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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

TMT Conflict and Innovative Performance: The Moderating Role of Socialization Capabilities and Decision-Making Decentralization

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to analyze the influence of conflict within the top management team (TMT) on innovative performance. It considers the moderating roles of socialization capabilities and decentralized decision-making and addresses a theoretical and empirical gap in the literature.

Theoretical framework – This study examines the relationship between conflict within the management team and innovative performance. It differentiates between task and relationship conflict and explores the moderating role of socialization capabilities and decentralization.

Design/methodology/approach – A quantitative approach was adopted to estimate three theoretical models that allow for the evaluation of relationships between conflict in the TMT and innovation. These models are based on data collected from organizations in various sectors.

Findings – The results show that task conflict positively affects innovative performance, while relationship conflict negatively impacts it.

Practical & social implications of research – To strengthen TMT leadership, it is recommended that programs be implemented to improve interpersonal skills and foster trust and communication. Additionally, adopting decentralized structures that facilitate innovation is advised.

Originality/value – This study provides a novel approach by analyzing the interaction between internal TMT factors and organizational structural factors.

Keywords: TMT, innovative performance, socialization capabilities, decision-making.

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1 Introduction

In recent years, innovation has been recognized as a critical factor in the competitive development of organizations (Hu et al., 2022; Huang & Hao, 2024). This has prompted the emergence of literature that analyzes the factors influencing innovation and its outcomes (Chen et al., 2023; Yao & Wang, 2024). These outcomes correspond to the introduction of new or improved products and marketing innovations, understood as an organization's innovative performance (Tsui et al., 2022).

The role of Top Management Teams (TMTs) has been emphasized, as they are responsible for decision-making and thus influence innovative performance (Chen & Liu, 2024; Kwan et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2024; Xu, 2024).

Various aspects and characteristics of TMTs and their impact on innovative performance have been analyzed in the literature. For example, TMT diversity has been examined in terms of observable variables such as age, education, place of origin, gender, and experience (Lakshman & Gonzalez, 2023; Yang & Shao, 2023; Y. Zhou et al., 2023b; Auh & Menguc, 2005; Bantel & Jackson, 1989; Ensley et al., 2002; García-Granero et al., 2017; Talke et al., 2010, 2011; Wiersema & Bantel, 1992). However, one element that has not been analyzed yet is considered a relevant aspect: conflict within the TMT.

Previously, conflict within the TMT was thought to negatively impact organizational performance. However, some studies have shown that conflict can have a positive impact, depending on the type of conflict that arises within the TMT (Bedford et al., 2022; Yi et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022). Conflict can increase the capacity for learning, debate, and analysis, which are fundamental to innovative outcomes (Medina et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2019).

In this regard, we propose analyzing the impact of conflict within the TMT on innovative performance. To this end, we will consider the direct effect of such conflict on innovative performance, as well as the direct and moderating effects of socialization capacity. According to Jaider Vega-Jurado et al. (2019a), organizational socialization capacity corresponds to an informal coordination mechanism that increases opportunities for social relationships and supports accessibility, deep understanding, and refinement of existing knowledge. This could stimulate debates and discussions within the TMT that help propose better innovative solutions and make favorable decisions about innovation outcomes. It could also encourage conflict resolution within the TMT.

This is essential because innovative performance is associated with an organization's ability to find novel solutions to challenges in the current competitive landscape (Sutarti et al., 2021; Sperber & Linder, 2016). In this sense, differences in thinking, debates, and controversies that may arise within the TMT responsible for organizational decision-making can favor innovative results and enable the organization to respond effectively to these challenges.

Additionally, previous literature has identified organizational mechanisms that influence innovation outcomes (Van Den Bosch et al., 1999). Among these mechanisms, the capacity for socialization and decentralization of decision-making stand out.

Socialization capabilities in an organization stimulate collaborative work and knowledge dissemination (Kanchanabha & Badir, 2021; Park & Kim, 2020). Therefore, these capabilities could play a fundamental role in moderating potential conflicts within the team and, consequently, influence the relationship between conflict and innovative performance.

Previous research has suggested that decentralized decision-making moderates organizational innovation (Batarseh et al., 2018; Damanpour, 1991; Jansen et al., 2006; Wong et al., 2011). However, little research has been conducted on how conflict among TMT members is moderated by decentralized decision-making.

This article begins with a literature review and formulation of hypotheses, followed by the methodological design and results. Finally, the conclusions, limitations, discussions, and future research are presented.

2 Literature review and hypotheses

2.1 TMT conflict and innovative performance in organizations

Initially, research established that all types of conflict were counterproductive to organizational performance. However, theorists have suggested that conflict could be constructive under certain circumstances. Nevertheless, there has been a lack of empirical studies to demonstrate this (Wu & Chen, 2020). Since then, more and more studies have been required to examine conflict within organizations, both theoretically and empirically (Chen & Liu, 2020).

