Conflict on the Agile work floor: Can it be good?

INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN RELATION TO OBSERVED CONFLICT AND JOB SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT

In today's dynamic business environment, organizations are adopting Agile methodologies to adapt to increasing market complexity and satisfy customer demands. Agile teams, characterized by self-organization and iterative work cycles, have become prevalent across various industries. However, conflict can arise within these self-managing teams, which lack formal leaders to mediate disputes. This study investigates the relationship between observed intragroup conflict and job satisfaction (JS) in Agile teams, with a particular interest in the effects of Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Cultural Diversity (CD). Research suggests that the impact of conflict can vary based on context and mitigation strategies and that the role of CD and EI in the conflict-job satisfaction relationship is still unclear. To address these gaps, this study employs coded video observations as an objective measure of conflict occurrences. The results show that there is no difference between teams scoring high on job satisfaction and teams scoring low on this. The episode analysis does however provide insights on what could cause differences in intrateam conflict frequency. Based on these insights training opportunities are identified for managers with a focus on assumptions and verifying information.

Keywords

Agile teams, observed conflict, job satisfaction, emotional intelligence, cultural diversity, conflict dynamics, self-managing teams.

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1. Introduction

For the past two decades, customer demands have increased and marketing technologies have advanced, leading to more market complexity (Khan, 2020). In order to deal with such increasing complexity, the Agile way of working emerged in the software development industry, where close communication with the customer and short-term iterative working cycles helped these organizations to adapt to demanding customers (Nerur et al., 2005). Not only software development organizations found use in this Agile way of working, but other organizations with a scope beyond software development also adapted to this way of working, following in the footsteps of software development organizations (Khan, 2020). Due to this transition, these organizations have become more and more reliant on self-organizing teams, as these teams speed up the decision-making process and enable rapid adaptation to customer demands (Hoda et al., 2010).

In these self-organizing teams, it is important to have satisfied team members, because team member satisfaction is strongly correlated with team performance (Przybilla et al., 2018). Furthermore, according to Urien et al. (2017), social cohesion is an important factor for team member satisfaction. However, due to differing opinions or social tensions between team members, conflict can also emerge in teams. Especially in Agile teams, where there is no formal leader present to mediate conflicting viewpoints of team members (Barke & Prechelt, 2019). These contradictory viewpoints can lead to three types of conflict (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). First of all, disagreements may happen about the content or expected outcomes of a task, this is called task conflict (TC). Secondly, team members may disagree on a more personal level about things such as political stances or personal values. This is called relationship conflict (RC). In later research, a third type of conflict emerged process conflict (PC). This type of conflict occurs when there are disagreements about logistics surrounding a task such as task delegation or responsibility (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003).

Albeit mostly relying on surveys, throughout the years, quite a lot of research has been conducted about these kinds of conflict and their numerous outcomes. In earlier research, both task and RC were generally found to have a negative impact on group and individual outcomes, such as team performance, group viability and the focus of the present study: team member satisfaction (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jehn et al., 2008). PC also turned out to have negative impacts on the mentioned job outcomes, due to the personal connotations of disagreements about logistics (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). A recent meta-analysis however found that the negative impacts of each type of conflict differ based on context and mitigation strategies: TC can have a positive impact on Job Satisfaction (JS), because it allows team members to voice their perspective on the task and the negative impact of RC and PC can be mitigated when the conflict is managed accordingly, mostly by the leader, because this diminishes the negative impact of these types of conflict on group cohesion (de Wit et al., 2011; Tekleab et al., 2009). Nevertheless, given the absence of an official leader in Agile teams, it is not

always clear how conflict can be managed in those teams to mitigate the potential negative effects on team outcomes (Crawford et al., 2014).

Besides conflict management, there are two other factors that play a role in the relationship between intrateam conflict and JS: Cultural Diversity (CD) and Emotional Intelligence (EI). In an increasingly globalizing world, team national CD is an important factor influencing the relationship between JS and conflict situations. Ayub and Jehn (2006) propose that higher national diversity increases the amount of TC, RC and PC that occurs within a team. On top of that, Ungerleider (2008) found that conflicts in culturally diverse teams lead to increased dissatisfaction due to differing cultural norms. Leifels and Bowen (2021) found that CD increased subgroup formation within a group, which leads to an increase in social stressors, ultimately decreasing the JS of team members. On the contrary, Ayoko et al. (2002) found that sometimes when a team is culturally diverse, it can increase the productivity generated by the conflicts and, as a result, has a positive impact on JS among other group outcomes. The authors noted that this seemed to occur when conflict was managed by reducing speech interruptions and team member dominance. Since the paper by Ayoko et al. (2002), the world has changed: Globalization has increased the amount of culturally diverse teams and technological advancements allowed for globally dispersed collaboration, increasing the complexity of working in a culturally diverse team (Caputo et al., 2023). In turn, this increased complexity negatively impacts the relationship between conflict and JS because conflict impedes on the teams communication and stimulates team members social categorization (Harush et al., 2018). Therefore, because of the contradicting findings in the literature, it is unclear what role CD plays in regard to conflict and JS.

Together with CD, EI is also relevant in understanding team conflict dynamics and their outcomes. For instance, EI can play an important moderating role in the relationship between conflict and JS. Ma and Liu (2019), even though they did not distinguish between the different types of conflict, found that employee EI reduces the number of counterproductive work behaviors a team member displays as a result of conflict with one's supervisor. Similarly, Kundi et al. (2022) found that EI also moderates counterproductive work behaviors resulting from RC between team members. According to Gao et al. (2013), EI can even act as a buffer to deal with job stressors, which brings forth the question of whether EI can act as a buffer for the impact of conflict on JS. Thus, the role of EI in team conflict dynamics requires further investigation.

Lastly, traditionally, team conflict has been measured through surveys for the participants. However, surveys fail to capture the way in which conflict is expressed, and experienced or whether a conflict is instigated intentionally (Zhao et al., 2019). Hence, scholars have called for new measures of conflict occurrence, for instance, through video observations or arousal devices (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Zhao et al., 2019) in order to provide a more objective account of conflict and to allow for more

reliable explorations of how conflict is expressed. Therefore, in the present study, conflict is measured through coded video observations.

To shed some light on the relationship between conflict, JS, as well as national CD and EI in self-managing (Agile) teams, the present study aims to address the following research question:

RQ: How can observed intragroup conflict be related to job satisfaction of Agile team members?

By addressing this research question, this thesis makes two important theoretical contributions. Firstly, by exploring conflict through video observations, this thesis answers the calls for new measures of conflict, that allow for further development of conflict theory (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Zhao et al., 2019). Secondly, this thesis extends current knowledge on self-managing teams, by unpacking how different types of conflict unravel and influence JS in these teams, with a particular interest on the role that national culture and EI play in this relationship (Behfar et al., 2011).

This thesis also has practical relevance, since it provides managers and leaders aiming at implementing self-managing (Agile) teams with additional insights on the impact of conflict in self-organizing teams, which can help optimize the satisfaction in the teams by looking at the team composition. Besides providing insights on the impact of conflict, this thesis aims to identify training opportunities to improve how teams approach conflict, especially in regards to mono- and multicultural teams.

2. Theoretical Framework and Assumption Development

Below, the existing literature on the Agile way of working, conflict, culturally diverse teams and EI is reviewed. Firstly, the Agile way of working is defined and linked to the concept of intra-team conflict. After that, the influence of national CD and EI is discussed.

