Working together: how difficult is it for students to collaborate on projects?

Collaboration in student pairs make it or break it.

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Overview

Abstract

This present study examines how students act when faced with conflict during collaboration with other students on course assignments. More specifically, the effects of kind of relationship (acquaintance vs. collaborator vs. stranger) on conflict, conflict resolution strategies and reconciliation strategies were studied. This study also investigated the effects of relationship satisfaction and of prior experiences on conflict resolution. 299 Dutch students from Leiden University who worked on assignments in pairs or in groups completed the first part of a two-step questionnaire. 72 students from this sample completed the second part, selected because they had indicated they had experienced conflict with their partners.

Almost no effects for relationship type on conflict resolution and reconciliation were found, with only two exceptions. Students use collaboration as a conflict resolution strategy more often than avoidance and competition, and acquaintances have less conflict than collaborators and strangers. Possible explanations for the almost complete absence of effects are that the group that had experienced conflict was rather small in comparison, which led to even small and unequal group sizes for different relationship types. Therefore, further research on conflict resolution and reconciliation is recommended.

Keywords. Conflict, conflict resolution, reconciliation, relationship type, relationship satisfaction, students.

1. Introduction

Students often need to work together on a project during the course of their studies; they may find themselves needing to work in a pair or in a group. Partner pairs, also known as *dyads*, are defined as the smallest possible social group of students working together on an assignment. As students work together, conflict may occur in different situations. For instance, one partner does not put in as much effort as the other, or the pairs are unmatched in their abilities with one partner being more capable than the other. Furthermore, there can be disagreement about work allocation, different personal values and about the correct answer to the assignment. Conflict during assignment work may have a negative impact on the final grade of the project or on the relationship between the two students. Students want to receive a desirable mark for their work, so it is necessary for them to find a way to cooperate together for the completion of the assignment.

If students are given the freedom to choose their own partner, whom would they choose? What kind of a relationship would the students have with one another? Is it possible to be not connected at all, since the instructors randomly assign the pairs? It is interesting how the relationship type of the student pair can cause conflict to occur, and the relationship type can also be affected by the occurrence of conflict. Which conflict resolution and reconciliation strategies do students use? How do earlier experiences with pair work have an impact on the current work situation? Although pair work is a common way of working together, not much is known about what occurs during the conflict. The purpose of the present study is to examine conflict behavior of different types of student pairs working together on assignments.

1.1 Conflict and student pairs

Conflict

Conflict is a normal segment in our daily lives; it seems to be an inevitable process within pairs, groups and organizations. Conflict can be defined as a struggle about values, status power and tangible things with opposite interests between two or more individuals or groups (Coser, 1956). A conflict arises when actions or beliefs of one person generate discomfort or

feelings of threat to another person. Such a situation causes disagreement, discard and friction between these individuals or groups, so they may grow to stand more in opposition than in support of each other (Forsyth, 2006). Conflict is mostly seen as something negative due to the fact that it may cause disagreement, stress and social chaos during the act of collaboration; on some occasions, conflict can even lead to violence. However, conflict can also have positive effects; for instance, it can lead to solutions of higher quality than solutions without conflict (Dincyurek & Civelek, 2008).

Students who work together can become involved in different types of conflict. According to Jehn (1995), conflict can be subdivided in *task* conflict, *relationship* conflict and *process* conflict. *Task* conflict is caused by different opinions on aspects of the tasks, such as when the difficulty of the task makes it hard for students to come to an agreement. This kind of conflict may not only have negative consequences, but also positive consequences. For example, it can improve the quality of work and produce more alternative ideas. In group work, conflict can help group members to think further and avoid conformity traps (Torrance, 1957). The next type of conflict is *relationship* conflict, which refers to personal tensions in which negative emotions such as irritation, frustration and anger play an important role. An example of relationship conflict is when the students do not like each other, or when there are mutual irritations regarding personal characteristics. As a result, relationship conflict causes hostility, disturbs the harmony and undermines the trust in a partner pair. The last type of conflict—*process* conflict—deals with the logistic aspect of the task, such as the responsibility for a part of the assignment or the deadline of the task. Process conflict has a negative influence on the effectiveness of the student pairs (Rispen & Jehn, 2012).

Earlier studies show inconsistent results about the effects of task and relationship conflict on team and group performance. There are studies according to which task conflict is mainly functional for group performance, whereas relationship conflict is dysfunctional (McShane & Von Glinow, 2000; Robbins, 2000; Rollinson 2002). However, other studies have found a negative correlation between task conflict and team or group performance (Jehn, Nortcraft & Neale, 1999), or no significant relationship at all (Kurtzberg, 2000). De Dreu and Weingart (2003) found that both task conflict and relationship conflict exhibit a disruptive effect on performance, with relationship conflict being more disruptive than task conflict. This may be due to how relationship conflicts are generally more interpersonal and emotional than

task conflicts, and therefore will elicit a more negative affective response than task conflicts. According to studies by Langfred (2007), Rispens et al. (2007) and Wilhelm et al. (1993), people with high levels of relationship conflict have lower levels of trust in their relationship and feel less content at work than people with low levels of relationship conflict. This may lead to psychological withdrawal and high turnover intention. So, conflict can cause both destructive and beneficial outcomes.

Chan and Chen (2010) have identified a number of situations that could cause conflict among student pairs during the stage of cooperation. They listed these eight possible causes: *poor communication, poor task management, unfair work allocation, unequal treatment, being egocentric, having different values, lack of sense of responsibility* and *lack of initiative.* Chan and Chen (2010) only examined the causes of conflict between students who worked together in groups; the specific causes for student pairs in conflict are still unknown. It is possible that differences in capability and differences in ambition can also be very important factors that cause conflict between student pairs. In the present study, these two items are added to the eight causes listed by Chan and Chen (2010) for the purpose of examining which item generally causes the most conflict in different types of student pair. The present study will look at to which extent the three types of conflict (task, relationship, and process), occur in student pairs, and whether they are constructive or destructive.

Students in pair work

According to Laursen and Hafen (2010), conflict between two people entails disagreement, which is manifested in incompatible or opposing behaviors or views. Laursen & Collins (1994) suggested that differences in conflict and conflict behavior are dependent on the characteristics of the quarreling couple, both their personal characteristics and their mutual relation characteristics. A fundamental characteristic of a pair is that both partners are dependent on one another, meaning that they need each other for carrying out tasks and accomplishing goals (LeDoux, Gorman & Woehr, 2012). When individuals have invested more time in their relationship, they are more likely to be committed to one another and more willing to engage in positive coping to deal with conflict. If student pairs working together already have some relatedness or history with one another prior to their work relationship, this should weaken the probability for the working relationship to be dissolved when conflict

occurs (Ismail, Richard & Taylor, 2012).

  Laursen and Collins (1994) suggested that the conflict and the conflict behavior depend on the characteristics of the two people in question. For this reason, the present study will highlight three types of student pairs, namely *collaborators*, *acquaintances* and *strangers*. The distinction is based on the relationship history of the partners. In the first two types there already is a degree of familiarity: *collaborators* are students who have already worked together on assignments before, while *acquaintances* are students who know each other quite well, but have not collaborated with each other before. The third type of student pair is students who are *strangers*, students who either did not or barely know each other and have never worked together before. At first glance, strangers may have more conflict during collaboration than collaborators and acquaintances.

  According to Jehn (1995), relationship conflict will have a larger negative impact on relationship satisfaction than both task and process conflict. This may be due to the fact that both task and process conflict are less personal and involve less emotional processing than relationship conflict. Therefore, the impact of relationship conflict should be even greater when the student pair consists of collaborators and acquaintances, since these two types of student pairs would value their relationships with their partners more in comparison to strangers who do not know each other. These considerations lead to the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Strangers in student pairs have more conflict than acquaintances, who will have more conflict than collaborators.
Hypothesis 2a: All three kinds of conflict types have a negative effect on relationship satisfaction of the students.
Hypothesis 2b: Relationship conflict has a more negative effect on relationship satisfaction in comparison to both task and process conflict.
Hypothesis 2c: The negative effect of relationship conflict on relationship satisfaction is stronger for collaborators and acquaintances than for strangers.

1.2 Conflict resolution strategies

Conflict resolution can be defined as the behavior and intention of people in the process of

bringing conflict to an end. If there are no effective conflict resolution strategies, the conflict can escalate over time. People in conflict may use different styles of conflict resolution, and tend to have individual preferences for how they respond to conflict (Jensen-Campbell, Gleason, Adams & Malcolm, 2003). According to Jehn (1997), the conflict resolution strategy also depends on the type of conflict.

