Status Conflict in Groups

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We introduce status conflicts—defined as disputes over people's relative status (i.e., respect) positions in their group's social hierarchy—as a key group process that affects task group performance. Using mixed research methods, we qualitatively identify the characteristics of status conflicts, validate a four-item survey scale that distinctly measures status conflict, and investigate the relationship between status conflict and group performance. We determine that status conflict exerts a significant negative main effect, moderates the effects of task conflict on group performance, and hurts performance by undermining information sharing more than other types of conflict do.

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Despite a sociological tradition of studying conflicts over positions in social hierarchies, organization scholars have focused their attention on how other types of conflict in task groups affect group performance. Task conflict is disagreement over ideas and opinions pertaining to the group's task; relationship conflict is disagreement resulting from interpersonal incompatibilities, such as different personal values; and process conflict is conflict about dividing and delegating responsibilities and deciding how to get work done (Jehn 1997, Jehn and Mannix 2001). We argue that this trichotomy ignores a critical fourth type of conflict—that over members' status positions in the group's social hierarchy, the relative level of respect each member receives from others (Magee and Galinsky 2008). In this paper, we introduce status conflicts to the organizational conflict literature. We contend that broadening our consideration of group conflicts beyond those that are traditionally examined by organization scholars to include structural status conflicts produces a more comprehensive understanding of the role of conflict within groups and its impact on group performance.

We define status conflicts as disputes over people's relative status positions in their group's social hierarchy. The structural properties of status conflicts induce more competitive behaviors than do the other types of conflict because status conflicts have longer-term consequences, implicate other group members more, and have more distributive outcomes. These characteristics make status conflicts similar to competitive negotiations, which tend to involve restricted information sharing and, as a result, hurt group performance (Carnevale and Probst 1998, De Dreu et al. 2006, Toma and Butera 2009). Status conflicts thus may be particularly detrimental to group performance because they negatively impact information sharing among group members more than other kinds of conflicts do.

To illustrate what we mean by a status conflict, consider Morrill's (1995) description of relations between two executives of the "Independent" accounting firm. Relatively low-status Jimson "had recently made partner due in no small part to his mentoring by Vega.... Jimson repeatedly boasted about his latest engagements, and laughingly added that 'a new era had dawned' in which Jimson would mentor Vega on how to deal with clients." Vega defended his higher status by "telling Jimson that one of the distinguishing marks of an Independent partner is a 'reserved and professional perspective.' 'Too much confidence,' Vega warned, 'could lead one to arrogance and ruination'" (Morrill 1995, pp. 166–167). The content of this status conflict is Jimson and Vega's relative positions in the social hierarchy, not task problems, personal values, or procedural coordination.

Empirically, we use three samples of MBA student study groups of four to six people who worked together for one 10-week academic quarter on group assignments, in-class exercises, and individual assignments for between two and five required courses. We collected qualitative process data from the first sample of five teams for the duration of the 10-week quarter. Using these data, we identify the characteristics of status conflict, distinguish it from other types of conflicts, and observe the kinds of group responses to each conflict type. Based on these results, we then develop and validate a four-item status conflict scale using our second and third student samples. Finally, we examine the effects of status conflict on group performance in addition to those of task, relationship, and process conflict in our third student sample. We confirm information sharing as a mechanism through which status conflicts differentially affect group performance, and that status con-

flicts moderate the effect of task conflict on performance. Thus, we introduce conflicts related to social status and demonstrate their distinctive effects on group processes and outcomes. We believe that considering the structural properties of conflict expands our understanding of how conflict shapes group dynamics and affects group performance.

Introduction of Status Conflicts

Task groups without a formal hierarchical structure inevitably establish a social hierarchy (Bales 1958, Gould 2003, Tiedens et al. 2007). Although many researchers have depicted status hierarchies as systematically constructed (Berger et al. 1972, 1980), self-reinforcing and stable (Anderson et al. 2001, Magee and Galinsky 2008, Stewart 2005), others, such as Schein (1977, p. 64) argue, "Power struggles, alliance formation, strategic maneuvering, and 'cut throat' actions may be...endemic to organizational life." Furthermore, Gould (2003) argues that most interpersonal conflicts stem from disagreements about the amount of dominance exerted in social relations. There are many benefits of high status, including greater influence, credit for work, access to information and resources that contribute to individuals' performance, and more positive evaluations than of those with low status in groups (Berger et al. 1980, Foschi 2000, Friedkin 1999, Ridgeway and Correll 2006). People also derive inherent value from social esteem (Gould 2003, Huberman et al. 2004). Thus, it follows that individuals would compete for status and try to manipulate the social construction of status relations (Gould 2003, Zhou 2005). In other words, people's social-structural interests may be as important as their task, relationship, or procedural concerns are in organizations.

The contested nature of status hierarchies has been documented both theoretically and empirically. Whyte (1943) first identified status conflicts that take place in "honor societies," such as street gangs. Homans (1950) and later Morrill (1991, 1995) extended those dynamics to organizational contexts as well. Negotiated order theory suggested that social order is continuously (re)constructed as actors negotiate for status and vie for legitimacy (Strauss et al. 1963). Empirical research has demonstrated that people are willing to pay a price to maintain their status positions (Brett et al. 2007, Hambrick and Cannella 1993) or to attain higher status (Flynn 2003, Huberman et al. 2004). People engage in status contests (Blau 1964, Maclay and Knipe 1972, Owens and Sutton 2001, Zhou 2005) and status auctions (Sutton and Hargadon 1996), and may overtly challenge the status of others (Polzer and Caruso 2008, Porath et al. 2008), to sort out their relative social standing. Thus, we contend that conflicts over people's relative status positions in their group's social hierarchy

are a pervasive form of intragroup conflict that has been overlooked by the small group conflict literature.

Although many organizational scholars have been concerned with the effects of conflict on group performance, the research tradition that identified status conflicts has not examined similar outcomes. Therefore, we next develop a theoretical argument for how status conflicts affect group performance.

Effects of Conflict on Group Performance

Early research on conflict within groups focused on how it can produce tension and animosity and distract a team from the task at hand, thereby hindering team performance (Hackman and Morris 1975, Pondy 1967). By analyzing the discrete effects of task, relationship, and process conflict on group outcomes, however, Jehn (1995, 1997) found that, although all types of conflict are detrimental to member satisfaction, moderate levels of task conflict actually improve team performance because of enhanced information exchange processes. These results were consistent with other research indicating that divergent viewpoints within a group can improve decision quality by forcing members to take others' perspective and stimulating creativity (Amason 1996, Hollenbeck et al. 1995, Schwenk 1990).

Despite the potential benefits of task conflict on group performance, the positive relationship first reported by Jehn (1995) has been found inconsistently in subsequent research. In their meta-analysis, De Dreu and Weingart (2003b) determined that the average corrected correlation between *task conflict* and *group performance* was -0.23. This has generated a proliferation of research that attempts to uncover moderating variables that clarify the relationship between various types of conflict and performance (De Dreu and Weingart 2003a, Hinds and Mortensen 2005, Jehn and Bendersky 2003). Such complex models have led some scholars to conclude that the performance benefits of task conflicts may be highly circumscribed (De Dreu and Weingart 2003b). We posit that some of this inconsistency may be due to unobserved heterogeneity from status conflicts, which negatively affect group performance because of their structural nature and the competitive behaviors that they engender.

Status Conflicts Are Structural. Reflecting status conflict's structural content, descriptions of such conflicts often explicitly refer to "place," or social position in the group. For example, consider "Black Friday" in Roy's (1959) classic description of the interactions among a group of factory machine operators. When low-status Ike publicly insulted high-status George, George perceived this as a challenge to his superior status and responded by giving Ike the "silent treatment" for 13 days. To Roy, George said, "Ike acts like a five-year old, not a man!... He's always fooling around! I'm going to stop that! *I'm*

going to show him his place!" (Roy 1959, p. 165, italics added). Similarly, in one of the seminal studies of honor societies, Homans (1950) reports how status conflicts were enacted in bowling matches among the members of the Norton Street Gang that Whyte (1943) had followed. When the leader of the gang was asked what would have happened if one of the low-status members had won a bowling competition, he responded, "We would have tried to get them in another match and then ruin them. *We would have put them in their places*" (Whyte 1943, p. 165, italics added).