Studies have shown that conflict within the TMT can affect performance in various ways. On the one hand, it can facilitate decision-making within the organization by incorporating different opinions into the process.

On the other hand, conflict can create interpersonal tensions and generate distress among teammates because it causes people to become emotionally involved (Chen & Wang, 2021).

Based on these findings, the literature has identified two types of conflict that could arise within the TMT: task conflict (Narayan et al., 2021), which is associated with discrepancies in how to address and propose solutions to problems (Yun et al., 2020); and relationship conflict (Venugopal et al., 2020), which is linked to differences in interpersonal perceptions among TMT members. This leads to limitations in processing information as teams devote their efforts to interpreting these perceptions rather than addressing the issues at hand. This limits the cognitive process due to stress and anxiety experienced by TMT members, generating groups that defend different positions (Kanchanabha & Badir, 2021; Wang et al., 2019).

It is important to distinguish between task conflict and relationship conflict because of their different implications for individual attributions of the TMT and organizational performance.

According to Narayan et al. (2021), task conflict increases the creative effort of TMT members when they are questioned about their solutions. This increases cognitive processes resulting from divergent thinking and improves task focus. This requires TMT members to continually reexamine and challenge each other's opinions, seeking creative and innovative alternatives to today's business challenges, thereby promoting innovative performance (Venugopal et al., 2020).

At the group level, this type of conflict reinforces divergent opinions, interpretations, and points of view. It also increases critical evaluation, assessment of alternatives, and group problem-solving (Huang & Hao, 2024; Li & Liu, 2022). This is because synthesizing several points of view on a specific issue usually yields better results than an individual's perspective alone. This exposure to new cognitive perspectives on idea implementation contributes to a better understanding of organizational issues, positively influencing innovative performance (Yao & Wang, 2024). In line with the above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1a: Task conflict within the TMT positively correlates with the organization's innovative performance.

Relationship conflict, for its part, generally involves personal differences or altercations between TMT members (Yi et al., 2022). This causes apprehension, mistrust, and hostility, inciting dissatisfaction within the team. It reduces the team's willingness to accept others' decisions, decreases trust and communication, and ultimately leads to the isolation and polarization of TMT members (Sutarti et al., 2021). This reduces the effectiveness of decision-making in practice (Peng & Jia, 2023).

Specifically, Jehn and Mannix (2001) and Zhang et al. (2022) state that relationship conflict causes distraction, wasted time, and decreased ability to evaluate new information and commitment. In a group setting, this type of conflict reduces cooperation, goodwill, communication, and understanding, focusing TMT members on resolving personal disputes or retaliating (Hashmi et al., 2023). Discussions focus on the personal level rather than sharing knowledge and exploring solutions, which inhibits identifying opportunities to address organizational issues and restricts proposing innovative solutions. Ultimately, this discourages innovative performance in the organization (Wang et al., 2019). The above allows us to propose the following hypothesis:

H1b: Relationship conflict within the TMT negatively correlates with the organization's innovative performance.

2.2 The impact of organizational mechanisms on innovative performance and their moderating role amid conflict

Van Den Bosch et al. (1999) mention organizational mechanisms that influence performance, particularly innovation. These mechanisms are related to an organization's ability to synthesize and apply acquired knowledge, which is vital for innovation.

The authors specifically highlight the capacity for socialization as an organizational parameter that influences problem-solving and the proposal of ideas and solutions among individuals and their work teams (Vega-Jurado et al., 2019b). Socialization also involves sharing knowledge and experiences in informal conversations, which promotes accessibility to sources of knowledge within organizational units and increases trust and collaboration within these units (Bachrach et al., 2022; Kumar, 2023).

Zhou et al. (2023a) argue that socialization helps recognize the value of innovative ideas because members of an organization can better estimate the value of an innovation when considering it in the context of shared information. This process of knowledge identification improves when members can share and discuss ideas through mutual cooperation in the face of a problem. Cortes-Mejia et al. (2022) demonstrate the impact that socialization capacity has on innovation processes, clarifying that these effects could vary depending on the dimensions of innovation analyzed.

Consequently, organizations comprising individuals with low socialization skills are less likely to share new ideas with other team members. This suggests that a lack of internal knowledge exchange could limit how members of an organization interpret new possibilities that foster new knowledge and address innovation processes (She et al., 2020; Tran et al., 2020).

Thus, Wang et al. (2022) argue that organizational socialization capabilities promote the flow and circulation of data, information, and knowledge within an organization. This provides diverse perspectives on the same problem and affects the organization's innovative results. For this reason, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Organizational socialization capabilities positively correlate with the organization's innovative performance.