2.1 The Agile way of working and Agile Teams

The Agile way of working has been used for quite some time by software development teams. Even though several Agile methods have emerged such as Scrum and lean methodologies, they are all based on the values described in the Agile manifesto (Highsmith, 2001). According to the manifesto, Agile principles are centered around satisfying the customer, being tolerant to changing requirements and working with short-term goals. Furthermore, an additional difference between Agile teams and traditional teams, is that Agile teams are usually self-organizing. The reason for this is that it speeds up the decision-making progress, by bringing the authority for decisions within the team (Hoda et al., 2010). Besides speeding up the decision-making process, according to Tripp et al. (2016), bringing the authority for decisions to the team in this way has a positive impact on JS in Agile teams. On top of this, the authors found that a clearer task identity and higher perceived task significance resulting from Agile project management practices further increase the JS of team members.

In the past few years, the Agile way of working has become increasingly important, especially since the Covid-19 pandemic. The Agile way of working allowed teams to mitigate the negative impact of complexities brought forth by the pandemic, such as working remotely, on project success. Because the Agile way of working provides the employees within a team with a framework and structured Agile events, it prevents them from losing focus and slacking off (Cucolaş & Russo, 2023).

In order to make quick decisions and to deal with complex situations, Agile teams work in sprints, short periods of time for which the work is planned. In sprint planning sessions, the work for these sprints is planned. During the sprint, Agile teams have sprint refinement plannings to narrow down the goals of the sprint, and finally they have retrospective meetings, in which they reflect on their sprint.

The absence of a formal leader in the Agile methodology can however increase the amount of conflict within teams (Espinosa-Curiel et al., 2018). The employees within teams who used to manage the teams can be reluctant to surrendering the control and the authority they had. Resistance to Agile practices introduced by the scrum master can further increase the conflicting feelings between the former managers and the other team members. Overall the changes of team members shift in position and power increased the conflicting feelings within the teams (Espinosa-Curiel et al., 2018).

2.2 Conflict

Moreover, in the Agile context, contribution of diverse viewpoints by every team member is stimulated. These diverse viewpoints can clash, further increasing the number of conflicts (Przybilla et

al., 2018). In order to examine this relation in the Agile context, first the concept of conflict will be defined.

According to De Dreu and Weingart (2003) conflict is defined as: "the process resulting from the tension between team members because of real or perceived differences" (p. 741). However, later on in the conflict research, the focus of the conflict definition shifted from the tension resulting from differences towards the differences between individuals. For instance, Zhao et al. (2019) define conflict as: "a perceived difference, discrepancy, or incompatibility in desires, interests, beliefs, or values between individuals" (p. 112). Early research on the topic of conflict focused mainly on the negative impact created by conflict. However, through the years, more and more evidence has been found that low levels of conflict can also be beneficial to team outcomes. Rispens (2014) highlights these contrasting impacts of conflict. Conflict can be detrimental to teams, because it increases the cognitive load of team members, lowering team member efficiency. On the contrary, conflict can be beneficial for teams, because it increases the understanding of different viewpoints within teams and improves decision-making quality(Rispens, 2014). Due to the inconsistency of opinions on the impact of conflict, three types of conflicts are described, and their impacts are analyzed.

In their meta-analysis, De Dreu and Weingart (2003) distinguish between two types of conflict that impact team outcomes in different ways, dependent on the context; TC and RC. TC is conflict about the contents of a task. These conflicts are about the about the scope and interpretation of the task at hand. RC consists of disagreements regarding personal issues, such as personal or political values, taste and style. Both TC and RC negatively impact team performance in high uncertainty contexts such as project- or decision-making teams. In low uncertainty teams, both TC and RC do not have a significant negative impact (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). Jehn et al. (2008) found a third type of conflict in the literature; PC. PC consists of disagreements about delegation of tasks and responsibilities. In this study, the authors found evidence that PC also negatively impacts group outcomes through the disruption of positive group states, such as trust, respect and cohesion. Even though three distinct types of conflict are discussed, their occurrence is often interrelated (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). Because of this, in each section below, the interplay between conflict types is also briefly discussed in relation to one of the main variables of this thesis, namely JS.

2.3 Conflict and Job Satisfaction

According to Judge et al. (2020), research on the concept of JS started around the late 1920s and 1930s and can be defined as "*...an overall, evaluative judgment of one's job ranging from positive to negative"* (Judge et al., 2020, p. 210). JS has been considered in a wide range of research, because it influences several outcomes, such as job and task performance, organizational effectiveness, organizational citizenship behaviors and counterproductive work behaviors (Judge et al., 2020). This is why understanding what can hinder JS is important to minimize potential negative effects.

Despite the importance of JS in teams, relatively little research has been performed on this concept in in the Agile context (Behfar et al., 2011), however findings by Acuña et al. (2009), suggest a negative relationship between conflict and JS. Similarly, Przybilla et al. (2018) found that conflicts also lowers the JS of team members. According to several other studies, conflict does also impact JS (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; de Wit et al., 2011; Jehn et al., 2008). For instance de Wit et al. (2011) performed a meta-analysis in which the impacts of conflict on job outcomes are further analyzed and among the many outcomes, it seems that conflict has a strong negative effect on JS (Judge et al., 2020). Given the lack of research using observed conflict, for the purpose of drafting propositions it is assumed that observed conflict behaves similarly to conflict recorded through a questionnaire.

According to the meta-analysis by de Wit et al. (2011), each of the mentioned types of conflict impact JS differently. In the next sections the relationship between each type of conflict and JS will be discussed more in depth.

2.3.1 Task conflict

Firstly, in the meta-analysis de Wit et al. (2011) a negative association between TC and JS is found. The authors explain this as a consequence of stress that is generated by the negative assessment of a team members' own competencies as a result of TC. Another study also found this negative association in an Agile context (Acuña et al., 2009). However, other studies nuance these findings and argue that the relationship between TC and JS is dependent on the way in which TC is expressed and the behavioral context in which it is expressed. When TC is expressed mildly in an active learning context, it allows for more information acquisition about team members' perspectives and emotions. This enhanced information acquisition sparks more positive active emotions in participants of the conflict, which ultimately leads to higher JS (Todorova et al., 2014).

Not only does the expression of TC influence its relationship with JS, but also the frequency of the conflict matters. Jehn and Bendersky (2003) argue that even though TC can lead to creative decisions, excessive TC will erode group member satisfaction. More recently, De Clercq and Belausteguigoitia (2017) found a strong negative relationship between TC and JS. According to them, this negative relationship exists because TCs can become too intense or can be perceived as intimidating or insensitive, which causes negative feelings about the situation. On the contrary, a study by Ye et al. (2019) found evidence for a positive effect of TC on JS because TC helps develop a thorough understanding of the task at hand and it can stimulate an employee's interest in their work.

2.3.2 Relationship conflict

The second type of conflict, RC, has a more direct relationship towards satisfaction in the literature. Multiple studies confirm a negative relationship between RC and JS (de Wit et al., 2011; Hjerto & Kuvaas, 2017; Ye et al., 2019). The relationship also holds true for Agile contexts according to Acuña et al. (2009). This negative relationship can be explained through the heightened levels of resentment,

mistrust and anxiety caused by RC (Guerra et al., 2005). Furthermore, RC also negatively impacts JS because it signals interpersonal tension and rejection. This threat to self-esteem causes stress within employees, which ultimately leads to dissatisfaction about the situation in which the RC took place (Ye et al., 2019).

However, Shaw et al. (2011) offer another perspective, where RC plays a moderating role in the relationship between TC and JS. There was a stronger negative relationship between TC and satisfaction, when there was a higher level of RC. RC has this moderating role because it creates a hostile environment, in which task-related inputs are more likely to be ignored or met with antagonizing reactions.

On the contrary, Medina et al. (2005) provide evidence for a mediating role of RC on the relationship between TC and JS. According to the authors, RC has a mediating effect on the relationship, because during TC a criticism may be interpreted as personal disapproval, turning TC into RC, and in turn lowering satisfaction.

