conflict outcomes (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003).

5.3.3 The Interplay Between Task Conflict and Relationship Conflict

The link between task conflict and relationship conflict may be explained by attributions theory (Fincham and Jaspars, 1980; Weiner, 1985). Task conflict leads to relationship conflict when a disagreement is attributed to self rather than to situational reasons. These attributions elicit different emotions (Lazarus, 2006), trigger affective conflict (Creed and Miles, 1996), and may serve to lead task conflict to be closely tied to relationship conflict throughout a team's lifecycle (Greer *et al.*, 2008). Studies provided empirical evidence of the direct relationship from task to relationship conflict (Curşeu *et al.*, 2012) (Mooney *et al.*, 2007) (Rose *et al.*, 2007), and few unpacked mechanisms through which this relationship manifests (Rispens, 2012). For instance Rispens (2012) found that negative emotions associated with the task conflict are more likely to trigger relationship conflict.

While theoretical and empirical evidence has demonstrated the relationship from task conflict to relationship conflict, research that examines the reverse causality is limited. Some researchers even ruled out the existence of such causality (Gamero *et al.*, 2008), and others found that there was no significant effect of relationship conflict on task conflict (Greer *et al.*, 2008). Yet, anecdotal evidence suggests that the presence of relationship conflict is likely to impact task

conflict. For instance, Eisenhardt and Bourgeois III (1988) found that political fighting among executives resulted in distorted perceptions of each other's ideas about the task. Essentially, relationship conflict is likely to decrease goodwill and mutual understanding, which hinders the completion of cooperating tasks (Deutsch, 1958). When relationship conflict erupts, emotional clashes and tensions can hinder the ensuing task discussions (Jehn and Bendersky, 2003) and cloud task-related efforts (Parayitam and Dooley, 2007), thereby triggering increased task conflict.

The integration of the previous sequential perspectives substantiates an argument that the association between task conflict and relationship conflict could be cyclical. Accordingly, researchers' prior attempts to determine unidirectional causality using cross-sectional surveys may have obscured the dynamic cyclical relationship that might occur as task conflict affects relationship conflict (and vice versa) over the length of the conflict episode. Previous research in other fields has denoted such cyclical pattern as a spiral. Consequently, the notion of spirals appears crucial for the understanding the interplay between conflict types, and therefore will be used to provide direction for constructing our theory.

A spiral is defined as a “*pattern of consecutive fluctuations (i.e., increases or decreases) in linked variables resulting from previous values of one or both variables*” (Autry and Golicic, 2010, p. 89). Spiral research suggests that a reciprocal relationship between two variables follow two possible patterns: 1) *a deviation-amplifying spiral pattern*, and 2) *a self-correcting spiral pattern*. The deviation-amplifying spiral, which occurs when a change in one variable generates a similar change in another variable (Lindsley *et al.*, 1995; Andersson and Pearson, 1999), could move either in an upward (where increases in one variable leads to increases in the other variable) or a downward direction (where decreases in one variable leads to decreases in the other variable). Conversely, the self-correcting pattern (also called deviation-counteracting spiral) occurs when an increase (decrease) in one variable is followed by a decrease (increase) in another variable (Autry and Golicic, 2010).

An application of this theoretical lens has provided explanation to various issues including individual performance (Lindsley *et al.*, 1995), individual creativity (Perry-Smith and Shalley, 2003), incivility in the workplace (Andersson and Pearson, 1999), tyrannical behaviour (Ashforth, 1994), and buyer-supplier relationship performance (Autry and Golicic, 2010). For instance, Lindsley *et al.* (1995) built a theoretical framework for performance–efficacy spirals where performance affects self-efficacy, which in turn affects performance, which in turn affects self-efficacy, and so on. The authors also proposed factors that impact the occurrence, continuance, and stopping of the efficacy-performance spiral. Similarly, in a supply chain context, Autry and Golicic (2010) applied a spiral lens and demonstrated that performance and relationship strength in buyer-

supplier relationships follow a cyclical pattern over time. The notion of spiral presented in these papers is crucial for understanding the interplay between the two types of conflict, as will be shown later.

5.3.4 Literature Gaps and Research Questions

In summary, prior research has overlooked the investigation of the conflict process and has emphasized the conceptualization of conflict as a single construct. Therefore, the process through which conflict emerges and evolves remains poorly understood. Moreover, however important the conflict typology and the interplay between conflict types may have been stressed in previous intraorganisational research, this typology has received limited attention in buyer-supplier relationship settings (Rose and Shoham, 2004; Rose *et al.*, 2007; Mo *et al.*, 2012; Srinivasan *et al.*, 2018; Pfajfar *et al.*, 2017), and considerations of the interdependencies between task and relationship conflict are rare (Rose and Shoham, 2004). This consequently leads us to more specific research questions about conflict in buyer-supplier relationships: 1) *How does a conflict episode unfold over time?* And 2) *what is the interplay between task conflict and relationship conflict over the conflict episode?*

5.4 Research Setting and Methods

Answering the research questions raised in this paper necessitates a methodology capable of capturing dynamic processes. Therefore, process-focused multiple case studies were conducted (Hewerdine and Welch, 2013). This approach is particularly appropriate when the researcher seeks to enrich understanding of a phenomenon and the context in which it is occurring (Mahapatra *et al.*, 2010). A retrospective approach was employed to capture changes over the conflict episode over time (Pettigrew, 1997; Pentland, 1999). Although collecting data retrospectively is criticized for respondents' limited recall abilities (Zahra and Covin, 1995), we counteracted such shortcoming by obtaining dyadic data on recent conflicts (last 12 months) using multiple informants (Eisenhardt, 1989; Van de Ven and Huber, 1990). We also used an interview graphical guide to help managers' more accurately reflect on their experiences (Hollmann *et al.*, 2015)

5.4.1 Context

The context for this study is the Moroccan Automotive industry. Morocco is an ideal setting typifying an emergent market (El Baz and Laguir, 2017) that has been building its position as an international hub for the sector, and has attracted a number of big automotive players in recent years (Reuters, 2017, December 12) including Renault, SNOF, GMD, Lear, Delphi, Yazaki, SEWS, Faurecia, Leoni, Saint-Gobain, TE Connectivity, and more recently Peugeot Citroën. The industry

represents one of the most developed and established sectors, with exports approaching 7 billion euros and making 44% of industrial Moroccan exports (Morocco World News, 28 April, 2018). The industry has also been characterised by an increasing tendency for cooperative relationships between buyers and suppliers in various functional areas (Howard *et al.*, 2006; Takeishi, 2001; Wilhelm, 2011). Together, these factors make the Moroccan automotive industry a suitable context for examining our research question. We used a sample from one industry to rule out dyadic differences in dyadic links and practices in buyer-supplier relationships (Liu *et al.*, 2012).

5.4.2 Case Selection

The authors collaborated closely with the *Moroccan Association for Automotive Industry and Trade* in the search for suitable buying companies in order to select from a well-structured sample (Voss *et al.*, 2002). Once cases were identified, the researchers gained access either through recommendation from the Association or through personal acquaintances. One of the researchers also attended an annual business-to-business (B2B) event, the Automotive Meetings Tangier-Med (AMT), to meet other managers from the companies initially identified.

Our selection of the cases was guided by the following factors in order to control for sources of extraneous variation (Eisenhardt, 1989). First, the conflicts were supplier-induced as attributions impact behaviour (Kim *et al.*, 2006). Second, the importance of those incidents (conflict issue) was controlled, including only important conflict issue that were vital to buyer performance (Jehn, 1997). Third, dyads representing similar tier positions (Tier1/Tier 2) were selected. This selection criterion eliminated cases in which companies did not have the same position in the supply chain network, as the tier position may differentiate the nature and outcomes of exchange relationships (Inemek and Matthyssens, 2013). Within this restricted sample, we used theoretical sampling based on two criteria: 1) conflict outcomes to capture cases where conflict led to functional and dysfunctional outcomes, and 2) power structure to capture both cases of balanced and unbalanced power in the dyads (Lusch, 1976b), resulting in four cases. A sample size of four case studies has been considered appropriate for case study based papers (Mahapatra *et al.*, 2010; Eisenhardt, 1989; Vanpoucke *et al.*, 2014), and for conflict studies (Ellegaard and Andersen, 2015).

5.4.3 Data Collection

Data collection started with interviews of people within the buying company who had central roles in the management of the exchange relationship (e.g. a General Manager or a Purchasing Director). This first contact provided initial information that helped us identify a core component supplier

and a substantive conflict episode. Core component suppliers were important because these relationships appear to have an impact on manufacturing firms' expectations, and therefore this maximizes the chances to capture critical incidents rather than trivial information (Primo *et al.*, 2007). We subsequently applied snowball sampling by asking prime contacts, at both the buying and the supplying companies, to select their colleagues who were able to report on the identified conflict situation (Lockström *et al.*, 2010). Although most of the employees nominated worked in the Purchasing and Logistics department, some of these respondents were from other departments including Quality, Production, and Engineering. Positions from the supplier side included Customer Service, Sales and Marketing, Quality, and Engineering. These were selected because supply chain conflicts involve actors across buying/supplying firms' functional departments (Primo *et al.*, 2007; Cooper *et al.*, 1991) and therefore it was necessary to capture various perspectives to have a complete picture of the conflict episode. Second, those respondents were typically the contact points the buying/supplying company's personnel interacted with on a regular basis (Wu and Choi, 2005; Lockström *et al.*, 2010), and were involved in addressing the conflict episode (Johnson and Sohi, 2016). Table V-1 provides a brief description of the study cases.

In this paper, we focused on four cases (dyadic relationships), and a conflict episode and its subsequent resolution process (which was constituted of several micro-episodes or critical incidents that triggered meaningful perceptual and/or behavioural attention over the conflict episode). We used semi-structured interviews for our data collection. Particularly, respondents were asked to answer questions related to how the conflict episode evolved over time (See Appendix 1 for the interview protocol). Furthermore, to better elicit the sequence of events and pinpoint their temporal location over the conflict episode, we used an interview graphical guide to help respondents describe the details of the conflict situation (See Appendix 2), and draw the dynamics of conflict over time⁶. This approach has been recommended for the integration of a temporal lens into organisational research to understand the shape of changes over time (Ancona *et al.*, 2001) and has been successfully used in interorganisational relationships dynamics research (Hollmann *et al.*, 2015).

In-depth interviews were carried out in two phases. The first phase between the 15th of October 2016 and 30th January 2017, and the second phase from 25th June to 30th September 2017. In total 65 interviews were conducted. All of the interviews were conducted face-to-face in the buyers' and suppliers' premises. The interviews were carried out in the native language of the

⁶ Given managers' time constraints, some of them preferred to talk about the conflict episode without drawing its dynamics. Therefore, following the interviews, the researcher created the timeline as a summary of the key events that happened throughout the conflict situation, and this was sent back to the respondents for approval.

interviewees (French, except for 3 respondents who felt comfortable in taking the interview in English) to maximize their ability to express their thoughts, feelings and opinions (Vanpoucke *et al.*, 2014). The duration of each interview ranged from 30 to 120 minutes. Interviews within each relationship continued until the point of saturation was reached where information became repetitive (Eisenhardt, 1989). The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim in order to preserve the entirety of statements and allow high reliability of the data (Gray, 2013). Respondents were then presented with the chronology of events during the conflict situation for review and approval to prevent any misunderstandings. Some respondents were interviewed twice to clarify or obtain further details on previously mentioned aspects of the conflict process. These steps validated the obtained data and improved its accuracy (Yin, 2017). Finally, all interview transcripts were translated into English for analysis (See Appendix 3 for the translation process).