There has been a lot of research conducted on how people respond to conflict. As a result, differing typologies of conflict resolution have been conceived, which have some elements in common. Thomas and Kilmann (1974) proposed five conflict resolution strategies based on two dimensions: assertiveness and cooperativeness. Assertiveness is attempting to satisfy one's own concerns, while cooperativeness is about satisfying somebody else's concern (Figure 1). The first strategy Thomas and Kilmann (1974) mentioned was *accommodation*, which is the surrendering of one's own needs and wishes in order to accommodate the other party after a conflict. *Avoidance* is the strategy in which one ignores the conflict, acting as if nothing happened, which leaves the conflict unresolved in the end, which can be a trigger for future conflict. The third strategy is *collaboration,* where the individuals work together to find a solution that is beneficial for both parties—they strive for a win-win situation. The fourth strategy is *compromise*, in which both parties try to come to an agreement by meeting each other "in the middle", which often is not the optimal solution. In *competition*, individuals remain assertive about their own concerns at the expense of the other party, and their own objectives are perceived as being more important than those of others. Graziano, Jensen-Campbell and Hair (1996) also proposed five strategies to resolve conflict using different terminology: the term obliging was used instead of accommodation; dominating was used instead of competition; and integrating was used instead of collaboration. The only terms they used that are the same as the ones used by Thomas and Kilmann (1974) are avoidance and compromise. This is an example of having different names for similar or the same resolution strategies.

COMPETITION   COLLABORATION

ASSERTIVENESS
(Attempting to satisfy one's own concerns)

ASSERTIVE

COMPROMISE

UNASSERTIVE

Avoiding   ACCOMMODATION

UNCOOPERATIVE   COOPERATIVE

COOPERATIVENESS
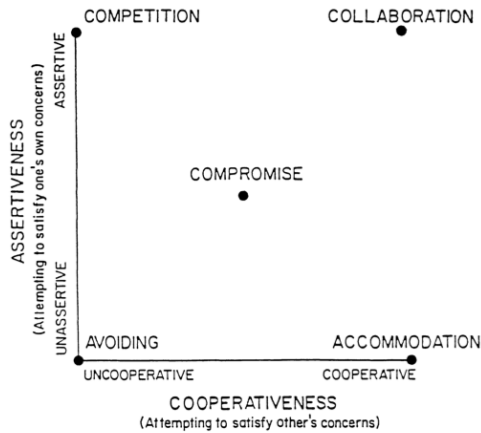(Attempting to satisfy other's concerns)

Figure 1. Two-dimensional taxonomy of conflict handling modes (adapted from Thomas and Kilman, 1974, p. 11). Copyright, Xicom, Inc. Adapted by permission

Figure 1. The five conflict resolution strategies according to Thomas and Kilmann (1974).

According to the Dual Concern Model, the choice of resolution strategy depends on the level of concern for oneself versus the level of concern for others (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993). The Dual Concern Model differs from the model produced by Thomas and Kilmann (1974) with regards to both axes: the axes provided by Thomas and Kilmann measures assertiveness and cooperativeness while the axes in the Duo Concern Model measures one's own concern in relation to the concern for others. Although there are some differences such as the axes and the strategy terms used, the strategies of both theories are in reality the same.

In the Dual Concern model, collaboration will occur when there is high concern for oneself and also for the other party. This term collaboration as used in this model covers resolution strategies such as negotiation and compromise. In addition, this model also proposes that accommodation occurs when there is a high concern for others and a low concern for the self.

Laursen (1993) has combined collaboration and accommodation into one category named *cooperation*, which refers to solution-oriented strategies or negotiation strategies. Laursen (1993) has identified three types of resolution strategies that are most often used by people: cooperation, competition and avoidance. *Competition* refers to a controlling resolution strategy that includes negativity, antagonism and competition, motivated by high concerns for the self and low concerns for the other. The third resolution strategy is *avoidance* by which people do not confront one another with the problem, motivated by low concern for both self and other.

This study intends to examine which of the three conflict resolution strategies—competition, cooperation or avoidance —is used most often and by which party. In the studies on workplace conflicts by Rahim (1983) and Hammond (1999), collaborating strategies were preferred most often, followed by accommodating and compromising.

With regards to our norms and values at present, people generally prefer the strategy of cooperation over the strategies of avoidance and competition. Avoidance and competition can be perceived as anti-social conflict resolution strategies and as unacceptable behavior, whereas cooperation is perceived to be more social and morally more acceptable. Social evaluation is an important factor, which can influence how people choose a suitable conflict resolution strategy for themselves. Furthermore, it is often important for student pairs to complete the assignment properly, and strategies of avoidance and competition can potentially endanger this goal.

According to Yu, Branje, Keijsers and Meeus (2014), people will become more aware of the threat of conflict to their relationship when they regard this relationship as important. With this being known, people will adjust their conflict resolution strategy according to the type of relationship they have with their partner, for instance a pair of friends would use other resolution strategies than a pair of strangers. Changes in conflict resolution strategies can have a positive or negative effect on a relationship during the process of working together, especially when the notion of friendship is involved.

Wied, Branje & Meeus (2007) found that friends are more likely to manage conflict harmoniously than non-friends. Student pairs, which consist of collaborators or acquaintances, will probably use the resolution strategy of cooperation more often in comparison to student pairs of strangers. Cooperation is more in line with maintaining a good collaborative relationship than avoidance and competition. Collaborators and acquaintances are seen to value their relationship more than people who are strangers to begin with. Strangers may use avoidance more than collaborators and acquaintances, because strangers may have fewer concerns about their relationship with their partner. While strangers may care less about the relationship, they probably do have a lot of concern about their final performance during the course of them working together. It is possible to say that non-friends, or strangers, may tend to use avoidance as a strategy more often than competition, because competition might have a negative impact on the final outcome. These considerations lead to the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 3a: Student pairs use collaboration[1] more often than avoidance, and avoidance more than competition.

Hypothesis 3b: Collaborators and acquaintances will use collaboration more often than strangers.

Hypothesis 3c: Strangers will use avoidance more often than collaborators and acquaintances.

1.3 Reconciliation strategies

Conflict resolution strategies are often confused with reconciliation strategies. Conflict resolution strategies bring the conflict to an end, while reconciliation strategies are primarily used to restore the relationship after a conflict occurred and to reduce future conflict. Reconciliation is a process to re-establish close relationships after a conflict and to increase relationship closeness and commitment (Tsang, McCullough & Fincham, 2006). However, there is indeed some overlap between conflict resolution strategies and reconciliation strategies. For instance, some resolution strategies may already include some attempt to restore or prevent damage to a relationship; one example is the conflict resolution strategy of cooperation. According to some notions, reconciliation strategies are only used after a conflict has been solved; in actuality there is no clear line between conflict resolution and reconciliation (Fisher, 1997).

Another possible misunderstanding is that reconciliation is the same as forgiveness. Forgiveness can be defined as a process in which the individual who is a victim would act constructively towards the other individual who is the offender (Fincham, Beach & Davila, 2007). However, reconciliation is a mutual process, which means that both parties are active and both parties can choose whether they are willing to approach one another.

Just like conflict resolution strategies, there are also different types of reconciliation strategies. Knüppe (2007) found six different types of such strategies: compensation, talking over, ignoring, apologizing, physical contact and humor. *Compensation* involves acting more

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[1] Instead of cooperation collaboration is used, this is explained in the *Method* section (*2.4 Two-step questionnaires)*.

kindly than usual, buying something, or doing something nice for the other party. *Talking over* involves trying to create mutual comprehension by discussing the situation. *Ignoring* the situation refers to acting as if the conflict never happened. *Apologizing* means showing remorse for something that had happened, which often serves as a request for forgiveness. *Physical contact* involves bodily interaction such as an encouraging pat on the shoulder, hugging or cuddling. Finally, *humor* is used to make people laugh and to distract them from the conflict. Knüppe (2007) found that compensation and talking over were strategies that were used most often in romantic relationships. Dietz (2012) found that participants used talking over and apologizing more with friends than with siblings. Generally speaking, however, there is little known about reconciliation strategies used in student pairs.

The present study will examine which of the reconciliation strategies are used most often by collaborators, acquaintances and strangers. My prediction is that both collaborators and acquaintances will use more reconciliation strategies than strangers. For these first two types of student pairs, the relationship with their fellow partner is more important than for strangers, so it is likely that they use more reconciliation strategies to restore their relationship. For the sake of maintaining their friendship, collaborators and acquaintances will most likely use the reconciliation strategies of talking over, compensation and apologizing more often than other reconciliation strategies. By contrast, strangers will most likely use the strategy of ignoring because they may be less concerned about the relationship with their partner. These considerations lead to the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 4: Collaborators and acquaintances will use talking over, compensation and apologizing more often, and ignoring less often than strangers.