2.3.3 Process conflict

The third type of conflict, PC, is omitted in a lot of research, since several times it is hard to distinguish from TC and in other cases it is closely related to RC (Behfar et al., 2011). Additionally Passos and Caetano (2005) argue that even though a direct negative effect of PC on satisfaction has been shown, there is not a lot of theoretical support for this relationship.

In order to deal with the lack of theoretical support, Behfar et al. (2011) study two different types of PC: logistical and contribution conflict. Logistical conflict is about the effective organization and utilization of group resources; contribution conflict is more focused on disagreements on unequal contributions, such as free riders. While logistical conflict is detrimental to group performance, contribution conflict has a strong negative effect on satisfaction. Disagreement about the contribution can give team members a feeling of disrespect or a feeling of unfair burden, leaving them dissatisfied.

Furthermore, disagreements on logistics or contributions also decrease positive states such as trust and respect and disagreements on delegation can challenge team members feeling of competency. A decrease in trust, respect and feeling of competency all lower the satisfaction of a team member(Jehn et al., 2008). On top of this, Kuriakose et al. (2019) found that excessive PC hinder information exchange and information processing within teams, reducing team members perceived control on a situation which negatively affects JS.

Contrary to the belief of Passos and Caetano (2005), Jehn and Bendersky (2003) argue that PC is theoretically similar to RC. Even though PC is about logistics surrounding tasks, distributing responsibilities involves assessing a team members skills and values. Based on this conclusion, they argue that the interaction between PC and satisfaction is similar to that of RC and satisfaction.

2.3.4 Assumptions about Conflict & Job Satisfaction

To sum up, a positive effect of conflict on JS is described only in specific situations. TC only influences JS positively when it is expressed in a mild manner and not too often. No positive interactions between PC and JS or RC and JS were found. Based on the theory, the following assumptions are formulated:

Assumption 1a: The manifestation of (observed) moments of conflict (Task, Relationship and Process) is negatively associated with job satisfaction.

Assumption 1b: The manifestation of (observed) moments of conflict (Task, Relationship and Process) differs between teams whose members feel high vs low levels of job satisfaction.

2.4 Observed Conflict, Cultural Diversity & Emotional Intelligence

Even though the literature shows an overwhelming amount of evidence for the negative relationship between conflict and JS, some papers also report a positive relationship between conflict and JS (Todorova et al., 2014; Ye et al., 2019). This positive relationship can be explained by several factors, such as CD and EI of team members.

2.4.1 Observed Conflict and Cultural Diversity

Due to the subconscious nature of cultural differences, conflicts may also be more difficult to solve (Stahl et al., 2010). According to Stahl et al. (2010) cultural diversity can be defined in a broad variety of ways, however for the present study the focus lies on cultural diversity defined as a diversity of national culture. These cultural differences intensify interpersonal conflict according to Cheng et al. (2012) This can in turn lead to entrenchment of the team members in their own perspectives, which will ultimately lead to a higher conflict intensity. A higher conflict intensity has a detrimental effect on the relationship between conflict and JS (Todorova et al., 2014). Cultural differences can not only increase the difficulty to solve conflicts within teams, cultural differences can also play a role in the occurrence of conflicts, further increasing the difficulty increase team cohesion, especially in self-managing teams (Cheng et al., 2012).

On the contrary, CD may have a positive mediating effect on the relationship between PC and JS. Stahl et al. (2010) argues that CD lowers JS, because of the lack of perceived efficiency in the group. In this case, CD may weaken the negative relationship between PC and JS, because the lower perceived efficiency in culturally diverse groups may give rise to situations where PC can help establish efficient processes for working together. Based on the research, the following proposition is developed:

Assumption 2: The manifestation of (observed) moments of conflict differs between mono- and multicultural teams.

2.4.2 Observed Conflict and Emotional Intelligence

Considering the role of emotions in the relationship between conflict and JS (Todorova et al., 2014), EI may also play an important role in the occurrence of conflict. According to Mayer et al. (2000) EI is defined as the ability to express, perceive and interpret emotions and the ability to regulate emotions and to stimulate emotional growth. It is "...the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (p. 189). Since this definition, however, there have been developed competing models that are all labeled as EI. For instance, the model by Goleman (1995), which is broader than the model by Salovey and Mayer, includes self-control and persistence (Mayer et al., 2000). For the present study however, the definition of Salovey and Mayer is used for EI, because this definition remains closest to the core concept of EI and does not overlap with other concepts (Mayer et al., 2000). This definition was also used by Wong and Law (2002) to construct the questionnaire that is used in this study. The model for this definition consists of four dimensions: Appraisal and expression of emotion in the self; Appraisal and recognition of emotion in others; Regulation of emotion in the self; Use of emotion to facilitate performance. Through these four dimensions EI can influence conflict frequency and JS in multiple ways.

Firstly, EI may play moderating role for conflict, because people scoring higher on EI are better equipped to deal with their own negative emotions resulting from conflicts(through self-emotion appraisal) Not only does EI help to deal with someone's own negative emotions, but it also helps to better understand negative emotions of the opposite party and to adapt one's owns emotions consequently(through others' emotion appraisal/regulation of emotion). Both these aspects of EI help to minimize negative emotions and to buffer the impact of negative emotions on JS (Ullah, 2022). Besides managing emotions, people with high levels of EI also deal with conflicts in a more constructive matter, redirecting the focus of the conflict to work tasks (use of emotion), which may help to further mitigate the negative effects of conflict on JS (Kundi et al., 2022). Additionally, the moderating effect of EI may become stronger in culturally heterogenous teams, because according to Gao et al. (2013), EI acts as a buffer for the impact of work stressors on JS. Considering these findings, the following assumption is formulated:

Assumption 3: The manifestation of (observed) moments of conflict differs between teams that score high vs low in perceived emotional intelligence.

There is however a difference between the theory on which the assumptions are based and the present study. The assumptions are based on theory that used questionnaire items to record intragroup conflict, however the present study introduces another method for recording conflict, based on observations. A methodology was chosen to both collect data on how observed conflict can be coded and to investigate whether the formulated assumptions carry over for this novel way of measuring intragroup conflict.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The approach used in the present study to answer the research question is the mixed-methods approach. According to Saunders et al. (2019) the method of a study also influences the conclusions drawn at the end. The mixed-methods approach can help to lower the impact of the so called "method effect", the effect a chosen methodology has on the outcomes of a study, lowering the potential of unanticipated outcomes (Saunders et al., 2019). Although scholars noted that there are no clear weaknesses for the mixed methods approach (Dahler-Larsen, 2022), it does however require greater methodological knowledge by the researcher and a clear purpose for the use of mixed methods (Liping & Hsin-Hui, 2017; Saunders et al., 2019). In this study, the qualitative part of the research consisted of interpreting videos of meetings to determine if conflict took place. The reason for this approach is to aid in the measurement process and to provide insights for a novel non-questionnaire measurement of conflict, as called for by Zhao et al. (2019). To advance the qualitative findings, the quantitative part of this study consisted of statistical analyses of the observed conflict, where groups are compared to identify the role of CD and EI in relation to the manifestation of (observed) moments of conflict.

Finally, to further investigate the quantitative data, exploratory analyses were performed were the sample was split in half at the median observed conflict frequency, after which the variables JS, EI and CD were investigated for both these groups.

3.2 Data collection

The data for this research was collected in the context of a large research project at a Dutch financial organization, which was conducted by the Organizational Behavior, Change Management & Consultancy (OBCC) group of the University of Twente. Normally, for data collection which involves human participation ethical approval is required to show that accepted ethical standards are followed. In 2018, the OBCC got the ethical approval for the data collection in this research project. Hence, no specific ethical approval was required for this study. This data was collected over a time period of four years (2018-2022). The data used for the variable intragroup conflict consists of the interpretation by observers of behavior-coded videos of each Agile team in the organization participating in the research. For each team the retrospective meeting was recorded and coded.