The structural nature of status conflict is further demonstrated by noting that relative positions in a group's social network help predict which individuals are likely to engage in these conflicts. In the Norton Street Gang bowling competitions, for instance, low-status Alec challenged high-status Long John rather than one of the other three high-status bowlers: "It was not that Long John's bowling ability was uncertain.... As a member of the top group but not a leader in his own right, it was [Long John's] social position that was vulnerable" (Homans 1950, p. 166). Thus, the configuration of disputants' status ambitions is a function of their positions in the group's social structure (Benjamin and Poldony 1999), not their interests in a particular conflict outcome.

Task, relationship, and process conflicts are not structural. They are based on different information or perceptions of task outcomes, group processes, or personal values (De Dreu et al. 1999, Sell et al. 2004). Although the protagonists' status may impact the strategies used and outcomes of the conflicts (Mannix and Neale 1993, Van Kleef et al. 2006), their relative status positions are not the substance of the conflict. Furthermore, unlike the structural predictability of status interests, task, relationship, and process conflict interests are issue-specific and vary across the conflict episodes that a group experiences (Thompson et al. 1988). In sum, the structural focus of status conflicts distinguishes them from the focus of conflicts over tasks, relationships, and processes.

Status Conflicts Induce Particularly Competitive Behaviors. We contend that status conflicts distinctly affect group performance because they induce competitive negotiation tactics that restrict information sharing within the group. There are several reasons why status conflicts are particularly competitive. First, status conflicts have longer-term implications than do the other types of conflicts because patterns of dominance and deference established in current interactions tend to persist into the future (Blau 1964), thereby raising the stakes of the argument. The conflict between Vega and Jimson in the introductory example was about whether or not a "new era had dawned" in which the order of deference between them had changed. Because of the long-term implications of dominance patterns, disputes

over social relationships in which there is ambiguity between actors concerning relative social rank become disproportionately competitive and intense relative to the triggering incident (Black 1990, Gould 2003). This can be seen in another seminal sociological study of status conflicts in work groups: Kapferer's (1969) deconstruction of a conflict that occurred between Abraham and Donald, two workers in a Zambian zinc mine. Although both the task conflict (over rate busting) and the relationship conflict (over the threat of witchcraft) were serious issues, the actual task and relational norm violations that occurred were relatively minor. It is Kapferer's interpretation that the status interests of the disputants exacerbated the otherwise low-level task and relationship conflict into a highly intense dispute that resulted in Donald leaving the work group. Although task, relationship, and process conflicts also may have long-term consequences, their central purpose is not fundamentally reshaping the relationship between the disputants in ways that alter access to valuable resources.

Second, status conflicts engage other group members more than the other types of conflicts do because the entire network of social relationships is implicated by a challenge to the social hierarchy (Kapferer 1969, Morrill 1991, Ridgeway and Walker 1995). Furthermore, allies and bystanders in a group are essential to the legitimate social conferral of relative status between any pair of group members (Kalkhoff 2005). Thus, status conflicts often involve active allies or passive bystanders to legitimate the hierarchical implications of a status conflict (Blau 1964, Gould 1999, Kapferer 1969, Ridgeway and Correll 2006). However, allies and bystanders need not always be physically present to be implicated in status conflict. In the initial example, for instance, Vega implies that Jimson's violation of the "distinguishing marks of an Independent partner" would harm his reputation not with Vega, but with important stakeholders such as clients, subordinates, and other partners in the firm. Vega gains leverage in the conflict by implying that important third parties are interested in maintaining the existing status hierarchy and, even though not present at the time, could plausibly be mobilized to reinforce Vega's higher status position. Likewise, Kapferer (1969) identifies the protagonists' relative positions in the group's social network as critical to understanding the course of the dispute: Because Abraham was more central in the social network than was Donald, Abraham was able to mobilize more allies than Donald despite the ambiguous justness of their conflict.

The alliances that are potentially mobilized in status conflicts are based on people's structural relationships to the protagonists rather than their substantive interests in the conflict (Podolny and Phillips 1996). Alliances are less common in task, relationship, or process conflicts than they are in status conflicts because ally and bystander mobilization requires overlapping substantive

interests (Polzer et al. 1998, Van Beest and Van Dijk 2007, Van Beest et al. 2004). Because the presence of even potential allies and bystanders encourages negotiators to behave more competitively (Carnevale et al. 1979, Rubin and Brown 1975, Schmidt and Kochan 1972), this characteristic of status conflicts is associated with more competitive behaviors, on average, than in nonstructural conflicts. Importantly, this is true even if the observers are passive bystanders because the mere possibility of forming a coalition in the future may be enough to influence current behavior, even if the allies are never mobilized (Baumgartner et al. 1975, Morrill 1995, Schmidt and Kochan 1972).

Finally, because status is a fixed social resource, status conflicts have zero-sum outcomes; i.e., gaining status means lowering another's rank in the hierarchy (Berger et al. 1998, Gould 2003, Homans 1961). Jimson's status gain at Independent accounting, for instance, would result in Vega's status loss. In contrast, people's interests in task, relationship, or process conflicts may be more integrative; i.e., there may be possibilities for joint gains (Walton and McKersie 1965) because of opportunities to trade concessions across issues of varying importance to the parties or find mutually acceptable compromises (Pruitt 1983, Thompson 2001). We posit that the integrative potential in task, relationship, and process conflicts generates less competitive negotiation strategies than does the distributive nature of status conflict interests (Lewicki et al. 1999, Pruitt and Rubin 1986, Tinsley et al. 2002).

Status conflicts, therefore, may induce more competitive behaviors than task, relationship, or process conflicts do because of their longer-term implications, greater bystander engagement, and more distributive outcomes. We contend that heightened competitiveness affects group processes in ways that are particularly detrimental to task performance. Although other mechanisms, such as cognitive load, negative affect, and threat rigidity, which are present in all types of conflict, may reduce *individuals'* information processing capacity (Carnevale and Probst 1998, Greer and Jehn 2007), we posit that the heightened competitiveness that results from status conflicts will be especially detrimental to *group* information sharing. Research on group decision making has shown that competition, relative to cooperation, inhibits group information sharing (Toma and Butera 2009) and learning (Van der Vegt et al. 2010). Because sharing information is needed to achieve optimal joint outcomes (De Dreu and Carnevale 2003, De Dreu et al. 2008), its restriction is likely detrimental to group performance (Srivastava et al. 2006).

We now turn to qualitatively (Study 1) and quantitatively (Study 2) distinguishing status conflict from other types of conflicts that occur in task groups. In Study 3, we will examine the effects of status conflict on group performance and information sharing.

Study 1: Qualitative Analysis of Status Conflict

In this first study, we sought to systematically identify the characteristics of status conflicts in task groups composed of peers (i.e., without a formal hierarchical structure) where we could observe the emergence and evolution of status hierarchies. Thus, in Study 1, we explore (1) how status conflict is distinct from task, relationship, and process conflict; (2) what particular group processes it engenders; and (3) with what frequency it occurs in isolation and in combination with different types of conflicts.

Methods

Participants. Participants were 25 full-time MBA students at a West Coast university during their first quarter in the program. They were organized into five teams of five members each and worked together on assignments from five required courses. Fifteen were men, 13 were white, and their average age was 27 years (S.D. = 1.88). On average, they had 4.26 years (S.D. = 1.25 years) of postgraduate work experience.