Case	Buying company	Supplier company
1	C1B: <i>WiringCo</i> Nb. Of respondents: 8; Total interviews: 10 Informants: Country Purchasing Director, Purchasing Manager (PM)*, Raw Material Buyer, Material Planning Supervisor*, Quality Manager, Production Engineer, Raw Material Planner, Supplier delivery Performance Coordinator.	C1S: <i>ElectroCo</i> Nb. Of respondents: 8; Total interviews: 9 Informants: Customer Service Manager (CSM), Customer Service Coordinator (CSC), Sales Representative (SR), North Africa Sales Manager (NASM)*, Customer Service Supervisor (CSS), North Africa Operations Director (NAOD), Customer Resident Engineer (CRE), North Africa Logistics Manager (NALM)
2	C2B: <i>AutoElecCo</i> Nb. Of respondents: 6; Total interviews: 6 Informants: Production Engineer, Logistics Manager, Purchasing Manager, Quality Manager, Single Point Buyer, Supplier Quality Engineer	C2S: <i>CableCo</i> Nb. Of respondents: 8; Total interviews: 8 Informants: General Manager, Sales Manager, Country Quality Manager, Global Quality Manager, production Engineer, Logistics Manager, Process Engineer, Maintenance Manager
3	C3B: <i>SeatCo</i> Nb. Of respondents: 6; Total interviews: 6 Informants: Procurement Coordinator, Operations Director North Africa, Production Manager, Quality Manager, Logistics Manager, Engineering Manager	C3S: <i>TextileCo</i> Nb. Of respondents: 8; Total interviews: 8 Informants: General Manager, Logistics Manager, Quality Manager, Quality Coordinator, Logistics & Production Coordinator, Cost Recovery Coordinator, Industrial Projects Manager, Plant Manager
4	C4B: <i>AutoTechCo</i> Nb. Of respondents: 8; Total interviews: 9 Informants: Purchasing Manager*, Production Manager, Procurement Coordinator, Customer Quality Supervisor, Raw Material Planner, Buyer, Planning Coordinator, Logistics Manager, Logistics Coordinator	C4S: <i>Connector</i> Nb. Of respondents: 9; Total interviews: 9 Informants: Customer Service Manager, Customer Service Coordinator, Allocation & Shortage Supervisor, Supply Chain Manager North Africa, Deputy Supply Chain Manager, Logistics Manager North Africa, Allocation & Shortage Manager EMEA, Quality Manager

*Interviewed twice

Table V-1: Overview of the cases

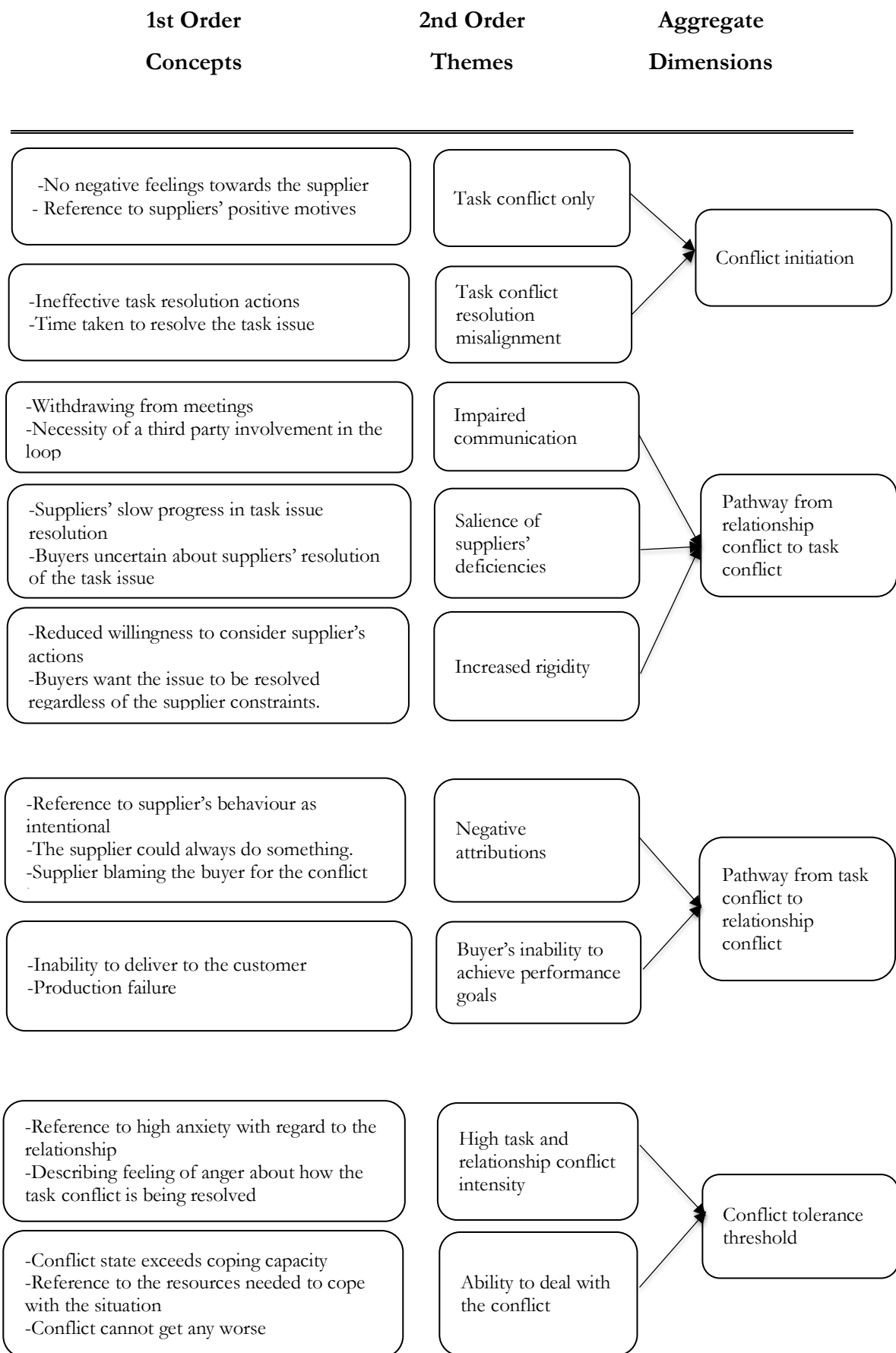
5.4.4 Data Analysis

The translated transcripts were imported into QSR NVivo 10 for coding. The coding process involved three major steps including 1) identifying first-order empirical themes using language that was as close to the data as possible (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), 2) consolidating empirical themes into second-order conceptual categories, and 3) identifying theoretical dimensions and developing the process through which conflict unfolds over time (Sandhu and Kulik, 2018; Besharov, 2014).

We began our analysis with open-coding of interview transcripts (Huberman and Miles, 2002). We first read the transcripts line-by-line to identify common statements and group them into informant-centric first-order empirical themes (Sandhu and Kulik, 2018). As we progressed

through the transcripts, we sought to improve our coding scheme. We compared themes within and across transcripts in order to refine the boundaries of the first-order themes (Besharov, 2014). The first-order themes related to a wide range of phenomenon presented in the data and captured issues such as the timing of issue resolution, and whether the issue was resolved or not. There were also themes about managers' feeling anxious about the relationship, and instances where suspicion surfaced in the relationship.

In the second phase of the analysis, we engaged in axial coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) wherein we identified similarities and differences among the first-order themes, and we consolidated them into high-order conceptual categories. Here, we went back to the raw data and reviewed all the transcripts to verify the fit between the initially coded passages and the emerging second-order categories (Sandhu and Kulik, 2018). For instance, from the first-order themes dealing with "buyers' reduced willingness to consider suppliers' actions" and "buyers wanting the issue to be resolved regardless of the supplier's constraints", we developed a second order category labelled "Increased rigidity". We also grouped the first-order themes describing "suppliers' slow progress in task issue resolution" and "buyers' uncertainty about suppliers' resolution of the task issue" under the second order category of "salience of suppliers' deficiencies". Through similar analytical steps, we distilled further second-order categories. In the final stage of analysis, we gathered similar second-order categories into several overarching theoretical dimensions that make up the basis of our emergent framework, and we actively explored the role that the conceptual categories played in the conflict process (Besharov, 2014). Approaching the data from this perspective, we identified, for instance, how "task conflict resolution misalignment" was important as an influence in transitioning between the initial emergence stage of the conflict process and the task-relationship spiral stage. In order to ensure that the emerged framework provided the best fit between the data and the theoretical explanations, the research team, at multiple points, brainstormed alternative conceptualizations on the relationship among the emerged theoretical dimensions and the relevant literature (Pratt *et al.*, 2006; Sandhu and Kulik, 2018). The final data analysis is illustrated in figure V.1, which summarises our coding process and data structure. It depicts the structure of first-order concepts, second-order conceptual categories, and aggregate theoretical dimensions. We concluded the analysis by constructing a model of the conflict process in buyer-supplier relationships (Section 5.7).



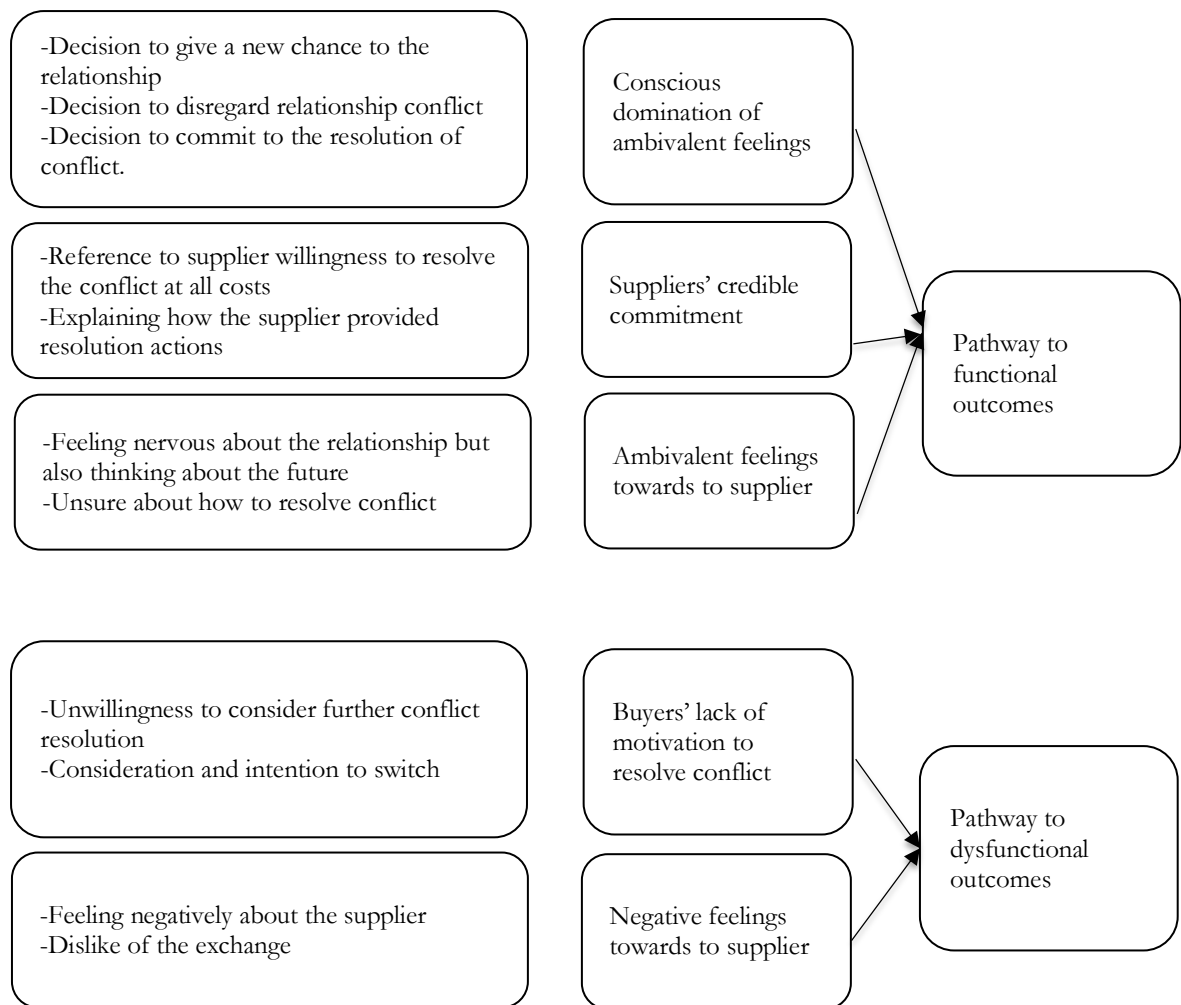


Figure V-1: Data Structure

5.5 Within-Case Analysis

The within-case analysis offers details of the four dyadic buyer-supplier relationships. Each case opens with some background information, then it proceeds to the description of the conflict episode.

5.5.1 Case 1: WiringCo – ElectroCo

The critical incident in this case was a *delivery failure* of two basic terminals used by *WiringCo* in the production of wire harnesses for an OEM customer. The OEM introduced an engineering change for these terminals but only in one type of harnesses produced by *WiringCo*. However, the OEM quickly standardized the use of the new terminals in other types of wiring harnesses. This consequently resulted in excess demand, which in turn generated delivery failures because *ElectroCo* was unable to meet their customers' needs

with the available resources in place. With *WiringCo*, *ElectroCo* has three deliveries a week. *ElectroCo* missed the first delivery at the beginning of the week. The buyer then informed the supplier about the delivery issue and adapted to the situation by using their safety stock so as not to stop their production lines. Subsequently, in the second delivery, the quantity delivered was not adequate, and this created a “backlog” in the system. At this point, *WiringCo*'s managers felt disappointed and requested an explanation from the supplier's representatives to understand the root causes of the delivery failures. Managers from both sides met and discussed the problem, and the supplier promised that the issue would be resolved, in that they were deploying extra resources internally to catch up with the deliveries. In the meantime, the supplier would deliver by airfreight directly from another production site in the US. However, even with this intermediate solution, the supplier was still unable to reach the buyer's expected level of service, and there were great inconsistencies between the buyer's requests and what the supplier could provide, thereby triggering tension with the exchange. *WiringCo*'s managers blamed *ElectroCo* for their lack of seriousness and incompetence in managing the issue and requested a detailed plan of the disruption management for the coming weeks. In the following series of events, the supplier could not follow the recovery plan and several delivery failures happened. The operational performance of *WiringCo* was at risk, production lines were frequently stopped, and resolving the issue with *ElectroCo* was requiring a lot of resources and time from *WiringCo*. Their exchange became more strained, communication between the parties was frustrated and interaction was not leading to any solution because *ElectroCo* had no visibility about when their capacity issue could be resolved. However, because *WiringCo* could not change *ElectroCo* or bring the components from an alternative, they tried to re-consider conflict issue resolution. Following this, *ElectroCo*, after lengthy discussion and consultation with their central offices, decided to make an investment to prove their commitment to the relationship and their willingness to resolve the root cause of the issue. They presented a solid investment plan, a duplication of their production lines; *ElectroCo* installed a new production site in Europe to accommodate *WiringCo*'s needs. Finally, *WiringCo* accepted *ElectroCo*'s propositions, they considered that *ElectroCo*'s initiative would be beneficial in the long run, and so they continued working in the “crisis mode”, ordering the minimum quantities needed and using airfreight transportation at the expense of the supplier. *ElectroCo* and *WiringCo* created a task force team to support these operations.