For the variables JS, CD and EI data was retrieved by the surveys base on previously validated items each of the recorded teams had to fill out.

3.3 Sample Description

The sample for this study consists of 8 Agile teams, with a total of 67 individual members, who volunteered to participate. 48 of the members were men and 13 women. Gender data for six participants was missing. The average age of the participants was 39, ranging from 22 years old to 65

years old. The majority of the participants has the Dutch nationality (57%) followed closely by participants with the Indian nationality (12%). Three percent of the participants were of the English nationality. Finally, the German, Spanish, Peruvian, Belgian, Armenian, Hungarian, Brazilian, Slovakian, Thai, Russian and Polish nationalities each make up for 1.5% of the sample. Six of the values for nationality were missing and one participant entered "other" as their nationality. Five of the teams were considered culturally diverse and three culturally homogenous. More specifically, a team was considered culturally homogenous when it consisted of members with the same nationality and when they spoke their native language (in this case, Dutch). Vice versa, a team was considered multicultural when either at least one member was of a different nationality or when their native language was not spoken.

3.4 Measures

3.4.1 Conflict frequency

In order to determine conflict frequency within teams, all recorded team meetings were coded using a verbal behavior coding scheme developed earlier by the OBCC group of the University of Twente(Hoogeboom et al., 2021). A number of behaviors within this coding scheme were used to mark potential starting points of conflicts. The used behaviors were 'Disagreeing', 'Correcting', 'Giving negative feedback' and 'Defending own position'. These behaviors were chosen because they all signal some type of criticism (giving negative feedback about performance of a team member, disagreeing with team members' opinions) (Spencer-Oatey & Xing, 2000). These criticisms can cause disagreements or show differences between beliefs and values, which according to Zhao et al. (2019) can be considered conflict. The moments that were coded with behaviors that could indicate conflict were then judged by four coders, who each interpreted the moments independently. This was done to improve the reliability of the measurement for conflict frequency. Besides judging whether conflict took place, the coders also categorized the conflict moments in task, relationship and process conflict using the definitions by Behfar et al. (2011) and Jehn et al. (2008). However, a Fleiss multirater Kappa of only .113 was found for whether a conflict occurred or not, indicating low agreement between the coders.

3.4.2 Job satisfaction

JS was measured using the Brief Index of Affective Job Satisfaction by Thompson and Phua (2012). This instrument consists of four items which can be answered on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree (Cronbach's alpha of 0.864). A few examples of the statements posed are:

"I find real enjoyment in my job"
"I like my job better than the average person"

3.4.3 (Perceived) Emotional Intelligence

The EI of team members is retrieved using the scale designed by Wong and Law (2002). The survey items were mixed within the survey of the overall research project, in order to prevent participants from recognizing measured concepts, which may cause bias when answering the survey. The survey items measure each of the four aspects of EI: self-emotion appraisal, others' emotion appraisal, uses of emotion and regulation of emotion. There are 4 questions per aspect which can each be answered on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree (Cronbach's alpha of 0.790). Some examples of the questions in the survey are:

"I have good understanding of my own emotions"
"I am quite capable of controlling my own emotions"
"I am a good observer of others' emotions"

3.4.4 Cultural diversity (mono- vs multicultural teams)

Whether a team is culturally diverse, is determined by both retrieving participants' Nationality and most fluent language spoken. Based on the responses, the variable CD was dichotomized: Teams where cultural diversity was not present (i.e., all members were from the same nationality and the native language of all participants was spoken) are considered monocultural and teams where cultural diversity was present (i.e., there was at least one member of a different nationality and the language spoken was not the native language of the participants) were considered multicultural.

3.5 Data Analysis

3.5.1 Thematic analysis

The first step in the analysis process consisted of a deductive thematic analysis of the videotaped moments in which participants show behaviors that potentially signal conflict. A thematic analysis consists of searching across the dataset for repeated patterns of meaning, in this case, regarding conflict (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In order to do so, four coders looked at the moments where conflict potentially took place and identified whether conflict took place, based on their familiarity with the theory on conflict. In case conflict took place, they also interpreted the type of conflict that took place, through deductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), based on the definitions of TC, RC and PC by Behfar et al. (2011) and Jehn et al. (2008). Afterwards, the moments of conflict were compared to reinforce the reliability of the interpretations by the coders. In this way, the data for observed conflict was quantified in terms of frequency count, so that it can be used as a variable in the quantitative analysis.

3.5.2 Comparative and Correlation analyses

The second step in the analysis process consisted of a quantitative analysis of the data. In order to prepare the data, for each variable statistical assumptions (e.g., normality of data) were checked. This

was done to satisfy assumptions necessary for the statistical analyses performed (Mishra et al., 2019). The checks for normality wielded the following results: The variable JS on team level ($W = .95$, $p = .72$) and EI on team level ($W = .892$, $p = .246$) did not depart significantly from normality, however the variable conflict frequency did depart significantly from normality ($W = .802$, $p < .05$).

After this check, firstly a correlational analysis was done for the variables of conflict frequency and JS. Because a non-normal distribution was found for the variable of conflict frequency Spearman's correlation is used for this test. In case correlations are found, it shows that there is covariance between JS and conflict frequency. Secondly, in order to further explore the data, the correlational analyses are also performed between the specific types of conflict (TC, RC and PC). Again, a Spearman's correlation was computed since the distribution of all three categories departed significantly from normality ($W_{tc} = .809$, $p < .05$; $W_{RC} = .418$, $p < .05$; $W_{PC} = .813$, $p < .05$)

To explore the interaction between CD and observed conflict frequency, the sample was split in two groups: culturally homogenous teams (i.e., monocultural teams) and the culturally heterogenous groups (i.e., multicultural teams). To test assumption two, the difference in mean observed conflict frequency is tested. Again, because the distribution of Conflict Frequency departs significantly from a normal distribution, a Mann-Whitney U value, a non-parametric test value is computed (Saunders et al., 2019). In case a significant difference is found between the two groups, this provides evidence that the conflict in culturally homogenous teams differs from the conflict frequency in culturally heterogenous teams. This test is also performed for each of the specific types of conflict, to further explore the data.

Next, to explore assumption 3, a similar approach is taken for the EI analysis as for the moderating effects of CD. In order to compare the different levels of EI to each other, the group is first split in two groups at the median value, one with high perceived EI and one with low perceived EI, through the survey data gathered during the data collection. In case a statistically significant difference is found, this provides evidence that EI plays a role in the conflict frequency.

3.5.3 Episode Analysis

Finally, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how CD in a team interacts with conflict, two conflict episodes are analyzed. An episode can be defined as a moment in the teams activity with "... heavy engagement, salient interaction dynamics, and strategically important decisions" (Jarrett & Liu, 2018, p. 5). In the context of this thesis, the episode analysis was focused on CD, because the data did not corroborate the observations made by the observer of the present study in this regard. An episode analysis can help explain the discrepancy between the data and the observations, since a key benefit of an episode analysis is that it provides the researcher a level of understanding of a situation that other methods of research, such as interviews and surveys fail to capture (Jarrett & Liu, 2018).

4. Results

This thesis aims at exploring how observed intragroup conflict can be related to JS of Agile team members when considering both perceived EI and cultural diversity. In order to address this goal, firstly, the descriptive statistics are reported. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, variables both on team level (i.e., CD) and on individual level (i.e., EI) are reported. Secondly, the results from both the comparative and correlation analyses are shown.

