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## Applying Conflict Management Styles to Resolve Task Conflict and Enhance Team Innovation

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### Abstract

Task conflicts among group members have a significant impact on team creativity, so it is critical to identify which conflict resolution styles should be used. This paper aims to examine how various conflict management styles influence team creativity via task conflict. The empirical research was conducted using the Structural Equation Model (SEM) for a sample of 257 employees working for Vietnamese organizations. The results show that dominating style increases task conflict while combining and obliging styles reduce it. To take advantage of the creativity-related benefits associated with task conflict, team leaders should develop an open atmosphere that encourages participants' integrating styles, rather than dominating styles. The negative influence of obliging style reflects Vietnamese culture's high collectivism. The study provides various approaches for task conflict management and also highlights the role of controlling task conflicts in enhancing team innovation. It implies that employees will be able to work better as a team in practice if conflict management strategies are used in a flexible manner. It helps them to build a good connection and successfully implement new ideas. Further research should extend the conclusion of this analysis in various contexts to generalize the findings.

### Keywords:

Conflict;  
Team Innovation;  
Conflict Management;  
Vietnam.

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## 1- Introduction

Conflict is an unavoidable and normal event in any organization. Organizations have been faced with structural, personnel, and resource distribution issues as a result of industrialization and globalization, resulting in different forms of conflict [1]. Employees participate in different types of confrontation, which wastes organizational capital. The degree to which conflict has a positive or negative effect on an organization is determined by the types of conflict and how it is treated. Human resource managers have applied a variety of styles (dominating, obliging, and integrating) for resolving conflicts and working cooperatively so far.

In addition, task conflict and relationship conflict are two forms of conflict. Task conflict, which is characterized by task inconsistency, results in the team's failure to achieve the target. Relationship conflict involves relational or personal problems that can endanger the relationship between the two parties. While some studies have listed both task and relationship conflict, this study focuses exclusively on task conflict because relationship conflict undermines organizational performance and stakeholder satisfaction, thus it should be avoided [2].

Moreover, the impact of task conflict on team creativity has been inconsistent or unclear. It may give rise to debate between different viewpoints, thereby leading to increased team creativity [3]. The debates are likely to foster

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organizational communication and exchange of work-related opinions, thoughts. Nonetheless, a high level of task conflict might be detrimental to team effectiveness [4]. Meanwhile, other researchers have used a contingency method to determine if task conflict improves or degrades a range of team outcomes, including creativity [5].

More notably, Vietnamese culture is characterized by strong collectivism, power distance, conservatism, and paternalism [6]. It is contrast to individualistic cultures like the United States and Western Europe. Therefore, examining the impact of task conflict on team creativity in Vietnam, where opposing viewpoints are not often welcomed and a united collective voice and harmony are usually viewed as desired [7], is a conservative test. It motivates us to investigate the influence of conflict management styles on team creativity through task conflict in Vietnam - an emerging market.

This article is structured as follows: The second section includes a literature review and the development of hypotheses. The research process and research model are discussed in the following section. The results of the study are summarized in Section 4. Conclusions and implications for clinicians and scholars are discussed in Section 5.

## 2- Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

### 2-1- Task Conflict

Workplace conflict has been proven to be inevitable in various studies. The difference in opinion, beliefs, views among employees leads to task conflict or relationship conflict [8]. Relationship conflicts are based on relationship problems that result from individual differences as well as differences in opinion and interests on non-task issues like religion, politics, and fashion, while task conflicts involve differences of viewpoints, ideas, and opinions in the group about the goals or content of the task being performed [9]. Employees usually consider the conflicts as “work disagreements”, “work conflict”, and “task problems”. Rahim (2001) [10] defined task conflict as “*conflict occurring when two or more organizational members disagree on their task or content issues*”. However, it has been proven in various studies that its mere presence is not the issue, but how it is managed determines whether conflict leads to a constructive or destructive outcome.