Regarding the effect that socialization capacity could have on innovative performance, it is possible that developing this capacity moderates the impact that the types of conflict within the TMT have on innovative outcomes.

As previously noted, these socialization capabilities imply that organizations create spaces that facilitate information sharing among members. Informal discussions about creative ideas and points of view regarding problems faced by team members may affect the relationship between conflict types and innovative outcomes. In particular, task conflict within the TMT can create spaces where possible solutions to problems faced by TMT team members are discussed and analyzed (Lu et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2023a). This leads to discussions about new ideas and points of view in an organizational context. Ultimately, this could lead to better innovative outcomes (Medina et al., 2018; Sutarti et al., 2021; Yi et al., 2022). This increases the effects of task conflict within the TMT, promoting the organization's innovative performance. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2a: Organizational socialization capabilities positively moderate the relationship between task conflict and innovative performance.

Similarly, informal spaces driven by organizational socialization capabilities could influence the relationship between conflict within the TMT and innovative performance. These spaces could promote the resolution of personal disagreements or altercations among TMT members. The presence of these capabilities fosters trust and collaboration among TMT members. These fundamental elements offer the opportunity to resolve personal differences, reducing personal discussions within the team. Thus, these capabilities mitigate the negative effects of conflict within the TMT on the organization's innovative performance (Chen & Liu, 2024; Cortes-Mejia et al., 2022). Therefore, the following hypothesis can be stated:

H2b: Organizational socialization capabilities negatively moderate the relationship between relationship conflict and the organization's innovative performance.

Decentralization of decision-making refers to the distribution of authority within an organization (Xie et al., 2022). It is the extent to which decision-making power is distributed rather than concentrated (Aiken & Hage, 1968). Decentralization expands communication channels (Cardinal, 2001) and increases the quality and quantity of ideas and knowledge used for problem-solving (Zhang et al., 2022). This is linked to how innovative performance is presented within an organization (He & Wong, 2004; Lakshman & Gonzalez, 2023; Vega-Jurado et al., 2017; Yang & Shao, 2023).

Additionally, decentralizing decision-making increases the sense of control over work, encouraging unit members to seek innovative solutions (Lakshman & Gonzalez, 2023; Yang & Shao, 2023). Since task conflict requires a space in which TMT members can debate and contrast their thoughts and have their points of view considered in decision-making processes (Ma & Huang, 2023; Zhou et al., 2023b), it is likely that decentralizing decision-making processes promotes the positive effects of task conflict on innovative performance. This gives rise to the following hypothesis:

H3a: Decentralization of organizational decision-making positively moderates the relationship between task conflict and the organization's innovative performance.

However, taking this into consideration, the decentralization of decision-making could also increase relationship conflicts because it encourages interaction between team members. This leaves more room for such conflicts to arise when decisions regarding problem resolution within the organization fall to multiple managers (Liu et al., 2024; Ma & Huang, 2023), thereby promoting the negative effect of relationship conflict on innovative performance. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3b: Decentralization of organizational decision-making negatively moderates the relationship between relationship conflict and the organization's innovative performance.

The above allows us to observe the following theoretical model (Figure 1)