4.1 Descriptive statistics

Table 1 shows the descriptives of the EI and the JS variable. After a visual and statistical inspection, both variables were both found to be normally distributed, and no significant outliers were detected. However, from this table it becomes clear that only 50 of the 67 data points are valid for this dataset for both variables EI and JS. This stems out of the fact that either the participants were not present at the first recorded meeting, where EI scores were recorded, or participants who were not present at the third recorded meeting, where JS scores were recorded.

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics on individual level for Job Satisfaction (JS) and Emotional Intelligence (EI)*

	JS	**EI**
Min	2,75	4,00
Mean	5,47	4,90
Max	7,00	6,81
SD	0,88	0,58
N	67	67
Valid N	54	61

Table 2 shows the descriptives on a team level. JS and EI were both recorded on the individual level, however a group score was calculated by averaging the scores per team for both JS and EI respectively. This table shows that there is a lot of variation in the conflict frequency per team, where on the one hand, a team had retrospective meetings where only one conflict took place, while other teams had more frequent conflicts, up to twelve conflicts within one meeting.

Table 2. *Descriptive statistics on team level of Observed Conflict Frequency, Job Satisfaction (JS) and Emotional Intelligence (EI)*

	Conflict Frequency	**JS[a]**	**EI[a]**
Min	1	4.50	4.55
Mean	4	5.46	4.86
Median	3	5.54	4.74
Max	12	6.25	5.44
SD	3.63	0.51	0.30
N	8	8	8
Valid N	8	8	8

[a] This variable has been calculated for each team.

Table 3 presents the observed instances of conflict. A total of 31 conflicts were recorded during the meetings. The rater for this study coded 22 conflicts as PC, while the other raters mentioned in section 3.2 predominantly coded conflicts as TC. The distribution of the observed conflict frequency can also be retrieved from table 3.

Table 3. *Observed conflict frequency per category*

Conflict Type	**TC**		**RC**		**PC**		**Total Conflicts**	
	N	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	*%*
Team 1001	0	0	0	0	2	9.1	2	6.5
Team 2001	4	50	0	0	9	40.9	13	41.9
Team 3001	1	12.5	0	0	2	9.1	3	9.7
Team 4001	1	12.5	0	0	0	0	1	3.2
Team 6001	0	0	0	0	1	4.5	1	3.2
Team 7001	1	12.5	1	100	1	4.5	3	9.7
Team 8001	1	12.5	0	0	2	9.1	3	9.7
Team 12001	0	0	0	0	5	22.7	5	6.2
Total	8	100	1	100	22	100	31	100

4.2 Inferential statistics

The first step was to explore Assumption 1a and 1b on the relationship between observed conflict and JS. Concerning Assumption 1a, because the variable conflict frequency does depart from normal

distribution, Spearman's rank correlation was computed between Conflict Frequency and JS. A negative monotonic relationship was found between the two variables which was, however, not statistically significant, r(6) = -.241; p = .565. To explore Assumption 1b, the sample was split in high and low JS based on the Median (Mdn = 5.53). The observed conflict frequency was compared between the high and low JS groups, but no evidence for a statistically significant difference was found (U = 4.50, p = .343). Both of the tests performed for Assumption 1 did not wield statistically significant evidence for an association between the manifestations of observed conflict and JS.

The correlational analysis for the total frequency of observed conflict, was repeated for each conflict category (TC, RC and PC). Again, Spearman's correlation was computed, due to the conflict categories not having a normal distribution. The results of these tests are reported in table 4. No evidence was found for a statistically significant relation.

Table 4. *Correlational analysis (Spearman's between Task Conflict (TC), Relationship Conflict (RC), Process Conflict (PC) and Job Satisfaction (JS)*

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. JS	---			
2. TC	-.701			
3. RC	.247	.087		
4. PC	-.233	.219	-.340	---

The Mann-Whitney U test was repeated for each conflict category as well. The results for these tests are reported in table 4. None of the differences between low and high JS teams were found to be statistically significant.

Table 5. *Comparison of conflict frequency for Task Conflict (TC), Relationship Conflict (RC) and Process Conflict (PC) between high and low job satisfaction (JS) teams*

	Job Satisfaction level:		
	Low JS	**High JS**	
	(n = 4)	(n = 4)	
Conflict Type:	**Mean rank**	**Mean Rank**	**Mann-Whitney U**
TC	5.50	3.50	4.00
RC	4.00	5.00	10.00
PC	5.75	3.25	3.00

Secondly, Assumption 2 was explored, which entailed a difference in the manifestation of (observed) moments of conflicts between mono- and multicultural teams. In order to explore this assumption, the

number of conflicts was compared between multicultural and monocultural teams. Again, a non-parametric test is used to compare the groups, since Conflict Frequency was not normally distributed. The Mann-Whitney U was computed, and this test indicated that there was no significant difference between the conflict frequency of multi- and monocultural teams (U = 2.50, p = .143). Like Assumption 1, the tests for Assumption 2 were also repeated for each subcategory of conflict. However, no significant difference was found between mono- and multicultural teams for TC (U = 1.00, p = .071), RC (U = 9.00, p = .786) and PC (U = 3.00, p = .250).

Thirdly, Assumption 3 was explored, in which it was explored whether the manifestation of observed moments of conflicts differs between teams score high and low on perceived EI. The first step for this exploration was to split the sample based on the median team EI (Mdn = 4.74; SD = .30). This splits the group in 4 low average EI groups and 4 high average EI groups. The observed conflict frequency between the high average EI groups and low average EI groups was compared by computing the Mann-Whitney U. The results of this test did not provide significant evidence that the distribution of Conflict Frequency differs between teams with high average EI and teams with low average EI (U = 6.00, p = .686). Similar to Assumption 1 and 2, this test was also repeated for each subcategory of Conflict. The frequency of TC, RC and PC was compared across high average EI and low average EI teams through computing the Mann Whitney U for each conflict category. The results for these tests are reported in table 5. None of the differences between high and low average EI were found to be statistically significant.

Table 6. *Comparison of conflict frequency for Task Conflict (TC), Relationship Conflict (RC) and Process Conflict (PC) between high and low average Emotional Intelligence (EI) teams*

	Average Emotional Intelligence:		
	Low EI (n = 4)	**High EI** (n = 4)	
Conflict Type:	**Mean rank**	**Mean Rank**	**Mann-Whitney U**
TC	5.50	3.50	4.00
RC	4.00	5.00	10.00
PC	5.13	3.88	5.50

4.3 Further Exploratory Analyses

In order to investigate the dataset beyond the assumptions formulated, additional exploratory analyses were performed. First of all, assumption 1 was investigated in the opposite direction, whether the average JS differs between teams with high and low conflict frequency. To do so, the sample was split in two groups, based on the number of conflicts observed within a team. The sample was split at the

median, grouping five teams as low number of conflicts observed, and three teams as high number of conflicts observed. To compare the means of these two newly constructed groups an independent samples t-test was performed. The assumption of normality was met in this case because JS was normally distributed. This test showed that there was no statistically significant difference in mean JS between teams with a high number of observed conflicts (M = 5.36; SD = .88) and teams with a low number of observed conflicts (M = 5.52; SD = .23), t(6) = .422; p = .688.

Assumption 2 was also investigated in the opposite direction. Again the high and low conflict frequency groups were compared for this analysis. Four out of five low conflict frequency teams were multicultural teams, while one out of three high conflict frequency teams was a multicultural team. This suggests that in this sample there are more monocultural teams that have a high frequency and there are more multicultural teams that have a low conflict frequency, however a Chi-Square test to compare the distributions did not wield statistically significant evidence: X^2 (1, N = 9) = 1.74, p = .19.