1.4 Partner and conflict history

In this study, two types of history are brought into consideration: conflict history, which refers to encounters with conflict during earlier collaborative opportunities with others, and relationship history, which refers to the history of students with their present partners.

Partner history and relationship satisfaction

Choosing the most suitable conflict resolution strategies and reconciliation strategies depend not only on conflict type (task, process, or relationship), but also on the type of relationship of the student pair (collaborators, acquaintances, or strangers). Earlier research from Raffaelli (1997) shows that young adolescents rated their friends lower on importance and on satisfaction when frequency of conflict was higher. From another angle, adolescents who rate their partner low on importance and satisfaction will often have more conflict than adolescents who rate their partner high on importance and satisfaction. The expectation would be that strangers have more conflict than collaborators and acquaintances. Therefore, we expect that strangers probably rate their partner lower on importance and satisfaction than collaborators and acquaintances.

As mentioned previously in *Hypothesis 4*, collaborators and acquaintances are expected to use different reconciliation strategies than strangers do. Collaborators and acquaintances will mostly use the strategies of talking over, compensation and apologizing, while strangers will use the strategy of ignoring more often.

Relationship satisfaction may play a role of mediator between relationship type and reconciliation strategies. When a student is satisfied with the relationship with his or her partner, the reconciliation strategies will be adjusted to this perception. If a student pair does not know one another beforehand but they find their relationship during the collaboration satisfying, they could adopt the same reconciliation strategies that are used by student pairs consisting of those who knew each other already or had collaborated with each other in the past. These considerations lead to the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 5a: Collaborators and acquaintances will be more satisfied with the relationship than strangers.
Hypothesis 5b: Students who are more satisfied with the relationship will use the reconciliation strategies of talking over, compensation and apologizing more than students who are less satisfied with the relationship.
Hypothesis 5c: The effects of relationship type on the use of reconciliation strategies are mediated by relationship satisfaction.

Previous conflict experiences

Previous experiences with conflict can influence the choice for conflict resolution strategies when dealing with the current situation of conflict. The use of specific conflict resolution strategies can have desirable or undesirable outcomes. When a conflict resolution strategy used in the past has led to desirable outcomes, there is a larger possibility that it will be used again in the next conflict. With undesirable outcomes people will be more likely to choose other strategies when conflict occurs again. Few studies have been conducted on how past experiences with conflict have influenced a current situation of conflict, which is the reason why this present research has been initiated. These considerations lead to the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 6: Students with successful experiences with a resolution strategy will use it more in present conflict than students with unsuccessful experiences with that strategy.

2. Method

2.1 Design

This study uses a questionnaire for students working together for a certain requirement. The effects of two factors were examined: gender (male versus female) and relationship type (collaborator versus acquaintance versus stranger). Participants completed a questionnaire, which asked about the relationship with their partner as well as the following types of variables: conflict subjects, frequency of conflict, who initiates conflict, conflict resolution strategies and reconciliation strategies.

The goal of this study was to test student pairs working together on an assignment. However, unfortunately, there was only one course where students worked together in pairs, and in this group, which consisted of 100 students, only 8 had experienced a conflict. Therefore, it was decided to broaden our selection criteria by selecting students who worked together in groups in addition to those who worked in pairs. The questionnaire was adjusted for the participants who worked in groups. Since we had not anticipated this in advance, none of the literature and hypotheses are based on groups or the differences between pairs and groups. Some analyses were performed to see if group-size (a pair versus a group) had any influence on the results.

2.2 Procedure

In this study we used a two-step questionnaire. The first questionnaire took about 3 to 5 minutes. Only participants who met the criteria of having a conflict were asked to complete the second questionnaire. The criterion for the second questionnaire was that the student must have had at least one conflict during the cooperation process. Completing the second questionnaire took another 10 to 15 minutes; students who filled in the second questionnaire received either 1 credit or 2 euro's. In selecting students for the second questionnaire, it was necessary to look at their answers to the questions about having a conflict during the collaboration; for this reason, there was a moment of non-anonymity. However, after the selection we were able to guarantee complete anonymity.

We recruited students from selected courses where they had to complete assignments

in pairs or in groups. When the students agreed to participate, they got a self-report questionnaire, and they were asked to fill it in individually without communicating with anyone else. The researcher was present to answer any questions and informed the participants that they could quit at any time while filling in the questionnaire. In addition, participants received an informed consent form, which told the participants about what the main purpose of the study is, how they needed to fill in the questionnaire, and how there were no right or wrong answers. Furthermore, participants were assured that the information would be treated anonymously and confidentially. In the informed consent, the students were asked if they wanted to participate in a lottery to win one of the two 25 euro vouchers. Students were also asked if they wanted to receive a report of the study; if they did, they could fill in their email address.

2.3 Participants

299 students from Leiden University were approached to participate in filling out the first questionnaire, and 74 of these students filled in the second questionnaire. The coordinators of the Departments of Psychology, Pedagogy and Political Science at the Faculty of Social Science were contacted in order for the researcher to find out which courses had students working together in pairs or in groups. The only course in which students worked together in pairs was *Applied Data Analysis* of the Department of Psychology. From this course, only 8 of the 100 participants indicated that they had experienced a conflict. The 199 students who worked in groups were gathered from the course *Stress, Health, and Diseases*; in this course, students needed to work together in pairs or in groups.

The average age of the students of the whole sample was 21.98 years. Among the participants, all types of student pairs or groups (i.e. collaborators, acquaintances, and strangers) were present (Table 1).

Table 1. Subjects by gender and relationship type (questionnaire 1)

	Collaborators	Acquaintances	Strangers	Total
Women	57	44	127	228
Men	14	17	40	71
Total	71	61	167	299

2.4 Two-step questionnaires

Participants who worked in groups received an adjusted questionnaire that is different than the one filled out by participants who worked in pairs.

Questionnaire 1

The participants first received a short self-report questionnaire with 21 questions divided into three parts: personal information (including gender, age and education), relationship with their partner and the presence of conflict.

Relationship type. There were three types of student pairs, namely collaborators, acquaintances and strangers. To categorize students into one of these three groups, two questions were asked: "Have you worked with this fellow student before?" and "Did you know this student before?" If students answered both questions in the affirmative, they were categorized as collaborators. Students who only answered the second question in the affirmative were categorized as acquaintances. The other students were categorized as strangers.

Relationship satisfaction. Knüppe's (2007) satisfaction items asked about participants' satisfaction with the relationship in general, thoughts about, the level of trust they have in the fellow student, the level of trust in the future with the fellow student, and frequency of irritation experienced by the fellow student and the participant. In Knüppe's (2007) study on romantic relationships and Ammerlaan (2010) and Vakiari's (2010) study on friend relationships, the reliability of the relationship satisfaction scale varied from .64 to .77, ranging from just acceptable to acceptable.

Occurrence of conflict. The 12th question in the first part of the questionnaire asks, "Has there been a conflict or serious tension during the collaboration with your fellow student?" This question could be answered with "yes" or "no"; if the question was answered in the affirmative, there was a second question about with whom the student had a conflict with, only one student or multiple students.

Conflict. The three types of conflict, relationship, task and process were subdivided into ten items about different topics of conflict: content of the task (**t**), disagreement on the way of collaboration (**p**), fail to fulfill commitment (**p**), lack of responsibility and initiative (**p**), poor communication (**p**), unequal work load (**p**), mutual irritation (**r**), differences in

norms and values (**r**), egocentric behavior (**r**) and others. These topics were based on the study by Chan and Chen (2010) and two own items were added, which was explained in section *1.1 Conflict and student pairs.*

In addition, there were also two other matters assessed regarding who was usually the initiator of the conflict and who was usually the guilty party. This was done using a 7-point scale where 1 indicated "almost always me" and 7 indicated "almost always my fellow student."

Questionnaire 1: adjustments for groups
Compared with the first questionnaire for the pairs, the first questionnaire for the groups contains two extra questions. The question about the gender of the co-student has been changed to ask for the number of female students and male students in their group. Secondly, a question has been added to see how many students of the group the participant had experienced a conflict with.

Questionnaire 2
The second questionnaire was for students who had experienced conflict during collaboration. This questionnaire was about the types of conflict, conflict resolution strategies, reconciliation strategies and feelings during conflict (see Appendix). Participants needed around 10 to 15 minutes to complete this questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 59 questions divided into five parts: conflict characteristics, type of conflict, conflict resolution strategies, reconciliation strategies, and finally, previous experiences with conflict.

Conflict characteristics. Items regarding conflict characteristics in general address the conflict frequency and the conflict severity on a 7-point scale. In addition, there were also two other matters assessed regarding who usually initiated the conflict and who was usually the guilty party. This was done using a 7-point scale where 1 indicated "almost always me" and 7 indicated "almost always my partner."