Procedure. At the beginning and end of the quarter (after all course grades had been submitted), the members ranked themselves and their teammates on six status dimensions: status, influence, contribution, respectability, intelligence, and social popularity. During the 10-week quarter, each team audiotaped all team meetings and copied the lead researcher on all intrateam e-mails, from which we excised conflict episodes. This procedure allowed us to observe conflicts "live" rather than rely on retrospective recollections of conflict incidents from the participants. We define a conflict as perceptions of discrepant views or interpersonal incompatibilities (Jehn 1995). A conflict episode involves a single set of participants talking about a single topic. When the topic or participants change, a new conflict episode begins. This definition resulted in 259 total conflict episodes.

Coding Process and Scheme. We iteratively developed our coding scheme using the team with the most change in its status order, based on mean Spearman's correlations of the Time 1 and Time 2 rank orders for each of the six status dimensions on which the participants were surveyed. We used this team for developing our coding scheme because the ranking data suggested it was likely to have the highest levels of status-based conflicts. We considered each conflict episode in terms of Jehn's (1997) definitions of task, relationship, and process conflict, and we then discussed episodes that seemed not to fit one of the categories and/or appeared to involve issues of relative social positions.

After iterating our coding definitions together, the authors independently coded a subset of the conflict

episodes in terms of all four types of conflicts, allowing for multiple conflict codes (e.g., an episode could be coded as having both task and status conflict present). Our Cohen's kappa measure of interrater reliability for task conflict equaled 0.86, for process conflict it equaled 0.72, for relationship conflict it equaled 0.76, and for status conflict it equaled 1. We then trained an independent rater, who was blind to the purposes of the study, about our coding scheme to ensure its reliability (Miles and Huberman 1994). We achieved a Cohen's kappa of 1 for task conflict, 0.77 for relationship conflict, 0.76 for process conflict, and 0.76 for status conflict. We discussed all disagreements and determined a final set of codes for each conflict episode. The second author then coded the other four teams with the final protocol.[1]

Results

Our analyses indicate that 47% of all conflicts experienced by these groups involved some aspect of status. Table 1 presents the frequency of coded conflict episodes, including how often status conflicts occurred alone and with task, relationship, and process conflict by team.

Pure Status Conflicts. Pure status conflicts are focused exclusively on the social hierarchy of the group. For example, two members of Team 2, A and B, discussed their high schools as a way of asserting their superior "pedigree":

> B: We still had a better education than you guys, so that's okay.
> A: Yeah, I don't think so…Madeline Albright went to my high school, motherf****r. Madeline motherf****n' Albright!
> B: So? Every single president and prime minister came out of my high school.
> A: Yeah? B: Like, 70% of politicians in that country come from my high school.
> A: That doesn't mean anything…. No. I went to a very, very wealthy high school.
> B: Well, I just went to the most intelligent high school in all of Southeast Asia.

This conversation about who had superior education credentials was purely an attempt to increase the relative esteem in which other group members held each of them. Thus, it was about their positions in the group's social structure rather than differing information or perspectives about tasks, processes, or personal values.

In general, we found that team members employed one of three "arguments" in service of their goals of modifying or reinforcing the hierarchy by (1) asserting superior legitimacy or competence, (2) attempting to assert dominance relative to others, or (3) devaluing another's or inflating one's own contributions. Legitimacy or competence arguments challenge another's logic or understanding of the information to justify why the challenger's views were more accurate or appropriate than another team member's views. In the previous example, for instance, A and B used their educational credentials to establish the relative legitimacy of their opinions in the context of an academic task group. Use of this argument is consistent with research where displays of competence lead to higher status (Berger et al. 1972, Lord 1985, Ridgeway and Erickson 2000, Van Vugt 2006), and higher-status individuals define legitimacy to suit their interests (Bechky 2003, Hallett 2003, Zhou 2005). For example, in our student teams we observed comments like "You've always got it wrong. I get all this stuff" (Member R, Team 3), and "I understand what you're saying, but I've read that sentence like 10 times" (Member S, Team 1).

Asserting dominance was identifiable by being assertive relative to group norms, by telling others what or how to do something, and by insulting or interrupting others. Displays of dominance have been associated with higher status and influence (Anderson and Berdahl 2002, Fragale 2006, Judge et al. 2002, Lord et al. 1986). This is due, in part, to others' increased perceptions of competence (Anderson and Kilduff 2009) and the elicitation of complementary submissive behaviors in others (Tiedens and Fragale 2003). Examples of this tactic in our student groups include "Just shut up, don't even say

Table 1 Frequencies of Status Conflict Occurring Alone and in Conjunction with Task, Relationship, and Process Conflicts

	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Team 4	Team 5	Total	Percentage of total conflict episodes
Status conflict	4	50	44	12	11	121	47
Alone	1	12	8	2	4	27	10
With task conflict	2	26	15	8	6	57	22
With process conflict	1	6	8	2	1	18	7
With relationship conflict	0	2	8	0	0	10	4
With multiple types	0	4	5	0	0	9	3
Task conflict alone	17	27	19	34	17	114	44
Process conflict alone	1	4	10	1	0	16	6
Relationship conflict alone	2	3	3	0	0	8	3
Total episodes	24	84	76	47	28	259	

any more" (Member S, Team 5), and "I see it, but you tell me in the terms I'll agree" (Member L, Team 3).

Contribution arguments generally involved undermining or devaluing another's contribution to the group's task or accentuating one's own contribution. This is consistent with research demonstrating that group members thought to be capable of contributing more to the group's goals (Berger et al. 1986) or observed engaging in generous, self-sacrificial behaviors (Hardy and Van Vugt 2006, Willer 2009) are conferred higher status; for example, " '[C]uz you know, I . . . I think me and L were sitting there Saturday afternoon . . . and there I was, one of the two people who were typing it up" (Member R, Team 3). These arguments were less prevalent than were legitimacy and dominance displays, however.

Another distinctive feature of status conflicts is that they frequently involve multiple members of a group, either as allies or as bystanders. As mentioned earlier, allies and bystanders can defend the status order or use the status conflict to boost their own status (Gould 1999), and they may serve as a source of social proof to validate and legitimate the status order following a status conflict (Kalkhoff 2005, Ridgeway and Erickson 2000). Consider the following example of another conflict on Team 2 between the same two protagonists, A and B, from the opening example of a status conflict:

> L: Why didn't you go?
> A: I don't know. I can't remember.
> B: 'Cuz his girlfriend doesn't let him go out.
> L: That's lame.

In this excerpt, L's alliance with B helps reinforce the legitimacy of B's claim to higher relative status in the group by derogating A's subordination within his personal relationship. In another example, from Team 1, Member S responded to a joke Member B made about him in the school newspaper by e-mailing the entire group: "S: While I like joke [*sic*], it depends on time, place and occasion. Obviously [the] Professor and his TAs are grading our final exam paper. I can't understand why you execute me publicly and try to make my poor grade worse." B's public teasing of S made S fear that it might lower the esteem in which the professor and TA held him. By e-mailing this angry message to the full group, S publicly aired his grievance and potentially mobilized his allies in the group.

Pure Task Conflicts. In contrast, task conflicts arose from differences of opinion related to the task at hand. An example of a pure task conflict was demonstrated by Team 5:

> D: Your profits [are] still going to be zero. Right?
> M: No, your profit's negative apparently.
> J: No—
> D: In the long run, it's going to be zero.
> J: But why will it be zero?
> D: Because you're in a perfectly competitive market.

> J: Right, but—
> D: That's the definition.

Although this was a quite heated disagreement, the parties were all focused on figuring out the right answer to the problem; thus, it was coded only as task conflict.

