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### Knocking on the Outgroup's Door: Seeking Outgroup Help Under Conditions of Task or Relational Conflict

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# Knocking on the Outgroup's Door: Seeking Outgroup Help Under Conditions of Task or Relational Conflict

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Three studies investigated the willingness to seek help from another group in situations where collaborative goals are undermined by task or relational conflicts between the groups. Compared to task conflict, relational conflict was argued to trigger a striving for more autonomy. The results from three experiments ( $N=82$ ,  $N=65$ , and  $N=62$ ) supported the prediction that relational conflict, compared to task conflict, promotes more help avoidance, in particular avoidance of dependency-oriented help (a full solution). As expected, no difference was found for the willingness to seek autonomy-oriented help (a hint) from the other group.

In a globalising world, there is an increasing need for groups to collaborate. EU member states, for example, are challenged to share information and expertise, reach collective decisions, and seek or provide help to each other—all the while guarding their own goals and resources. In comparison to collaboration between individuals or members of the same group, collaboration between groups is a topic that has received very little research attention. Only recently have researchers begun to take into account the specific dynamics that are at play in the context of intergroup cooperation (e.g., Nadler & Halabi, 2006; Stürmer & Snyder 2010; van Leeuwen, 2007; Wright & Richard, 2010). In the current research, we focus on the exchange of help between groups. More specifically, we present three studies investigating the willingness to seek help from members of another group in situations where collaborative goals are undermined by task or relational conflicts.

An important rationale for seeking help is the instrumental benefit associated with help. Whether it is financial assistance or specific expertise, the receipt of help can improve the helpee's situation. Help is useful in promoting learning (A. M. Ryan & Pintrich, 1997) and in removing barriers that interfere with the ability to achieve important goals (Cunningham & Platow, 2007; Jackson & Esses, 2000). In organizational contexts, the importance of seeking help has long been recognized as an important part of organizational learning (Ashford & Cummings, 1985; Morrison, 2002; Rashman, Withers, & Hartley, 2009; Schilling & Kluge, 2009). But despite the fact that help seeking can be an adaptive strategy for coping with difficulty, people often refrain from asking for needed help because they perceive help seeking as a sign of incompetence (e.g., Butler & Neuman, 1995; Nadler, 1987; A. M. Ryan & Pintrich, 1997; Täuber & van Leeuwen, 2010). For example, Newman and Goldin (1990) found that children refrained from seeking help with their schoolwork out of fear of being perceived as “dumb” by their peers, teachers, and parents. Most of the research on help seeking and help avoidance stems from literature on

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individual helping, often in an educational context (e.g., Butler & Neuman, 1995; Clegg, Bradley, & Smith, 2006; Newman & Goldin, 1990; A. M. Ryan, Gheen, & Midgley, 1998). To understand the willingness of people to seek help from a different group, it is important to take into account the specific dynamics that typify intergroup relations.

Drawing on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), we argue that when group affiliations of helper and helpee are salient, helping interactions between individuals must be viewed as *intergroup* interactions (for similar arguments, see Levine & Crowther, 2008; Nadler, 2002). Because people derive an important part of their identity (i.e., their social identity) from their membership in social groups, group members are often concerned with the need to positively differentiate their group from other groups, that is, to stress their group's distinctiveness and portray their group as better than relevant comparison groups. But the economic pressures of society cause groups to form alliances and to cooperate with other groups in order to strengthen their position. The need for positive distinctiveness, which is often achieved through intergroup competition, thus needs to be met within the overarching framework of interdependence and intergroup cooperation.

Most groups that are involved in a collaborative setting while maintaining their distinctive functionality and identity are facing a situation in which cooperative motives are accompanied by conflicting ones (Bornstein, 2003; Komorita & Parks, 1995). Collaborative goals imply that groups need to cooperate to achieve them, and they legitimize the exchange of help between groups. In the absence of a collaborative goal, a request for help to another group may be viewed as illegitimate and even suspicious, for example, the manager of one company asking a rival company for tips on how to market their latest product. However, groups are often *simultaneously* involved in intergroup cooperation and in various forms of intergroup conflict, which could affect the willingness to seek help from the other group and the type of help that is preferred. Consider, for example, a merger of two organizations. The postmerger aggregate is typically viewed by the members involved as two separate parties that need to cooperate under the same umbrella (Giessner, Viki, Otten, Terry, & Täuber, 2006; van Leeuwen, van Knippenberg, & Ellemers, 2003). The restructuring itself can constitute a serious threat to employees' organizational identity, triggering relational conflict that is expressed in increased hostility and intergroup bias (Terry, Carey, & Callan, 2001). For the merger to be considered a success, however, it is important that the members of the merged organizations work together, share information and expertise, and help each

other out when necessary. The successful completion of the merger is therefore at least partially contingent on the degree to which the employees are willing to cooperate and to knock on each other's door whenever they need help. Because many groups in society operate under a mixture of cooperative and conflicting goals, it is somewhat surprising that the issue of overcoming such obstacles to establish intergroup cooperation has received little research attention to date (Bornstein, 2003; Gould, 1999). The aim of the current research is to contribute to a better understanding of intergroup collaboration in these complicated mixed-motive situations. As such, it is the first study to investigate the willingness to seek outgroup help in a context where competitive and collaborative goals collide.