5.5.2 Case2: AutoElecCo - CableCo

The conflict-triggering event in this case was a *quality failure*. Initially, *AutoElecCo* purchased the component from another supplier in Italy. This supplier had become very problematic with very repetitive issues, which severely impacted their relationship. Consequently, *AutoElecCo* decided to switch to *CableCo* as they provided a more competitive offer. Although this component was new to *CableCo*, *AutoElecCo* trusted their competencies in terms of product development. They went through the engineering change process and defined the component's characteristics that were suitable for *AutoElecCo*'s production process and compliant with their customer's requirements. However, when *AutoElecCo* received the products to launch the serial production, they found that the product was defective. It was not the same wire they agreed upon during the prototype phase, and therefore they could not use it in their production. Consequently, they put up a complaint on their Supplier Management System and informed the supplier via email about the quality issue. Initially, the claim was rejected, and the supplier's representatives said that the product was compliant with the sample they agreed upon. *AutoElecCo* then invited the supplier to come to their plant and visualize the issue, and later on *CableCo*'s managers recognized their mistake. The buyer collaborated with the supplier to find a solution; they had an intensive constructive interaction and information exchange at this stage. The supplier's representatives visited the buyer's plant to understand the issue, to understand the buyer's production process, and to share and learn technical knowledge from the buyer. *CableCo* then improved the product and resumed delivery, however, a second quality failure occurred in the delivered batch. Here again the supplier rejected *AutoElecCo*'s claim, and then tension erupted. *AutoElecCo*'s managers were intransigent and even informed *CableCo* that they would switch back to the former supplier if the root cause of the issue is not identified and resolved. *CableCo* asked for some time to work on the product, and they proposed to *AutoElecCo* a temporary solution, i.e. to bring the component from the former supplier and *CableCo* would cover all the logistics and transportation costs, as well as the product premium price. *AutoElecCo*'s managers gave in to the wishes of their counterparts but they were still dissatisfied as this meant they would be working under stressful conditions. In the meantime, *CableCo* was improving the product, but were unable to remove failure causes, and every time they sent an improved product for testing, the issue was still there. At the third attempt to improve the product, *CableCo* was unsuccessful, they were not able to identify the origin of the failure, and so they were not able to confirm when the issue would be resolved nor how they intend to solve it in the near future.

Consequently, *AutoElecCo*'s managers were extremely dissatisfied, highly distressed, and very disappointed. They accused the supplier of incompetence, and they blamed them for accepting a project for which they did not have the required knowledge and resources. At this stage, they refused to discuss with *CableCo* any further improvement actions and decided to negotiate a new contract with the former supplier, which resulted in contract cancellation for this product with *CableCo*.

5.5.3 Case 3: *SeatCo* - *TextileCo*

The conflict-triggering event in this case was a *quality failure*. The textile purchased from *TextileCo* had some lines and folds, which *SeatCo* considered not in accordance with the general product definition. Upon receipt of the defective material, *SeatCo* opened a formal quality notice against the supplier on their Supplier Quality Tracking System and followed the internal procedures for quality claims. However, the supplier rejected the claim, which further heightened tension. Perceptions of dishonesty and untruthfulness created dysfunctionality of the relationship and impaired the communication and exchange of products between *SeatCo* and *TextileCo*, because *SeatCo* refused any product deliveries as they suspected their quality was poor. This resistance from both sides prevented any further discussion to resolve the issue, and consequently, both the buyer and the supplier decided to involve the OEM and their Central Purchasing Division (who are responsible for contract negotiation with the supplier). The OEM arbitrated between *TextileCo* and *SeatCo*, identified the defect, and confirmed that one of the defects identified was indeed a supplier's failure. The supplier then accepted and decided to carry out the necessary containment actions with the available resources they had, and *SeatCo* accommodated the supplier's constraints. However, when the supplier started the sorting out process, they tried to negotiate the quantity of the products to be replaced, which resulted in a clash between both companies' managers, with *SeatCo*'s managers criticising and blaming *TextileCo* for dishonesty and unfairness; thereby impairing communication and preventing conflict resolution. Following this, the Central Division got involved and visited *TextileCo*. Parties discussed all the types of quality issues that they encountered in the previous period, the supplier's constraints in resolving the quality issues, and their anticipated improvement efforts. As an initial decision, they agreed on the specific actions that should be carried out to resolve the current issue and catch up the missed delivery. The supplier then replaced the products and *SeatCo* resumed normal flow activities. As a second decision, *TextileCo* and *SeatCo* central office managers decided to better develop the Logistics Protocol

including the quality specifications, in order to avoid any conflict over quality standards in the future. Conflict was successfully resolved and the relationship between *SeatCo* and *TextileCo* improved compared to its initial level prior to the conflict.

5.5.4 Case 4: AutoTechCo - ConnectorCo

The conflict-triggering event in this case was a *delivery failure* of an electrical connector. The buyer has two deliveries a week with *ConnectorCo*. In this case, the supplier's representative informed *AutoTechCo* that this component would not be delivered on the scheduled delivery date and justified this failure by *AutoTechCo's* inconsistent buying behaviour (unpredictable increase in another plant). They informed *AutoTechCo* that they could deliver the products in three days if *AutoTechCo* paid for the premium transportation cost. Because *AutoTechCo* admitted they were partially responsible for this failure, they agreed to pay for the transportation premiums and used their safety stock to unblock the situation. However, in the following days, they did not receive any delivery details from the supplier, which increased their frustration. Consequently, managers felt very annoyed and did not know how the conflict would be resolved. Because switching the supplier was not an option, they escalated to their top management to request a better course of action from the supplier. Next, the supplier then confirmed that the component would be delivered the next day from Germany provided that *AutoTechCo* gives them their DHL account to ensure the shipment. On the delivery day, *AutoTechCo* were informed that the delivery was cancelled because the products were defective. At this point, the supplier was 100% liable, the risk was higher for *AutoTechCo* and therefore managers had a very aggressive reaction. They requested an "On board Courier" delivery from the supplier to receive the products quickly, but the supplier's representatives refused to bear the costs. Subsequently, there was blame shifting between parties, and *AutoTechCo* threatened *ConnectorCo* that the OEM will be informed of their poor performance. At this moment, *AutoTechCo* altered their production and brought a quantity from a competitor to not stop their production and impact the OEM, but *ConnectorCo* was not informed of these actions, and they were imputed the costs of production downtime. *ConnectorCo*, at the end, following their Central Customer Service instructions, covered the costs and delivered the products at their expense. But *AutoTechCo's* managers perceived this as an ill-timed and ineffective response; they believed that they underwent a critical situation that could have been managed more effectively if the supplier had been more collaborative and responsible for their actions. Therefore, the relationship continued with high tension because of switching difficulty,

but *AutoTechCo* has already started discussions with the HQ and the OEM to change the supplier, and produce this product in-house.

5.6 Cross-Case Analysis and Discussion

Having described how each conflict episode developed over time, we will now highlight the similarities and differences across our cases (Eisenhardt, 1989). We focus on the stages of the conflict process, with a particular emphasis on: (1) identifying process stages, (2) identifying triggers for entering each stage (Interphase dynamics); and (3) the interplay between task and relationship conflict within each stage (intrapphase dynamics). We distinguished three stages: conflict initiation, task-relationship conflict spiral, and conflict outcomes.

5.6.1 Conflict Initiation Stage

Across the cases, the data have shown that the investigated conflict episodes started with an initiation stage. Buyers articulated that a problem existed and expressed their disagreement to the supplier. For instance, when a failure occurred in case 3, the buyer put up a complaint on their supplier management system, and expressed it via email to the supplier. From the data, two types of dynamics were detected within this phase. Cases 3 and 4, both task conflict and relationship conflict rose simultaneously from the initial point of the episode. On the other hand, in cases 1 and 2, we found a different dynamic whereby task conflict rose in the initial phase, but relationship conflict still remained low. Our analysis suggests that the mechanism for this suppression effect is the shadow of the past. Consistent with Batenburg *et al.* (2003), the shadow of the past is defined as “*the history of prior transactions between business partners*” (p. 11). When buyers perceived a shadow of the past consisting of favourable previous interactions, the perception of task conflict was not accompanied by tension and hostility, rather parties were open to discussion and attempted the resolution of the task in hand in a very collaborative atmosphere. The purchasing Manager from *WiringCo* illustrated this aspect “*by collaborating with [ElectroCo], given this business experience between us throughout the years, I was sure that [ElectroCo] did not do it on purpose, [ElectroCo] didn't do it to disrupt us or to cause us problems with the customer. There is a certain level of trust. I am sure [ElectroCo] exhausted everything they had, they exhausted their stock, they had no alternative (...) So this relationship between the two entities helped that all people worked towards a solution so as to unblock the situation*” (C1B-Purchasing Manager). Similarly, another manager remembered, “*well with [CableCo], our relationship is really good both professionally and personally, business with them has always been growing. They made a lot of efforts to develop and improve the products*

we purchase from them. So even when we had this issue, it didn't change, we still trusted them, and at first we were sure that, even though there was a problem, something went wrong, it was out of their control". On the other hand, when the shadow of the past was negative, buyers interpreted supplier's behaviour as sinister and conveying distrust, and attributed the cause to the supplier. A manager recounted *"So with [TextileCo], we had a lot of bad situations in the past, and really frequently, that the relationship became very tense ... and so we were on edge, and it kind of created a hostile environment ... Every time there is a problem, it's the same thing (...) bad faith supplier"* (C3B-Operations Director North Africa, SeatCo). Hence, when history of prior interactions was negative, subsequent task conflict was interpreted as further evidence of hostility, and therefore both conflict types occurred simultaneously.

This evidence suggests that buyers considered their initial beliefs when they faced task-related arguments with their counterparts. Through their repeated interactions, buyers have built relational reliability towards their suppliers (Poppo *et al.*, 2008). When the problem arose, history of prior interactions prevented the occurrence of relationship conflict by casting a shadow of the past on the present, and reinforcing a positive interpretation of the supplier's behaviour. This is in line with existing intraorganisational conflict research. Scholars predicted that relationship conflict emerges through a process of misattribution, and found that, for example, relationship conflict is likely to occur when trust is low rather than when trust is high (Chang, 2017; Simons and Peterson, 2000). However, the cross-sectional nature of previous studies makes it difficult to understand under what circumstances this relationship does not hold. We found that, by looking at the entire process of the conflict episode, the impact of the shadow of the past has a low enduring impact, as over time, relationship conflict does occur (regardless of the nature of the shadow of the past) particularly when task conflict is not properly resolved as will be shown next.

5.6.2 Task-Relationship Conflict Spiral Stage

A cyclical relationship between task and relationship conflict in the form of a spiral emerged from the data. While analysing the data, we noticed that over the conflict episode, interviewees frequently referred to how increased tension with the exchange relationship prevented task conflict resolution. Similarly, respondents also illustrated how increased conflict over the delivery/quality of the products generated increased hostility within the relationship. One interviewee cogently summarised such patterns *"the supplier resisted and resisted, and so reactions were very... (pause) it was very tense. We were in a vicious cycle, we couldn't work*

it out, they wanted something that we did not accept, and they rejected our requests, and this pissed us off, so we became even more stringent and we rejected all what they said about the quality of the product” (C3B-Logistics Manager). Below we distil the mechanisms leading to the occurrence, the continuation, and the ending of the spiral.