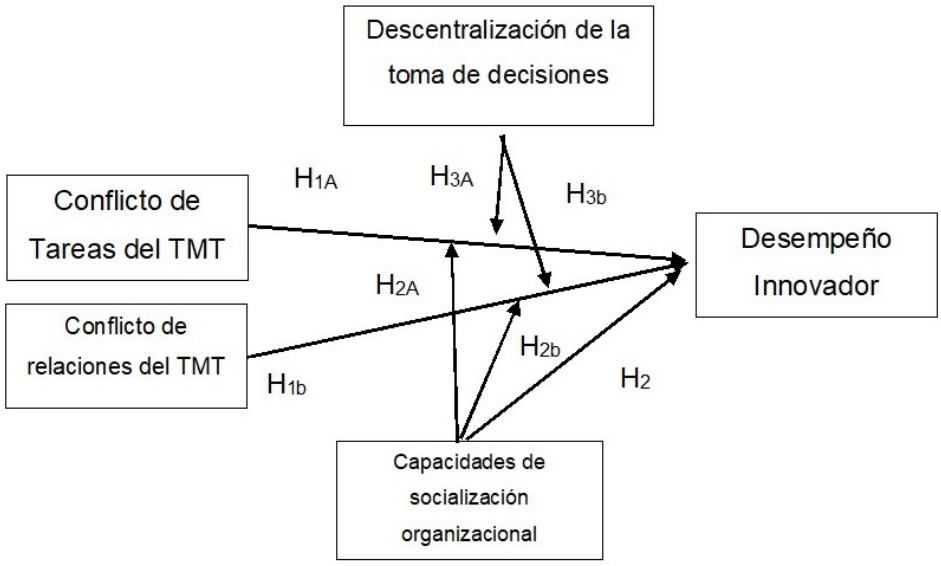

Figure 1. Theoretical model

3 Methodology

3.1 Data collection

The sample was obtained from organizations located in Colombia's Caribbean region. These organizations are registered with their respective chambers of commerce and have assets equal to or greater than 30,000 times the current legal monthly minimum wage. They also have 50 or more employees and a senior management team. The sample includes organizations from seven departments: Bolívar, Atlántico, Cesar, Córdoba, Guajira, Magdalena, and Sucre. According to the databases of the chamber of commerce of each department, 3,419 organizations were identified that met these criteria. Data collection took place between October 2019 and November 2020. Prior to this, the questionnaires were tested to ensure the questions were understandable to TMT members.

The questionnaire was sent to the CEO, Managing Director, and/or General Manager of each organization, as well as to at least 80% of each organization's TMT members. This was verified with the CEO, Managing Director, and/or General Manager. The CEO was interviewed in person, and the rest of the TMT members were interviewed virtually. A letter explaining that the research was supported by Universidad del Norte as part of the doctoral studies process in administration accompanied the questionnaire. Each respondent was given an explanation of each dimension, and they completed the form online. They were offered a report once the project was completed.

Information on both the dependent and explanatory variables was collected from different sources and respondents to reduce endogenous problems and common method bias (García-Granero et al., 2017; James et al., 1993; Mihalache et al., 2014). For the dependent variable, responses were collected from the CEO, CSO (Chief Science Officer), CTO (Chief Technology Officer), or ICM (Internal Control Manager). For the explanatory variables, responses were collected from the CFO (Chief Financial Officer), COO (Chief Operations Officer), CTO, CMP (Chief Project Manager), QM (Quality Manager), CCO (Chief Communications Officer), or HRM (Human Resources Manager).

After identifying 3,419 potential organizations for the study, the population was refined using the double-respondent technique, yielding a final sample of 155 organizations that met the established methodological criteria. Information was collected from 496 TMT members of these companies, ensuring a robust database with multiple informants per organization. This strengthens the internal validity of the results and reduces single-source bias in the analysis of the relationships between the variables.

Non-response bias was controlled by comparing the first and last respondents; no statistically significant differences were found in the main variables. Additionally, follow-ups and reminders were sent to increase the response rate. This helped ensure the representativeness of the sample and minimize possible distortions in the results (Supplementary Material, Supplementary Data 1 – Dataset).

3.2 Construct measurement

Scales from previous studies that had been verified by various analyses were used. To measure innovative performance, we used the scale developed by Vega-Jurado et al. (2008), which targets CEOs and uses a 1-to-7 Likert scale, where 1 means "totally disagree" and 7 means "totally agree." To quantify the degree of agreement among TMT members regarding the organization's innovative performance, we used the agreement index (James et al., 1993), which compares the average agreement observed at the item level among individuals in a group with the expected population variance (Sanchez & Amo, 2004). This is defined by the following expression (Equation 1):

$$r^*_{wg(J)} = 1 - \left(\overline{S}^2_n / S^2_{EU} \right) \quad (1)$$

where $r^*_{wg(j)}$ corresponds to the agreement index, $\overline{S}^2_n$ is the mean variance of the item averaged for all items in a given group, and S^2_{EU} is the expected variance based on the responses given. This index yields figures between 0 and 1; 1 indicates perfect agreement among respondents, and 0 indicates total heterogeneity in the responses. The average agreement index for innovative performance is 0.70, indicating a moderate degree of agreement among respondents. Items include:

(1) The organization regularly introduces products (goods or services) that are completely new to the market.
(2) The organization regularly introduces products that are new to its portfolio but were already offered by some competitors.
(3) The organization achieves the desired profitability from its new product development strategy.
(4) Compared to our competitors, our new product development strategy has been more successful.
(5) The organization has implemented new or significantly improved production processes.
(6) The organization regularly introduces new techniques or channels for promoting its products.
(7) The organization regularly introduces new methods for positioning its products in the market.

To measure TMT conflict, we used the instrument proposed by Liu et al. (2009), which targets TMT members and is evaluated on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 corresponds to "strongly disagree" and 7 corresponds to "strongly agree." This instrument separates task conflict and relationship conflict because, according to the literature, both can coexist, and task conflict can be a precursor to relationship conflict (Liu et al., 2009; Simons & Peterson, 2000). The average agreement index for task conflict was 0.53, and the average agreement index for relationship conflict was 0.61, indicating the level of agreement among TMT members regarding these constructs. Items addressing task conflict included:

(1) There is often disagreement among TMT members about the content of strategic decisions in the organization.
(2) There are often disagreements about ideas in the TMT.
(3) There are often differences of professional opinion in the TMT.
(4) TMT members often disagree on the organization's strategic decisions.