Conflict type. One question asked which type of conflict is mostly present in the current conflict; the students needed to choose between relationship, task and process conflict.

Conflict resolution strategies. Participants were asked about the conflict resolution strategies they used in conflict with their fellow students by means of the Dutch Test for

Conflict Handling (DUTCH) designed by Van de Vliert (1997), which measured the five resolution strategies: competition, compromise, collaboration, avoidance and accommodation. These questions had a 7-point scale where 1 indicated "not at all" and 7 indicated "very often." The DUTCH has been found to be a flexible and valid instrument in assessing conflict management strategies. This scale showed sufficient internal reliability in its sub-scales with Cronbach's alphas between $\alpha = .65$ and $\alpha = .73$ (Van de Vliert, 1997).

In the present study the intention was to use the three resolution strategies according to Laursen (1993), competition, cooperation and avoidance. However, the scales of cooperation and cooperation used in the past showed a low reliability with Cronbach's alphas of $\alpha = .63$ for cooperation and $\alpha = .56$ for cooperation used in the past. Due to the low reliability of the scales for cooperation, collaboration was used instead of cooperation in the present study.

Reconciliation strategies. Following the questions on conflict resolution strategies, participants were asked who took initiative in reconciling after conflict on a 7-point scale where 1 indicated "almost always me" and 7 indicated "almost always my fellow student." They were also asked which strategies they had used to reconcile with their partner after the conflict. They responded to Knüppe's (2007) scale of six reconciliation strategies, which was originally developed for romantic relationships but has also been used in studies on friendships (Ammerlaan, 2010; Vakiari, 2010) and parent-child relationships (Wiedom, 2011). The items were about compensation (acting extra nicely, buying or doing something nice), initiating talking things over, ignoring the situation, apologizing, physical contact, and humor. Again, participants gave their responses on a 7-point scale ranging where 1 indicated "not at all" and 7 indicated "very often."

Earlier experiences with conflict. This part of the questionnaire looked at earlier experiences with conflict during cooperation or during assignments in the past. We converted the five resolution strategies from the DUTCH into five descriptions. For each resolution strategy, the participants were asked to which extent they had used this resolution strategy in the past. For example, participants were asked to which extent they had used the strategy "mix some water with the wine" (compromise), which is a Dutch saying for a kind of compensating behavior. This was answered on a 7-point scale where 1 indicated "never" and 7 indicated "always." Participants were also asked whether the conflict resolution strategies had a positive or negative effect on the conflict in the past.

Questionnaire 2: adjustments for groups

There were three questions added to the questionnaire for groups: students were asked (1) whether the students who were in conflict had already worked together; (2) if so, how many times have they already worked together; and (3) whether they knew each other already (although not necessarily having collaborated together).

3. Results

3.1 Reliability of scales

Scales were formed for the three conflict resolution strategies and relationship satisfaction by calculating the mean of the respective items. Table 2 shows the means, the standard deviation, the number of items and the Cronbach's alphas for all scales, and (without Cronbach's alphas) for the one-item measures for reconciliation strategies and conflict resolution strategies used in the past. The scales of the resolution strategies show sufficient reliabilities for scientific purposes from $\alpha = .68$ to $\alpha = .81$; the relationship satisfaction scale is also highly reliable, with $\alpha = .79$.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and reliability of the scales

Scale	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD	k	α
Resolution strategies							
Competition	73	1	7	3.80	1.17	4	.77
Collaboration	73	1	7	4.60	.83	4	.68
Avoidance	73	1	7	4.00	1.34	4	.81
Reconciliation strategies							
Talking over	73	1	7	4.38	1.46		
Compensation	73	1	7	2.89	1.68		
Ignoring	73	1	7	4.42	1.89		
Apologizing	73	1	7	3.05	1.60		
Physical contact	73	1	7	2.03	1.39		
Humor	73	1	7	3.70	1.99		
Relationship satisfaction	73	1	7	3.61	1.21	6	.79
Resolution strategies used in the past							
Competition	72	1	7	3.58	1.53		
Collaboration	72	1	7	5.19	1.27		
Avoidance	72	1	7	3.85	1.89		

3.2 Occurrence of conflict

Hypothesis 1 is concerned with strangers having more conflicts than collaborators and acquaintances. In order to test this hypothesis, a cross-tabulation with chi-square test was conducted for relationship type with occurrence of conflict (Table 3). The chi-square shows a significant effect of the relationship type on the conflict, $X^2(2) = 7.25$, $p < .05$. The main finding is that acquaintances experience less conflict (11.5%) than collaborators (28.2 %) and strangers (28.1%).

Table 3. Occurrence of conflict for different relationship types.

	Collaborators	Acquaintances	Strangers	Total
No conflict	51	54	120	225
	(71,8%)	(88.5%)	(71.9%)	(75.3%)
Conflict	20	7	47	74
	(28.2%)	(11.5%)	(28.1%)	(24.7%)
Total	71	61	167	299

If collaborators and strangers are taken together and compared with acquaintances, a chi-square is conducted with continuity correction due to the fact that it is a two by two cross table. Results show still a significant effect, $X^2(1) = 6.38$, $p = .01$. The results only partially support Hypothesis 1 since they do show that strangers have more conflict than acquaintances, but results do not confirm that strangers have more conflict than collaborators.

3.3 Conflict types

The first hypothesis is based on the sample of the first questionnaire ($N = 299$), the other hypotheses are based mainly on the second questionnaire ($N = 74$), so the sample size for the other hypotheses is smaller than for the first hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2a states that the three types of conflict all have a negative effect on relationship satisfaction of the students. In order to test this hypothesis, a regression analysis was conducted with the three types of conflict as independent variables and relationship satisfaction as the dependent variable (Table 4). The overall relationship was found to be not

significant, $F(3, 69) = 1.16$, $p = .33$, $R^2 = .05$. Looking at the coefficients of the different types of conflict, relationship conflict shows the highest beta coefficient and is almost significant, $\beta = -.28$, $p = .07$. The betas for task and process conflict are clearly non-significant.

Table 4. Regression analysis for type of conflict on relationship satisfaction and Pearson's correlation for type of conflict and relationship satisfaction.

	r	p	B	SE	β	t	p
Task conflict	-.05	.34	-.42	.34	-.17	-1.22	.23
Process conflict	.01	.47	-.43	.38	-.18	-1.15	.26
Relationship conflict	-.15	.10	-.80	.44	-.28	-1.82	.07

$R^2 = .05$, $N = 73$.

Hypothesis 2b suggests that relationship conflict has a more negative effect on relationship satisfaction than task and process conflict. Results already show non-significant betas for task and process conflict and an almost significant beta for relationship conflict with the regression analysis. For this reason, an extra test with the zero-order correlations was conducted between the three types of conflict and relationship satisfaction. However, Pearson's correlation analyses showed no significant correlations (Table 4).

Hypothesis 2c proposes that the negative effect of relationship conflict on relationship satisfaction is higher for collaborators and acquaintances than for strangers. The current study makes a clear distinction between three types of relationships: collaborators, acquaintances and strangers. Collaborators and acquaintances have been combined into one group named non-strangers because the group of acquaintances was very small ($N = 7$), which caused little statistical power. In other words, *Hypothesis 2c** proposes that the negative effect of relationship conflict on relationship satisfaction is stronger for *non-strangers* than for *strangers*. Firstly, Table 5 shows that there are 3 non-strangers and 13 strangers who did have a relationship conflict. A chi-square test with continuity correction was conducted to test whether relationship type is related with the occurrence of relationship conflict, and was found to be non-significant, $X^2(1) = 2.01$, $p = .16$. A two-way ANOVA was conducted to test the hypothesis, with relationship conflict and relation type as independent variables and

relationship satisfaction as the dependent variable. Both main effects of relationship type and relationship conflict on relationship satisfaction were found to be non-significant, $F (1, 69) = .33$, $p = .57$ and $F (1, 69) = .852$, $p = .36$, as was their interaction, $F (1, 69) = .01$, $p = .95$. When looking at the means, the first thing to note is that non-strangers generally show a higher relationship satisfaction than strangers ($M = 3.81$ vs. 3.49), as seen in Table 5. Secondly, the difference between the means is a little larger for non-strangers ($D = 3.86 - 3.44 = .42$) than for strangers ($D = 3.59 - 3.23 = .36$). So, the negative effect of relationship conflict is a little larger for non-strangers than for strangers. The means are in line with the hypothesis, however, as mentioned before these trends are not significant.

Table 5. Amount of relationship satisfaction and relationship conflict for the relationship types.