5.6.2.1 Spiral Occurrence

The transition to the spiral stage has been explained by the inadequacy of task conflict resolution. When the supplier was not able to resolve the task issue, this negative experience evoked negative affect, characteristic of relationship conflict. The Purchasing Director from *AutoElecCo* reflected on this aspect *“a supplier who has a recurring problem, it means that the supplier has not implemented the actions needed, the actions were not efficient, and so it creates more tension and nervousness with any supplier, so the relationship became a little tense [with CableCo]”* (C2B-Purchasing Director). Another aspect of the insufficiency of task issue resolution referred to when the speed of task resolution was slow. *WiringCo*’s experience with *ElectroCo* inspired the following comment from their Country Purchasing Director *“well, initially, when the problem occurred, we thought that it was a matter of few days, as the supplier told us at the beginning. But afterwards, time was passing by and the issue was not yet resolved, so we started getting nervous because it was a lack of seriousness, and we told the supplier that this is not what they explained to us. While we expected that the issue would be resolved quickly, it was not the case, it was still the same situation”* (C1B-Country Purchasing Director). In the same way, another manager described *“they promised that the problem would be resolved in couple of days as they have a strong R&D department. They started making improvements and sending us samples to see if it worked (...). But this took time, and at some point, the production was going to stop because we were not receiving raw material inputs”* (C2B-Supplier Quality Engineer).

This suggests that task conflict persistence plays a key role in the transition from conflict initiation to task-relationship spiral. When task conflict has been present for long or was inadequately addressed, the transition to the next stage occurred. These findings are in line with research suggesting that task conflict resolution within a team lessens the likelihood of conflict type propagation. In intraorganisational research, scholars found that when team members resolve their task conflicts, their interaction will not be organised in terms of emotions indicative of relationship conflict (Yang and Mossholder, 2004; O’Neill and Allen, 2014) but rather will be based on respect and high communication (Jehn *et al.*, 2008).

5.6.2.2 *Spiral Continuation*

Once the spiral occurred, it was perpetuated by the cyclical interaction of task conflict and relationship conflict. We highlight the mechanisms through which these effects manifest in a buyer-supplier conflict setting.

Pathway from Task Conflict to Relationship Conflict

Interpretation of the data suggests that once the spiral occurs, subsequent task conflict triggers further increases in relationship conflict. Two mechanisms drive this link: negative attributions regarding suppliers' behaviour and buyers' inability to achieve their performance goals. Respondents stated that frustration emerged from their belief that supplier's behaviour was intentional. This was clearly evident in the Quality Manager's statement *"So there was a lack of reactivity from the supplier, and they did not provide any containment actions. Normally when such thing happens, for example with other suppliers, with self-respecting suppliers, they should come and visit us in our factory to see the defect, and replace the product as soon as possible. This is for me a supplier that cares about his business and cares about the relationship with the customer. But with [TextileCo], although they are very close geographically, the relationship is strained, so they are not flexible, they are not motivated to help us or to cooperate to find a solution; they are not fair in their dealings. Seriously, they are a bit greedy (Laughs), unless they see a return in money they would not lift a finger, let alone when they expect costs! So when you know that this lack of reactivity is intentional, it got on our nerves"* (C3B-Quality Manager). Similarly, in case 4, the Customer Service Manager from the supplying company reflected on their customer's state *"they were very disappointed because it was very critical, but it was out of our control, we could not do much, we had to wait. The customer was unhappy and frustrated with our response, they believed that we did not want intentionally to resolve the issue, because [for them] there is always something a supplier can do"* (C4S-Customer Service Manager). Supplier's blaming behaviour further heightened buyer's negative attributions. As *AutoElecCo's* Supplier Quality Engineer put it *"First, the supplier has renounced the problem. So we were really frustrated because the supplier rejected it in their first response; they said that they sent the product corresponding to the samples we sent them, and that the problem should be from our internal processes. So this was the bone of contention, and this "it's you not us" attitude heated up the discussion and triggered tension with the supplier (...)"* (C2B-Supplier Quality Engineer). Taken together, these statements suggest that indeed negative attributions of task conflict increase buyers' perception of relationship conflict (Tidd *et al.*, 2004).

Moreover, task conflict increased buyers' inability to achieve performance goals and this in turn triggered subsequent relationship conflict. Because the conflict issue was highly relevant to the buyer's goals, buyers' inability to achieve their goals was attributed to the supplier's behaviour, and hence it triggered frustration and tension. As stated by *AutoTechCo's* Purchasing Manager "*At this moment, we were really outraged. Frankly, it was very serious. Really, because the supplier promised something but did not respect it and we did not have any other option. And all what mattered to us was not to stop the production, and to ensure the deliveries to our customers (...)*" (C4B-Purchasing Manager). The manager further emphasized "*it was somehow ineffective because we could not reach our production lines objectives and our chains have been shut down. And so it was very irritating, we had already stopped our chains*". In a similar manner, a manager from *WiringCo* noted "*it was at the mass production stage, the lines were running and we were committed to our customer, which means that we were tight in time, every minute counted, so we were very nervous because it was highly likely that our deliveries to the customer would be delayed*" (C1B-Supplier Delivery Performance Manager). These findings from the empirical data are consistent with research pertaining to the importance of goals and its impact on organisations behaviours and states (Simon, 1964). Researchers predicted that the goals pursued by individuals are strong determinants of their behaviour (Pondy, 1967), and therefore events that frustrate progress toward goals trigger negative affect states (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996), and may lead to relationship defection (Hollmann *et al.*, 2015).

Pathway from Relationship Conflict to Task Conflict

On the other hand, the cases indicate that there are three mechanisms that drive the link from relationship-to-task conflict. Initially, the existence of relationship conflict led to increased rigidity in dealing with task conflict. Buyers had lower levels of cooperation. They were entrenched in their positions and held onto their initial statements with regards to task issue resolution. The Quality Supervisor from *TextileCo* explained that "*there was no compassion [from SeatCo]. For them, there was an issue and we had to solve it, they wouldn't help us*" (C3S-Quality Supervisor). Similarly, the Purchasing Manager from *AutoTechCo* stated "*so we maintained our position (...) We didn't discuss further with the supplier, we stopped our lines, and we waited for the reception of the terminal*" (C4B-Purchasing Manager). Therefore, the presence of relationship conflict caused increased rigidity during task conflict resolution. As such, buyers had a rigid mind-set, wherein they were less open to exploring alternative viewpoints from suppliers about task conflict resolution, and were less considerate to suppliers' constraints. Therefore, they did not make any adjustments and showed

reluctance to change their initial preferences. This is in line with the speculative assertions in the extant intraorganisational conflict literature that has postulated that relationship conflict makes team members less open to work-related ideas of other team members, and can even generate antagonism and intolerance to task-based suggestions (De Wit *et al.*, 2013; Fischer *et al.*, 2011).

In subsequent cycles, the existence of relationship tension increased buyers' salience of supplier's deficiencies. From the data, it appeared that the existence of tension in the relationship impaired perception of suppliers' efforts and their progress towards task resolution. As illustrated by a manager from case 2 "*we were fed up with the situation, really, the actions were more or less the same and the problem persisted (...) It was clear that we wouldn't get to a solution, the supplier did not have the ability to solve the issue*". Another manager from case 1 stated "*the situation was critical, we were annoyed with the supplier, we even questioned the supplier's credibility, you see what I mean (...) they had no visibility about when they would get out of this situation, so how are we going to believe in their actions?*" (C1B-Purchasing Manager). Accordingly, when tension erupted in the relationship, buyers' had biased judgment (Staw *et al.*, 1981) and perceived the supplier as unable to resolve the conflict. This is in line with the argument that affect impacts information processing and choice, and lies at the heart of individuals' perceptions and attitude formation (Lazarus, 2006; Easterbrook, 1959).

Relationship conflict also impacted communication between parties, which prevented task conflict resolution. As shown from the data, relationship-related tension hampered discussions, as indicated by *SeatCo's* Operations Manager "*I told their Director directly you will always stay like this, you are unprofessional and dishonourable, stop beating around the bush and do a concrete action. The [OEM] said it's non-compliant...Full stop! So I took my stuff and I went out because I was wasting my time with them because they did not want to unlock the situation (...)*" (C3B-Operations Director North Africa). Similarly, another manager illustrated "*there was confrontation with [the supplier] (...) it was bad, we could not communicate further with them and we requested the intervention of the HQ to obtain a better course of action and resolve the problem*" (C4B-Purchasing Manager). In this respect, these quotes reflect that relationship conflict caused increased task conflict through a breakdown in communication. In line with common theorising on the role of communication in buyer-supplier relationships (Hoegl and Wagner, 2005), we suggest that impaired communication precludes discussion of task conflict resolution and consideration of various alternatives, as it creates ambiguity which prevents the quick development of a shared understanding (Hartley *et al.*, 1997). Taken

together, the previous discussion highlights that task and relationship conflict are indeed reciprocally related and that different mechanisms trigger the direction of the causality.

5.6.2.3 Spiral End Point: Conflict Tolerance Threshold

The data revealed that the conflict episode is a process that is driven by a series of task and relationship conflict related events. It is characterised by a continuous updating process of both task and relationship conflicts in the form of an amplifying spiralling pattern. The dyad reaches a conflict tolerance threshold stage as the spiral tops out to such an extent that conflict cannot get any worse. The notion of conflict tolerance threshold is introduced as an important constituent of the conflict episode, and is defined as “*the highest level of conflict intensity that partners can tolerate*”, and therefore it demarcates a conflict tolerance point. At this stage the viability of the relationship has become in danger. As one manager put it, “*we caused them a lot of problems to the point where they no longer wanted to hear about [us]*” (C1S-North Africa Sales Manager).

Reaching the threshold point is triggered by buyers’ inability to deal with conflict. Respondents illustrated how the conflict at this stage exceeded their coping capacity, and referred to the resources needed to cope with the conflict situation. A Country Purchasing Director reflected on the threshold point of the same conflict episode “*We tried to solve the problem, but each time, uh, broken promises... (...) This created a lot of frustration and tension between us (...) we considered that it was a lack of seriousness. At some point, we said to ourselves, that’s it! We cannot continue like this (...)*” (C1B-Country Purchasing Director, WiringCo). Similarly, another manager recounted “*But after a while, it gets beyond your tolerance capacity, that’s it ... We could not continue like that*” (C2B-Single Point Buyer). Along similar vein, a Logistics Manager emphasized “*so, it was really too much, it was really unacceptable, we reached that point where, where really, where we could not permit this*” (C4B-Logistics Manager), and another manager recalled “*we reached to the limits, things were really overflowing, and I did not want to have contact with them anymore*” (C3B-Operations Director North Africa). Thus, across all cases, buyers seem to have reached the threshold and have come to view it as an important constituent of the conflict spiral.

5.6.3 Conflict Outcomes Stage

While all cases reached this conflict tolerance threshold, a point where both task and relationship conflict were high, different outcomes were delineated from the case analysis. In case 1 and 3, the spiral self-corrected and reversed the direction towards a de-escalatory

spiral, thereby achieving functional outcomes; and cases 2 and 4 did not exhibit a self-correcting patterns leading to dysfunctional outcomes. Functional outcomes refer to the successful resolution of both task and relationship conflict returning the relationship to the same or improved pre-conflict state, whereas dysfunctional outcomes refer to unsuccessful resolution of conflict with a significant deterioration in the relationship. Functional outcomes have been evidenced by a Manager who explained *“now we resumed a relationship that is simple (...) our customer understood how we are, and how the interaction should be. There are lines that should not be stepped on, respect and professionalism should be key in our relationships...There should be a mutual consideration of a sensitive interpersonal behaviour”* (C3S-General Manager), *“now we are more aligned with the supplier, we share the same understanding of quality specifications. This facilitates the management of quality incidents as responsibility can be easily verified”* (C3B-Procurement Coordinator). A manager from case 1 reflected on their experience *“the relationship with them has become stronger because this conflict was successfully resolved (...) they have made huge efforts, and if these efforts were not deployed, (ub), (...) they were able to reduce the relational strain, and honestly they showed us that they were trustworthy (...) following this and their efforts, we have made improvement in the lead-time for this components and for others that were not part of this incident”* (C1B-Country Purchasing Director). These examples show the positive outcomes of the conflict episode, and is supported by extant literature where functional outcomes were measured by reference to “constructive changes in projects” and “energy to collaborate” (Barker *et al.*, 1988; Song *et al.*, 2006). On the other hand, dysfunctional outcomes have been empirically evidenced *“so when we had this problem, the decision was made that we would stop the delivery from [the supplier], we opted for the second alternative we had, this had a huge impact on the business with them”* (C2B-Supplier Quality Engineer). The dysfunctional outcomes generated by the conflict episode were also illustrated by another manager *“the customer has become very intransigent with regards to similar incidents although very minor ones. There has been less and less collaboration, the relationship got from bad to worse”* (C4S-Customer Service Representative). Likewise, another manager recounted *“it was not resolved appropriately, they had an inappropriate reaction, and then even their efforts were not effective (...) so since then, there have been discussions about changing the supplier for this components, we discussed the engineering change with our customer, and we are now in the process”* (C4B-Purchasing Manager). Hence in these cases, conflict was not successfully resolved and the relationship was diluted and left vulnerable to dissolution.