Meanwhile, relationship conflict was addressed by the following items:

(1) There is often personal friction between TMT members.
(2) Personality clashes within the TMT are evident.
(3) Tension between TMT members is evident.
(4) Resentment between TMT members is evident.

Socialization capabilities had an agreement index of 0.77 and were assessed using the following items:

(1) Information, resources, and knowledge are shared within the organization among members of different functional areas.
(2) Members of different functional areas within the organization value their contributions to various processes aimed at generating value for customers.
(3) There is ample opportunity for informal conversation between employees during working hours in our organization.
(4) Employees from different functional areas feel comfortable communicating with each other when difficulties arise.
(5) Employees treat each other with respect.
(6) It is easy to talk to anyone you need to, regardless of rank or position.

The following items were evaluated for the decentralization of decision-making, which had an agreement index of 0.42:

(1) Decisions cannot be made in the organization until a supervisor approves the action.

(2) Employees can become discouraged by the decision-making process.

(3) Even routine difficulties in the organization have to be referred to someone higher up in the hierarchy for decision-making.

(4) Most decisions employees make have to be approved by their supervisor.

The control variables were the respondent's age and education, represented by the general area of their graduate program according to the following parameters: (1) Economics, Administration, and Accounting; (2) Health Sciences; (3) Engineering; (4) Law; (5) Psychology; (6) Architecture; and (7) other. The third control variable was the TMT member's years of experience as a manager, with the following parameters: (1) between 1 and less than 3 years, (2) between 3 and less than 6 years, (3) between 6 and less than 9 years, (4) between 9 and less than 12 years, and (5) 12 years and over.

3.3 Data analysis

Versions 25 of SPSS and 24 of AMOS were used to examine the relationship between the variables under study and to evaluate the influence of moderating effects in the regression models. First, a preliminary analysis was conducted using correlations and descriptive statistics to observe the central tendencies and dispersion of the variables, which allowed for the identification of possible initial relationships.

Next, a five-step hierarchical regression analysis was performed to test the proposed hypotheses. The first three steps involved introducing only the study variables, enabling the direct impact of each variable on the dependent variable to be analyzed. The first model included control variables, the second included main independent variables, and the third evaluated direct effects between independent and dependent variables.

The last two models incorporated moderating effects to verify how certain variables can alter the relationship between the main variables. The fourth model included individual moderators, and the fifth model verified the combined effect of all moderators on the observed relationships.

We included hierarchical regression because it allows for the sequential evaluation of direct and interaction effects, facilitating the robust identification of the moderating effects of socialization capabilities and decentralization on the relationship between TMT conflict and innovative performance.

The SPSS analysis provided the necessary regression coefficients, R^2, and p-values to interpret the significance and adequacy of each model.

4 Results

The following table shows the correlations, mean, and standard deviation of each variable under study (Table 1)

The reliability and validity indices are shown in the table below (Table 2).

As shown in the table, all constructs in the model display adequate levels of reliability and validity. Specifically, the Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, confirming the high internal consistency of the scales. Similarly, the average variance extracted (AVE) is above 0.50 for all constructs, indicating appropriate convergent validity.

Table 1
Correlations and descriptive statistics

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	M	SD
1. Age	1									
2. Education	0.007	1								
3. Experience	0.004	0.001	1							
4. Task conflict	0.032	0.062	0.247	1					3.46	1.42
5. Relationship conflict	0.024	0.042	0.05	0.51					2.56	1.54
6. Socialization capabilities	0.357	0.047	0.027	0.07	0.131	1			5.92	1.25
7. Decentralization of decision-making	0.256	0.369	0.028	0.12	-0.18	0.07	1		3.05	1.67
8. Innovative performance	0.667*	0.524	0.314	0.18	-0.11**	0.26	0.02	1	5.17	1.58

*p < .05 (two-tailed); **p < .01 (two-tailed).

Table 2
Reliability and validity indices

Construct	Cronbach's alpha (α)	Composite reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Task conflict	0.83	0.87	0.59
Relationship conflict	0.85	0.89	0.62
Socialization capabilities	0.88	0.91	0.64
Decentralization of decision-making	0.81	0.86	0.60
Innovative performance	0.90	0.93	0.67

Table 3
Hierarchical regression analysis to test the hypotheses

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Step 1					
Interception	5,324	4,147	3,248	3,426	3,153
Age	0.023	0.022	0.245	0.217	0.187
Education	0.042	0.038	0.0347	0.0396	0.029
Experience	0.356	0.245	0.147	0.163	0.146
Step 2					
Task conflict	-	0.184**	0.18	0.188*	0.141*
Relationship conflict	-	-0.003**	0.031	0.295*	0.007
Step 3					
Socialization capabilities	-	-	0.314***	0.416**	0.311*
Step 4					
Socialization capabilities x Task conflict	-	-	-	0.0003**	-
Socialization capabilities x Relationship conflict	-	-	-	0.0481**	-
Step 5					
Decentralized decision-making x Task conflict	-	-	-	-	0.015*
Decentralized decision-making x Relationship conflict	-	-	-	-	0.0016*
R^2	0.346	0.454**	0.514***	0.604	0.544
Changes in R^2	-	0.108	0.06	0.09	0.03

*p < .05 (two-tailed); **p < .01 (two-tailed); ***p < .001 (two-tailed).

