ICEI 2017
on Emotional Intelligence
PORTO
U.PORTO

Relational conflict is not too bad for employees when they have developed their emotional intelligence skills

Miriam Benitez y Juan A. Serrano-Ortega
Malaga University

miriambenitez@uma.es

Grupo de Investigación SEJ-583
Selección y Gestión del Talento

UNIVERSITAS MALACITANA

Introduction

Team conflict constitutes one of the most prevalent team processes in the workplace (Benítez et al., 2011; De Dreu, 2010), especially in competitive organizational contexts, such as, university organizations (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007). De Wit, Greer, & Jehn (2012) 's methanalysis showed that, team conflict is not always negative for employees well-being. Its effects are depending on the conflict type and conflict contexts. In this sense, research has shown that, task conflict could be positive for job satisfaction and, relationship conflict consequences of well-being could be buffer when team members have good skills to solve conflicts (De Dreu *et al.*, 2004; Seong & Choi, 2014). Emotional intelligence has come to be seen as a key concept for the development of organizations. Especially in professions that require continuous management of interpersonal relationships, such as, teachers (Extremera & Fernández-Berrocal, 2004, Jiménez & López-Zafra, 2007). When individuals are in a conflict situation, whatever the type, they face the same ones influenced by their emotional state (Barry & Fulmer, 2004; Montes 2014). Therefore, employees with high emotional intelligence may be better able to cope with conflict-induced stress than people who do not have such a skill (Armstrong *et al.,* 2011). However, despite the existence of empirical evidence on the influence of emotional intelligence on the adequate management of conflict, there are few studies that have analyzed the moderating role of emotional intelligence in the relationship between both types of conflict (task and relationship conflict) and burnout.

Aim and Hipotheses

This study extends the conflict literature by examining the moderating role of emotional intelligent on the relationship between two conflict types (task conflict and relationship conflict) and burnout core (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization).

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Task conflict will be less positively related to burnout than relationship conflict.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Emotional Intelligence will modulate the relationship between task conflict and burnout (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization). Thus, task conflict will be positively related to both dimensions of burnout, only when employees have low levels of emotional intelligence.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Emotional Intelligence will modulate the relationship between relationship conflict and burnout (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization) buffering this positive link.

Method

Participants: 171 university employees. Teachers and researchers (76.6%), Concierge Staff (11.7%) and Library (11.7%). Mean age of 46.76 (*SD* 9.3) and a mean tenure of 51.07 months (*SD* 267.22). Being 50.9% women and the rest men.
Questionnaires:
CIT (Benítez *et al.,* 2012) to measure task conflict (α = .76) and relationship conflict (α = .86).
TMMS-24 (Fernández-Berrocal *et al,* 2004) to measure emotional intelligence. Emotional attention dimension (α = .89), emotional clarity dimension (α = .89) and α = .88 for the emotional repair dimension.
Spanish version of MBI (Mañas *et al.,* 1998) to measure burnout. α= .88 for depersonalization and α = .85 for emotional exhaustion.

Results

Table 1.		Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations (n =171)							
	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Task Conflict (TC)	2,73	0,94	1						
2. Relationship Conflict (RC)	2,26	1,05	.34**	1					
3. Emotional Attention (EA)	2,93	0,77	0.8	.12	1				
4. Emotional Clarity (EC)	3,64	0,75	.02	-.07	.07	1			
5. Emotional repair (ER)	3,78	0,69	-.04	-.13	-.00	.52**	1		
6. Emotional exhaustion	2,12	0,93	.20**	.42**	.10	-.39**	-.35**	1	
7. Despersonalization	3,0	1,22	.17*	.29**	-.01	-.28**	-.28**	.39**	1