The data revealed two mechanisms that can correct the negative conflict spiral: 1) buyers considering the shadow of the future 2) supplier’s resolution actions. In cases 1 and

3, reaching the threshold triggered a certain level of ambivalent feelings towards the supplier. Buyers experienced high relationship conflict (negative feelings) but were also thinking about the expected future outcomes from collaboration with the supplier (positive feelings). As reflected in the story of C1B-Supplier Delivery Performance Coordinator from *WiringCo* “*So what I want to say is that even if [ElectroCo] was not able to solve the problem and the relationship was very tense, and at some point we were disgusted, but what next can we do? We tried to jointly solve the issue! It was better for us and for them to sit down around the table and talk (...) we had no interest in completely screwing up the relationship with them, they will be supplying us for the next, I don't know how many years, and one day we will need them as well...*”. Similarly, the Purchasing Manager from *WiringCo* stated “*Because when you think about it, the relationship is on-going, you will be working with them*”. The Country Purchasing Director added “*Now the question is, can we change the supplier? No. Do we have to buy our products from this supplier? Yes. So we had to find a solution, and so what we did was that we left the tension aside and we tried to bounce back, to give a new breath ... consider for example a couple, the couple argues and can get to the point of divorce, but because there are other aspects of the relationship that unite them, they try to misplace the negative side of things and find a solution*” (C1B- Country Purchasing Director). Similarly, a Manager emphasized “*so after this, I was frustrated, we were caught between two stools, the relationship was very tense, but at the same time they are a mandated supplier, and so if we could solve the situation in a way, maybe the relationship with them in the future would be better*” (C3B-Logistics Manager). Alternatively, cases 2 and 4 were focused only on the current conflict and the negative feelings that emerged from the conflict. As one manager recalled “*we were not happy about how things were going and we started considering switching to our previous supplier for good*” (C2B-Single Point Buyer). Along similar lines, a manager from case 4 reflected on their experience “*what happened generated great frustration, we were extremely angry (...) there have been discussions about changing the supplier for this components*” (C4B-Purchasing Manager). In these cases, there was only a presence of negative feelings, and hence buyers were unwilling to further continue conflict resolution and had the intention to switch to another supplier.

When buyers were ambivalent in terms of their attitude towards the suppliers, they purposely chose to ignore the negative affect, and attempted to change the direction of the spiral, thereby giving the relationship a second chance to recover from the conflicting situation. This is consistent with research on the notion of ambivalence regulation in organisational research (Piderit, 2000). Scholars argued that people often experience positive and negative feelings and that they choose coping mechanisms to override one pole of the ambivalence and reduce its significance. Research implied that a mechanism

used is “conscious domination”, where individuals consciously ignore the significance of the negative affect and focus on the positive side (Ashforth *et al.*, 2014; Clark *et al.*, 2008; Petriglieri, 2015). As mentioned in the above quotes, interviewees referred to the shadow of the future as an important element to the deliberate downplay of relationship conflict. The shadow of the future or “*extendedness of the relationship*” (Heide and Miner, 1992) is defined as “*expectations of future interaction*” (Poppo *et al.*, 2008). This expectation of future business casted its shadow on the present management, and partners believed that they should reach an agreement so as not to destroy relational ties. Case findings show that the shadow of the future became salient when partners reached the threshold point rather than at the beginning of the conflict episode. Because buyers expected that their business would continue in the future with their suppliers, they were more willing to change their conflict frames (Pinkley, 1990), and to refocus their own and others’ attention on more important problems. In other words, buyers redirected the trajectory of the conflict episode to a more constructive process, thereby changing the direction of the amplifying nature of the spiral. This is consistent with previous research that demonstrated that subjects who expected on-going interaction played more cooperatively than subjects who did not (Kelly and Thibaut, 1979; Heide and Miner, 1992), and are more willing to make short-term sacrifices (Ligthart *et al.*, 2016).

The second mechanism in the pathway to functional outcomes is the nature of suppliers’ actions. At this point, suppliers’ actions confirmed buyers’ ambivalence coping choice. In case 1, a manager from the supplying company explained how their efforts toward resolution helped in driving outcomes “*so we assumed responsibility, we explained that what we were going through was out of our control, and we had presented our investment plan to them*” (C1S-Customer Service Manager). Similarly, reporting on the same conflict, managers from the buying company stated “*the supplier explained how the issue will be phased out and gave us strong indicators, they showed us that what has happened was not intentional, and that they cared about us (...) the supplier did his best with all the investments they made to solve the root cause of the issue. This clearly counts because it shows strong commitment*” (C1B-Material Planning Supervisor), and “*so action has been taken, and this time it was a colossal investment...*” (C1B-Purchasing Manager), “*the supplier has reassured us at all levels that this problem is not going to happen again*” (C1B-Raw Material Buyer). Likewise, in case 3, observing such actions from the target of ambivalence enhanced buyers’ conscious attempt to ignore relationship conflict and reduced lingering uncertainty about conflict resolution potential “*at the end we explained to them our preventive plan. We explained the adjustment method and the control range that would be controlled*” (C3S-Quality

Supervisor), and “*we’ve established a new working process, a new logistics protocol with specified clauses in order to avoid such conflicts in the future*” (C3B-Quality Manager).

Taken together, this discussion provides evidence that in spite of conflict escalating to the threshold level, parties still had a chance to achieve functional outcomes. Relationship conflict did not seem disengaging, because even though tension was high, buyers gave a “*second chance*” to suppliers by downplaying relationship conflict and focusing on task conflict resolution. Buyers’ dominance of their ambivalence, i.e. their ability to override relationship conflict, and suppliers’ actions explained functional outcomes beyond and above the nature and level of conflict. Suppliers’ actions demonstrated suppliers’ credible commitment to conflict resolution, and represented a sign that the relationship was worth continuing. Buyers’ consideration of supplier’s actions and the resulting future business opportunities supported the spiral’s de-escalatory direction. As reflected by one manager from *WiringCo* “*so with the supplier’s efforts, we were able to resolve the conflict (...) what was different is that we felt the supplier’s commitment, and with this investment, we perceived a better business in terms of logistics and transportation costs* (C1B- Supplier Delivery Performance Manager). Likewise, the quality manager from *SeatCo* explained “*so we’ve established a new working process as suggested by our central team and agreed with the supplier upon a new logistics protocol with specified clauses in order to avoid such conflicts in the future*” (C3B-Quality Manager). In sum, contrary to the literature, mere existence of relationship conflict does not always lead to dysfunctional outcomes (as evidenced by case 1 and 3), and task conflict does not lead to functional outcomes (as evidenced by case 2 and 4) (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003). In fact, the occurrence of relationship conflict might delay the conflict resolution as it impacts task conflict by generating a spiral. But when relationship conflict remains in the dyad, and the shadow of the future is high, it triggers ambivalent feelings, which in turn lead to spiral self-correction. Table V.2 summarises the cross-case findings.

	Initiation	Task-Relationship Spiral	Threshold	Outcomes
Case 1	Yes Task only	Amplifies and self-corrects	Ambivalence ambivalence dominance- Actions	– Functional
Case 2	Yes Task only	Amplifies	Negative feelings actions	-No Dysfunctional
Case 3		Amplifies and self-corrects	Ambivalence ambivalence dominance- Actions	– Functional
Case 4		Amplifies	Negative feelings- Actions (Not sufficient)	Dysfunctional

Table V-2: Summary of the cross-case findings

5.7 Theoretical Implications

Conflict dynamics are often acknowledged but poorly understood (Lengers *et al.*, 2015; Koza and Dant, 2007; Lumineau *et al.*, 2015). Thus, in this study, our research strategy was to explore conflict dynamics in buyer-supplier relationships, and to relate insights from the empirical data to the scarce existing knowledge. We explored dyadic conflict dynamics through a process model, and extended previous research in various ways.

The process model Figure V-2 built in this study conceptualizes the conflict episode as moving from a conflict initiation state, to a conflict spiral phase where task and relationship conflicts impact each other in a continuous feedback loop until a conflict tolerance threshold, and then to conflict outcomes. Inadequate task issue resolution triggers the task-relationship spiral, wherein task conflict impacts relationship conflict and vice versa. Two mechanisms drive the task-to-relationship pathway including negative attributions and buyer's inability to achieve performance goals. On the other hand, the reverse pathway is explained by three underlying mechanisms including: increased rigidity, salience of suppliers' deficiencies, and impaired communication. The spiral amplifies in an escalatory manner until both conflict types top out (threshold). Finally, unless some impetus triggers a disruption (change in direction) in the spiralling pattern at this point, the conflict episode would have dysfunctional outcomes. Alternatively, the spiral self-correction begins with buyers' perception of high shadow of the future, which triggers ambivalent feelings towards the supplier. Buyers then consciously disregard their negative feelings, and suppliers provide the right resolution actions in order to achieve functional outcomes.

This study fills a void by proposing a process model of how conflict unfolds over time in a buyer-supplier relationship. First, by conceptualizing conflict as a multidimensional construct, we found that, in buyer-supplier relationships, task conflict is likely to cause relationship conflict, thereby consolidating previous research findings (Rose et al., 2007). Moreover, we also found that relationship conflict is indeed apt to cause task conflict, which is inconsistent with previous research that ruled out the existence of such relationship (Gamero et al., 2008; Greer et al., 2008). Essentially, our study is the first to develop an integrated process model linking conflict types, and our results suggest that task and relationship conflict reciprocally impact each other thereby forming a spiralling pattern.

As a second contribution, we revealed the mechanisms underlying these spirals. Regarding the task-to-relationship conflict pathway, our results both extend and challenge the role of the shadow of the past in triggering the spiral. While previous studies found that groups low in trust are likely to suffer from a negative task-relationship conflict spiral (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003), we demonstrated that trust is not the only mechanism, because even in cases where trust is high (Cases 1 and 2), inadequate resolution of task conflict triggered the spiral. Consequently, we provide empirical evidence to the recent discussion on the importance of task conflict resolution on the propagation of other types of conflict (O'Neill and Allen, 2014; Behfar et al., 2008; Greer et al., 2008). For instance, Greer et al. (2008) suggest that when team members resolve their task conflict, their communication and respect for each other is likely to be higher, thereby reducing the likelihood of the occurrence of other conflict types. Similarly, O'Neill and Allen (2014) found that task conflict resolution was significantly related to team task performance, and suggested that this would limit the emergence of other conflicts. On the other hand, regarding the relationship-to-task pathway, we contribute to the current literature by delineating the mechanisms supporting this linkage (increased rigidity, salience of suppliers' deficiencies, and impaired communication).

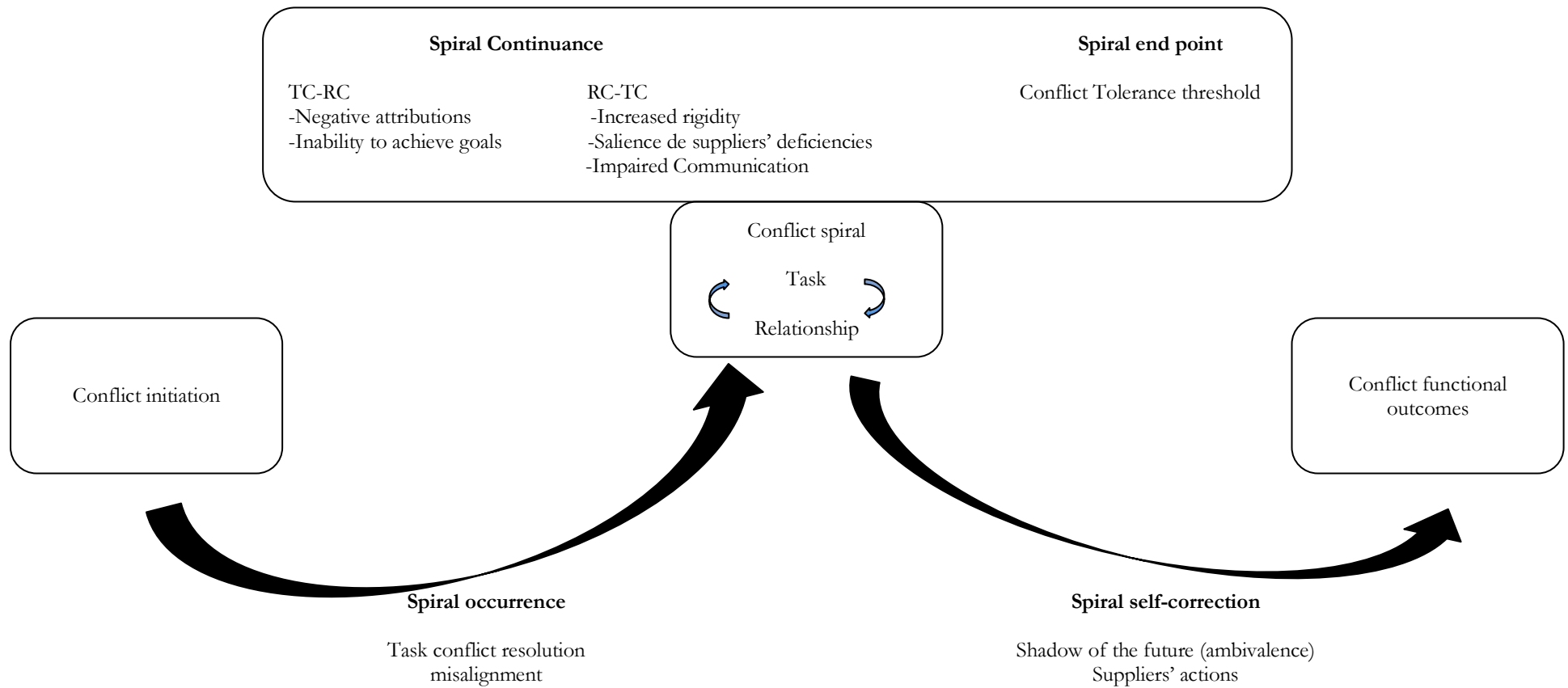


Figure V-2: A dynamic model of buyer-supplier conflict processes

As a third contribution, we introduce the notion of “conflict tolerance threshold” as an important point in the conflict process. This tolerance threshold is decisive as it reflects the point at which self-correction of the spiral is most needed. At this stage, a discontinuous change in the spiral occurs, and our findings highlight the role of the shadow of the future in explaining such dynamics. The shadow of the future generates mixed feelings towards the supplier (ambivalence), which in turn trigger a more controlled and reflective information processing (Maio et al., 1996; Newby-Clark et al., 2002). Buyers consciously regulate their ambivalence by detaching from their relationship conflict perception (Ashforth et al., 2014) to the extent that relationship tension and frustration no longer prevent them to work jointly with their suppliers on task issue resolution. Suppliers subsequently provide actions that sustain buyers’ approach and help in resolving the conflict situation, and self-correcting the spiral. Therefore, dyads are likely to regain their ability to improve task conflict discussion after experiencing the task-relationship spiral, and failure to do so would lead to dysfunctional outcomes.