### 2-2- Conflict Management Styles

The way how a group member deals with the conflict is explained through various conflict management styles. A five-style or three-style model can be used to present the fundamental approaches [11]. Thomas (2008) [12] suggested five conflict resolution types: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating. Rahim (1983) [13] also introduces a five-style model focused on two aspects of “concern for self or others”: dominating, integrating, obliging, avoiding, compromising. However, the components of a five-style model can be reduced and integrated into three specific conflict styles: (a) forcing or dominating, (b) solution-oriented or integrating, and (c) smoothing or obliging [14]. Our research follows a three-style approach.

#### **Dominating style (Win-Lose strategy)**

This style is characterized by a high degree of concern for oneself and a low level of concern for others, suggesting a win-lose strategy or pushing actions to achieve one's own position or goal without regard for others. This style displays a violent, inflexible approach and shows competing attitudes linked with aggression [15]. Using a dominating style could lead to higher levels of conflict, so it is appropriate in urgent situations or for an unimportant problem [16].

*H1: Dominating style has a positive impact on task conflict.*

#### **Obliging style (Lose-Win Strategy)**

This style is also known as accommodating which emerges from a lack of concern for oneself and a strong concern for others. Individuals with an obliging style tend to place others' interests ahead of their own, downplaying discrepancies and emphasizing commonalities to persuade others' concerns [17]. This obligating style is applied while individuals display self-dedicated behavior by ignoring their needs for the other group, habitually resulting in a lose-win outcome. This style can also be used to preserve a relationship especially when the relationship is more important than the issue. It may be appropriate for Asian working environments because Asian countries' character is mostly collectivism [18].

*H2: Obliging style has a negative impact on task conflict.*

#### **Integrating style (Win-Win Strategy)**

This approach focuses on working together to find a solution, indicating a strong concern for oneself and others. It reflects openness, information sharing, and a thorough analysis of disparities to get an efficient solution that is agreeable to all parties. In other words, Individuals who are involved in conflicts try to come up with creative and imaginative approaches that not only satisfy their own needs but also meet those of others [19]. When the problems are complicated, this style works well in integrating the expertise and knowledge of multiple parties to formulate and execute ideas

effectively. This style is often linked to less task conflict [20]. As a result, the integrating style is seen as efficient and sufficient in settling conflicts. Integrating and accommodating styles assist workgroup participants in getting to know one another better and feeling prepared to complete tasks.

*H3: Integrating style has a negative impact on task conflict.*

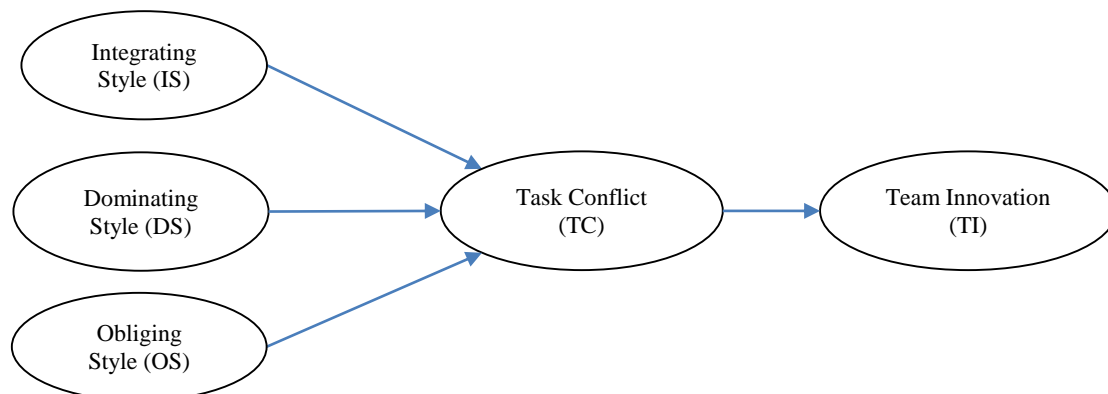
### 2-3- Team Innovation

Team creativity is described as the product of efforts to develop and incorporate new and improved ways of doing things [21]. It is the creation and development of new concepts, practices, or processes that are helpful to the team [22]. Researchers have used a contingency approach to find out whether task conflict improves or damages team outcomes (including innovation) when considering the relationship between task conflict and creativity [23].