Pure Relationship Conflicts. Relationship conflict is motivated by a negative interpersonal relationship based on different values, preferences, and priorities. This distinguishes it from status conflicts, which may occur regardless of the quality of the interpersonal relationship. An example of a pure relationship conflict comes from a heated discussion among members of Team 3 over hiring practices and gender discrimination:

> P: You take the same person, the same education, the same qualities, one is a man, one is a woman, which one will you pick?
> L: I'll hire a woman . . . . Just because I want women to be more in the work force. Why would you hire a man?
> R: That's, you're so discriminatory—
> L: Why would you hire a man? . . . You're denying a qualified woman from entering the work force—that's ridiculous!

This argument was about differences of values and opinions, but the participants did not attempt to bolster their own status or lower another's status in the process, so it was coded as just relationship conflict.

Pure Process Conflicts. Process conflict relates to how to accomplish a task. Team 1 provides an example of a pure process conflict, as follows:

> J: I really think we should get together to do the last finance case. We all know that S and P could do it together, but I think it would be better if we all read it and then met and discussed it before you two shoot out the answer.
> B: J, that's fine. I think you should still attempt to do the case yourself whenever you can so that we can make our group discussion more effective.

Pure process conflicts were, essentially, logistical discussions.

Group Process Implications of Status Conflicts. Status conflicts seemed to generate particularly competitive behaviors. Group members were highly aggressive, shared little information, ignored information that was shared by others, and withdrew from group conversations in the face of status conflicts. This is most evident when we consider examples of status conflict co-occurring with other types of conflicts. In status conflicts that co-occurred with task conflicts, we observed group members explicitly withholding information at times, apparently as a sign of dominance over others. In one

exchange in Team 2, for instance, B refused to share information with team member Z:

B: No, you don't need [it]. No.
Z: Come on, I need it.
B: No.
Z: No?
B: No.

Failing to share information or acknowledge information shared by others was usually less blatant, however. A more common tactic was to repeatedly interrupt others. Members J and P on Team 1 provide an example:

P: No, we're not talking about the dog market. Dog market we're going to price at 200 something.
J: Dog—
P: [*interrupting*] Based on this one.
J: Well—
P: [*interrupting*] But we're talking about what the implications [are] for the human market.

Another competitive tactic that we observed when task and status conflicts co-occurred was an entrenchment of positions accompanied by derogating other member's opinions. For instance, members of Team 2 were engaged in a task-related discussion about real estate, and Member Z refused to yield:

L: It could be real estate in Podunk, Iowa.
A: Yeah.
B: All right, if you have, right, if you have 10 people living in a town, and 100 apartment buildings, would you build a 101st apartment building?
Z: I will not build, but somebody will.
B: Nobody would build.
A: No, nobody would build.

Because Z was of lower status than either A or B, Z's intransigence was met by B subsequently questioning Z's rationality (i.e., competence or legitimacy): "B: You've got to be rational.... Okay, Z, you've got to think rationally.... You've got to think conceptually. If you had empty apartments, would you, would you build more? No!" After B denigrated Z's logic, Z appeared to disengage from the group's discussion.

In contrast, every group in our sample experienced numerous pure task conflicts while working on their homework assignments together that did not generate the same kind of competitive responses or information restriction. The group response to the example of pure task conflict described above, where members of Team 5 were discussing profit levels in a perfectly competitive market, is typical. Team members took turns sharing their viewpoints, the conflict concluded with an agreement on the answer, and all the participants moved directly into a discussion of other aspects of the assignment. There was no apparent disengagement that would indicate information restriction in subsequent task conflicts. Similarly, during a process conflict within Team 3, members shared differing opinions on how to write a group paper:

H: We can just randomly put our ideas I think and just cut it and cut it—
R: It could also be quicker if people just like build off each sentence kind of.
A: Yeah, if we just...if we're able to split into sections and...each write a part and integrate.
H: But then trying to make the writing all the same after when you connect it.

The conflict concluded with a compromise agreement about how to accomplish the task. Thus, we found that when individuals tried to gain status relative to another group member in conjunction with a task, relationship, or process conflict, the exchanges were more competitive, and the parties shared less information than they did without the status conflict present.

Study 1 Discussion
Our qualitative analysis of these conflict episodes indicates that status conflicts are distinguishable from other types of conflicts and that they are relatively common in these kinds of task groups. The distinctive feature of status conflict is asserting or challenging the structural status order, or the relative levels of respect in the group, regardless of the quality of the interpersonal relationship between the individuals involved. These efforts were most often made by asserting superior legitimacy or competence, attempting to assert dominance relative to others, devaluing another's or inflating one's own contributions, and/or mobilizing allies.

Although status conflict does occur independently, it more commonly co-occurred with a task, relationship, or process conflict. We believe this is due to the relative social acceptability of the other types of conflict compared to an overt status contest. Despite frequent co-occurrence of status conflicts with other types of conflicts, status conflict appeared as a separate conflict type, with its own verbal and behavioral characteristics, and not just a motive for individuals to engage in task, relationship, and process conflict. Our coding process consisted of observable behaviors, whereas measuring motives would require self-reports from the individual participants. Although it is possible that some of the task, relationship, or process conflicts were motivated by a desire to advance one's own status interests, a conflict was only coded as a status conflict if those status interests were behaviorally manifested in ways consistent with our coding protocol. Furthermore, the 10% of the status conflicts that occurred by themselves indicate that status conflicts are distinct from the other types. Additionally, given their typically high correlations, it is probably quite common that task, relationship, and process conflicts co-occur with each other too (De Dreu and Weingart 2003b, Jehn et al. 1999, Simons and Peterson 2000). Thus we are consistent with the organizational

conflict literature to consider status conflict a distinct type of conflict instead of an underlying motivation, despite high levels of conflict co-occurrence.

Consistent with our theorizing, status conflicts seemed to produce particularly intense, competitive exchanges that resulted in less information sharing among group members. This was especially evident when status conflict co-occurred with a different type of conflict. In these exchanges, team members withheld information, interrupted each other to prevent others from sharing competing viewpoints, failed to acknowledge valid information that was shared by others, and, at times, withdrew from a discussion altogether more than when those conflicts did not co-occur with a status conflict. These behaviors seemed to reduce or eliminate the potential benefits of sharing different information and perspectives, which is precisely the mechanism through which task conflict, in particular, can improve team performance.

It is notable that the groups we observed engaged in relatively little relationship conflict. We believe this was the case primarily because the qualitative data came from recordings of formal group meetings and intra-group e-mails. To the extent that these groups socialized and discussed personal issues outside of "working hours," or when a subset of the group members met informally, they did not record these interactions, and thus, they remain outside of our analysis. Additional relationship conflicts may have occurred during these more informal, unrecorded meetings. It is also possible, however, that Jehn's (1995) relationship conflict construct is so broad that previous research would have coded some of our status conflicts as relationship conflicts, thereby inflating the apparent amount of relationship conflict that occurs in task groups.

We next develop and validate a survey instrument based on our qualitative observations to determine whether status conflict is empirically distinct from task, relationship, and process conflict.

Study 2: Construct Development

Methods
Having identified the characteristics of status conflicts with our qualitative data, we next developed a nine-item survey scale. We designed questions to reflect the four common manifestations of status conflicts that we observed in Study 1: asserting superior legitimacy or competence (e.g., "Members of my team questioned the credibility of other group members"), asserting influence or dominance (e.g., "My team members competed for influence"), devaluing another's or inflating one's own contributions (e.g., "My team members disagreed about the relative value of members contributions), and mobilizing allies (e.g., "My team members frequently took sides (i.e., formed coalitions) during conflicts"). We also added several items reflecting the zero-sum nature of

status conflicts (e.g., "In my group, I've experienced or observed two people both fighting to have the last word in an argument"). The full list of items is in Table 2. We also included nine items from Jehn (1995) and Shah and Jehn (1993) that typically have been used to measure task, relationship, and process conflict.