Our final line of analysis revolves around the surprising finding (surprising in light of the existing literature) linking conflict types and outcomes. Past research overwhelmingly assert that relationship conflict has negative effects on outcomes (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003). Our findings confirm previous research pertaining to the detrimental effects of relationship conflict, and show that relationship conflict indeed could have immediate negative effect (e.g. increased task conflict). However, when this effect is explored through a temporal lens interesting findings emerge. In the long-term relationship conflict is not “bad”. Accordingly, we further close the “*disconnect in the literature on team conflict between theorizing (i.e., task conflict can be good, relationship conflict is bad) and the empirical evidence*” (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003, p. 742). We therefore sow the seeds for a reframing of relationship conflict in the literature, which has so far predicted relationship conflict as destructive.

5.8 Limitations & Future Research Directions

This research is the first attempt to study conflict dynamics in buyer-supplier relationships. It contributes to theory through the integration of a temporal lens to the study of conflict, and the elaboration of a dynamic theory of conflict processes. However, as with any case study research, there are limitations to the conclusions generated in this research

First, in this research, we limited our sample to four cases from a single industry in a single country. Although this setting helps rule out industry and country-level variations (Liu *et al.*, 2012), it may limit the generalizability of the findings. However, we believe that several aspects of the automotive industry are germane to other industrial settings (McIvor and Humphreys, 2004). In the current study, a restricted number of cases enabled us to interview managers from both sides of the dyads, and within various functional departments. This was necessary as conflicts in buyer-supplier relationships usually involve managers from various departments (Primo *et al.*, 2007). However, additional cases may be carried out in future research to draw similarities and differences across various industrial settings.

Second, although contracts and dependence play a role in relationship dynamics they were not included in the model. Regarding dependence, we had two cases where buyers and suppliers had equal power and two cases where power was unbalanced in the dyad. Interviewees raised power issues in their responses by mainly referring the extendedness of the relationship in the future. Therefore, these quotes were coded under the “shadow of the future”, which was included in the process model. This highlighted the temporal dependency within the relationship and illustrated parties’ inability to switch to another supplier. Through our model, in the future, we will be able to formalize that and test the adjacent variables again through surveys or experiments. This larger data set will enable us to capture more variance on the dependence. Future research could also extract “dependence” as a variable in further investigation, and investigate how conflict episodes affect power dynamics and shifts in bases of power (Petersen *et al.*, 2008; Benton and Maloni, 2005), looking for instance at how buyers and suppliers seek to alter dependencies in the focal exchange relationship or in their broader supply network as a reaction to the conflict episode.

Similarly, contracts are critical variables in buyer-supplier relationships as they define the subject matter of the exchange relationship (Mooi and Ghosh, 2010). They are central mechanisms that reduce the risk and uncertainty in exchange relationships (Lusch and Brown, 1996), and “provide a safeguarding mechanism against interorganisational conflict” (Bai *et al.*, 2016, p. 12). However, contracts were not included in the model proposed in this thesis because of contract specificity. Contract specificity refers to “the degree to which aspects of the contract are formulated to enhance clarification and verification” (Griffith and Zhao, 2015, p. 24). Specific contracts provide clear guidelines

on how to resolve conflicts (Griffith and Zhao, 2015). In the data collection process, none of the interviewees mentioned formal contractual terms. As contracts were never mentioned, we double-checked by asking interviewees how the contract is used in resolving the conflict. The respondents provided the following explanation. The companies had a signed agreement (called “Logistics Protocol”) stating the very basic performance requirements including volumes, delivery and quality, and therefore there isn’t enough granularity in the contracting devices used. As stated by one manager: *"There is a contract, but the contract is not sufficiently detailed, the contract mainly focuses on prices, Incoterms, delivery terms...etc. (...) But everything that is operational is not sufficiently developed"* (C3B-Logistics Manager). This was also highlighted by referring to the fact that more elaborated contracts are at the HQ level. It may be a worthwhile effort for future researchers to further investigate the role of contracts and contract specificity in conflict resolution both in different industrial settings, and within supply chain network in the context of multinational companies where relationships extend beyond subsidiary-subsidary to include HQ-HQ relationship as well.

Third, a clear limitation of our study is the unit of analysis. The unit of analysis in this paper is the firm (buyer and supplier). However, buyer-supplier exchanges are made up of, and managed by individuals (Aulakh et al., 1996). These individuals are boundary spanners at the interface of these exchanges; it is through them that these exchanges come into effect, and hence it is through them that conflicts are resolved (Blois, 1999; Andersen and Kumar, 2006). Those individuals play different roles spanning various hierarchical levels, corporate i.e. framing the strategic intentions of such organizations, or operational, i.e. implementing policy (Floyd and Lane, 2000; Janowicz-Panjaitan and Krishnan, 2009). However, we did not recognize a cross-level impact of having informants from different levels, but we aggregated the attitudes of the individuals in the firm and ascribed conflict and its resolution to the organisation as a whole. Future research however should investigate and recognize these differences (e.g. corporate and operating levels) within the context of buyer-supplier conflicts.

Furthermore, we focused on the direction of change in each conflict types, but we haven’t examined the rate of change, i.e. whether the magnitude of task conflict change is proportional to the magnitude of relationship conflict change. Interesting future directions would be to consider “conflict velocity” and combine both the rate and direction of change in understanding conflict dynamics. Studying velocity has been the focus of various studies

in organisational research (Wilt *et al.*, 2017; Elicker *et al.*, 2010; Lawrence *et al.*, 2002; McCarthy *et al.*, 2010) and scholars found that velocity indeed plays a role in determining organisational outcomes.

The findings have shown that the conflict process is characterised by a spiral between task and relationship conflict. Equally, the organisational sociology literature describes spirals as often triggering other spirals (Masuch, 1985; Andersson and Pearson, 1999). Given that buyer-supplier relationships are embedded in a wider network incorporating various other entities (Autry and Golicic, 2010), it would be equally valuable to understand whether these spirals trigger associated spirals as side-effects. Investigating this possibility and the associated factors that lead to it should be further explored.

Finally, we have established the importance of the conflict tolerance threshold in the conflict episode, but we haven't investigated its constituents. Consequently, much work remains to be done to explore situational variables that determine the level, the speed of reaching the threshold, and the adjustment of the threshold level in buyer-supplier relationships. For instance, scholars investigating conflict within teams have shown that time pressure, a feature of the task environment, generates misunderstandings and significant amount of conflict (Maruping *et al.*, 2015; Chong *et al.*, 2011). Future studies, then, may examine why some dyads may get to the threshold point differently in supply chain relationships.

5.9 References

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5.10 Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Protocol

Interviewees' background information

- For how long have you been in the current position?
- What is your role and responsibility in the organization?

General Questions

- How long have you been working with this supplier?
- How important is this supplier to your company? (Purchasing volume, change over time, alternative suppliers).
- Could you trace the major phases of your relationship development?
- What do you perceive to be the main benefits of this relationship? What are the key challenges?
- Could you please describe your relationship with this supplier? (Prompt: trust, satisfaction, commitment, interpersonal relationship).

Incident-related Questions

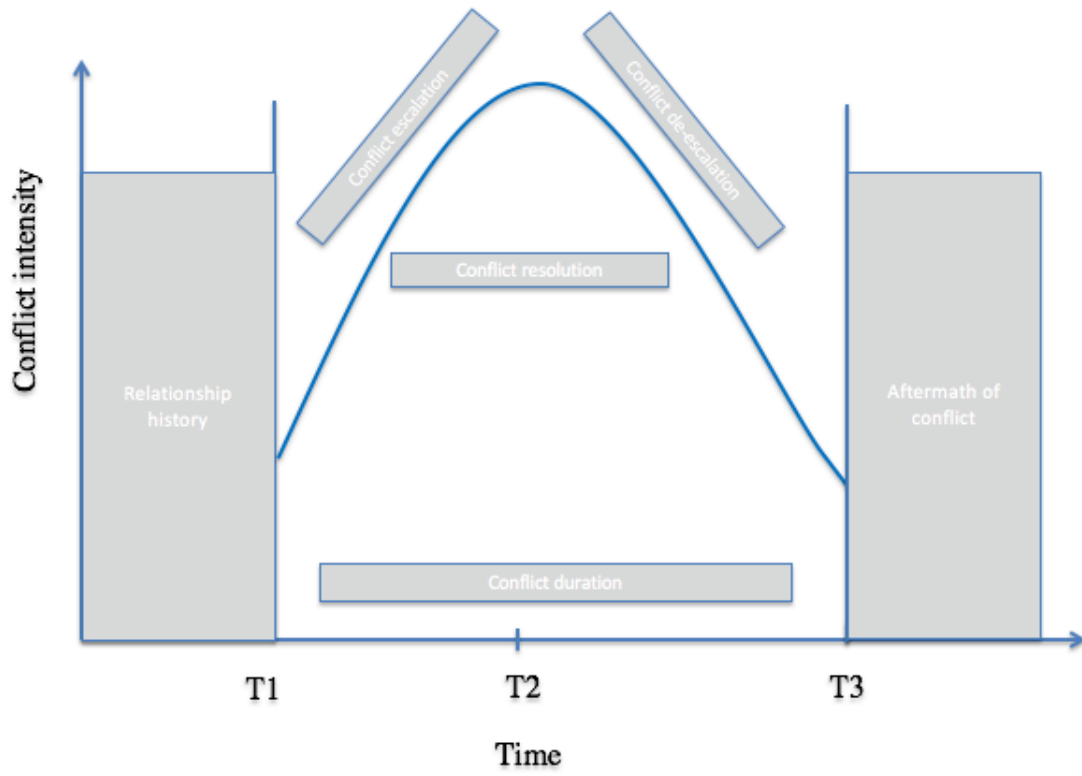
Please recall one major/critical incident that occurred in your relationship with a core component supplier during the past 12 months and whose response process involved difficulties with the supplier.

- Could you please provide a description of this incident? (Prompt: impact on performance, length, decisions)
- Could you please describe with details how you interacted with the supplier? (Prompt: supplier efforts, social interaction, information sharing process, actors involved)
- What were the constraints/difficulties in the incident resolution process? (Prompt: causes, mitigation efforts, trade-offs)
- What was the impact of this incident on the business with this supplier (buyer)? How has your relationship with this supplier (buyer) changed after the incident was resolved?