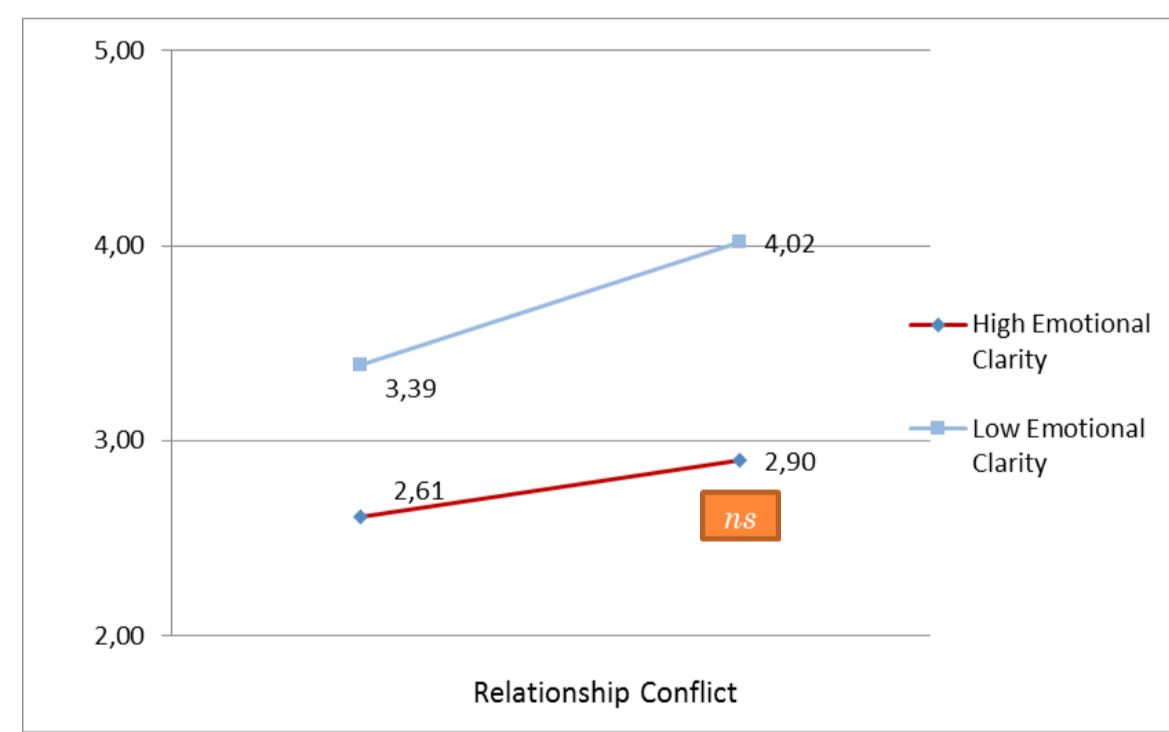* *p* < .05 two-tailed, ** *p* <. 01 two-tailed.

Table 2. Hierarchical Regression Analysis Examining the moderating role of Emotional Intelligence on the relationship between both conflict types and Emotional Exhaustion

Steps	Emotional Exhaustion		
	R	Δ R	B
1. Task Conflict (TC)	.04	.18**	.20*
2. Relationship Conflict (RC)	.18	.14**	.40**
3. Emotional Attention (EA)	.32	.15**	.08
Emotional Clarity (EC)			-.30**
Emotional repair (ER)			-.13*
4. Interactive effects TC	.31	.005	
TC X EA			.01
TC X EC			.02
TC X ER			.05
5. Interactive effects RC	.34	.04*	
RC X EA			.13*
RC X EC			-.13*
RC X ER			-.05