### TASK CONFLICT AND RELATIONAL CONFLICT

When discussing outgroup help seeking in situations where collaborative goals are undermined by intergroup conflict, we propose to distinguish between (a) task-related conflicts that arise from competing goals and negative interdependence and (b) relational conflicts that pertain to the protection of the ingroup identity. *Task conflicts*<sup>1</sup> between groups are well researched and are reflected in early theories such as Realistic conflict theory (Campbell, 1965). Realistic conflict theory proposes that incompatible group goals or scarce resources trigger a competitive motivation, which, over time, can extend to non-task-related domains and result in negative intergroup attitudes and behavior (Campbell, 1965; Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961). Incompatible group goals cause competitive behavior even when group members do not personally seem to gain direct profit from their group's winnings, because their positive interdependence with their fellow ingroup members evokes the belief that these will sooner or later reciprocate (Gaertner & Insko, 2000; Stroebe, Lodewijkx, & Spears, 2005). Intergroup competition is often stimulated within organizations because it is assumed that it will enhance performance. Team excellence, for example, is often defined in organizations in terms of the team's performance relative to that of other teams (Tjosvold, Johnson, Johnson, & Sun, 2003).

*Relational conflicts* are about the value and expression of the group identity and are typically rooted and reflected in such processes as negative stereotyping,

<sup>1</sup>Literature on intragroup conflict also employs the term *task conflict*, which refers to disagreement about the distribution of resources, procedures, or outcomes related to the task (e.g., De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). In the current article, task conflict is defined in line with literature on intergroup conflict and refers to incompatible group goals.

ingroup favoritism, and outgroup derogation (Scheepers, Spears, Doosje, & Manstead, 2006). Relational conflicts can arise when the value of the own group is threatened by (members of) another group, for example, through derogatory comments (Hopkins et al., 2007). A threat to the value or meaning of the ingroup reduces the motivation to favor or cooperate with the source of this threat. For example, Jackson and Esses (1997) found that people high in religious fundamentalism were opposed to helping groups whose norms and values were a threat to their own values (e.g., gay men and lesbians, single mothers). When the value of the ingroup is threatened by another group, identity concerns are activated. One way of repairing the positive distinctiveness of the ingroup is by engaging in actions that present the group in a more favorable light. This point is nicely demonstrated in research by Hopkins and colleagues (Hopkins et al., 2007). Their Scottish participants were informed that the English view them as mean and tight-fisted. To ward off this threat to their identity and present their ingroup in a more positive way, participants became more generous toward other groups.

### The Psychological Costs of Seeking Help

To understand how task conflicts and relational conflicts affect group members' willingness to seek help from other groups, it is important to understand the psychological costs in terms of reduced autonomy that are associated with seeking help. Nadler introduced a model of intergroup helping that is based on the notion that groups strive to challenge or maintain social dominance relations and use the exchange of help as a tool to achieve that (Nadler, 2002; Nadler & Halabi, 2006; Nadler, Harpaz-Gorodeisky, & Ben-David, 2009). Members of low-status groups are frequently faced with a dilemma between (a) the motivation to improve their group's realistically disadvantaged position by seeking and accepting help from other groups and (b) the motivation to preserve and enhance their group's positive distinctiveness by avoiding the appearance of helplessness and dependence. The instrumental benefits of receiving help often go at the expense of a group's autonomy. The term *autonomy* refers to regulation by the self (R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2006). It is important to note that autonomy is not identical to independence. What is crucial to autonomy is the individual's freedom to choose—thus people choosing to depend on another may still keep their autonomy (Deci, La Guardia, Moller, Scheiner, & Ryan, 2006). As autonomy is undermined by forces experienced as alien or pressuring, the experience of a need for help could undermine autonomy when people in need feel they have little choice in matters such as whether they seek help, whom they seek help from, and what type of help they may receive. The

reported psychological consequences of receiving outgroup help that threatens the helpee's need for autonomy include lower competence-based self-esteem, feelings of inadequacy, stress, interpersonal conflict, and emotional exhaustion (Beehr, Bowling, & Bennett, 2010; Buunk, Doosje, Jans, & Hopstaken, 1993; Halabi & Nadler, in press; Schneider, Major, Luhtanen, & Crocker, 1996).