Concluding Questions

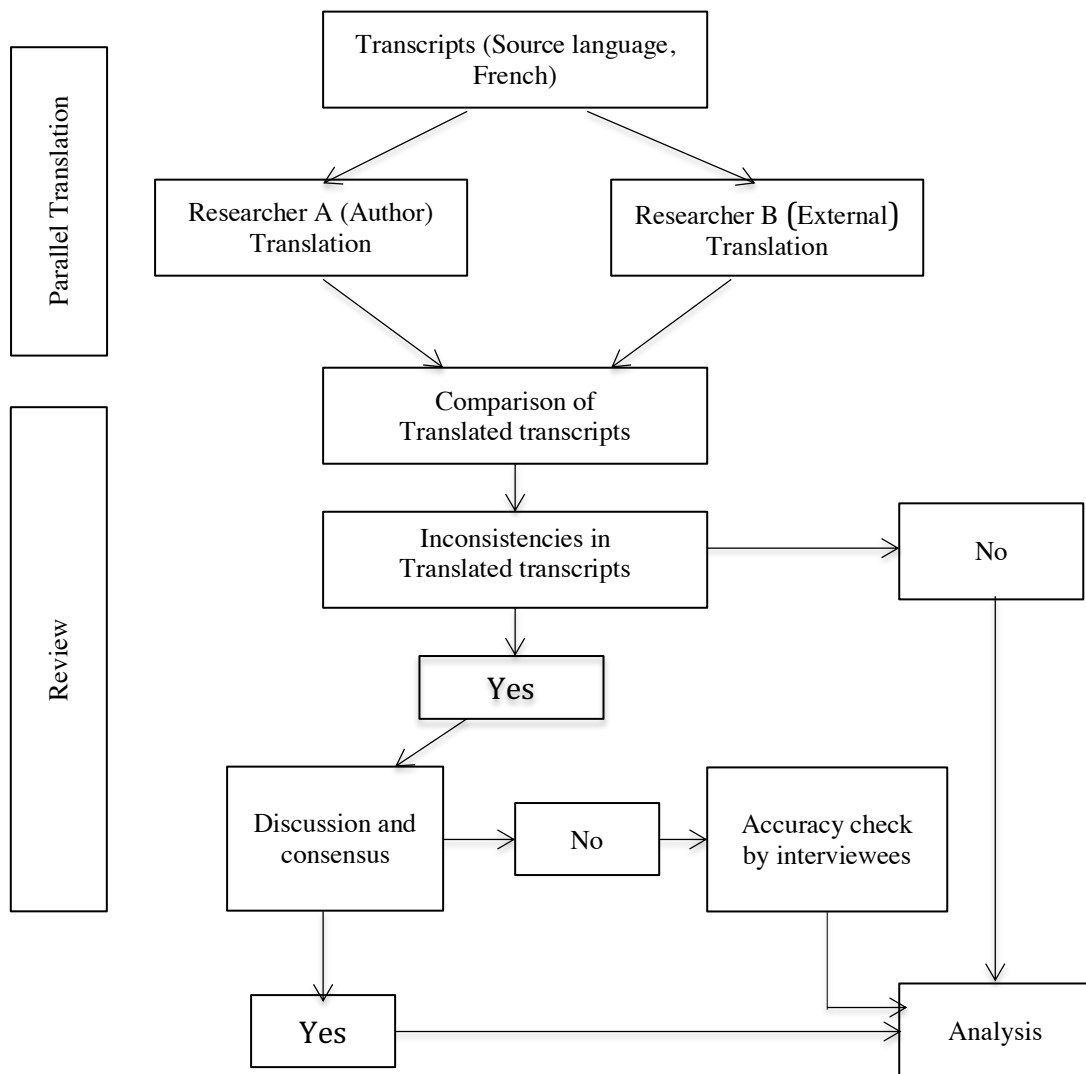
- Do you have anything to add?
- Are there other aspects that you have thought of during our interview that you think might be important for me to know about justice in your relationship?

Appendix B: Interview Graphical Guide



Appendix C: Transcripts' Translation Process

Interviews were carried out in the native language of respondents. In Morocco, French, is the language used in business. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and the transcripts were translated from French into English. The translation process, as reported by cross-cultural researchers, is of crucial importance to the validity and reliability of the data (Twinn, 1997). In this research, the translation process followed a collaborative translation approach (Douglas and Craig, 2007). A bilingual researcher was involved in the translation process. The researcher was familiar with the subject-specific terminology, had an awareness of style and grammar, nuances, and idiomatic expressions of both the source and target language. The researcher was also aware of and understood the linguistic or social context within which the interviews have taken place. In order to ensure that the translation was as accurate as possible and to resolve the inconsistencies between researchers, when possible, the translated transcript was returned to bilingual respondents for accuracy checks. Alternatively, both researchers discussed the gaps until a consensus was reached. The translation process is depicted in the figure below.



VI. Chapter Six: Discussion & Conclusion

This chapter summarizes and reflects on both the theoretical (section 6.2) and managerial (section 6.3) contributions of the research. It also considers the limitations of the research and proposes some potential empirical and theoretical extensions (section 6.4).

6.1 Introduction

Conflict has long been a subject of interest to scholars from various disciplines including philosophy, social studies, psychology, and management (Rahim, 2017). Perspectives on conflict have evolved from narrowly pejorative conceptualizations (i.e. conflict as an essentially ‘destructive’ force) towards a more balanced and multi-faceted view that emphasizes both the omnipresence of conflict and stresses its potentially beneficial, as well as negative, consequences (Pondy, 1967; Coser, 1956). In the specific setting of inter-organizational exchange, it is well established that conflict is a pervasive feature of buyer-supplier relationships (Frazier, 1999; Hoppner *et al.*, 2015; Van der Maelen *et al.*, 2017) with, again, both positive and negative outcomes (Pfajfar *et al.*, 2017) but the specific characteristics of this complex phenomenon - and accompanying processes of conflict resolution – remain under-explored. This three-essay thesis is intended to address this conceptual and practical gap.

6.2 Research Gaps

The systematic review paper highlighted research contributions that are not “*apparent from reading the individual studies in isolation*” (Denyer and Tranfield, 2009, p. 685), and identified the potential research gaps in the way conflict has been researched in the field of supply chain relationships. Four main conflict themes typify extant research: (1) conflict antecedents, (2) conflict outcomes, (3) conflict types, and (4) conflict resolution. Based on the descriptive and thematic analyses, and building on Lumineau and Oliveira (2018) pluralistic conceptualisation of interorganisational relationships, four major ‘blind spots’ were identified and should be tackled to advance current conflict theory: ***conflict asymmetry***, ***conflict valence***, ***conflict level of analysis***, and ***conflict over time***. The subsequent empirical papers in this thesis specifically addressed the third and fourth blind spots. Although the four gaps are interesting, “conflict level of analysis” and “conflict over

time” have been theoretically recognised as more pressing issues, and in need of empirical investigation (Lumineau *et al.*, 2015). These two gaps also address practical concerns and therefore the obtained findings would have direct applicability to managerial practice.

6.2.1 Conflict Level of Analysis

Conflict scholars acknowledge that mechanisms from different levels of analysis can have distinct effects on conflict and its resolution in buyer-supplier relationships (Lumineau *et al.*, 2015), and therefore they argue that a robust understanding of conflict requires the consideration of higher as well as lower levels of analysis (Hackman, 2003). However, through the systematic review, it appeared that extant conflict studies predominantly referred to one level by focusing solely on relationship level factors, and how they are related to conflict and its resolution (Yang *et al.*, 2017). Accordingly, little efforts have been devoted to integrating multi-level analysis and examine potential cross-level interaction (Bai *et al.*, 2016; Lee *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, there is a lack of clarity of key constructs and their interactive effect on conflict resolution.

6.2.2 Conflict Over Time

Existing theoretical developments in the conflict area pertain to the nature of conflict (Rose *et al.*, 2007), its antecedents (Osmonbekov *et al.*, 2009; Bai *et al.*, 2016; Cai *et al.*, 2017; Zhuang *et al.*, 2010), and its impact on various outcomes (Kang and Jindal, 2015; Leonidou *et al.*, 2006; Humphreys *et al.*, 2009; Hirshberg and Shoham, 2017; Samaha *et al.*, 2011), but do not examine conflict as it manifests over time in buyer-supplier relationships. Despite the importance of conflict dynamics to research and practice, researchers largely ignored what happens when conflict emerges, its resolution process, or the dynamics that lead to (dys)functional outcomes (Pfajfar *et al.*, 2017). This has mainly been constrained by the adoption of a static view of conflict and the accompanying use of cross-sectional surveys (See paper one for more details).

6.3 Theoretical Implications

Conflict resolution has been acknowledged as an important aspect of conflict research (DeChurch *et al.*, 2013). Yet, as the systematic review established, it has received limited attention – in terms of the number of studies and the depth of their investigations. The findings suggest that the resolution process is driven in part by an appraisal of suppliers’ resolution tactics, whereby a misalignment in resolution triggers increased conflict intensity. This misalignment has two major components: tactic misalignment or timing

(speed) misalignment. The relative speed of resolving conflict shows that the supplier is being sufficiently concerned about the conflict situation to quickly resolve it (Tomprou *et al.*, 2015), and this therefore minimises the impact on the intensity of conflict expression and conflict emotionality. Therefore, the thesis contributes to the conflict literature by highlighting that resolution misalignment hold the potential to escalate conflict.

Additionally, this thesis departs from prevailing conflict resolution frameworks (Blake and Mouton, 1964; Rahim and Bonoma, 1979; Le Nguyen *et al.*, 2016; Koza and Dant, 2007) as it examines specific tactics that are deployed to resolve conflict rather than aggregate behavioural strategies (e.g. collaboration or competition). A theoretically grounded taxonomy of resolution tactics emerged from the field data. It suggests there are four types of conflict resolution tactic - (1) *psychological reactive*, (2) *tangible reactive*, (3) *psychological prospective*, and (4) *tangible prospective* – that shape conflict resolution. Accordingly, this taxonomy provides a foundation for a deeper understanding of the range of tactics used by suppliers to resolve their conflict with their buyers.

To better understand the dynamics of conflict resolution, this thesis revealed cross-level contextual factors that appeared to “buffer” or “activate” the impact of resolution misalignment on conflict intensity. Findings suggest that conflict resolution tactics are important, but they work in a complex interplay with contextual forces that affect the likelihood of conflict escalation or resolution. Beyond the taxonomy of tactics, the findings shed new light on the role that buyers’ resources and relationship quality play in buyer-supplier conflict resolution. Resource availability has been shown to play a key role in individuals’ coping with downsizing (Armstrong - Stassen, 2006), job stress (Latack and Havlovic, 1992), and organisational change (Rafferty and Griffin, 2006). However, this has not been investigated in inter-organizational and specifically buyer-supplier conflict settings. Hence, introducing the construct of resources as an important aspect of the resolution process is a further contribution. This research also highlighted the importance of relationship quality in conflict resolution, and extends prior research by establishing the interaction between buyers’ resources and relationship quality and its impact on conflict intensity. Four typical situations emerged: “*complete buffer*”, “*complete activation*”, “*conflict persistence*”, and “*rapid escalation*”.

Essentially, this thesis uncovers interaction of key constructs from different levels, and therefore provides a multi-level explanation of conflict resolution in buyer-supplier

relationships. Accordingly, it responds to calls to build multi-level models of conflict resolution (Lumineau *et al.*, 2015), and support the argument of the strength of multi-level studies as advocated by supply chain (Tangpong *et al.*, 2010) and other general management researchers (Rousseau, 1985; Klassen and Menor, 2007; House *et al.*, 1995)

Furthermore, despite having established that conflict is a complex temporal process, resolution has been predominantly conceptualised as isolated attempts (Le Nguyen *et al.*, 2016) to use one single strategy (Euwema and Van Emmerik, 2007; Van De Vliert *et al.*, 1995). The current work supports a dynamic conceptualization of conflict resolution, which suggests that conflict is not managed or overcome by a single intervention, but over time, as buyers and suppliers engage in resolution interaction, conflict intensity changes, and hence various tactics are deployed (Andrews and Tjosvold, 1983; Jameson, 1999). Looking across the entire conflict episode, this research suggests a form of exhaustion process, whereby psychological positions are no longer sufficient when conflict escalates to moderate levels. In other words, resolution tactics that may work for mild conflict situations were not effective for moderate/intense conflict. This is in line with Ellegaard and Andersen (2015) study, where the authors provided evidence that using interorganisational communication by non-actors represents an effective means to resolve severe conflict beyond the established resolution strategies. The findings obtained further consolidate this view; in this study, “*prospective tactics*”, in the form of future-oriented tactics to prevent future conflict occurrence, are typically useful under high conflict intensity situations. Accordingly, the model and the data presented here lay some of the groundwork for future research on conflict resolution in buyer-supplier relationships. By expanding the understanding of resolution tactics and their use over time, this study enriches the overall theory of buyer-supplier conflict resolution.

This study also expands on the limited empirical research, to date, regarding the dynamics of task and relationship conflict. To date, few research studies have incorporated both task and relationship conflict types (Srinivasan *et al.*, 2018; Pfajfar *et al.*, 2017; Bradford *et al.*, 2004; Bobot, 2011; Lee *et al.*, 2017; Reid *et al.*, 2004; Plank and Newell, 2007). While previous studies have recognised that they are related (Rose *et al.*, 2007), how they are related has been less investigated (Rose *et al.*, 2007), providing inadequate theorizing about the relationship between the different types of conflict over time (Vandenbroucke *et al.*, 2017). The present findings provide novel insights to the supply chain conflict literature by indicating that the direction of causality between task conflict

and relationship conflict is reciprocal, forming a spiralling pattern over time. Moreover, this research not only shows the spiralling pattern but, through the longitudinal research design, it also established the triggers that play a role in the occurrence, amplification, and self-correction of the spiral.