	Non-strangers		Strangers	
	M	*N*	*M*	*N*
No relationship conflict	3.86	24 (88.9%)	3.59	33 (71.7%)
Relationship conflict	3.44	3 (11.1%)	3.23	13 (28.3%)
Total	3.81	27 (100 %)	3.49	46 (100 %)

3.4 Conflict resolution strategies

Firstly, correlations between the three resolution strategies are found very low (between -.18 and .04) and all non-significant.

Hypothesis 3a states that in general, students will use collaboration more often than avoidance, and avoidance more than competition. In order to test this hypothesis, a one-way repeated measures ANOVA was conducted with collaboration, competition and avoidance as dependent variables. Because Greenhouse-Geisser epsilon is greater than .75, the Huynh-Feldt correction for degrees of freedom was used ($\varepsilon = .96$). The results show that there is a significant effect for the three strategies, $F (1.92, 138.46) = 9.36$, $p < .01$. Pairwise contrasts revealed that collaboration is significantly more used than competition ($M = 4.60$ vs. 3.80, $p < .01$) and than avoidance ($M = 4.60$ vs. 4.00, $p = .01$). Competition and avoidance did not significantly differ from one another, but the non-significant trend showed by means ($M =$

4.00 vs. 3.80, $p = .33$) was in line with Hypothesis 3a. *Hypothesis 3b** proposed that non-strangers would use collaboration more than strangers. To test this hypothesis, a one-way ANOVA was conducted with collaboration as dependent variable. However, the results show no significant effect for the relationship type, $F(1, 71) = .04$, $p = .85$. Looking at the means of both groups, there is a very small difference in unpredicted direction between non-strangers ($M = 4.62$) and strangers ($M = 4.58$). *Hypothesis 3c** stated that strangers use the resolution strategy of avoidance more often than non-strangers. In the same way as *Hypothesis 3b**, a one-way ANOVA analysis was conducted and again the results did not support our hypothesis, $F(1, 71) = .06$, $p = .81$. Looking at the means, strangers use avoidance a little more often ($M = 4.03$) than non-strangers ($M = 3.95$).

3.5 Reconciliation strategies

Hypothesis 4* states that non-strangers would use the reconciliation strategies talking over, compensation and apologizing more often, and ignoring less often than strangers. To test this hypothesis, three one-way ANOVAs were conducted with a different reconciliation strategy used as dependent variable each time and the relationship type as a factor. There was an almost significant effect for the reconciliation strategy of talking over, $F(1, 71) = 3.89$, $p = .052$. Non-strangers used the reconciliation strategy of talking over more often ($M = 4.81$) than strangers ($M = 4.13$). For the reconciliation strategy of apologizing, no significant effect was found $F(1, 71) = 1.69$, $p = .20$. Results only show a non-significant trend according to which non-strangers use more apologizing ($M = 3.37$) than strangers ($M = 2.87$). For compensation, the results also do not show a significant effect, $F(1, 71) = .02$, $p = .89$. Compensation was slightly used more often by non-strangers ($M = 2.93$) than strangers ($M = 2.87$).

An additional analysis had been conducted in order to test which reconciliation strategies were used when reconciliation did or did not occur. Six independent *t* tests were used with as grouping variable if reconciliation took place and as test variables the six reconciliation strategies. Three *t* tests were found significant, the *t* test for talking over, $t(71) = 2.14$, $p < .05$, ignoring, $t(54.96) = -3.25$, $p < .01$, and humor, $t(71) = 2.91$, $p < .01$. Looking at the means, when reconciliation took place, talking over ($M = 4.63$ vs. 3.88) and humor ($M = 4.40$ vs. 2.79) were more used than when reconciliation did not take place (Table 6). Ignoring ($M = 5.33$ vs. 3.98) was more used when reconciliation did not take place than when

reconciliation did take place (Table 6).

Table 6. Means for reconciliation strategies when stated reconciliation did or did not occur, and t tests statistics.

	Took reconciliation place?				
	Yes	**No**	*t*	*df*	*p*
Talking over	4.63	3.88	2.14	71	.04
Compensation	2.92	2.83	.20	71	.84
Ignoring	3.98	5.33	-3.25	54.96	.00
Apologizing	3.18	2.79	.99	71	.33
Physical contact	2.18	1.71	1.38	71	.17
Humor	4.40	2.79	2.91	71	.00

3.6 Relationship satisfaction

Hypothesis 5a* states that non-strangers are more satisfied with the relationship than strangers. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to test this hypothesis. Looking at the means of the two types of students, non-strangers are more satisfied with the relationship ($M = 3.81$) than strangers ($M = 3.50$), but this trend was found not significant, $F (1, 71) = 1.24$, $p = .27$. *Hypothesis 5b* proposes that students who are satisfied with their relationship will tend to use the reconciliation strategies of talking over, compensation and apologizing more often than students who are not satisfied with their relationship. To test this hypothesis, Pearson correlations between relationship satisfaction and the three resolution strategies was conducted. The results do not support our hypothesis, since they are all clearly non-significant (Table 7).

Table 7. Pearson's correlations between the three reconciliation strategies and relationship satisfaction.

	r	*p*	*N*
Talking over	*.09*	*.44*	*73*
Compensation	.17	.15	73
Apologizing	-.01	.96	73

Hypothesis 5c states that the effects of the relationship type on the use of reconciliation strategies are mediated by relationship satisfaction. Sobel tests were conducted to test the mediation effect. Table 8 shows the three regression analyses with friendliness as mediator (M) and talking over, compensation and apologizing as Y and relationship type as X. The regression analyses with relationship satisfaction as an independent variable and one of the three reconciliation strategies as dependent variable all show no significant values. Although the regression analyses were found to be not significant, Sobel tests were still conducted, but did not show any mediation effect for the three reconciliation strategies of talking over, $z = -.51$, $p = .61$, compensation, $z = -.89$, $p = .38$, and apologizing, $z = -.20$, $p = .84$.

Table 8. Sobel test

		DV	IV	B	SE_b	β	p	R^2
	Analysis 1	Y	X	.11	.14	.09	.44	.01
Talking over	Analysis 2	M	X	-.33	.29	-.13	.27	.02
	Analysis 3	Y	M	.08	.14	.06	.59	.06
		Y	X	-.66	.35	-.22	.07	
	Analysis 1	Y	X	.24	.16	.17	.15	.17
Compensation	Analysis 2	M	X	-.33	.29	-.13	.27	.02
	Analysis 3	Y	M	.24	.17	.17	.16	.17
		Y	X	.02	.41	.01	.05	
	Analysis 1	Y	X	-.01	.16	-.01	.96	.00
Apologizing	Analysis 2	M	X	-.33	.29	-.13	.27	.02
	Analysis 3	Y	M	-.04	.16	-.03	.82	.02
		Y	X	-.51	.39	-.16	.20	

Hypothesis 6 states that when students had a successful experience in the past with their preferred resolution strategy, they will use it more often in present conflict than if they did not had a successful experience with it. Frequencies show that just like in present conflict,

collaboration is most often used in the past (28 times), followed by avoidance (16 times) and competition (9 times). Three independent t tests were used to test the hypothesis, each time on the subset of persons, which had preferred the strategy in the past. Unfortunately, all three t tests were non-significant, with t tests for competition, $t(7) = -.04$, $p = .97$, collaboration, $t(26) = .71$, $p = .48$, and avoidance, $t(14) = 1.43$, $p = .18$ (Table 9). Looking at the means, the mean of competition shows that students who used competition in the past and had a positive experience with it would not use competition as much in the present ($M = 3.79$) compared to students who had a negative experience with the resolution strategy, who would use it more ($M = 3.83$); this finding is not in line with the hypothesis. For the resolution strategies of collaboration and avoidance, the means do support our prediction, which is that there would be more students who use the same resolution strategy in a present situation of conflict if they had a positive experience with it in the past (Table 9). However, both trends are not significant.

Table 9. Resolution strategies used in the past and the success percentages

Past resolution strategy	Successful	N	% Success	t	df	p	M present strategy
Competition	Yes	6	75.0	-.04	7	.97	3.79
	No	3					3.83
Collaboration	Yes	27	96.4	.71	26	.48	4.88
	No	1					4.25
Avoidance	Yes	7	43.8	1.43	14	.18	5.43
	No	9					4.86
Total	Yes	40	75.5				
	No	13	24.5				

Focusing on the correlations of the resolution strategies in a present situation of conflict with resolution strategies in the past, results show three very significant correlations. Avoidance has a much higher correlation, $r = .70$, $p < .01$, than competition, $r = .38$, $p < .01$, and collaboration, $r = .37$, $p < .01$ (Table 10).