Participants. We surveyed two samples of working middle managers enrolled in a part-time MBA program at a West Coast university. The first sample includes 134 people (53% response rate) from four classes of students configured in 24 groups of five to six people (mean = 5.8). Respondents were 26 years old, on average (S.D. = 10.08), with an average of 6.16 years of postgraduate work experience (S.D. = 5). Sixty-eight percent of the sample was male, and 33% was white. The second sample had 240 people (a 95% response rate) from the same population of working students who were configured in 44 different groups of the same size as the first sample. Sixty-eight percent of respondents in this sample were male, and 39% were white. The average age was 29.5 (S.D. = 3.68), and the respondents had an average of 6.12 (S.D. = 4.2) years of postgraduate work experience.

Procedure. We collected data from the first sample via an online survey that was administered to all first-year part-time MBA students at the end of their quarter, right before their final exams. The survey instructions were to "Please think about your group experiences over the entire quarter, not just on your most recent group project," and to "Rate the extent to which each statement resembles your own study group." All questions were on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from "to no extent" (1) to "to a great extent" (7). We used the first sample to conduct exploratory factor analyses (EFAs) on all 18 conflict items and determine the reliabilities of the conflict scales.

The procedure and materials used with the second sample were identical to the first, but the survey was administered in the final class of the student's core organizational behavior course during a different academic quarter than for the first sample. This time, students were required to complete the survey for course credit but could opt out of the research study. We use this larger second sample to conduct comparative confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) and aggregation analyses.

Results

EFAs and Reliability Tests. To determine the association among items, we conducted EFAs using principal components extraction with promax rotation (kappa = 4) on responses from our first sample (see Table 2). Four factors accounted for 73% of the variance. The three items that measure task conflict loaded together,[2] the three items that measure relationship conflict loaded together, and two of the three process conflict items

Table 2   Exploratory Factor Analyses

	Status conflict	Relationship conflict	Process conflict	Task conflict
My team members experienced conflict of ideas.	0.020	−0.065	−0.041	**0.877**
My team members frequently had disagreements about the task we were working on.	−0.027	−0.194	<u>0.460</u>	**0.667**
My team members often had conflicting opinions about the task we were doing.	0.094	0.065	0.161	**0.663**
My team members experienced relationship tension that was not related to the task.	0.026	**0.710**	0.164	−0.007
My team members often got angry while working in this team.	−0.051	**0.751**	0.246	−0.138
My team members experienced emotional conflict.	−0.030	**0.674**	0.145	0.228
My team members had disagreements about who should do what.	−0.140	<u>0.487</u>	<u>0.573</u>	0.058
My team members experienced conflicts about task responsibilities.	−0.043	0.122	**0.749**	0.174
My team members disagreed about resource allocation.	0.196	0.049	**0.653**	0.005
My team members had arguments where those involved seemed to care more about who was right than what was right.	<u>0.494</u>	<u>0.418</u>	0.033	0.067
In my group, I've experienced or observed two people both fighting to have the last word in an argument.	0.254	<u>0.675</u>	−0.259	0.163
My team members frequently took sides (i.e., formed coalitions) during conflicts.	**0.775**	0.022	−0.021	0.048
My team members experienced conflicts due to members trying to assert their dominance.	**0.706**	0.227	−0.097	0.154
My team members competed for influence.	**0.711**	0.010	−0.143	0.335
My team members disagreed about the relative value of members' contributions.	**0.885**	−0.077	0.198	−0.044
My team members were condescending to each other.	0.259	<u>0.697</u>	0.060	−0.307
Members of my team questioned the credibility of other group members.	<u>−0.833</u>	0.148	−0.428	0.199
Certain members of my team frequently contradicted each other or "butted heads," regardless of the topic of conversation.	<u>−0.775</u>	−0.207	0.032	0.043

Notes. Items in bold are used in subsequent confirmatory factor analysis. Unanticipated loadings are underlined. Extraction method, principal component analysis. Rotation method: promax (kappa = 4) with Kaiser normalization.

loaded together. One process conflict item, "My team members had disagreements about who should do what," double-loaded almost equally on the process and relationship conflict factors, so we excluded it from subsequent analyses. Four of the nine status conflict items loaded together, positively and uniquely on a separate factor. Two additional items loaded negatively on the status conflict factor, and three others loaded (or cross-loaded) on the relationship conflict factor. We suspect these latter items tapped into the quality of the interpersonal relationship, making them less clearly distinguishable from relationship conflicts than were the other six items. Cronbach's alpha measuring the reliability of the four-item status conflict scale equals 0.90. Values for alpha for the other conflict scales were all acceptable (task conflict: $\alpha = 0.74$, relationship conflict: $\alpha = 0.79$, two-item process conflict: $\alpha = 0.74$).

Comparative CFAs. To test the discriminant validity of our scales, we conducted comparative CFAs on our second sample of responses to determine whether our four-factor model adequately represents the data and fit better than alternative models. Fit statistics for the unconstrained four-factor model met standard criteria: $\chi^2 = 114.60$ (48, $N = 239$), $p < 0.001$, comparative fit index (CFI) $= 0.95$, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) $= 0.05$. We then conducted a series of sequential chi-squared difference tests to assess whether or not the unconstrained four-factor model fit the data better than a one-factor model with the covariance among all four latent conflict factors set equal to 1, and three separate three-factor models where status conflict was assumed to load on the same factor as relationship conflict, process conflict, or task conflict, respectively. For the latter analyses, we fixed the covariance between the status conflict factor and each of the other conflict factors to 1. Results of all model comparisons confirmed that our unconstrained four-factor model demonstrated the best fit of the data (see Table 3).

Aggregation Analyses. We calculated the within-group agreement index, r_{wg} (James et al. 1984), and the intraclass correlation coefficient, ICC(1), to determine the appropriateness of aggregating the task, relationship, process, and status conflict constructs from our larger, second sample to the group level of analysis. The r_{wg} index ranges from 0 to 1, with values greater than 0.70 justifying group aggregation (Klein et al. 2000). ICC(1) is a point estimate of interrater reliability that takes into account group size. A value greater than 0.12 is generally considered acceptable (James 1982). Because there was not much variance in group size, we averaged it across the teams (Bliese 2000).

Table 3 Confirmatory Factor Analysis: Sequential χ^2 Difference Tests

Model	χ^2	df	p
Unconstrained four-factor model	114.60	48	<0.001
One-factor model	318.59	54	<0.001
Difference from four-factor model	203.99	6	<0.001
Three-factor model (TC, PC, SC/RC)	178.08	49	<0.001
Difference from four-factor model	63.48	1	<0.001
Three-factor model (PC, RC, SC/TC)	241.05	49	<0.001
Difference from four-factor model	126.45	1	<0.001
Three-factor model (TC, RC, SC/PC)	147.91	49	<0.001
Difference from four-factor model	33.31	1	<0.001

Note. TC, task conflict; PC, process conflict; RC, relationship conflict; SC, status conflict.

The aggregation statistics produce support for group-level aggregation. For task conflict, the ICC(1) equaled 0.25 and the mean r_{wg} equaled 0.84; for relationship conflict, the ICC(1) equaled 0.33 and mean r_{wg} equaled 0.90; for the two-item process conflict scale, the ICC(1) equaled 0.21 and mean r_{wg} equaled 0.82; and for status conflict, ICC(1) equaled 0.13 and mean r_{wg} equaled 0.84. Thus, the within-group agreement and interrater reliabilities were all acceptable.

Study 3: Effects on Group Performance

Having developed a measurement scale for status conflicts, we now assess its effects on group performance. Given the unambiguous and consistent negative relationship found between individual satisfaction and all types of conflict (De Dreu and Weingart 2003b), we had no reason to expect that the effect of status conflict would be any different. Therefore, we chose to focus our analyses on the more ambiguous relationship between group performance and status conflict. We posit that including status conflict along with the traditional measures of task, relationship, and process conflict will enhance our understanding of the role of conflict on group performance.