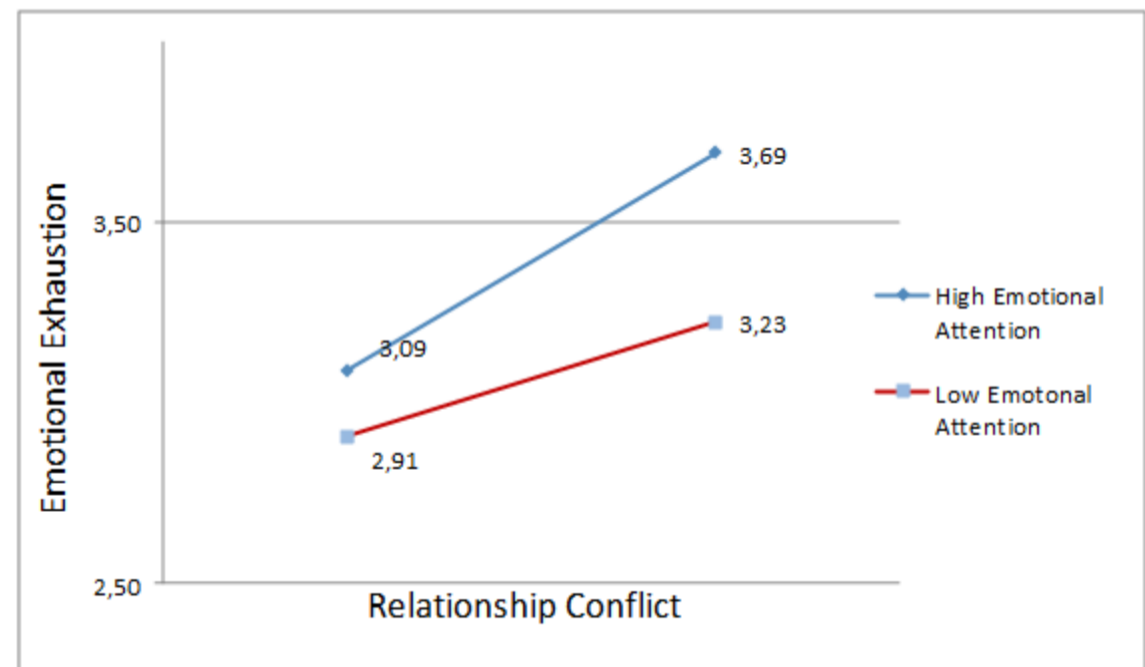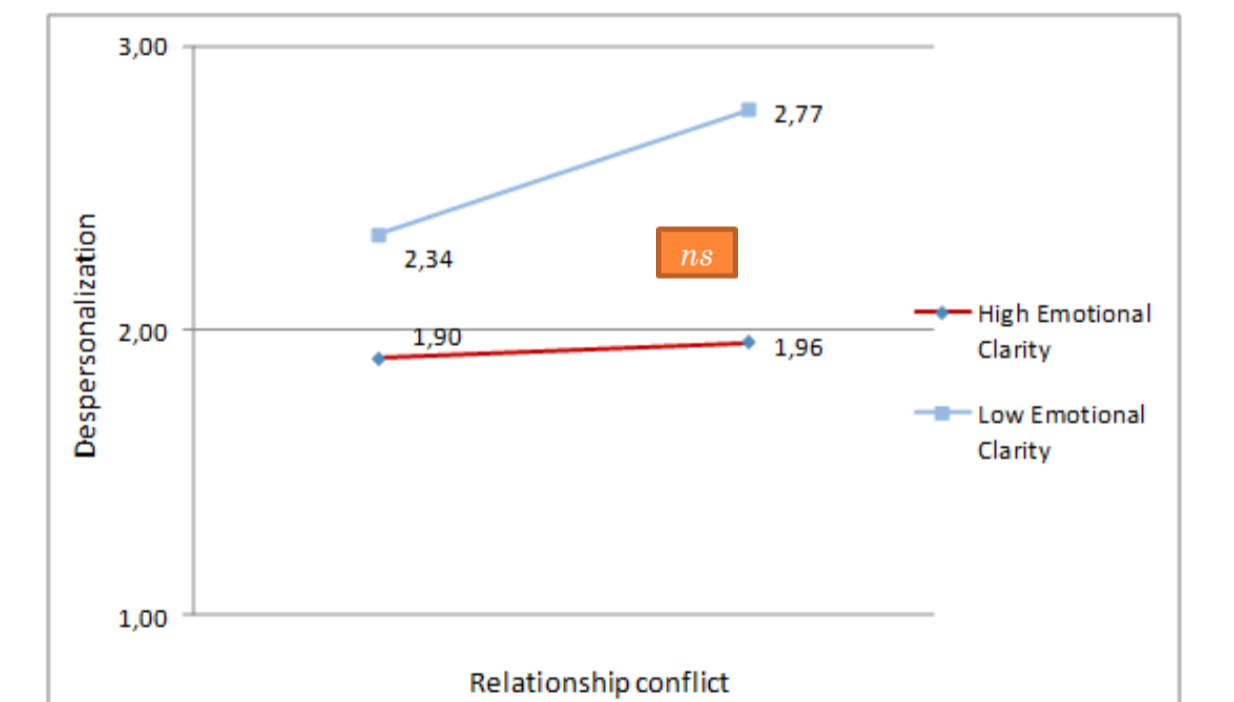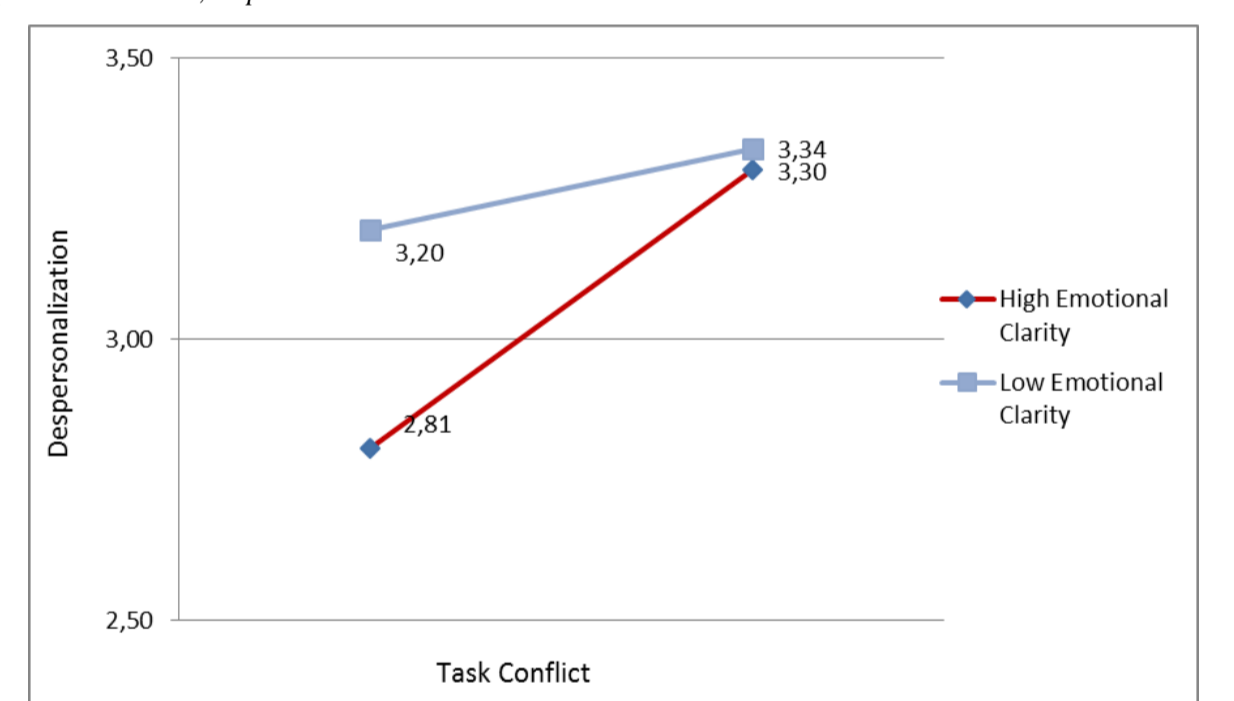* *p* < .05 two-tailed, ** *p* <. 01 two-tailed.