First, some previous studies have found that task conflict has a positive effect on team creativity [24]. Task conflict is likely to encourage various thoughts and the exchanging of a wider variety of ideas on related issues at the workplace [25]. When a workgroup is faced with task disputes, they are more innovative in their thinking [26]. Minor conflicts can inspire group members to seek better options or solutions [27]. Since diverse views and experiences are exchanged, constructive dialogue and conversation are likely to boost a team's innovation. Conflict is likely to encourage learning and the generation of fresh, potentially innovative ideas, resulting in a more competitive and inventive team [28].

On the contrary, many researchers have noted the negative impact of task conflict on team effectiveness. Job disagreement hinders one's ability to interpret, absorb, and analyze knowledge [29], which can have a negative effect on creativity. Where there is a lot of task tension, the role of the team members executing the task becomes more ambiguous, and success declines as a result. When task-related disagreement grows, teams are less able to form and sustain cohesive teams [30]. As a result, team members are less able to work well or produce new strategies or solutions. As a result, we believe task conflict has a negative impact on team performance.

*H4: Task conflict is negatively related to team innovation.*



**Figure 1. The proposed research model.**

## 3- Research Methodology

### 3-1- Data

Primary data for hypotheses testing was collected from full-time employees working for companies or organizations in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, using an online survey questionnaire. There are seven items for integrating style, five for obliging style, three for dominating style, three for task conflict, and six for team innovation in the questionnaire. Items used in this study were all originally written in English, but participants are Vietnamese. The survey items were first translated into Vietnamese, then back-translated into English by bilingual experts and researchers to reconcile all differences and refine the wording. Five research associates with expertise in human resource administration pre-tested and then updated a draft of the questionnaire in Vietnam. The survey was reviewed by 30 staff from various organizations to identify problems with terminology, content, and question ambiguity. Some minor changes were made in response to their feedback. After we conducted an official survey, out of 320 responses, 257 were appropriate.

As shown in Table 1, the demographic profile of the respondents indicates that the sample consisted of more females (56.4%) than males (43.6%) but this difference only accounts for less than 15%. With regards to age, the majority of employees (26.8%) belong to the age group of 25 to less than 30 years old and the results also showed that there is a fair mix of age groups. 65 percent of the participants in the study have a bachelor's degree, while 18.7% have a master's degree. In terms of experience, the majority of respondents (51.8%) have fewer than three years of experience.

**Table 1. Respondents' profile.**

Measure	Value	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	145	56.4%
	Male	112	43.6%
Age	Below 25 years	61	23.7%
	25 to below 30 years	69	26.8%
	30 to below 35 years	46	17.9%
	35 to below 40 years	36	14.0%
	40 to below 45 years	35	13.6%
	45 years and above	10	3.9%
Education	High school	38	14.8%
	Bachelor	167	65.0%
	Master	48	18.7%
	Doctor	4	1.6%
Occupation	Government	80	31.1%
	Non-government	177	68.9%
Income	Less than 10 million VND	101	39.3%
	10 to below 20 million VND	101	39.3%
	20 to below 30 million VND	21	8.2%
	30 million VND and above	34	13.2%
Experience	Below 3 years	133	51.8%
	3 to below 5 years	34	13.2%
	5 to below 7 years	19	7.4%
	7 to below 10 years	19	7.4%
	10 years and above	52	20.2%

### 3-2- Measures

The items used for each model in this analysis were adapted from previous studies (as shown in Appendix I). First, conflict management styles were created using the Rahim (1983)'s Organizational Conflict Inventory-II as cited earlier. The scale's validity is demonstrated by its ability to differ conflict management styles. As mentioned above, the components of a five-style model can be reduced and integrated into a three-style model: (a) forcing or dominating, (b) solution-oriented or integrating, and (c) smoothing or obliging. Although Rahim's original scale were elicited for all five conflict-management styles, this study only focused on the three conflict-management strategies (dominating, integrating, and obliging). The Likert scale responses ranged from strongly disagreement (1) to strongly agreement (7).