The high and low conflict frequency groups were compared again to also test Assumption 3 in the opposite direction. Because, after visual inspection, EI was not normally distributed, a non-parametric test is used again. The mean EI rank of the low conflict frequency group (Mean Rank = 4.6) was close to the mean EI rank of the high conflict frequency group (Mean Rank = 4.3) and as expected the test did also not indicate a significant difference between the high and low conflict frequency group (U = 7, p = .88).

4.4 Episode Analysis

Finally, to explore through a more qualitative approach how conflict impacts JS in mono and in multicultural teams, a conflict of a monocultural and of a multicultural team are analyzed and compared. The episodes chosen for this analysis, were a process conflict in team 2001 and a process conflict in team 6001. The reason these two teams were chosen was because they scored relatively similar on average JS (JS_{2001} = 5.32, JS_{6001} = 5.71) and on average EI (EI_{2001} = 4.62, EI_{6001} = 4.55), but had a big difference in conflict frequency, were team 2001 had a conflict frequency of 12 and team 6001 had a conflict frequency of 1. A process conflict was chosen because team 6001 only displayed a process conflict, and by investigating the same type of conflict the possibility that the type of conflict influences the differences between the teams is eliminated. The transcription of both conflicts can be found in Appendix I and Appendix II.

4.4.1 Assumptions and Expression of Opinion

The first conflict episode concerns a process conflict about the responsibility for the quality of newly generated leads. This conflict lasts two minutes and takes place between F7 and F9. This conflict was analyzed because it displays clearly how team members react to disagreements and conflict. The conflict starts with F9 announcing that the teams should work on their goals for the next quarter. The following excerpt shows this interaction:

F7: *This – this is not nice. I don't – I don't like it that..*

F9: *This does not work?*

F7: *...we quickly have to come up with something.*

F10: *No.*

F9: *Well, you don't have to come up with something in that way.*

What stands out in this excerpt is the initial reaction of F7 to something she does not agree with. Her first reaction is to announce in the middle of the group that she does not like what F5 has said. She expresses a strong personal opinion based on an assumption about what was said.

F7 responds to this that the goals have already been formulated during the present meeting and that she would rather spend some time apart to formulate her own goals. F9 explains to F7 that what was discussed during the meetings were the so-called "learnings" and that they can now think about the "how" of implementing these learnings. F9 explains that the learnings will also be sent in the email the next morning and that it is fine that the team works on the learnings later on. F7 agrees, but she physically turns away from the conversation, stands up and takes her phone out of her bag, not looking interested in the conversation anymore. Meanwhile, F5 starts asking questions to F9 about his personal goals, and the process conflict is ultimately forgotten.

A common theme in this conflict episode is that the team members are making assumptions about what is said (*"...even heel snel iets moeten verzinnen / ...have to quickly make [a goal] up*"). Another theme in this conflict episode was ignoring miscommunications. F7 answers in an affirmative way to the response on her negative feedback, but is visibly dissatisfied by the answer of F9. Meanwhile, after further clarification, after F9 clarifies that she meant her remark as a suggestion and that it is fine that the team members work on the the goals later, the conflict quickly dissolves. This is illustrated at the end of the conflict by the following excerpt:

F9: *Well, this – you will get the goals later in your email, tomorrow morning, so if you want to think about it then, that is all fine by me*.

After this explanation F3 asks a question about the content of the goals, F7 sits down again and the conversation continues.

4.4.2 Verifying Interpretations

The second conflict starts with a misunderstanding about whether missing values should be used before an add-on can be added to a release. This conflict lasts around eight minutes and takes place mainly between F3, F6 and F1. This conflict was chosen because it shows a clear contrast with Team 2001 in dealing with the conflict.

The conflict starts with F6 suggesting that first the requirements for an add-on need to be approximated before the requirements of embedding this add-on are approximated. In response, F1 says that he remembers F3 giving other instructions about always using values. F3 responds that what F1 says is true, but afterwards clarifying what he meant through explaining that variables should always be used, but that the use of these variables should be visible. Based on this answer, F5 starts asking questions about other negative figures on the board. The team asks more questions towards F3, to which he clarifies further what he meant. After F6 answers this question. After this answer, F4 asks if the calculation of add-ons is a responsibility of their squad, or that they should rather focus on implementation, since this information was not forwarded to the team. In a reaction to this, F6 asks about the presence of the team and F1 answers this question, by saying that one of the team members works only 2 days. F6 explains that he thought there would be focus on the discussed tasks full time and says that he needs to check the rules around the things. This concludes the conflict, and the team moves on to the next stick note on the board.

A common theme in this episode is that assumptions made are verified by the team members. This is illustrated by the following excerpts:

- *F1: "...I remembered that eh one day [name of the person] said okay, we need to use <rigor> timers, thinking and priorities are super necessary and now maybe you have changed your mind or?"*
- *F4: Just, I think this just eh about the division of the tasks, right?*

Another common theme in this conflict episode is the neutral tone of the conversation. During the conflict, participants let each other finish their sentences, and a calm tone of voice was used by the participants throughout the conflict episode.During the meeting, the team members look at each other during communication and the team member smile while challenging each other. For example, when F1 challenges F6 about using certain values, he says it with a smile on his face, as if he is looking to receive an explanation for the difference between what F6 says and what he heard before.

Comparing the two episodes, there are no specific differences that can be directly linked to the cultural diversity in the teams. There is however one clear difference between the two teams. On the one hand, in the monocultural team, in the case of disagreement, the team members put forward their opinion about the disagreement, while in the multicultural team, in the case of a disagreement, the team members verified their interpretation first, defusing the disagreement and converging the viewpoints of the team members.

5. Discussion

The goal of this thesis was to investigate whether and how observed intragroup conflicts could be related to the JS of Agile team members, especially when considering the variables cultural diversity

(i.e., mono- vs multicultural teams) and EI. Based on the results theoretical implications with regards to the measure of observed moments of conflict and the role of CD and EI in conflict have been formulated. Besides theoretical implications, training opportunities and areas of focus for scrum masters, product owners and Agile managers are identified. Below the theoretical and practical implications of this thesis are discussed.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

5.1.1. Observed Moments of Conflict

The first theoretical implication of this thesis concerns the exploration of *observed* moments of conflict through video observations. Previous research called for new measures of conflict that allow for further development of conflict theory (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Zhao et al., 2019). Our results showed that none of the tests surrounding the assumption of a negative relationship between observed conflict frequency and JS wielded statistically significant results, even though the theory suggested the presence of this relationship (de Wit et al., 2011; Jehn et al., 2008; Judge et al., 2020). One potential explanation is that the *observed* conflict variable in this thesis measures something slightly different than the conflict measured through questionnaires, because questionnaires are subject to self-report bias (Zhao et al., 2019). Moreover, on the one hand questionnaires are subject to a tendency of participants answering in a socially desirable way, while on the other hand an observer is subject to observer bias, relying on common sense knowledge to some extent (Saunders et al., 2019). The difference in what is measured by questionnaires and by observations can be an explanation for the absence of a statistically significant difference.

For the observed conflict measure, there were also differences between the observations of each coder. Even though there was agreement on when conflicts occurred between at least two coders, a total Fleiss multirater Kappa was found. This could indicate that even though the four raters did recognize conflict, just familiarity with the subject is not enough. According to Saunders et al. (2019), when constructing a coding schedule "...observation categories in your schedule should be devised to be consistent with your research question and objectives" (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 307). Each coder had a different research question and objectives with their studies. Moreover, even with a consistent coding scheme, the observations are still subject to the cultural lens of the researcher. In order to improve the reliability of the construct observed conflict frequency, the conflict categories should be more clearly specified and the amount of observer interpretation should be reduced by formulating clear agreements on when a conflict starts (Kothari, 2013; Saunders et al., 2019).

