



# Conflict, Supportive Communication, and Group Satisfaction

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## Abstract & Literature Findings

Conflict among group members is an everyday phenomenon and is present in both academic and professional groups. Post-secondary educational institutions incorporate group work to better prepare students to work in groups within the job setting.

Bodie & Burleson (2008) developed the Dual-Process Theory of supportive communication outcomes, which proposes that the effects of messages and other components of supportive interactions (such as types of supportive communication and group and task commitment) produce certain effects as a function of how they are processed cognitively by their recipients. Dual-Process theories are useful for explaining supportive interactions in specific circumstances.

Types of social support (Bowsler, Langford, Maloney, Lillis, 2008), perceived intent of social support (Bodie, Burleson, & Jones, 2012), and group and task commitment (Bayazit and Mannix, 2003) have been associated with group and project satisfaction; however, research is limited on how these variables together impact group and project satisfaction.

This study examines the relationship between conflict within groups and perception of supportive communication during conflict, and project and group satisfaction.

## Method

### Participants

Participants were recruited from several Midwestern Universities using e-mail and Facebook. Ages ranged from 18-30+ years old. 17% of participants were male and 83% of participants were female.

### Procedure

A Qualtrics survey examined participants' pre-existing attitudes toward the presence of conflict, and social support and its contribution to group and task satisfaction.

In addition, participants were given a scenario of a group conflict situation and asked how they would respond. Survey items consisted of multiple choice and Likert-scale questions. Two questions were geared toward types of social support, two questions focused on perceived intent of social support, eight questions dealt with group and task commitment, and seven questions focused on overall satisfaction.

Some sample questions include:

- "Receiving support, in general, from another group member in this conflict situation would increase my satisfaction with group task."
- "Indicate your level of agreement using the scale provided. Receiving social support in this group conflict situation would increase my overall satisfaction with the completed project."
- "In a group setting, I am generally more committed to task performance than group cohesion."
- "In the scenario described above, why would you think your other group member provided you with social support?"

## Results

RQ1: Is a group members' satisfaction associated with the existence of conflict?

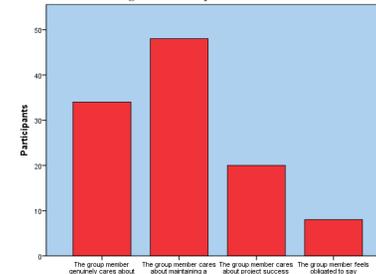
Table 1: Frequencies of Conflict and Group Satisfaction

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very Dissatisfied	1	.9	.9	.9
	Dissatisfied	4	3.6	3.6	4.5
	Neutral	10	9.1	9.1	13.6
	Satisfied	48	43.6	43.6	57.3
	Very Satisfied	47	42.7	42.7	100.0
Total		110	100.0	100.0	

Our research findings suggest that students in an academic group setting were less satisfied when conflict was present.

RQ2: In a group that experiences conflict, how do members perceive the intent of social support provided?

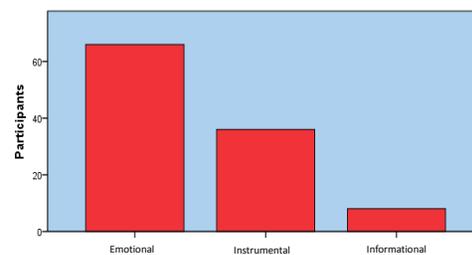
Figure 1: Perceptions of Intent



Most respondents perceived the provider of support to engage in supportive communication for the purpose of maintaining positive group atmosphere.

RQ3: In a group that experiences conflict, which type of social support is preferred?

Figure 2: Types of Social Support

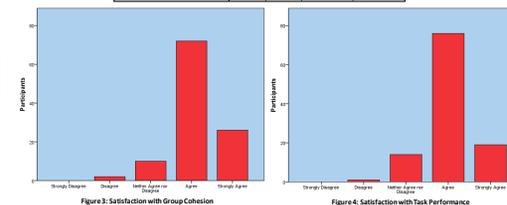


Most participants preferred emotional support while informational support was least desirable.

RQ4: Is higher group satisfaction based on received social support associated with greater commitment to a) task or b) group cohesion?

Table 2: Frequencies of Group and Task Commitment

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Part 1 In a group setting, I am generally more committed to group cohesion than task performance.	3.59	110	.733	.070
Part 2 In a group setting, I am generally more committed to task performance than group cohesion.	3.74	110	.905	.086



Group and task commitment are not correlated with overall satisfaction.



## Discussion

Although students preferred the absence of conflict in an academic group setting, it is quite possible that conflict will occur.

Because students were motivated to accept social support on the basis of restoring positive group atmosphere, it can be implied that providers of social support will have a desired impact if their supportive messages are group cohesion-focused.

These results provide guidance for group members, group leaders and teachers in deciding what type of support will best alleviate the negative effects of conflict, thereby leading to better group performance and more satisfied group members.

Results suggest that people are more committed to task than to group cohesion. Yet, receiving social support increases satisfaction with both task performance and group cohesion.

Future research should further investigate additional factors associated with the various ways people perceive the intent of the support provided.

Although results show most participants prefer emotional support, this may reflect the preponderance of female respondents.

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