Next, we evaluated team creativity using Anderson and West (1998)'s scale [31], which refers to employees' perceptions of the team's ability to generate and share new ideas. The following are two sample items for innovation: "My team is always moving toward the development of new answers" and "People in the team co-operate to help develop and apply new ideas". A seven-point Likert scale (1 = total disagreement, 7 = total agreement) was used to collect data on team innovation.

Finally, we used three items developed by Jehn and Mannix (2001) [32] to measure task conflict, with the scale describing overall workplace task conflict. This scale is also used by Yu and Mary (2018) [33] and Tafvelin (2020) [34]. The participants, for example, were asked to respond to the item: "How frequently do you have disagreements within your team about the task of the project you are working on". Participants indicated how much they related to the content of each item, using a Likert-style scale ranging from 1 = none to 7 = a great deal. We applied the Brislin's method [35] to translate all survey instruments from English to Vietnamese: (1) A native Vietnamese speaker who was fluent at English translated the original scales into Vietnamese; (2) A bilingual professional translator who was blinded to back-translate the original version into English; (3) the authors compared and found no discrepancies between the two versions.

### 3-3- Data Analysis

Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to evaluate our theoretical model. This method is commonly used in business and management research [14]. PLS-SEM solves several problems of covariance-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM). First, PLS-SEM provides accurate model estimations for small sample sizes [36]. The minimum recommended sample size for PLS-SEM, according to Chin & Newsted (1999) [37], is 30 to

100. Second, unlike CB-SEM based on maximum probability, PLS-SEM is a nonparametric method that does not assume data is normally distributed.

To test the proposed models, we used SmartPLS version 3.0 and the two-step analysis technique. First, we checked the validity and reliability of the measures. Second, we use a bootstrapping approach (1000 resamples) to determine the significance levels for path coefficients.

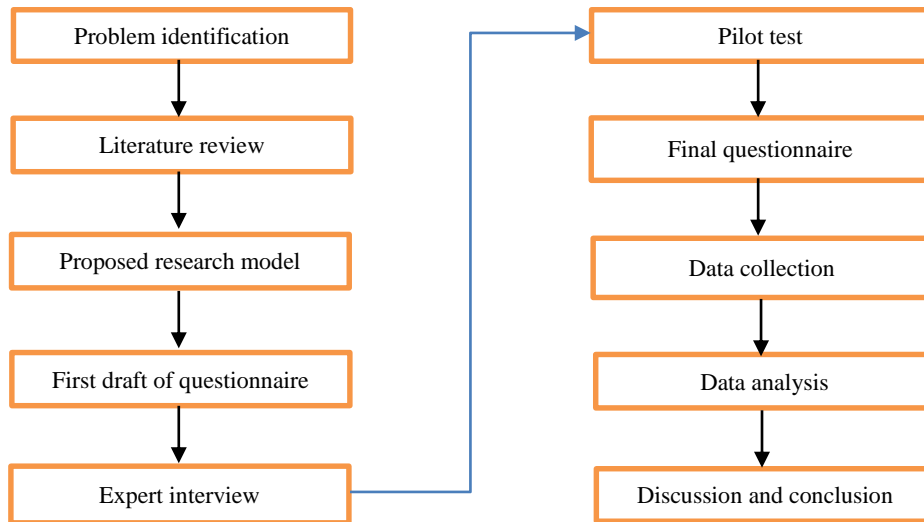


Figure 2. Flowchart of the study.

## 4- Results

### 4-1- Measurement Model Assessment

The reliability and validity of the construct measures are used to evaluate the measurement model. The criteria such as internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were proposed by Hair et al. (2017) [38]. The internal consistency reliability of constructs was first tested using composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha. The CR and Cronbach alpha scores in the study were also higher than the cut-off value of 0.7, as seen in Table 4. Second, the outer loadings of the indicators and the average variance extracted were used to determine convergent validity (AVE). Items with outer loadings greater than 0.40 should be kept for analysis. In this analysis, all outer loadings were greater than 0.7. Another standard criterion for determining convergent validity at the construct level is AVE. AVE was greater than 0.5, suggesting that the construct explained more than half of the variance of its indicators [39]. Third, in terms of discriminant validity, we made sure that each construct's square root of AVE was greater than its association with other constructs. The Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) values were also smaller than the 0.85 thresholds [40]. As shown in Tables 2 and 3, our analysis has discriminant validity.