Hypotheses

Given the attention to status conflicts in the sociological literature and their prevalence in Study 1, we conclude that they are fairly common in task groups. Previous studies that have measured only task, relationship, and process conflicts, therefore, may have had limited explanatory power because of noise from unobserved status conflicts. Like other forms of conflict, status conflict consumes team resources (Loch et al. 2000); therefore, considering its effect on performance along with those of task, relationship, and process conflicts may help explain more of the variance in performance than do models without it. We hypothesize the following.

HYPOTHESIS 1. *Adding status conflict to analyses will explain more total variance of group performance than*

will models with only task, relationship, and process conflict.

Status conflicts will likely hinder team performance. Because conflict over status is not related to the group's task, it should serve as a distraction and harm group performance. In the Loch et al. (2000) models, for instance, when status is conferred based on non-task-related "politicking" (e.g., networking, gossiping, or exchanging favors), status conflicts are detrimental to group performance. Similarly, Mannix and Sauer (2006) argue that conflict becomes more detrimental when dealing with unclear status hierarchies in which members may be focusing on obtaining status positions instead of the task. Groups with many high-status individuals may be easily preoccupied with sorting out their status hierarchy, leading to dysfunctional team processes (Groysberg et al. 2011, Overbeck et al. 2005). Furthermore, as individuals assert their status interests by challenging or defending their status position, they may make suboptimal decisions that hurt the group's task performance (Hambrick and Cannella 1993, Van der Vegt et al. 2010). For these reasons, we hypothesize the following.

HYPOTHESIS 2. *Status conflict will exert a negative main effect on group performance.*

Although all types of conflict may reduce individuals' cognitive information processing to some extent (Carnevale and Probst 1998, De Dreu and Weingart 2003b), we argue that the three distinctive characteristics of status conflicts—long-term implications, bystander engagement, and distributive outcomes—make status conflicts more competitive than other types. This inhibits information sharing at the group level more than task, relationship, or process conflicts. In Study 1 we observed that individuals responded particularly competitively to status conflicts, and restricted information sharing as a result. This observation is consistent with research on negotiations, which finds that disputants are more competitive and less likely to share information in distributive negotiations than in integrative negotiations (Thompson 1991, Tinsley et al. 2002). Furthermore, sharing information is needed to achieve optimal joint outcomes (De Dreu and Carnevale 2003, De Dreu et al. 2008). Research on group decision making has also shown that competition, relative to cooperation, inhibits group information sharing (Toma and Butera 2009), and that information sharing is positively related to team performance (Srivastava et al. 2006). Similarly, group learning processes are hindered as individuals focus more on maintaining their position in the group's hierarchy than on team outcomes, which negatively affects performance (Van der Vegt et al. 2010). For these reasons, we hypothesize the following.

HYPOTHESIS 3. *Status conflicts will negatively affect group performance via diminished group information sharing more than the other types of conflicts will.*

Last, we hypothesize that this heightened information restriction means status conflicts will negatively interact with task conflicts to predict group performance. This is because the information restriction resulting from status conflicts undermines the exact mechanism that produces the positive potential of the task conflicts (Jehn 1995, 1997). Especially when tasks are nonroutine, task conflict may enhance group performance by increasing group members' tendencies to scrutinize task issues and to engage in deep and deliberate processing of task-related information (De Dreu and Weingart 2003b, De Dreu and West 2001, Jehn 1995). For example, Lovelace et al. (2001) found that task conflict positively impacted group innovativeness when individuals felt freer to express doubt and engaged in collaborative communication processes. This information sharing mechanism moderated the effects of task conflict on group innovativeness. In Jehn et al. (1999), the positive effect of informational diversity on group performance was mediated by task conflict. In other words, the positive effects of informational diversity were realized when task conflicts elicited the members' informational differences. If status conflicts impede group performance by restricting group information sharing, then when status and task conflict co-occur, the positive potential of the task conflict should be undermined by the presence of status conflict. Task conflicts may positively affect performance only in the absence of status conflicts. Stated formally,

HYPOTHESIS 4. *Status conflict will moderate the effect of task conflict on group performance such that group performance is highest when task conflict is at a high level and status conflict is at a low level.*

Methods

We use the same data that we used for the CFA and aggregation analyses in Study 2. All variables were standardized for these analyses to reduce potential multicollinearity (Aiken and West 1991).

Variables. The dependent variable is the grade each team received on its final group project for the organizational behavior core course during which these data were collected. The assignments were collected prior to the survey's administration but graded afterward. The assignments were graded by two graders on a 16-point scale with a mean grade of 13.70 (S.D. = 1.36). The graders both independently graded a subset of seven assignments to establish an interrater reliability (Cohen's kappa = 0.78). There were no differences across the class sections, so we pooled the data.

The aggregated task, relationship, process, and status conflict scales that we collected from the survey are our independent variables.

To measure group information sharing, we used the knowledge process criteria scale (Wageman et al. 2005).

It comprises three items measuring the extent to which group members shared information and learned from each other (e.g., "Members of our team actively shared their special knowledge and expertise with one another"). The Cronbach's alpha equaled 0.73, the ICC(1) equaled 0.17, and the mean r_{wg} equaled 0.81.

Following past conflict research, we also included a number of control variables in our analyses. To capture demographic heterogeneity that might affect performance through conflict (Jehn et al. 1999), we measured the percentage of group members that are white (mean = 37.8, S.D. = 24.17). We also control for the mean GMAT standardized test scores as a measure of general business knowledge for the team that indicates the group members' task abilities (mean = 677.63, S.D. = 24.52).

Because the impact of conflict on group performance depends on the quality of the group processes, we included three group process variables in addition to these group composition variables. Two items addressing open conflict norms ("Conflict was dealt with openly in my team" and "If conflict arose in my team, the people involved initiated steps to resolve the conflict immediately") achieved an acceptable Cronbach's alpha of 0.76. Because the open discussion of conflict has been a key conflict management strategy for teams that benefit from task conflict (Jehn and Mannix 2001), we included this two-item scale in our analyses, even though the mean r_{wg} is a bit lower than is recommended (ICC(1) = 0.19 and mean $r_{wg} = 0.66$). Because there was no variation in task interdependence across our groups, we considered the quality of the group's task-based processes instead, based on the effort process criteria scale (Wageman et al. 2005). The scale comprises three items regarding the level of effort members collectively expend on the task. We included this measure of group processes because concerns regarding free riders and team members shirking their responsibilities were particularly salient in this sample. The effort process criteria scale achieved an individual-level Cronbach's alpha equal to 0.84, an ICC(1) equal to 0.35, and mean r_{wg} equal to 0.81, justifying aggregation to the group level of analysis. Finally, because most research that considers the effects of competitiveness on information sharing also examines cooperativeness (e.g., De Dreu et al. 2008, Toma and Butera 2009), we include the group cooperativeness scale (Lester et al. 2002). It reflects the extent to which team members communicated and cooperated with each other. It is composed of eight items that are adapted to fit the question structure of our survey (e.g., "My team members cooperated to get the work done"). The Cronbach's alpha from the individual responses was equal to 0.88, and the aggregation statistics support group-level analyses (ICC(1) = 0.37 and mean $r_{wg} = 0.96$).