Table 10. Pearson's correlations between present and past resolution strategies.

| | | Present | | |
		Competition	Collaboration	Avoidance
Past	Competition	.38**	.02	-.04
	Collaboration	.15	.37**	-.05
	Avoidance	.05	-.40**	.70**

**. $p < .01$ (2-tailed)

As additional analysis a chi-square was conducted to test whether there were differences in success for three resolution strategies used in the past. The chi-square shows a significant effect of being successful with a conflict resolution strategy used in the past, $X^2(2) = 15.72$, $p < .01$. Table 9 shows the level of success for the three strategies used in this study. Collaboration is the most successful strategy (96,4%), followed by competition (75,0%) and avoidance is the least successful strategy (43.8%).

4. Discussion

The present study intended to provide some insight in the conflict resolution and reconciliation strategies of students and to explore the effects of previous experiences with conflict on present conflict. Students were divided into three relationship types, namely collaborators, acquaintances and strangers, but for the most analyses collaborators and acquaintances have been grouped together as 'non-strangers' because the acquaintances group was too small sample.

Almost none of the predictions of the present study were supported by the results. There was only partial support for two predictions. Firstly, collaboration was more used than avoidance and competition (which were against expectation not significantly different from each other). Secondly, results supported the prediction that acquaintances experience less conflict than strangers.

4.1 Findings and explanations

Conflict type and relationship type
The first hypothesis states that *strangers have more conflict in comparison to acquaintances, who will have more conflict than collaborators*. According to the findings, acquaintances experience less conflict than collaborators and strangers, which is in line with the first hypothesis. Contrary to the prediction, collaborators experienced more conflict than acquaintances; the level of conflict for collaborators was equal to the level of conflict for strangers. An explanation for this contrary finding could be that collaborators are more used to conflict during cooperation, and are less concerned about possible destructive outcomes, since they may also know that conflict can be constructive too. For this reason, collaborators may not avoid conflict, which may explain the high occurrence of conflict in comparison to acquaintances. Perhaps the latter are more concerned about the destructive outcomes of conflict, and thus tend to avoid conflict, which could have led to a low level of conflict when compared with collaborators and strangers.

Conflict type and relationship satisfaction
The second hypothesis was about the influence of the three types of conflict on relationship

satisfaction. Hypothesis 2a states that *all three kinds of conflict types have a negative effect on relationship satisfaction.* These predictions were not supported, although there was an almost significant effect for relationship conflict, which implied in line with the hypothesis, that a higher level of relationship conflict leads to a lower relationship satisfaction. Hypothesis 2b states that *relationship conflict has a more negative effect in comparison to both task and process conflict on relationship satisfaction.* This prediction was not supported by the results either; the results only showed a non-significant trend that relationship conflict is more strongly negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction than task and process conflict. Hypothesis 2c* predicts that *the negative effect of relationship conflict on relationship satisfaction is stronger for non-strangers than for strangers,* but no difference was found between non-strangers and strangers for the effect of relationship conflict on relationship satisfaction.

These non-supportive findings could be due to a methodological mistake. The question used to collect the data for testing this prediction was which type of conflict occurred most often during conflict. Most of the participants only filled in the most frequent type of conflict, but some of the participants filled in more than one type of conflict.

Earlier studies have shown ambiguous results about the influence of conflict on team performance and personal well-being. Jehn (1997) stated that in a workplace more task conflict occurred than process and relationship conflict, while Myers and Larson (2005) found that students have more process conflict during collaborations, and relationship conflict will probably occur in romantic relationships more often than task or process conflict. Present hypotheses are based on earlier studies on conflict in a workplace and during romantic relationships. This study focused on collaboration among students. Different context could be an explanation for the non-significant findings.

The third explanation could be that earlier studies of conflict were primarily focused on the influence of type of conflict on performance. Predictions for the present study were based on the conclusion of these studies. Jen (2013) proposed that a lot of research has been done on the influence of conflict on team performance, but less on relationship satisfaction. Team performance and relationship satisfaction are completely different processes, so the influence of conflict on these processes could also be completely different.

Conflict resolution

The third hypothesis was about conflict resolution strategies. Hypothesis 3a states that *student pairs use collaboration in general more often than avoidance, and avoidance more than competition.* There was partial support for this prediction; the resolution strategy collaboration was used more than competition and avoidance, but avoidance was not used more often than competition. Hypothesis 3b* states that *non-strangers would use the strategy collaboration more often than strangers* and Hypothesis 3c* states that *strangers would use the resolution strategy avoidance more often than non-strangers.* Once again, the results did not support these two predictions.

An explanation could be the measurement scale of the conflict resolution strategies. Even though all the conflict resolution strategies were measured on a seven-point scale, this does not imply that the three strategies could be compared. It is not easy to compare the statements where the participants needed to fill in their response using a seven-point scale to measure the extent to which the strategies applied to current conflict. Some statements may have been more extremely formulated than other statements, which could have influenced the comparisons.

Secondly, looking at the three strategies it appears that collaboration is the safest strategy for the participants; it has a small chance of escalation, brings no hard feelings and has a good outcome for the task and relationship. Competition is unsafe in the short run and more risky than avoidance, but avoidance could be more destructive in the long run than competition; avoidance may lead to failure to meet the deadline on short term, while the long-term effect could be that the irritations are not getting worked out, which could harm the relationship. With competition, direct confrontation may be destructive in the short term, but it sometimes can be constructive in the long run, because the assignment may be finished in time and the irritations would be worked out later on. This could be used to explain why avoidance is not more often used than competition.

The type of relationship could also play a role in the choice for resolution strategy. In a relationship between students working on a task competition could have a more constructive effect than in a romantic relationship. In other words, context plays also a role in the choice which type of conflict resolution strategy to use.

Reconciliation strategies

Hypothesis 4* states that *non-strangers would use the reconciliation strategies of talking over, compensation and apologizing more often and ignoring less often than strangers.* Results showed an almost significant effect for the reconciliation strategy talking over, suggesting that non-strangers use talking over to restore the relationship more than strangers. For the other reconciliation strategies, results did not support the prediction at all. Almost all reconciliation strategies were used more often by non-strangers than strangers, with the exception of ignoring which was slightly used more often by strangers than by non-strangers.

Additional analyses revealed that students who stated that reconciliation took place would use talking over and humor more and ignoring less than students who did not stated that reconciliation took place.

There has not been much research done into the use of reconciliation strategies in student pairs. The short term of the relationship could limit the need for reconciliation processes since reconciliation mostly occurs after or at the end of conflict. Student relationship usually exists for a short time and could also be more fragile.

Similar to conflict resolution strategies, type of relationship could have had an effect on the choice of reconciliation strategies. Reconciliation could be more important in order to maintain harmony for couples in a romantic relationship than in more short-term relationships of students or people in the workplace.

Relationship satisfaction

The fifth hypothesis is concerned with relationship satisfaction. Hypothesis 5a* states that *non-strangers will be more satisfied with the relationship than strangers.* There was no support found for this prediction, but there was a non-significant trend in line with the hypothesis. The second prediction about relationship satisfaction is stated in Hypothesis 5b: *students who are more satisfied with the relationship will use the reconciliation strategies talking over, compensation and apologizing more than students who are less satisfied with the relationship.* There was no support for this prediction. The last prediction about relationship satisfaction was Hypothesis 5c*: *The effects of relationship type on the use of reconciliation strategies are mediated by relationship satisfaction.* There was also no support found for the

mediating effect of the relationship satisfaction on the use of reconciliation strategies.

Conflict history

The last hypothesis 6 states that *when students had a successful experience with a resolution strategy they will use it more in present conflict than when they had an unsuccessful experience.* The prediction was again not supported; unsuccessful experience with a conflict resolution strategy did not lead to a switch of strategy. Additional analysis showed that collaboration was most successful and avoidance was least successful.

Due to small group sizes, tests for some groups had very low power. This made it hard to detect the effects, especially if the effects are not very strong. For example, collaboration had respectively 27 (successful) versus 1(unsuccessful) participants in their groups. Small group sizes and low power could be the cause of the non-supportive findings.

4.2 Limitations

The aim of this study was to examine how student pairs are affected by conflict during their collaboration. However, forced by necessity not only student pairs were used in this study, but also students who worked together in larger groups. In some regards, groups are more dynamic than pairs, because there can be coalitions, such as two against the rest. Furthermore, the larger the group is, the higher the probabilities for social loafing, free riding and fighting for leadership (Kerr & Bruun, 1983). Groups are more complex than pairs; the method of this study was focused on pairs and it was only partially adjusted for the groups, which means that we did not include all relevant factors concerning groups.