Table 2. Fornell-Larcker criterion.

	Dominating style	Integrating style	Obliging style	Task conflict	Team innovation
Dominating style	0.888				
Integrating style	0.036	0.843			
Obliging style	-0.145	-0.096	0.793		
Task conflict	0.395	-0.157	-0.225	0.892	
Team innovation	0.076	0.591	-0.167	-0.191	0.861

Table 3. HTMT ratio analysis.

	Dominating style	Integrating style	Obliging style	Task conflict	Team innovation
Dominating style					
Integrating style	0.065				
Obliging style	0.149	0.161			
Task conflict	0.414	0.136	0.206		
Team innovation	0.108	0.650	0.223	0.197	

**Table 4. Outer loadings, AVE, CR, and Cronbach's Alpha.**

Constructs	Measurement	Outer loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Dominating style (DS)	DS 1	0.828	0.869	0.918	0.789
	DS 2	0.918			
	DS 3	0.916			
Obliging style (OS)	OS 1	0.731	0.864	0.894	0.629
	OS 2	0.799			
	OS 3	0.725			
	OS 4	0.863			
	OS 5	0.836			
Integrating style (IS)	IS 1	0.737	0.940	0.945	0.711
	IS 2	0.733			
	IS 3	0.832			
	IS 4	0.866			
	IS 5	0.910			
	IS 6	0.898			
	IS 7	0.907			
Task conflict (TC)	TC 1	0.830	0.875	0.921	0.795
	TC 2	0.926			
	TC 3	0.915			
Team innovation (TI)	TI 1	0.843	0.931	0.945	0.742
	TI 2	0.839			
	TI 3	0.881			
	TI 4	0.864			
	TI 5	0.875			
	TI 6	0.865			

#### 4-2- Structural Model Assessment

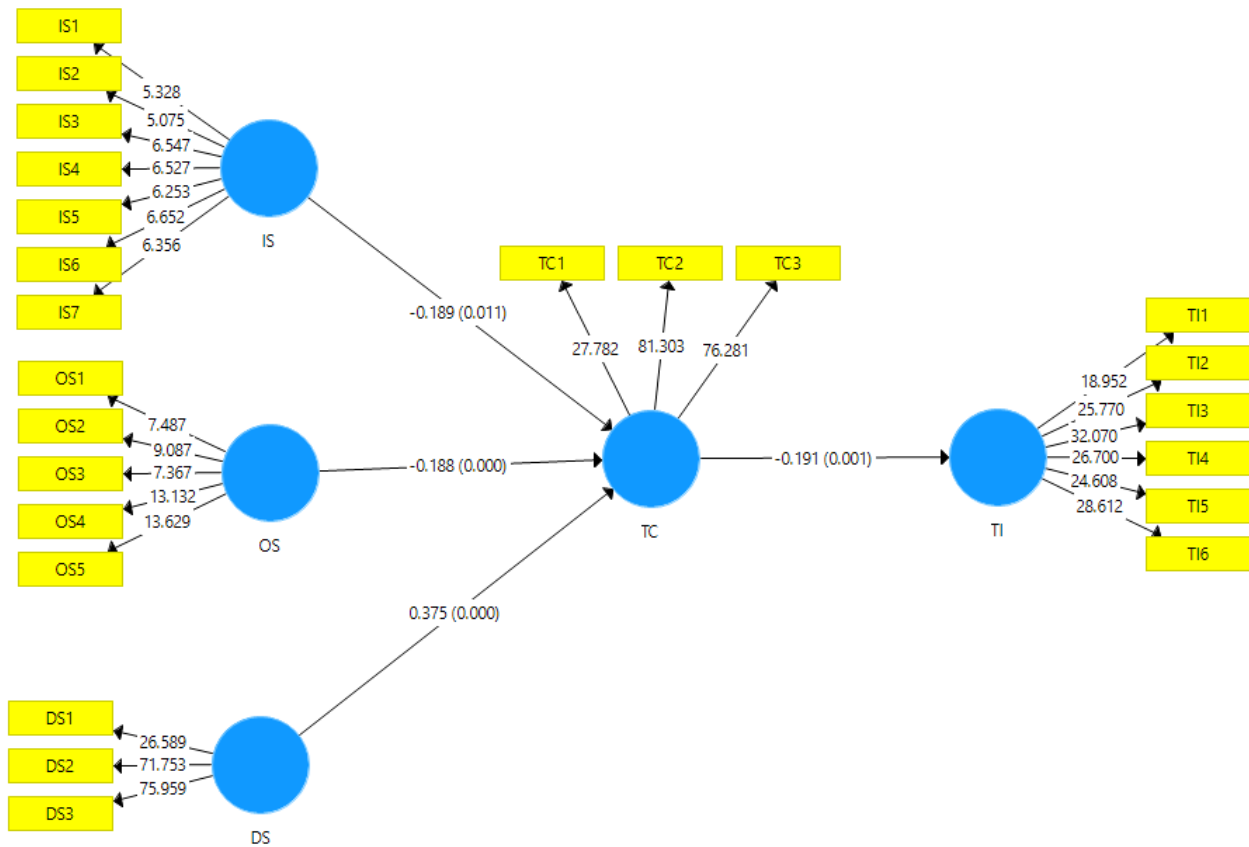
Before testing hypotheses, we checked for collinearity between constructs. Collinearity was investigated using the variance inflation factor (VIF) value. Since all VIF values were below the threshold of 5, collinearity among the constructs was not a significant issue in this analysis.