Table 4 Correlations and Descriptive Statistics of Standardized Variables ($N = 44$), and Means and Standard Deviations of Nonstandardized Variables

	Group perfom.	Task conflict	Relationship conflict	Process conflict	Status conflict	Mean GMAT	%White	Coopera-tiveness	Effort process criteria	Open conflict norms	Knowledge process criteria
Group performance	1										
Task conflict	0.10	1									
Relationship conflict	−0.08	0.59**	1								
Process conflict	0.04	0.64**	0.69**	1							
Status conflict	−0.08	0.57**	0.72**	0.60**	1						
Mean GMAT	−0.26*	0.12	−0.19	0.02	0.04	1					
%White	−0.14	−0.22	−0.10	−0.12	−0.07	−0.09	1				
Cooperativeness	−0.09	−0.34**	−0.66**	−0.63**	−0.64**	0.03	−0.02	1			
Effort process criteria	0.01	−0.22	−0.51**	−0.52**	−0.41**	0.01	−0.13	0.79**	1		
Open conflict norms	−0.09	−0.14	−0.44**	−0.43**	−0.36**	0.18	−0.27*	0.70**	0.65**	1	
Knowledge process criteria	−0.02	−0.25*	−0.47**	−0.39**	−0.51**	−0.07	0.08	0.76**	0.65**	0.54**	1
Mean	13.70	2.99	1.67	1.94	1.80	677.63	37.81	5.95	5.71	5.09	5.09
S.D.	1.36	0.72	0.58	0.60	0.61	24.52	24.17	0.60	0.86	0.79	0.83

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

Results

Correlations and descriptive statistics are reported in Table 4. Consistent with previous conflict research (De Dreu and Weingart 2003b), the four conflict scales are all significantly positively correlated with each other. None of the conflict scales has a significant simple correlation with group performance. This may indicate that they have indirect effects on performance in this sample. The group process variables are all significantly negatively correlated with all types of conflict.

Hierarchical Robust OLS Regression. We next tested our hypotheses with respect to group performance using hierarchical ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions with robust standard errors to correct for any nonindependence in the error terms within each class section

(see Table 5). To determine whether the addition of variables in the hierarchical analysis improves the model fit in robust regression analyses, we conduct Wald tests, which calculate whether or not the coefficients of the added variables at each step are simultaneously zero (Wald 1943). We report the adjusted R^2 at each step to describe the amount of variance explained by the model, given the number of variables that are estimated.

The adjusted R^2 of Model 1, with just the control variables, equals 0.03 (n.s.). Adding task, relationship, and process conflict in Model 2 improves the variance explained (adjusted $R^2 = 0.09$), but neither the model nor the Wald test is statistically significant. This means that the increase in variance that is explained with the simultaneous addition of these variables is not greater than would be expected by chance. *Task conflict* has a

Table 5 Hierarchical Robust OLS Regressions on Group Performance

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	0.02	0.07	0.04	0.33
Mean GMAT	0.00	−0.16	−0.09	−0.11
%White	0.28	0.32	0.39*	0.35*
Cooperativeness	−0.67**	−1.02**	−1.26**	−1.20**
Effort process criteria	0.23	0.24	0.34	0.34
Open conflict norms	0.33	0.38	0.48	0.64**
Task conflict		0.17	0.20	0.14
Relationship conflict		−0.63*	−0.28	0.17
Process conflict		0.18	0.26	0.09
Status conflict			−0.66*	−0.58*
Task conflict × Status conflict				−0.70**
Adjusted R^2	0.03	0.09	0.16**	0.37**
Wald test of change in goodness of fit		$F(3, 35) = 2.58$	$F(1, 34) = 4.53*$	$F(1, 33) = 10.23**$

Note. Two-tailed *t*-tests reported.
*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

nonsignificant positive coefficient ($\beta = 0.17$, n.s.), *relationship conflict* has a significant negative main effect on *performance* ($\beta = -0.63$, $p < 0.05$), and *process conflict* does not significantly affect *performance* ($\beta = 0.18$, n.s.). Adding *status conflict* to Model 3 significantly increases the adjusted R^2 to 0.16, $p < 0.01$ (Wald test $F(1, 34) = 4.53$, $p < 0.05$), and has a significant negative main effect on *performance* ($\beta = -0.66$, $p < 0.05$). These results support Hypotheses 1 and 2; adding the status conflict variable increases the percent of variance in team performance explained by the conflict model, and status conflict has a negative main effect on team performance.

The significant effect of relationship conflict that we found in Model 2 disappears with the addition of status conflict in Model 3. To test whether this reduction in effect is due to multicollinearity between these variables, we calculated the variance inflation factors (VIFs) in this model. The average VIF is 3.33 and the highest is 5.54 (for *relationship conflict*), suggesting that the results are not due to multicollinearity among the variables (Neter et al. 1996). This indicates that some of the variance that has been explained by the relationship conflict scale in the past may, in fact, be due to status conflict.
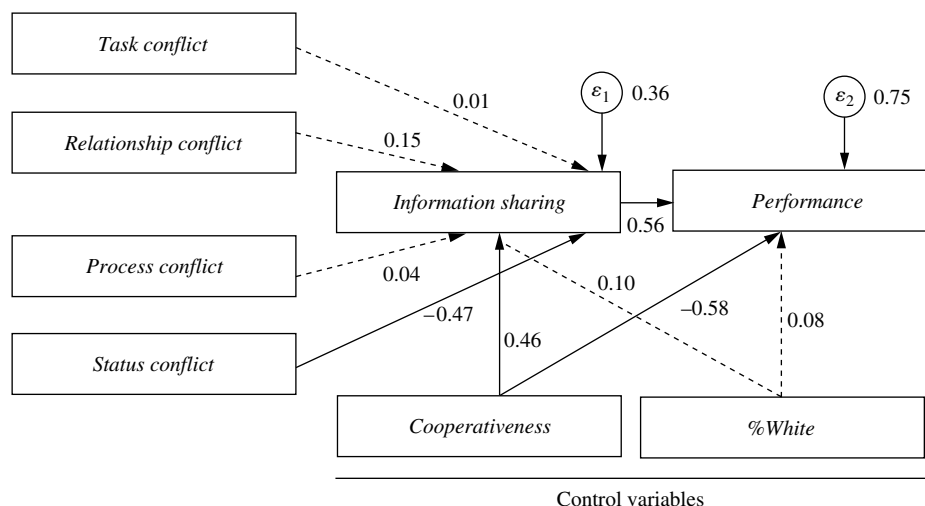
To test Hypothesis 3, we used a structural equation model with robust standard errors to conduct a path analysis with the four conflict types predicting *information sharing*, which predicts *performance* (see Figure 1). We also included *percentage white* and *cooperativeness* (with paths to both *information sharing* and *performance*), because they were both significant in Model 3. All independent and control variables were allowed to correlate. The model fits the data well, with $\chi^2(4, N = 44) = 4.50$, $p = 0.34$, CFI $= 0.99$, and SRMR $= 0.03$. *Information sharing* significantly

and positively affects *performance* ($\beta = 0.56$, $p < 0.01$). Of the four types of conflict, only *status conflict* has an effect on performance in this path model. It has a significant negative direct effect on *information sharing* ($\beta = -0.47$, $p < 0.05$) and a marginally significant negative indirect effect on *performance* ($\beta = -0.26$, $p = 0.06$). Neither *task conflict* nor *process conflict* nor *relationship conflict* affects *information sharing* ($\beta_{\text{task}} = 0.01$, n.s.; $\beta_{\text{process}} = 0.04$, n.s.; $\beta_{\text{relationship}} = 0.15$, n.s.). This path analysis confirms that status conflict negatively affects group performance because of its distinctive negative impact on group information sharing, consistent with Hypothesis 3.
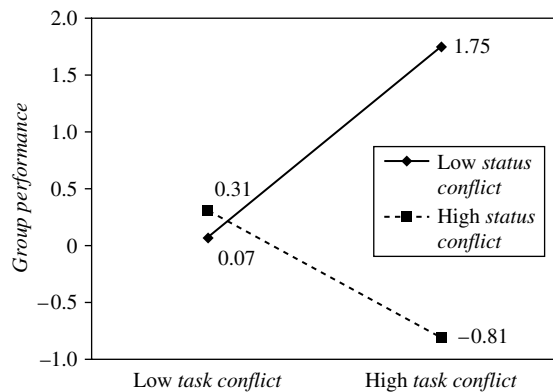
In Hypothesis 4, we predicted status conflict would moderate the effect of task conflict on performance because of its negative effect on information sharing. To test this, we added the interaction of task conflict with status conflict to Model 3 of our hierarchical robust OLS regressions (see Model 4 in Table 5). *Task conflict* still had a nonsignificant positive coefficient ($\beta = 0.14$, n.s.), and *status conflict* exerted a significantly negative main effect ($\beta = -0.58$, $p < 0.05$). The interaction of the two was also significant and negative ($\beta = -0.70$, $p < 0.01$). Thus, Hypothesis 4 is supported. In post hoc tests we determined that neither relationship nor process conflict significantly interacts with task conflict.