A second problem with the questionnaire concerned the different versions. By accident, two slightly different second questionnaires were made for groups, which resulted in missing a question about the gender of the partner involved in the conflict. This problem made it impossible to look at the gender of the partner for students who experienced conflict in groups.

Another restriction involving the questionnaire concerned misinterpretation. There were students who misunderstood the question about what type of conflict occurred most often during the conflict. Our intention with the question was that participants only encircled one answer, but some participants encircled two or three answers. During the data analyses

variables needed to be adjusted to the misunderstandings that were made by the participants. The second question that was misunderstood was about the gender of the fellow students of the group. The intention was that participants would fill in the gender of the members in the small group they needed to collaborate with, but unfortunately some participants filled their entire work group, which made it hard to compare the groups. For future research, a short pilot study is recommended; in this way unclear questions could be adjusted or removed from the questionnaires.

Two other remarks are that the participants were asked to fill in the questionnaire independently, but this did not happen all the time. There were students who discussed their answers with their fellow students or partner. Secondly, if a study only uses self-report questionnaires, it evokes the problem of social desirability. This means that participants may adjust their answers to social norms (Canary, Cupach & Messman, 1995).

All participants were Psychology students of the Leiden University, which means they had a relatively high education level and almost all participants were young adults (the average age was 21.98 year). This homogenous and specific group is not really representative for the population. This can influence the generalizability of this study because students often share the same attitudes towards conflict management compared to the population (Rodriguez, Manstead & Fisher, 2002).

The whole sample of 299 participants is in general large enough, but the group that had experienced conflict consisted of only 72 participants. This small sample size has influenced the power in a negative way. In this study, there was an unequal distribution between the three types of relationship, 20 collaborators versus 7 acquaintances versus 47 strangers. To reduce this unequal distribution, collaborators and acquaintances were grouped together as non-strangers, which may have led to a too heterogeneous group.

4.3 Future research

To test whether collaborators are indeed more open and less afraid for conflict than acquaintances, it is necessary to put extra questions in the questionnaires for future research. These extra questions need to ask about motives for conflict and whether conflict is perceived

as constructive or destructive.

Future research should also focus on more long-term relationships or long-term collaborations. It is hard to know whether reconciliation could appear on such a short notice. It is interesting to look at a long-term relationship to examine the influence of conflict on conflict resolution strategies and reconciliation strategies.

Another field to research is the way how the participants who work in pairs or groups are rewarded. Being individually rewarded or rewarded as a group may make a large difference in conflict behavior. Getting rewarded as a group could increase social loafing and free riding, while getting rewarded individually could increase feelings of competition among the participants.

In general, there is not much research done about reconciliation; the studies conducted previously showed ambiguous results. Reconciliation is a very important process during collaboration; it is therefore necessary to study the underlying processes of reconciliation. Conflict resolution and reconciliation strategies are important parts of conflict management. Conflict management occurs often in the daily lives of people, so it is important to investigate the behaviors of different groups and the underlying processes and how they can be influenced by all kinds of factors. It is important for future research to broaden the knowledge about conflict management.

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Appendix

ONDERZOEK NAAR CONFLICTSITUATIES
Universiteit Leiden, Sociale en Organisatiepsychologie
Masterthesis Mai Janssen & Joy Schoenmaker
Begeleider: Dr. P. de Heus

In dit onderzoek worden vragen gesteld over hoe jij en je mede student hebben samengewerkt aan een opdracht voor een bepaald vak.

Je zult als eerst een korte vragenlijst krijgen, aan de hand van je antwoorden beoordelen de onderzoekers of je in aanmerking komt voor de tweede vragenlijst.
Er volgen stellingen waarbij je moet aangeven in hoeverre die op jou, je medestudent en jullie samenwerking van toepassing is. Je kunt dit doen door het cijfer van je keuze te omcirkelen. Geef bij elke vraag slechts één antwoord, mits er anders aangegeven wordt. Als je per ongeluk een verkeerd antwoord hebt omcirkeld, kun je dit doorkruisen en alsnog het cijfer van je keuze omcirkelen.

De vragenlijst is anoniem. Dit betekent dat je nergens je naam of andere persoonlijke gegevens hoeft in te vullen, zodat je antwoorden nooit tot jou of je medestudent te herleiden zijn. De antwoorden die je geeft zullen vertrouwelijk behandeld worden. De resultaten van het onderzoek worden verwerkt in een scriptie, waarin op geen enkele wijze scores van individuele personen herkenbaar zullen zijn.
Het gaat in dit onderzoek om je eigen mening. Er zijn geen goede of foute antwoorden op de vragen. Het is belangrijk dat je geen enkele vraag overslaat.
Onder de mensen die hebben meegewerkt aan dit onderzoek zullen twee VVV bonnen van elk €25,- verloot worden. Als je hiervoor in aanmerking wilt komen, kun je jouw naam en e-mailadres op een aparte lijst invullen, die niet gekoppeld is aan jouw vragenlijst.
Alvast hartelijk dank voor je medewerking!

Handtekening:

Vragenlijst 1: Groepen

Hieronder volgen een aantal vragen over jou en je medestudenten waarmee je op dit moment samenwerkt. Omcirkel bij elke vraag wat van toepassing is.

1. Geslacht   1   Man

                             2   Vrouw

2. Leeftijd   __ jaar

3. Tot welke opleiding behoort de cursus waarin je op dit moment met medestudenten werkt.

   1   Psychologie   3   Culturele antropologie

   2   Pedagogiek

4. In welke fase van je studie zit je momenteel?

   1   Bachelor 1^e jaar   3   Bachelor 3^e jaar

   2   Bachelor 2^e jaar   4   Master

De vragen die hieronder volgen zullen betrekking hebben over je huidige samenwerking met je medestudenten. Hou deze samenwerking in gedachten bij het beantwoorden van de volgende vragen. Omcirkel wat van toepassing is.

5. Geslacht medestudenten   *(geef aantallen per sekse)*

   ___ man(nen)   en   ___ vrouw(en)

6. Heb je al eerder met een van deze medestudenten samengewerkt?   1   Ja

                                                                2   Nee

7. Zo ja, hoe vaak heb je al samengewerkt?   __ keer

8. Kende je deze medestudenten al eerder?   1   Ja, tamelijk goed

                                                             2   Niet of nauwelijks

9. Zo ja, hoelang kennen je elkaar al?   __ jaar en __ maanden

10. Hoe tevreden ben je met de relatie met je medestudenten?

    Helemaal niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Heel erg

11. Zou je nog een keer met je huidige medestudenten willen samenwerken?

    Nooit   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Heel vaak

12. Is er tijdens de samenwerking met je medestudenten sprake geweest van een conflict of serieuze spanningen? *Omcirkel wat van toepassing is.*

    1   Ja   2   Nee

    Indien je conflicten of spanningen hebt gehad gedurende je samenwerking, was dit met één medestudent of met meerdere medestudenten? *Omcirkel wat van toepassing is.*

    1   Één medestudent   2   Meerdere medestudenten

Hieronder volgen een aantal onderwerpen waarover studenten mogelijk spanningen kunnen hebben gedurende de samenwerking. Geef bij elk onderwerp aan of hier sprake van was tussen jou en je medestudent. Omcirkel wat van toepassing is.

	Ja	Nee
13. Meningsverschillen over de inhoud op de opdracht.	1	2
14. Meningsverschillen over de samenwerking.	1	2
15. Afspraken niet nakomen.	1	2
16. Geen inzet of initiatief tonen.	1	2
17. Slechte communicatie.	1	2
18. Oneerlijke werkverdeling, de een doet meer dan de ander.	1	2

19. Onderlinge irritaties.   1   2

20. Verschillen in normen en waarden.   1   2

21. Egocentrisch gedrag van jou of je partner.   1   2

22. Overig, namelijk

Vragenlijst 2

Omdat je op de 1^e vragenlijst hebt aangegeven dat er sprake is geweest van serieuze spanningen of conflicten tijdens de samenwerking, volgen hieronder nog een aantal vragen over het conflict dat jij en je medestudent(en) hebben gehad. Ook al was het conflict misschien met meerdere medestudenten, neem nu de student in gedachten <u>waarmee je het ergst of het meest in conflict bent geweest</u> gedurende jullie samenwerking. Beantwoord alle vragen met deze student in gedachten. Omcirkel wat van toepassing is.