Taken together, these results support the robustness of the measurement model, ensuring that the instruments reliably and validly measure the variables analyzed.

To test the hypotheses regarding the moderating effects of the types of conflict and organizational antecedents on innovative performance, a hierarchical linear regression analysis (Aiken, 1991) was conducted, as shown in Table 3. For step 1, a model with control variables was outlined (model 1). Step 2 proposed a model to explore the effects of task conflict and relationship conflict on innovative performance (model 2).

In Step 3, socialization capabilities were introduced to examine their impact on model 3. The inclusion of this variable increased the R^2 by 0.06, strengthening the model and altering the relationship between conflict and performance from negative in model 2 to positive in model 3. This variable significantly explained part of the variance in innovative performance (B = 0.31, p < 0.01), confirming H2. Step 4 introduced the moderating effects of socialization capabilities between task conflict (TCxSC, B = 0.003, p < 0.001) and relationship conflict (RCxSC, B = 0.0481, p < 0.001), resulting in significant relationships that validated H2a and H2b. These relationships strengthened the model, resulting in a significant change in R^2 of 0.09.

To avoid interference from the moderating effects of socialization capabilities on other effects, step 5 builds on step 3, adding the moderating effects of decentralized decision-making between task conflict (TCxDDM, B = 0.015, p < 0.05) and relationship conflict (RCxDDM, B = 0.016, p < 0.05). These significant relationships support hypotheses H3a and H3b, resulting in a variation in R^2 of 0.03 compared to model 3.

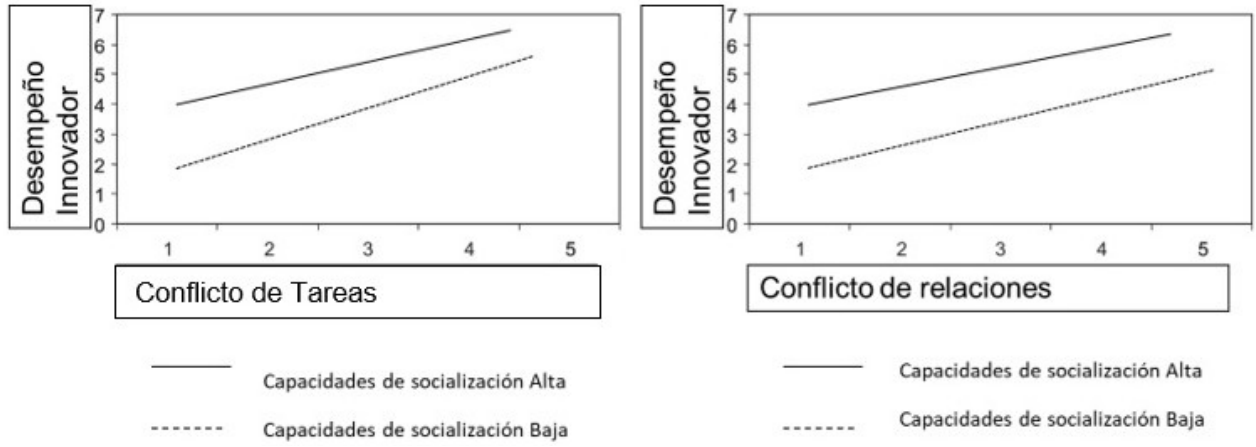

Figure 2. Socialization capabilities as moderators between task and relationship conflict and innovative performance