**Table 5. Results of a structural equation modelling.**

Hypotheses	Coefficients	T Statistics	P Values	f square	Support
H1: Dominating style → Task conflict	0.375	7.435	0.000	0.176	Accepted
H2: Integrating style → Task conflict	-0.189	2.543	0.011	0.045	Accepted
H3: Obliging style → Task conflict	-0.188	3.924	0.000	0.044	Accepted
H4: Task conflict → Team innovation	-0.191	3.432	0.001	0.038	Accepted

By bootstrapping 1,000 samples, the P-values were used to determine the statistical significance of our hypotheses. The key parameters obtained for the model in the structural evaluation are depicted in Figure 3. First, we tested the relationship between conflict management styles and task conflict. Table 5 reveals that dominating style has a significant positive impact on task conflict ( $\beta = 0.375$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), while integrating and obliging styles have significant negative effects ( $\beta = -0.189$ ,  $p = 0.011$ ; and  $\beta = -0.188$ ,  $p = 0.000$ , respectively). The findings are consistent with the findings of Darawong (2017), who studies the direct effect of conflict management styles on task conflict and relationship conflict between marketing and R&D staff in Thai manufacturing companies throughout the new product development process [41]. Individuals who use a dominating style tend to actively use their intelligence, experience, and power to defeat the ideas of others, regardless of the other party. When members of a group use an integrating style, on the other hand, they are more likely to share thoughts and listen openly to others in order to find the best solution. Task-related information is incorporated into the communication and decision-making process, resulting in a low probability of task conflict. An integrating style encourages positive project improvements, while a dominant style leads to violent conflict. Regarding obliging style, it can improve cohesion and social desirability, reducing task conflict. Vietnamese people, like Thais, showed a preference for obliging style [42] because Asians frequently want to maintain a good connection with another party, and they will typically try to make compromises to suit the other party's requirements, establish harmony, and also show the high degree of collaboration [43].





**Figure 3. Results of the structural model.**

Which conflict styles are chosen depends much on the situation. Employees' conflict solving strategies are influenced by culture [44]; for example, it can be expected that collectivism is favorably correlated with integrating and obliging styles. For example, Indonesians, who are collectivists, favor incorporating and obliging models, while Americans, who are individualistic, prefer integrating and dominating styles [45]. Hence, our findings may be appropriate for Asian working environments because Asian countries' character is mostly collectivism.