When specifying the conflict categories more precisely, it is especially important to distinguish clearly between task and process conflict. For the present thesis, a majority of the conflict behaviors were coded as PC, while in earlier research on the same dataset, the majority of the conflict behaviors was coded as TC. These concepts are also difficult to distinguish and and it can even be argued that the

concepts are not always mutually exclusive because of inconsistent use of TC definitions in research (Behfar et al., 2011). In order to improve the construct of observed conflict, a clear distinction is necessary between PC and TC based on Behfar et al. (2011), rather than distinguishing TC and PC based on the coders familiarity with the conflict theory.

5.1.2 Cultural Diversity and Observed moments of Conflict

The second theoretical contribution of this thesis concerns the role of national culture and EI in conflicts in self-managed teams. With regard to cultural diversity, during the coding, no difference was recognized by the observer between multicultural and monocultural teams. This is supported by the analysis results, since there were no statistically significant results in observed conflict frequency between mono- and multicultural teams. This is in contrast with the studies by Todorova et al. (2014) and Cheng et al. (2012), who underlined the increased conflict intensity in multicultural teams and its detrimental impact on JS A potential explanation for the lack of statistically significant evidence might be related to Stahl et al. (2010) explanation, according to which an individual's culture is not only shaped by their country of origin or their language but can also be influenced by their organization and profession. In this case, the organizational or professional aspects of culture might have become more dominant than the national backgrounds of the participants. However, this is one potential explanation on which future research is still needed (Nelson & Gopalan, 2003).

The episode analysis highlights a second theoretical implication in regards to the positive impact of PC in multicultural teams. Stahl et al. (2010) argued that in some cases, PC can have a positive impact on the JS of the team. A theme that emerged in the findings of the episode analysis was the verification of assumptions. During the meeting, every time there was a discrepancy between the team members, verifying questions were asked first create clarity about the viewpoints of each participant. According to Tenzer and Pudelko (2015), focusing on communication clarity is important to mitigate the negative effects of multicultural teams. This is very much aligned once again with the results of the episode analysis: contrary to what assumed by Cheng et al. (2012), the tone of the conflict rather than intensifying because of cultural differences, remained calm. Hence, communication clarity might act as a mitigating variable for the effects of cultural diversity on conflict intensity.

5.1.3 Emotional Intelligence and Observed moments of Conflict

As part of the second contribution of this thesis, the role of EI in relationship to observed moments of conflict was also investigated. In the theory of the present study, the concept of EI was linked to the observed moments of conflict through the emotions that play a role when conflict occurs. The findings of this thesis show no significant connection between EI and the presence of conflict. The gap between previous research and the results of this study may be explained by the findings by Rispens and Demerouti (2016). Rispens and Demerouti (2016) argued that conflict is also a continuous process and that the emotions involved in conflict are dependent on the detachment of conflict and the conflicts of

the day before. Since the present study only captured one meeting, while the observed teams are continuously working together, both conflict detachment and the history of the conflicts can explain the lack of a significant connection between EI and the presence of conflict.

Moreover, Jehn et al. (2008) showed that the number of emotions that conflict brings forth can be dependent on several other factors. One of these factors is, for instance, conflict efficacy The easier a team feels their conflicts are to resolve, the less emotions are involved in the actual conflict. Considering that EI is a construct that describes one's ability to manage one's own and others emotions (Mayer et al., 2000), the theoretical link between EI and observed conflict becomes less strong when fewer emotions are involved in the conflict, potentially explaining the lack of statistically significant differences in conflict frequency between high and low EI teams.

5.2 Practical Implications

This thesis also brought forth a number of practical implications. First of all, observed conflict frequency and JS do not seem to be correlated, nor is there a significant difference in conflict frequency between high and low average JS. The teams may not benefit from just reducing the conflict within teams, but managers and Agile leaders should focus on how conflict takes place and how it can be prevented. Furthermore, especially in multicultural teams Agile leaders and especially the scrum masters or product owner could focus on creating communication clarity during meetings. They should intervene when assumptions are made within meetings and in that case ask for clarification of the team members.

A second practical implication of this thesis is a training opportunity with regard to making assumptions in the case of disagreements. The episode analysis showcased the difference in approach towards conflict between a monocultural team with a high conflict frequency and a multicultural team with low conflict frequency. The difference in approach could not be directly linked to the cultural diversity of the teams, it did however show what caused the difference in conflict frequency. The team with low conflict frequency made less assumptions and verified what was said in case of disagreement. In order to lower the conflict frequency within teams, managers should organize trainings on how to deal with assumptions in teams. By doing so, the communication clarity within the team are improved and the negative impacts of having a multicultural team are reduced (Tenzer & Pudelko, 2015).

Finally, the findings of this thesis highlight that even though past studies suggested that EI can play an important role in the occurrence of conflict, rather than developing EI, workshops should be organized that focus on developing conflict efficacy. Improving the conflict efficacy of a team helps the team resolve conflicts and reduces the emotions involved within conflicts (Jehn et al., 2008). Besides conflict efficacy, Agile managers, scrum masters and product owners should monitor daily conflict frequency. In case of high conflict frequency they should identify the cause and steer to lower it,

because the frequency of conflicts in the past influences the emotional load of new conflicts (Rispens & Demerouti, 2016).

6. Limitations & Future Research

Despite the discussed results, the present study also had its limitations. First of all, the sample consisted of a total of only 67 participants of one large Dutch financial institution. In future research, the impact of cultural diversity on the manifestation of observed conflict should be evaluated in a bigger sample, ideally across multiple organizations to account for other aspects of culture (Stahl et al. (2010), especially considering the call by Nelson and Gopalan (2003) for more research on the link between national and organizational culture.

A second limitation of the present study is the lack of theoretical background for the chosen conflict-instigating behaviors. In total, 731 conflict-instigating behaviors were observed, of which only 31 were identified as leading to conflict. This can be a valid outcome, however to test whether this is the case, the theory should be examined and the definition of a conflict-instigating behavior should be refined beyond “behaviors that signal some type of criticism”.

Another reason additional research is necessary on the construct of observed conflict frequency is the discrepancy between the coders that used this measure. Even though there was agreement on when conflicts occurred between at least two coders, a total Fleiss multirater Kappa of only .113 was found. This could indicate that even though the four raters did recognize conflict, just familiarity with the subject is not enough. In order to successfully use this method of measuring conflict, a clear agreed upon definition of conflict is necessary.

Finally, the tests performed in the present study were all aimed at investigating direct interactions between conflict frequency and the variables EI, CD and JS. For future research a point of interest could be to investigate the moderating roles of EI on the relationship between observed conflict frequency and JS. Theoretically, no direct link can be found between EI and the occurrence of conflict, however a plethora of theories about the role of EI in conflict management is available, suggesting a more moderating role of EI rather than a variable impacting conflict frequency (Kundi et al., 2022; Ullah, 2022).

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis aimed to investigate the relationship between observed intragroup conflict and the JS of Agile team members, considering the variables of EI and CD. The theoretical implications derived from the findings shed new insights into the nature of conflict and its impact on team dynamics.

The exploration of observed moments of conflict through video observations yielded interesting results. Contrary to the expected negative relationship between observed conflict frequency and JS, no statistically significant findings were obtained. This suggests that the observed conflict variable used in this study may tap into a different construct compared to conflict measured through questionnaires, which are susceptible to self-report bias and socially desirable responses.

Concluding, this thesis contributes to the existing literature by highlighting the challenges in measuring *observed* conflict and the need for clearer categorization of conflict types. The study also challenges previous theories regarding the impact of CD and EI on conflicts in self-managed teams. By deepening our understanding of these factors, future research can explore strategies to enhance team dynamics, promote effective conflict resolution, and ultimately improve job satisfaction in Agile teams. In this way, organizational performance can be increased while at the same time boosting employee happiness.