Wat is het *geslacht* van deze medestudent?   1 man   2 vrouw

1. Heb je al eerder met deze medestudent (waarmee je conflict hebt gehad) samengewerkt?

    1 Ja   2 Nee

2. Zo ja, hoe vaak heb je al samengewerkt?   _____ keer

3. Kende je deze medestudent (waarmee je conflict hebt gehad) al eerder?   1 Ja, tamelijk goed

    2 Niet of nauwelijks

4. Hoe vaak hebben jij en deze medestudent conflicten of serieuze spanningen gehad?

Nooit	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Heel vaak

5. Hoe heftig heb je het conflict ervaren?

Helemaal niet	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Heel erg

6. Wie was meestal de initiator van conflict(en)? Anders gezegd, wie begint meestal de ruzie(s)?

Vrijwel altijd ik	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Vrijwel altijd medestudent

7. Wie was meestal de schuldige bij de conflicten?

Vrijwel altijd ik   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Vrijwel altijd medestudent

8. Welk soort conflict heeft tijdens jullie huidige samenwerking plaatsgevonden?
Omcirkel wat het meest van toepassing is.

1   Taakconflict: verschillen van mening over de inhoud en aanpak van de opdracht.

2   Procesconflict: conflict over de uitvoering van de opdracht (bijvoorbeeld over afspraken nakomen).

3   Relatieconflict: conflicten die te maken hebben met de persoonlijkheid van jou of de medestudent (bijvoorbeeld onderlinge irritaties vanwege verschillen in persoonlijkheid).

Hieronder volgen een aantal uitspraken over de manier waarop jij tijdens/na de spanningen hebt gehandeld. Geef bij elke stelling aan in hoeverre de stelling overeenkomt met hoe jij hebt gehandeld. Omcirkel wat van toepassing is.

9. Ik gaf toe aan de wensen van mijn medestudent.

Zeer zeker niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Zeer zeker wel

10. Ik onderzocht de kwestie net zolang tot ik een oplossing vond waar ik en de ander beiden echt tevreden mee waren.

Zeer zeker niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Zeer zeker wel

11. Ik probeerde er een compromis uit te slepen.

Zeer zeker niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Zeer zeker wel

12. Ik vermeed een confrontatie over onze tegenstellingen.

Zeer zeker niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Zeer zeker wel

13. Ik duwde mijn eigen standpunt erdoor.

Zeer zeker niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Zeer zeker wel

14. Ik gaf de ander gelijk.

Zeer zeker niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Zeer zeker wel

15. Ik kwam op voor doelen en belangen van zowel mezelf als de ander.

Zeer zeker niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Zeer zeker wel

16. Ik benadrukte dat we een tussenweg moesten zien te vinden.

Zeer zeker niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Zeer zeker wel

17. Ik omzeilde de meningsverschillen waar mogelijk.

Zeer zeker niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Zeer zeker wel

18. Ik probeerde winst te boeken.

Zeer zeker niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Zeer zeker wel

19. Ik probeerde de ander tegemoet te komen.

Zeer zeker niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Zeer zeker wel

20. Ik onderzocht de ideeën van beide kanten om een voor ons beiden optimale oplossing te bedenken.

Zeer zeker niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Zeer zeker wel

21. Ik stond erop dat we allebei water bij de wijn deden.

Zeer zeker niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Zeer zeker wel

22. Ik probeerde tegenstellingen minder scherp te doen lijken.

Zeer zeker niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Zeer zeker wel

23. Ik vocht voor een goede uitkomst voor mezelf.

Zeer zeker niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Zeer zeker wel

24. Ik paste me aan, aan de doelen en belangen van de ander.

Zeer zeker niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Zeer zeker wel

25. Ik werkte een oplossing uit die zowel mijn eigen, als de belangen van de ander zo goed mogelijk diende.

Zeer zeker niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Zeer zeker wel

26. Ik streefde waar mogelijk naar een compromis.

Zeer zeker niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Zeer zeker wel

27. Ik probeerde een confrontatie met de ander te voorkomen.

Zeer zeker niet 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Zeer zeker wel

28. Ik deed alles om te winnen.

Zeer zeker niet 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Zeer zeker wel

29. Heeft er na de spanningen verzoening plaatsgevonden? Anders gezegd, hebben jullie geprobeerd het weer goed te maken?

1 Ja 2 Nee

30. Wie nam er initiatief tot verzoening? Anders gezegd, als er ruzie was, wie maakte het (meestal) weer goed?

Vrijwel uitsluitend ik 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Vrijwel uitsluitend medestudent

In hoeverre deed jij de volgende dingen om je met je medestudent te verzoenen na bovenstaand conflict? Omcirkel wat van toepassing is.

31. Initiatief nemen om de ruzie uit te praten.

Helemaal niet 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Heel erg

32. Iets voor de ander doen (bijv. extra aardig doen, op koffie trakteren of brownie halen).

Helemaal niet 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Heel erg

33. Situatie negeren en doorgaan met normale gang van zaken.

Helemaal niet 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Heel erg

34. Verontschuldiging voor gedrag aanbieden.

Helemaal niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Heel erg

35. Lichamelijk contact zoeken met de ander (bijv. door schouderklopje te geven)

Helemaal niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Heel erg

36. Een grapje over de situatie maken

Helemaal niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Heel erg

In hoeverre deed je medestudent de volgende dingen om met jou te verzoenen na bovenstaand conflict? Omcirkel wat van toepassing is.

37. Initiatief nemen om de ruzie uit te praten.

Helemaal niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Heel erg

38. Iets voor de ander doen (bijv. extra aardig doen, op koffie trakteren of brownie halen).

Helemaal niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Heel erg

39. Situatie negeren en doorgaan met normale gang van zaken.

Helemaal niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Heel erg

40. Verontschuldiging voor gedrag aanbieden.

Helemaal niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Heel erg

41. Lichamelijk contact zoeken met de ander (bijv. door schouderklopje te geven)

Helemaal niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Heel erg

42. Een grapje over de situatie maken

        Helemaal niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Heel erg

Als je een conflict hebt met je medestudent, in hoeverre voel je je dan doorgaans:

43. Boos?

        Helemaal niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Heel erg

44. Verdrietig?

        Helemaal niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Heel erg

45. Angstig?

        Helemaal niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Heel erg

46. Heb je tijdens de samenwerking wel een overwogen om de samenwerking te verbreken?

        Nooit   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Heel vaak

47. In hoeverre heb je vertrouwen in je medestudent?

        Helemaal geen   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Heel veel

48. Hoe vaak erger jij je aan je medestudent?

        Nooit   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Heel vaak

49. Hoe vaak ergert je medestudent zich aan jou?

        Nooit   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Heel vaak

50. In hoeverre heb je vertrouwen in een toekomst met je medestudent?

Helemaal niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Heel veel

51. In hoeverre kun je met je medestudent over de problemen (tijdens de samenwerking) praten?

Helemaal niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Heel erg

Je hebt vast wel eens eerder samengewerkt in een duo bijvoorbeeld op de middelbare school of bij een ander vak van je huidige studie. De volgende vragen gaan over eventuele conflicten gedurende deze eerdere samenwerkingen.

52. Heb je tijdens eerdere samenwerkingen op het gebied van studie (nu of in een eerdere opleiding) wel eens een conflicten of serieuze spanning(en) ervaren?

Nooit   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Heel vaak

53. Hoe heftig heb je die spanning in het algemeen ervaren?

Helemaal niet   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Heel erg

54. Wie was in het algemeen meestal de initiator van de conflicten? Anders gezegd, wie begon meestal de ruzies?

Vrijwel altijd ik   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Vrijwel altijd toenmalige ander

55. Wie was meestal de schuldige bij de conflicten?

Vrijwel altijd ik   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Vrijwel altijd toenmalige ander

Tijdens de eerdere conflicten en spanningen die je hebt meegemaakt, heb je waarschijnlijk bepaalde strategieën gebruikt om het conflict op te lossen. Welke van de onderstaande strategieën heb jij in eerdere conflict situaties gebruikt om het conflict op te lossen? Omcirkel wat van toepassing is.

56. Je eigen zin doordrukken

        Nooit   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Heel vaak

57. Streven naar een win-win situatie (beide partijen krijgen wat ze willen).

        Nooit   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Heel vaak

58. Water bij de wijn doen (in het midden gaan zitten).

        Nooit   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Heel vaak

59. Het conflict vermijden.

        Nooit   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Heel vaak

60. Je aanpassen aan de ander.

        Nooit   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Heel vaak

61. Welke strategie heb je in het verleden *het meest* gebruikt? *Kruis aan wat van toepassing is.*

    1 Je eigen zin doordrukken

    2 Streven naar win-win situatie

    3 Water bij de wijn doen

    4 Het conflict vermijden

    5 Je aanpassen aan de ander

62. Heeft de strategie die je het meest hebt gebruikt tijdens eerdere spanningen een positieve invloed gehad op het conflict? *Omcirkel wat van toepassing is.*

    1 Ja   2 Nee

        Dankjewel!