Second, we discovered evidence for H4, which predicted a negative association between task conflict and team innovation ( $\beta = -0.191$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). High levels of task conflict can cause cognitive overload or negative emotion, both of which are detrimental to team creativity. In other words, conflicts and frustrations stifle team cooperation, which is essential for creating, assessing, and choosing the most innovative and creative ideas. Individuals' ability to interact, cooperate, and organize efficiently is impaired by task conflict [46]. As De Dreu (2006), as cited earlier, also stated: *"Increasingly high compared to moderate levels of task conflict, however, produce the stress, interpersonal tension, and distrust that prohibit people from focusing on the problem and from open-mindedly generating ideas. It also reduces team members' motivation to work together in selecting and implementing adequate problem solutions"*.

The effect size  $f^2$  determines whether an exogenous construct has a significant influence on an endogenous construct. 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 were used to describe small, medium, and large effects, respectively [47]. The  $f^2$  values for all combinations of endogenous and exogenous constructs are also reported in Table 5. The effect sizes for all exogenous latent variables were greater than 0.02, meaning that they had small to medium effects.

## 5- Conclusion

This study contributed to the philosophy of conflict management by examining how different types of conflict management influence task conflict. The results show that dominating style increases task conflict while combining and obliging styles reduce it. This study also presents that task conflict has a negative effect on team creativity. High levels of task tension can lead to negative emotional feelings and, as a result, a reduction in team creativity. Our results imply that team leaders who want to boost innovation should keep task conflict in control. They can create contact networks from which members can communicate and collect feedback, for example, to hold task conflict to a minimum. However, all of the responses were limited to the Vietnam context, which may reduce the generalizability of our results. Vietnam's cultural, economic, and institutional mechanisms have been reported to be different from developed countries. Therefore, researchers should be cautious when extending the conclusion of this analysis in other contexts.

## 6- Declarations

### 6-1-Author Contributions

Conceptualization, A.T.T., T.S.T.; writing—original draft preparation, A.T.T, K.O.N., H.V.T.; writing—review and editing, A.T.T., T.S.T., K.P.T. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

### 6-2-Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available in article.

### 6-3-Funding

The authors received the financial support from the University of Finance – Marketing for the research.

### 6-4-Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this manuscript. In addition, the ethical issues, including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/or falsification, double publication and/or submission, and redundancies have been completely observed by the authors.

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## **Appendix I**

### ***Conflict Management Styles***

IS1: I try to investigate an issue with my other team members to find a solution acceptable to us.

IS2: I try to integrate my ideas with those of my other team members to come up with a decision jointly.

IS3: I try to work with my other team members to find solutions to a problem which satisfy our expectations.

IS4: I exchange accurate information with my other team members to solve a problem together.

IS5: I try to bring all our concerns out in the open so that the issues can be resolved in the best possible way.

IS6: I collaborate with my other team members to come up with decisions acceptable to us.

IS7: I try to work with my other team members for a proper understanding of a problem.

### ***Obliging Style (OS)***

OS1: I generally try to satisfy the needs of my other team members.

OS2: I usually accommodate the wishes of my other team members.

OS3: I give in to the wishes of my other team members.

OS4: I often go along with the suggestions of my other team members.

OS5: I try to satisfy the expectations of my other team members.

### ***Dominating Style (DS)***

DS1: I use my influence to get my ideas accepted.

DS2: I use my authority to make a decision in my favour.

DS3: I sometimes use my power to win a competitive situation.

### ***Task Conflict***

How much conflict of ideas is there in your team?

How frequently do you have disagreements within your team about the task of the project you are working on?

How often do people in your team have conflicting opinion about the project you are working on?

### ***Team Innovation***

My team is always moving toward the development of new answers.

Assistance in developing new ideas is readily available.

My team is open and responsive to change.

In the team we take the time needed to develop new ideas.

People in the team co-operate to help develop and apply new ideas.

Members of the team provide and share resources to help in the application of new ideas.