Source: Prepared by the authors using SPSS 25

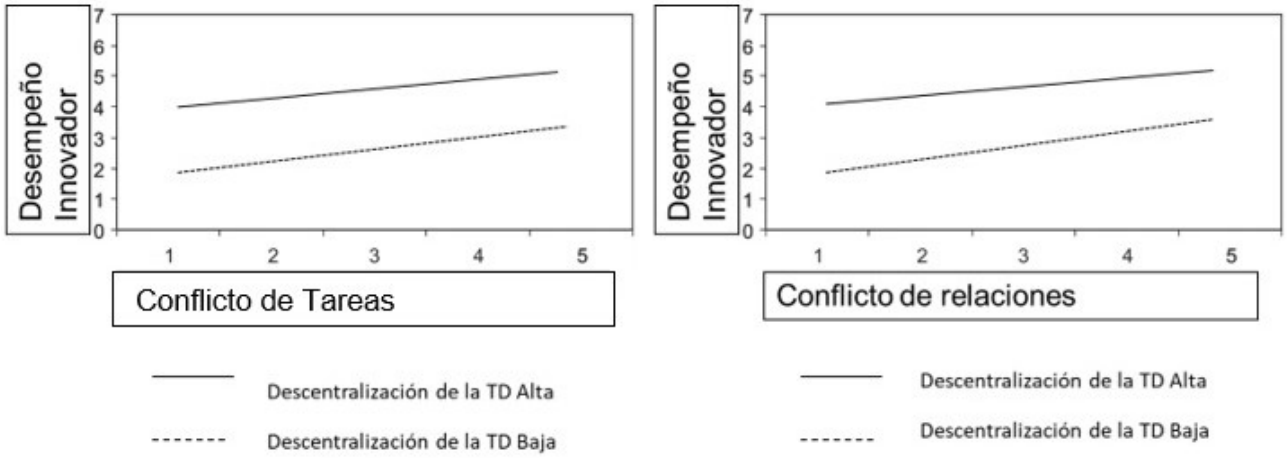

Figure 3. Decentralized decision-making as a moderator between task and relationship conflict and innovative performance. DM: Decision-making

Source: Prepared by the authors using SPSS 25

Figures 2 and 3 are presented to broaden the understanding of organizational antecedents and their moderating effects, specifically socialization capabilities and decentralized decision-making in relation to task and relationship conflict and innovative performance.

Figure 2 illustrates the impact of socialization capabilities on the relationship between task and relationship conflict and innovative performance. It demonstrates that higher levels of socialization lead to an increase in the influence of task and relationship conflict on innovative performance.

Figure 3 illustrates that decentralized decision-making in an organization increases the positive effects of task and relationship conflict on innovative performance. However, since the decentralized decision-making curve is less steep than the socialization capabilities curve, the latter has a stronger moderating effect.

5 Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the results obtained, there may be a positive or negative impact on an organization's innovative performance, depending on the team's internal dynamics and the organizational context. The three models analyzed revealed that a team's socialization capabilities and the extent of decision-making decentralization are pivotal factors that moderate this relationship. These factors can mitigate the negative effects of conflict and enhance innovative results

when conflict is managed appropriately. These findings reinforce the idea that conflict, often viewed as disruptive, can be a catalyst for innovation under specific structural and behavioral conditions within the TMT.

The first model examined the direct relationship between TMT conflict and innovative performance. It revealed that relationship and task conflict tend to have adverse impacts on the organization's ability to innovate in the absence of moderators. However, cognitive conflicts oriented toward constructive discussion of objectives and strategies were observed to be a source of new ideas and approaches. This finding aligns with previous literature suggesting that not all types of conflict are inherently harmful and that the context in which they emerge plays a crucial role in determining their effect on organizational outcomes.

The second model incorporated team socialization capabilities as a key moderator. The study found that when the TMT possesses effective socialization abilities, such as the capacity to develop interpersonal relationships, establish trust, and encourage open communication, the detrimental effects of relationship conflict can be substantially mitigated. Teams with high socialization capabilities were able to transform conflict into an opportunity to strengthen cohesion and commitment to shared goals. This promoted an environment more conducive to innovation. These findings underscore the importance of developing interpersonal skills within the TMT as a means of not only managing conflict but also harnessing the team's innovative potential.

The third model examined decentralization of decision-making as a moderating factor and revealed that organizations that delegate authority to lower levels experience less negative impact from TMT conflict on innovative performance. Decentralizing decision-making not only dilutes the power that certain individuals or subgroups within the TMT can wield, but also fosters a more diverse and rich flow of information. This contributes to improving the quality of strategic decisions. This approach allows innovative ideas to emerge from different levels of the organization, alleviating tensions within the TMT and distributing responsibility for innovation more broadly.

The findings of the study build on previous literature on TMTs and innovation by confirming that task conflict can drive innovative results while relationship conflict remains an obstacle. This is consistent with international research but takes on particular nuances in the Colombian context. Cultural and institutional factors, such as the high value placed on interpersonal relationships, organizational hierarchy, and centralized leadership styles, can intensify the negative effects of relationship conflict. At the same time, these factors can make the benefits of task conflict more dependent on the socialization skills of the management team. Administratively, the results suggest promoting controlled decentralization structures that broaden participation in decision-making without eroding the executive team's cohesion. This requires implementing formal coordination mechanisms, strengthening managers' socio-emotional skills, and designing spaces for strategic deliberation that encourage constructive dissent while maintaining the trust and unity of the TMT as the foundation for sustainable innovative performance.