Table 3. Hierarchical Regression Analysis Examining the moderating role of Emotional Intelligence on the relationship between both conflict types and depersonalisation.

Steps	Despersonalisation		
	R	Δ R	B
1. Task Conflict (TC)	.03	.03*	.17*
2. Relationship Conflict (RC)	.09	.06**	.26**
3. Emotional Attention (EA)	.18	.08**	-.04
Emotional Clarity (EC)			-.18*
Emotional Regulation (ER)			-.15*
4. Interactive effects TC	.21	.03*	
TC X EA			-.10
TC X EC			.18*
TC X ER			-.07
5. Interactive effects RC	.24	.02	
RC X EA			-001
RC X EC			-.19*
RC X ER			.03

* *p* < .05 two-tailed, ** *p* <. 01 two-tailed.

The main results showed that: (a) task conflict is positively related to emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, but this link is less high than relationship conflict link (ß = .20; p<.05, ß = .40, p<.01 for emotional exhaustion) and (ß = .17, p<.05 ß = .26, p<.01 for depersonalization) respectively; (b) emotional attention plays a positive and moderating role, just for the link between relationship conflict and emotional exhaustion (ß = .13, p<.05); (c) emotional clarity plays a negative and moderating role between relationship conflict and both burnout dimensions (ß = -.13, p<.05 for emotional exhaustion; ß = .19, p<.01 for depersonalization), and a positive moderating role between task conflict and despersonalization (ß = .18, p<.05).

Conclusions

Regarding the role of intragroup conflict, results revealed that not only conflict about personal issues or relationship conflict is positively associated to burnout, also task conflict. So, if conflict is not managed in teams, it can have detrimental consequences for organizational, individual and group outcomes (Ayoko, Hartel, & Cullen, 2002; De Dreu & Van Vianen, 2001). Although companies strive to introduce conflict resolution programs into their employees (Polkinghorn *et al.,* 2006), today, emotional management training still has major limitations (Katz, Sosa & Harriott, 2016). However, this study shows that in order to buffer the negative effects of task and relationship conflict training employees on the emotional intelligent skill is necessary in service organization (e.g., universities)