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9. Appendix

Transcript of Conflict team 2001(01:32:27 – 01:33:42)

F7: Dit - dit is niet leuk. Ik vind - ik vind niet het niet leuk dat ik dat.

F9: Dit werkt niet?

F7: Even heel snel iets moet verzinnen.

F10: Nee.

F9: Nou, je hoeft het in die zin nog niet te verzinnen.

F7: Wat?

F9: Het zou een opzetje zijn om later uit te werken.

F7: Ja.

F9: Maar als jullie zeggen: vind ik niet oké.

F7: Nee, want.

F10: Ik zou effe apart, eh, gaan.

F7: Want - want we hebben die doelen al.

F9: Ja. Jullie hebben de learnings.

F5: Ja.

F7: De - nee, maar, eh... eh, eh, eh.. even kijken, er zijn al doelen geformuleerd.

F9: Ja.

F8: Ja.

F9: En het gaat om de invulling van het hoe van de doelen.

F10: Hm.

F7: Ja, nou, sorry, ik, eh...

F9: Nee, je - ze- zeg maar. Als je zegt: dit is gewoon niet het moment ervoor, dan vind ik dat ook prima, hè, jongens.

F10: Ik denk dat wij.

F9: Als je zegt ik doe dit liever op een ander moment.

F10: Even een momentje.

F7: Wij moeten.

F2: Ja.

F7: Wat? Ja of zeg ik nu iets raars?

F5: Nee.

F9: Zeg het maar.

F5: Nee, ik snap - ik - nee, het is meer gewoon ik - ik wil voor klanttevredenheid, dus, eh... is het gewoon wat daar staat.

F2: Ja.

F7: Ja, daar kom je ook in een doel ondergenomen, dus, eh..

F9: Oké.

F5: Maar je.

F7: Ik moet sowieso eerst effe inlezen.

F5: Echt in het verlengde van de stappen naar succes.

F2: Ja.

F5: Dat dat daar moeten we - daar moeten.

F7: Ik zie wel.

F2: Misschien handig dat we donderdag <> dat je dan effe.

F5: Ja. Ik maak gewoon <>. Die drie.

F2: Is goed.

F5: Dingen, die moet je gewoon halen, dus, ja.

F2: Ja. Ja, die had ik al natuurlijk, dus dan, eh.

F9: Nou, dit - jullie krijgen de doelen sowieso gewoon straks in, eh..

F5: Ja.

F9: In jullie mail, hè.

F10: Ja.

F9: Morgenochtend.

F2: Yes.

F5: Ja.

F9: Dus als jullie er dan over na willen denken en het.

F2: Ja.

F9: Op een andere manier even willen uitwerken, is echt all fine by me.

F5: Ja.

Transcript of Conflict team 7001(00:19:38 - 00:27:22)

F4: I is good to make it clear in the mind: What are the steps first? And what is the eh- way to handle? And also for there to we can actually imbed into the whole eh-

F1: Yes, no yeah yeah I understand. But I mean eh- I remembered that eh one day [Name of the person] said okay, we need to use <rigor> timers, thinking and priorities are super necessary and now maybe you have changed your mind or?

F6: No, I—I-- I think you should have a clear view on the steps that come with it in the different possible directions. We need to choose given the visibility. This is <> I can say we can discuss, it is a little bit of <> forget <> in the box. Because, you might to do the one. And because of that you also do all of the others. I think if you want to do that, then it is probably better do all the next steps. <> this thing was supposed to provide <>. In the end it did not provide the workday and the <> right. It was because everything has been very dated; the <>time, the pool. So this was not supposed to take over the discussions and the eh <> That eh was the second point. And the last one was the <> they are asking it. I am so thankful for < this in the right>. We really tried to <fence> and to give back <>. I cannot give it today. Eh, I would like to to <thank to that>. was it checked. A bit <to the back> and a bit <to the front>, so after some time that can be checked in black and white <>. Later, we will go into the <DC>. There was no way to take it <> to the black and white, black or white. So this is the difficultly, the more the steps, eh- But to see it as a whole this is the really best. But eh- <>.

F1: Okay.

F6: <> It will be approximately, which is the least black or white, yes. I mean there are a lot of different possibilities but be aware that <>

F5: Is this what I think eh- is with the data <>? And then <> to introduce.

F1: Basically I mean like, this is again a <good> way to grown up. No, but eh- maybe I feel like we do not have the right to it.

F6: No, but eh- I mean eh this a <task>, when you think about this.

F1: Yes.

F6: It is much more than just a little bit of this and that. There is more. Eh- Then there is a position, when we must define the chances of <>

F5: So, yeah. you can depose, as a such <> of the quality and probably in the end you will have it also.

F3: <>

F6: So yeah, because what I mean is that, in this we know that the difference between the eh columns is ten percent approximately. I know for black and white is eh-

F1: Yeah.

F6: That is eh not correct . But when we talk about the <delayed> time, we have to understand that if you do not see the full of the eh- <> , it is more difficult eh, to see it moving a little bit, but eh- and after you keep on- You keep on persisting the difficulty, to see and then all we know is that it is not-

F5: Yes. But I am just asking, what is the negative for the negative in the checking process and the quality between the countries, so what is the negative?

F6: So I think focussing on one goal eh- for it and wait. Eh and- For example the thing with the law. The delay was developed into the goals <> . And then you need to continue to focus on closing <the wrong condition >. Think about a condition when it goes <as it> assist, <> They are all saying this to protect and that was no the deal. <>

F4: That was something, that was agreed to get on by the ING. We were expected to <do it like this.>

F6: So eh- I do not know where exactly. But I remember eh- to me eh- December, the beginning of December, they were talking about the <> then they do not consulate any-, they do everything.

F1: Yes.

F6: So looking eh- <> It is better communicate with to the team issues that say something to ING. Probably the similar blocks are not aware for both. That.

F4: Just, I think this just eh about the division of the tasks right? So for example you have do get it with a fellow teammate and then you are going to regarding the responsibilities. And then a sort of like, calculating the <airmos> and eh calibrating the shows from the beginning onwards eh- We will create something that would still be a IC spot. Then you can move the focus on the more specific tasks like a combination <of entities>. At the end of this, take a broad status within the process and I think this is exactly how we can do it by the moment now as well. It is nice to eh- to let it out eh- And

maybe that information was not <stable> well enough to eh team as well. I think when we try to solve that now, you are also more relying our tasks eh- on <>

F6: <> to that. This is a new eh- It is good to get a question from you eh, because I am the one who is-

F4: I, I, I

F6: When I hear that-

F4: So, who- who is- is is colours here, except for these two weeks , because then there was an arrangement made with the <approvement> project I believe. <Bouke> is very good in doing it like this or a week like this <> a lot since we started.

F6: The first from the start?

F4: Yeah, not seven days in the week.

F6: Because it is not crazy there, what I thought was to the focus on these things fulltime.

F4: Okay, that would make me eh <>

F6: But then it is a reasoning, I think to eh- be sure of what are the rules around these things so <> introduce it, so-

F4: <> Normally that is then us, who are usually more <> to work on the process?

F1: Yes, I think this is a first <avenue>, a first yes.

F6: No no, as <> uses the soaks from the two <> more, but we did not have enough <> back then. And then the theory to work on the eh <hacks>. <> So it is- So I mean, be sure you eh-

F1: That- That is bad, it will be at the back of the <>, yes.

F5: But eh- <> it is on going so.

F6: Just make sure you know it yes.

F1: Okay.

F6: And for this <> I forgot the thing, but this is a positive.

F1: The first thing is-

F6: It will go here.

F1: Oh yeah.

F6: It is because-

F1: You did not have the time?

F6: No, but I-

F1&F5: Hahaha.