From an applied perspective, the implications for management extend beyond instrumental recommendations and point to the need for a conscious reconfiguration of organizational arrangements.

In the context of managing task conflict within the TMT, one practical implication is intentionally designing formal, deliberative spaces that legitimize cognitive disagreement without personalizing it (Yi et al., 2022). In this sense, spaces should be created to address issues related to processes and activities within functional areas that could affect the organization's performance and strategic position (Bedford et al., 2022).

Additionally, think tanks are proposed, which are structured sessions that address issues arising from operations or the impact of external variables related to operational development. These sessions could provide organizations with market opportunities through the adjustment or creation of new products and/or services aimed at existing or new markets.

During these meetings, TMT members assume roles based on their positions, knowledge, cultural diversity, beliefs, aspirations, experience, points of view, and business visions. They reach consensus based on their differences (Zhang et al., 2022).

It is also advisable to set aside specific times for managing task conflicts within the decision-making cycle. For instance, before finalizing an important decision, the team could include a mandatory "critical review" phase to identify opportunities and/or threats in the dominant proposal, adverse scenarios, and unverified assumptions. Formal planning of this stage reduces the perception of personal attack and turns questioning into a professional duty. Thus, task conflict can be channeled productively while limiting the emotional escalation associated with relationship conflict (Peng & Jia, 2023).

Benchmarking and competitive intelligence practices can operate as structural mechanisms that direct disagreement toward the environment rather than toward individuals. This helps focus discrepancies and reinforce cognitive conflict as a legitimate analytical process that exists in other organizations. It also reduces the likelihood of negative personal attributions among team members (Ma & Huang, 2023).

Rather than trying to eliminate conflict, organizations should design structures, practices, and deliberative spaces that allow them to leverage its cognitive benefits without eroding cohesion within the management team. This involves strengthening socialization capabilities as a TMT competency and encouraging decentralized decision-making processes without fragmenting accountability (Jansen et al., 2005).

In terms of relationship conflict, it is recommended to encourage informal gatherings, integration meetings, and joint reflection sessions. These activities allow members to get to know each other beyond their formal roles and understand each other's backgrounds, personal styles, and motivations. This fosters a basis of interpersonal trust (Lu et al., 2021). This social cohesion acts as a catalyst; when a prior bond exists, professional disagreements are less likely to be interpreted as personal attacks (Yi et al., 2022).

It is also advisable to promote these experiences outside the usual organizational environment using common social spaces, such as sports or cultural activities or social gatherings. These experiences contribute to a better understanding of each team member's worldview, strengthening empathy and reducing the rigidity with which disagreements are often experienced in different contexts (Bedford et al., 2022).

Likewise, when members of an organization attend professional and academic events together, such as conferences, symposiums, congresses, seminars, and discussions, they can exchange impressions and build common meanings outside the immediate framework of organizational conflicts. This could stimulate performance (Peng & Jia, 2023).

Thus, this study provides an integrative view linking conflict, organizational mechanisms, and innovation. It opens new avenues for theoretical and empirical development in the field of TMTs while offering strategic guidance for innovation management in complex, culturally diverse organizational contexts.

Given the results obtained, future research should analyze how personality types interact with predominant management styles in different regions of the world. Culture significantly influences how individual traits are expressed within organizations (Hofstede, 2001; Wu & Yang, 2025). For example, in Latin America, leadership and management styles tend to be characterized by a greater relational orientation, interpersonal closeness, and value placed on trust and loyalty. These characteristics can enhance the expression of traits associated with social extroversion, kindness, and emotional intelligence in work environments (Hashmi et al., 2023).

In contrast, North America's culture is more individualistic, oriented toward achievement and autonomy. In this context, traits such as responsibility, self-efficacy, and proactivity may have a greater impact on leadership performance and perceptions (Kumar, 2023).

In Europe and some East Asian countries, management styles tend to be influenced by collectivist values, such as a strong group orientation, respect for hierarchy, and emotional control. These values may favor traits associated with self-discipline, emotional stability, and harmonious cooperation, rather than individual self-assertion (Li & Liu, 2022).

In Africa and the Middle East, organizational dynamics often combine strong community ties with hierarchical structures. The manifestation of personality in management may be influenced by social norms, age, status, and group membership. These factors can impact leadership, decision-making, and communication (Lakshman & Gonzalez, 2023). Considering these cultural differences allows us to interpret the results as context-specific, recognizing that personality traits are influenced by cultural expectations and the dominant management models in each region.

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SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Supplementary material accompanies this paper.
Supplementary Data 1 – Dataset

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Disclaimer on the Use of Artificial Intelligence
The authors declare that they did **not** use artificial intelligence (AI) platforms at any stage of this research. All analyses, interpretations, and writing were performed manually by the authors, without assistance from AI-based tools.

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