Following the advice of Aiken and West (1991), we plotted the task by status conflict interaction one standard deviation above and below the means of those variables, holding all other variables constant at their means (see Figure 2). We find that, consistent with our Hypothesis 4, group performance is highest when task conflict is high and status conflict is low. Group performance is lowest when both task and status conflict are

Figure 1 Path Diagram of Relationship Between Conflict Types and Team Performance

Notes. All independent (i.e., conflict types) and control variables were free to covary. Standardized path coefficients are reported. Solid paths indicate significant coefficients.

Figure 2   Task Conflict by Status Conflict Interaction

high. Thus, task conflict positively affects performance in the absence of status conflict, but those positive effects are undermined by a strong status conflict component.

Study 3 Discussion
Our results suggest that status conflict improves the explanatory power of models of conflict on group performance beyond those that include just task, relationship, and process conflict. Controlling for task, relationship, and process conflict, status conflict exerts a negative main effect on group performance. Status conflict, but not task, relationship, or process conflict, affects group performance by diminishing the quality of the group's information sharing. This undermines the positive potential of task conflict on performance, as indicated by a significant moderation of the effect of task conflict on group performance by status conflict. With low levels of status conflict, task conflict positively affects group performance, but with high levels of status conflict, group performance is especially poor. Some of the ambiguity around the relationship between task conflict and group performance, therefore, may be accounted for by unobserved status conflicts. These results suggest that status conflicts are an important group process construct to consider in addition to task, process, and relationship conflict.

It is important to note, however, that we have some unexpected results. First, we did not replicate the results of earlier research in our models with just task, relationship, and process conflicts (Model 2). Although the task conflict coefficient was positive in the analysis on group performance, it was not statistically significant, and process conflict was also positive and not significant. Furthermore, despite the theoretical explanation for task conflict's positive effects on performance being due to enhanced group information sharing, we did not find this effect in our path analysis. The only apparent positive effect of task conflict on performance that we observed was in our interaction with status conflict analysis, when status conflict was low. It is possible to

interpret these results as indicating that when task conflict does positively affect group performance, it is not due to enhanced information sharing, per se. It is also plausible, however, that the group dynamics we observed may be somewhat specific to an academic setting (Pfeffer and Fong 2004). In addition, with the status conflict main effect in the model (Model 3), the other types of conflict did not significantly affect group performance at all. It is possible that by asking about status conflicts as well as the other types of conflict, respondents in this sample may have made more of a distinction among them than they would have if we had only asked the traditional nine-item conflict scales. Determining whether there are situations where task, relationship, process, and status conflict exert independent main effects on group performance will help further define and differentiate these constructs. We are, therefore, cautious about generalizing our findings before they are replicated in other samples where at least significant effects of task conflict are observed.

The path analysis also helps explain why cooperativeness has a negative effect on performance in our regression analyses. Although it has a significant negative direct effect on *performance* ($\beta = -0.58$, $p < 0.01$), it also has a significant positive direct effect on *information sharing* ($\beta = 0.46$, $p < 0.01$). The indirect effect of *cooperativeness* on *performance* through *information sharing* is positive ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.05$), but the total effect is negative ($\beta = -0.33$, $p < 0.05$). This suggests that the cooperativeness scale might be capturing both the positive effects on group performance of facilitating information sharing (Lester et al. 2002) and the negative effects of overemphasizing group cohesion by suppressing conflict (Perlow 2003) or producing groupthink (Janis 1982). The simple correlation of cooperativeness and performance is not significant, and cooperativeness is strongly negatively correlated with each type of conflict. All of this suggests that controlling for the level of conflict in a group explains some of the variance in group performance that is associated with information sharing. As a result, cooperativeness exhibits a negative effect on performance because, conflict levels held constant, it may indicate accommodation rather than consideration of competing viewpoints.

General Discussion
Our research takes a distinctive approach to studying group conflict by focusing on how the structural properties of the group shape and are impacted by conflict. In a series of qualitative and quantitative studies, we have defined status conflicts, developed and validated a scale to measure the construct, and quantified the effects of status conflicts on group performance. In doing so, we make several important contributions to the group status and group conflict literatures.

Our first contribution is demonstrating that task groups experience conflicts over status. Although status may be ascribed based on a person's characteristics (Berger et al. 1980) and reinforced by interpersonal interactions of dominance and deference (Ridgeway et al. 1998), our research suggests status is a resource that also may be contested and negotiated. Thus, status hierarchies should be thought of as dynamically evolving social constructions, manipulable through efforts of the parties involved rather than as emergent, static social structures.

Furthermore, conflict scholars should consider the structural properties of groups to gain more insights into conflict dynamics. Previous research on the effects of conflict on performance has overlooked this important aspect of group processes, and this may be one reason its findings have been inconclusive. Our second contribution, thus, is demonstrating that in addition to disagreements over tasks, relationships, and processes, group members strive for the social and symbolic resources that are associated with high status. Group members' structural interests produce more competitive conflict processes than the other types of conflicts do, which hurts performance by reducing information sharing. Expanding the scope of conflicts that are considered in research on group dynamics to include those over status may help clarify the role of conflicts in many group and individual processes and outcomes.

Our final contribution is the validation of a four-item status conflict scale that we hope other scholars will utilize to build our understanding of the dynamics of status conflicts in groups. Consistent measurement of the construct would support its validity and enable comparisons of the effects of status conflict across settings, ultimately leading to a greater understanding of the way status conflicts influence group processes.

There are numerous things we do not do in this paper that present directions for fruitful future research. First, we do not consider the experiences or impacts of status conflicts that occur at different times in the group's life. Like the findings from Jehn and Mannix (2001), status conflicts may have different effects on group performance when they occur early in the group's life, as it sorts out the status order, versus late in the group's life, when the conflicts challenge an existing order. It may be that early conflicts that are resolved with the establishment of a stable status order are functionally beneficial, whereas conflicts that destabilize a status order are detrimental. Second, we do not consider the perceived legitimacy of a status conflict. For instance, if a status conflict happens in response to poor group performance feedback, it might be considered a more legitimate conflict than one that occurs in the context of a successfully performing group. More legitimate conflicts might be resolved more quickly because of a deferential acquiescence of the challenged individuals. The precipitating events and process that impact the likelihood that a status conflict will result in a change to or reinforcement of the group's status order should be explored in future research. Third, status conflicts that occur in different kinds of contexts might function differently. The presence of a formal reporting hierarchy or a more legitimate status order, for instance, may reduce the impact of status conflicts compared to the other types. Fourth, we are unable to distinguish the roles of passive bystanders from active allies in status conflicts. Although we posit that both lead to higher competitiveness than in other types of conflicts, it is also plausible that one or the other could have stronger effects. Finally, we have not considered the characteristics of the group or its members that may predict when groups are likely to experience high versus low levels of status conflict. Certain individual differences, tasks, external pressures, or other characteristics may contribute to the conditions under which status conflicts are likely to occur. All of these are promising areas for future research as we develop our understanding of how status dynamics affect groups and their individual members.

Endnotes
[1]The coding protocol is available from the first author upon request.
[2]One task conflict item, "My team members frequently had disagreements about the task we were working on," also loaded at 0.46 with the process conflict items. Because it loaded predominantly, at 0.67, with the rest of the task conflict items, and because of the substantial precedent for using these three items to measure task conflict, however, we included it as part of the task conflict factor.

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