Regarding the occurrence of the spiral, previous research established that a positive shadow of the past (e.g. situations characterised by high trust) prevents the occurrence of a negative task-relationship conflicts spirals (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003), yet the current findings partially support this proposition because as conflict unfolds, the non-resolution of task conflict triggered the spiral regardless of the nature of the shadow of the past. Therefore, guiding our findings is the basic premise that task conflict resolution prevents the occurrence of the spiral. This is a novel contribution to the conflict literature as previous research investigated task conflict levels but ignored the actual resolution of task conflict (O'Neill and Allen, 2014). The continuance of the spiral is explained by the reciprocal effect between task and relationship conflict. Two mechanisms explained the link from task to relationship conflict: negative attributions and inability to achieve performance goals, and three mechanisms explained the link from relationship to task conflict: increased rigidity, salience of suppliers' deficiencies, and impaired communication.

An important feature of the task-relationship conflict spiral is the threshold point. This threshold represented the highest conflict intensity that buyers could deal with. This is an important addition to the literature because while the notion of "threshold" has been used in other research fields, it has been understudied and generally ignored when investigating a wide variety of supply chain relationship phenomenon (Hollmann *et al.*, 2015). For instance, in studying justice decisions in an organisational behaviour context, Gilliland *et al.* (1998) found that a threshold appeared to exist in justice decision, such that if violations of justice exceed the rejection threshold, the situation will be considered unfair, regardless of the number of nonviolations. In the present research, the existence of this threshold coupled with a high shadow of the future triggered ambivalent feelings, thereby inducing spiral self-correction. One way of interpreting this effect is through ambivalence resolution, which suggests that individuals consciously override the negative or positive poles of their ambivalence (Ashforth *et al.*, 2014). Relatedly, research suggests that individuals who positively resolve their ambivalence are more likely to achieve positive outcomes (Petriglieri, 2015). Our findings support this proposition by showing that buyers' ambivalence regulation triggers a disruption in the spiral, and hence helps the negatively amplifying spiral self-correct. Overall, while both types of conflict have mainly been studied in small groups settings (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003), this research shows that

investigating conflict types in a buyer-supplier context is a promising research direction for future studies, particularly research that examines how to detect, control, and redirect task-relationship spirals.

Finally, this work also supplements the existing literature on conflict outcomes. It is generally acknowledged in the literature that task conflict is beneficial and relationship conflict is detrimental to performance (Jehn, 1995, 1997; Simons and Peterson, 2000; De Wit *et al.*, 2012; Peterson and Behfar, 2003). The study's findings highlight that this assertion is to be taken with caution, and that it is too vague to simply suggest that the source and intensity of conflict predict functional or dysfunctional outcomes. In the present research, while all cases experienced task and relationship conflicts, two of them achieved functional outcomes while two others dysfunctional outcomes. Accordingly, our findings imply that dynamics of conflict processes explain variance in the outcomes beyond conflict types. Therefore we expand and join the recent conflict thinking where researchers advocate that a continued focus on conflict types may be limiting (DeChurch *et al.*, 2013; Thiel *et al.*, 2017).

Essentially, this thesis shed some light on the greater promise of a time-sensitive approach to the understanding of conflict, with the aim of moving the literature beyond examining change through variance theories (Mohr, 1982). It therefore supports the argument for the limited explanatory power of a static view of conflict (Lengers *et al.*, 2015; Lumineau *et al.*, 2015; Koza and Dant, 2007; Mikkelsen and Clegg, 2017; Vaaland and Håkansson, 2003), and respond to calls from the broader supply chain researchers community on the integration of time in the study of buyer-supplier relationships (Halinen *et al.*, 2012; Lumineau and Oliveira, 2018; Krafft *et al.*, 2015; Vanpoucke *et al.*, 2014; Terpend *et al.*, 2008). The study further consolidates the usefulness of process research (Langley *et al.*, 2013; Van de Ven and Huber, 1990; Pettigrew, 1997), and the novel insights it brings to the understanding of conflict. Therefore, it enriches the methodological repertoire of buyer-supplier conflict study.

6.4 Practical And Managerial Implications

Early management scholars have acknowledged that conflict resolution represents a core obligation and responsibility for managers (Mintzberg, 1971), and supply chain scholars have equally indicated that supply chain agents spend one in every six hours of their time dealing with conflict (Bobot, 2011). In addition, scholars have also established that conflict

has direct consequences on both firms' and supply chain relationships' performance (Ren *et al.*, 2010; Samaha *et al.*, 2011; Yang *et al.*, 2012; Hirshberg and Shoham, 2017). Therefore, given the timeless importance of conflict, the empirical examination of buyer-supplier conflict dynamics is relevant to managerial practice. Overall, this paper makes a contribution to practice by providing a holistic picture on conflict processes, such that the results of this study can encourage managers to broaden the scope of their conflict understanding in important ways.

First, from a managerial point of view, although the systematic literature review offers no silver bullet or boilerplate to improve conflict resolution in buyer-supplier relationships, it reveals the complexities inherent to conflict, and the challenges that need to be addressed when conflict arises within buyer-supplier relationships. The identified research themes will help practitioners obtain an understanding of what research is focusing on, the relevant topics (and issues) for practice, and how they can be addressed. For instance, one of the blind spots in the current literature is conflict asymmetry. This is particularly useful for managers because it is necessary for them to understand and make sure that the other party is sharing the same understanding of the conflict issue/situation. Being on the same page will help managers better manage conflict by crafting resolution approaches that fit the requirement of the situation. Similarly, the level of analysis blind spot would help managers understand that a conflict with a supplier is embedded in the bigger picture of the relationship and that conflict dynamics, resolution, and outcomes can involve factors beyond the dyadic relationship.

Second, in terms of conflict resolution, the findings provide managers with an understanding of key considerations in the conflict resolution process, and illustrate how managers adjust their resolution tactics as conflict resolution unfolds. First, the process of resolution must be carefully designed, because misalignment, either in the form of tactic or speed misalignment, could trigger increased conflict. Therefore, it seems advisable for managers to intervene and provide resolution tactics as soon as the conflict emerges. Second, contextual conditions, relationship quality and resources availability, lay the groundwork for buyers' perception of resolution effectiveness, and could buffer or activate the effect of any misalignment. For instance, if buyers and suppliers enjoy a strong relationship, a misaligned resolution would not have an impact on conflict intensity. However, managers should be careful because if their counterpart runs out of resources to absorb misalignment, the "good" relationship conditions might backfire and trigger

increased conflict through feeling of betrayal and negative interpretation of this misalignment (e.g. a sign of “careless” behaviour).

Additionally, managers should be aware that conflict intensity should be taken into consideration when crafting resolution tactics. For instance, when conflict reaches a high conflict intensity level, managers are advised to highlight how the occurrence of similar conflicts in the future would be avoided, since their customers are not only concerned about the resolution of the current conflict, but are also concerned about the future occurrence of similar conflicts. Accordingly, managers are well encouraged to provide a clear explanation about the efforts that would be deployed, but most importantly, managers should complement these tactics with more tangible ones in the form of specific investments or further contract specification. Taken together, these insights have the potential to further enhance successful conflict resolution in buyer-supplier relationships because it enables managers not only to understand how different tactics, but also how these tactics are likely to work across all conflicting situations characterised by different intensities.

Finally, managers could benefit from the current findings by understanding how different types of conflict may evolve and transform over time, as this may help them better maximize performance (Greer *et al.*, 2008). Through the comprehensive and empirically grounded list of factors that lead to changes in the association between task-relationship conflict spirals (i.e., what causes escalation and counteraction), managers involved in conflict situations may know when the spiral would occur, how it would amplify, and the conditions necessary to its self-correction. Accordingly, they would have greater ability to control the dynamics of the conflict episode. For instance, managers should not expect that positive previous interactions with their counterpart would prevent them from entering a conflict spiral because a misalignment in task conflict resolution might trigger the spiral. This thesis also illustrates how these dynamics are tied to conflict outcomes, whereby buyers’ ability to disregard relationship conflict and focus on the resolution of task conflict potentially leads to functional outcomes.

To sum up, throughout the thesis, complexities inherent to the conflict process and its resolution have been explained, including conditions under which conflict escalates, as well as the contingencies under which conflict leads to positive or negative outcomes. As stated by Mikkelsen and Clegg (2017, p. 10) “*for practitioners to feel that their experience of conflict is reflected in the theorization of conflict, such theorization must incorporate complex types of*

understanding'. Thus, the findings obtained would enhance practitioners' knowledge about conflict and how to best resolve it to avoid its detrimental effects. Nonetheless, the issues explored and the findings obtained should be considered in light of the research limitations. These will be highlighted next along with areas that would benefit from further conceptual and empirical work.

6.5 Reflections on Research Limitations & Future Research Directions

6.5.1 Theory Building

The purpose in this research was to investigate conflict in buyer-supplier relationship through a qualitative approach. This was deemed suitable from both the theoretical and methodological viewpoints, but one direction for future research consists of empirically testing the generalizability and exploring the boundary conditions of our findings (Busse *et al.*, 2017). Further research could deploy a cross-sectional study in the form of a survey to consolidate and provide further validation to the findings of this research. Although using sample firms from the same industry helps rule out industry-level differences in dyadic links and practices in buyer-supplier relationships (Liu *et al.*, 2009), validation studies must expand the contexts in which conflict is explored to include different industries and supply chains. This could prove fruitful, as it would enable researchers to disentangle the effects of context differences, and draw conclusions across industry boundaries.

6.5.2 Retrospective Data

A retrospective longitudinal research design was used to investigate conflict dynamics because being granted access to cases where conflicts unfold *in vivo* and interviewing at both ends of the dyad longitudinally was not possible. The time constraint on the delivery of the PhD thesis did not allow for such endeavour. Consequently, further research could explore such dynamics *in vivo* to circumvent the limitations of retrospective accounts (Golden, 1992), and further consolidate the study's findings. Such access would allow the investigation of conflict as it unfolds, and thus enable researchers to gain deep understanding at the level of detail necessary to unravel the complexities of conflict processes (Woodside and Baxter, 2013). However, the findings obtained in this study are not spurious. This methodology has been successfully used in previous research examining processual issues, and provided reliable results (Bourgeois III and Eisenhardt, 1988; Vanpoucke *et al.*, 2014; Hollmann *et al.*, 2015; Halinen and Tähtinen, 2002).

6.5.3 Buyer's Perspective

Although we collected dyadic data, we only focused on buyer's perception of conflict without looking at the supplier's side. Considering both perspectives would provide insights into conflict asymmetry between dyad entities, thereby answering research blind spot one (as proposed in the systematic review paper). Asymmetries have been found to be an important predictor of conflict outcomes (Ma *et al.*, 2018). For instance, Jehn *et al.* (2010) found when groups have different ratings of conflict (conflict asymmetry) they are at greater risk of poor performance. Essentially, considering perceptions of both sides of the dyad would be a worthwhile addition to the thesis's findings as it would help track the impact of asymmetries on the conflict trajectory (Jehn *et al.*, 2015), and how parties deal with these asymmetries. Going forward, researchers could build on the rich body of knowledge on shared cognition in teams (Cannon - Bowers and Salas, 2001; Ensley and Pearce, 2001; Healey *et al.*, 2015; Kaufmann *et al.*, 2017) to understand asymmetries in a supply chain conflict context.

6.5.4 Supplier-Induced Conflicts

In the present research we controlled the source of the conflict, whereby we only focused on supplier-induced conflicts where suppliers were at the origin of conflict. However, in supply chain relationships, conflict might also emerge from buyers. Given that the locus of attributions affect behaviours and attitudes (Kim *et al.*, 2006), it would be of interest to consider conflict episodes that are initiated by the buyer (Kaufmann *et al.*, 2018), and examine whether similar or different conflict dynamics would emerge.

6.5.5 Combining Conflict Types & Conflict Resolution

A final limitation of the present thesis is that, in empirical study 1, conflict resolution tactics has been studied with a focus on a general indicator of conflict that does not differentiate between distinct conflict types. Furthermore, in empirical study 2, the dynamics of conflict types were investigated without specifically examining conflict resolution tactics for each conflict type. However, although we examined these streams in separate studies, the existing literature highlights that they are not mutually exclusive (Behfar *et al.*, 2008; Bobot, 2011). Accordingly, an interesting avenue for future research would be the combination of these two streams in order to examine the specific tactics that are employed both by buyers and suppliers to manage different types of conflict as they occur over the conflict episode. This is particularly interesting because recent research has shown that the simultaneous

occurrence of conflict types makes conflict resolution more complex. For instance, whereas researchers have found that “collaborating” is an optimal strategy to resolve task conflict, evidence has also shown that “collaborating” is negatively related to relationship conflict (Thiel *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, future research embracing interaction dynamics between conflict types and conflict resolution tactics would highlighted, what Carton and Tewfik (2016) referred to negative (positive) spillovers; case where a conflict resolution strategy unexpectedly escalates (reduces) a form of conflict it was not targeted for.

6.6 Conclusion

In sum, there are clearly many interesting and exciting research opportunities in the buyer-supplier conflict area. Because conflict and conflict resolution are so important to business practice, much more understanding of the dynamic and multi-level nature of conflict is needed. The set of papers presented in this thesis offer an initial step on this journey of discovery, provide a better understanding of how conflict and its resolution unfold over time, and opens up interesting new avenues for research. The ultimate objective is to generate interest among researchers and to encourage a program of research in this area.

VII. References

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