The need for autonomy is recognized in the helping literature, which distinguishes between *autonomy-oriented help* and *dependency-oriented help* (e.g., Jackson & Esses, 2000; Nadler, 2002; Nadler & Halabi, 2006). Autonomy-oriented help provides recipients with the tools to solve their problems on their own. Autonomy-oriented help is aimed at empowering the helpee and assumes that, given the appropriate tools, recipients can help themselves (Butler, 2007; Nadler, 2002; A. M. Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). In contrast, *dependency-oriented help* provides a full solution to the problem, is less concerned with the recipient's autonomy, and reflects the helper's view that the needy cannot help themselves (Nadler & Halabi, 2006; Nadler, Harpaz-Gorodeisky, & Ben-David, 2009). By their definitions, autonomy-oriented help is less instrumental in the short term than dependency-oriented help, because the recipient of help needs to contribute at least partially to solving the problem. However, in the long term, this contribution to problem solving will empower help recipients, boost confidence in their own abilities, and contribute to a sense of control (Butler, 2007; A. M. Ryan & Pintrich, 1997).

Alvarez and van Leeuwen (in press) investigated the psychological reactions to receiving autonomy- or dependency-oriented help when working on a set of complicated puzzles. Autonomy-oriented help, which was operationalized as a hint, was perceived by participants as having lower instrumental value but higher educational value. The recipients of autonomy-oriented help in this study reported more self-confidence and feeling more respected, more empowered, and less incompetent than the recipients of dependency-oriented help. To our knowledge, only one study (Nadler & Halabi, 2006, Study 4) compared group members' preferences for *seeking* dependency-oriented help over autonomy-oriented help, or no help at all. The authors found that high-identifying members of groups with unstable low status sought less dependency-oriented help than high identifying member of groups with stable low status. The amount of autonomy-oriented help seeking was equal between both groups—hence the difference resulted in more help avoidance among high-identifying members of unstable low-status groups.

### Seeking Outgroup Help in Conflict Situations

When collaborative goals are accompanied by task or relational conflict, group members' willingness to seek

help from the outgroup could be affected as a result. Although conflict in general might suppress the willingness to seek outgroup help because help seeking could be interpreted as a sign of weakness—and particularly in times of conflict people may want to avoid the appearance of weakness—we argue that the *type* of conflict also impacts on group members' willingness to seek outgroup help. Specifically, we propose that relational conflict will trigger a greater need for autonomy than task conflict. This assumption is based on the notion that relational conflict, more than task conflict, triggers identity concerns. One way to ward off this threat to the value of the ingroup is by engaging in actions that present the group in a more favorable light. In the context of help *giving*, group members can restore the image of their group through helping other groups (Hopkins et al., 2007). Helping other groups is a useful strategy to create a positive (moral, capable, and powerful) impression of the own group (van Leeuwen & Täuber, 2010). However, when the group is in need of help and needs to decide whether to request help from the outgroup, little opportunity exists to create a more *positive* impression of the ingroup through help seeking. At best, groups can try to avoid creating a more *negative* impression through seeking help. After all, seeking help could be viewed as a sign of incompetence and powerlessness (e.g., Nadler, 1987; Newman & Goldin, 1990). As a result, relational conflict can activate a need for more autonomy, and group members involved in relational conflict should exhibit more help avoidance than group members involved in task conflict.

The need for more autonomy that is expected to operate more strongly in settings characterized by relational conflict than settings characterized by task conflict should also impact on the type of help that group members request—if and when they do seek help. This expectation is based on two arguments. First, dependency-oriented help implies a greater degree of dependency on the provider of help, and thus leaves the help seeker less autonomy in solving the problem at hand. Autonomy-oriented help, in contrast, allows people to seek help without greatly reducing their autonomy (as seeking dependency help does). Second, dependency-oriented help has a higher short-term instrumentality than autonomy-oriented help. When conflict revolves around task completion, the high, short-term instrumentality of dependency-oriented help may stimulate group members to overcome their reluctance to request outgroup help, in particular dependency-oriented help. As a result, group members involved in relational conflict are expected to seek less dependency-oriented help from the outgroup than group members involved in task conflict.

In this article, three studies are presented in which we investigated outgroup help seeking in situations where intergroup collaborative goals are accompanied by task

or relational conflicts between the groups. The first study focused on the perceived motives for help seeking under these conditions. In the second and third study, group members' actual willingness to seek outgroup help was investigated. Consistent with earlier research (e.g., Alvarez & van Leeuwen, in press; Nadler, 2002; Nadler & Halabi, 2006; Nadler et al., 2009), autonomy-oriented help was operationalized as a hint in all three studies, and dependency-oriented help was operationalized as a complete solution to the problem at hand. Task conflict was activated by the introduction of competing group goals. Relational conflict was activated by presenting group members with derogatory comments by the outgroup about the competence of the ingroup (cf. Hopkins et al., 2007).

## STUDY 1

To investigate people's perceptions of help seeking under task or relational conflict, participants were presented with a story describing an organization in which a member of one department was seeking dependency- or autonomy-oriented help from a member of another department. As the story explains, in addition to the general need to collaborate with other departments for the benefit of the organization at large, the relations between these two departments were also characterized by task conflict (the two departments were competing over a bonus) or relational conflict (members of one department had made some derogatory comments about the members of the other department). It was hypothesized that seeking autonomy-oriented help in the form of a hint would be viewed as more in the interest of the department and a better demonstration of the positive value of the department in the relational conflict condition than in the task conflict condition, whereas the opposite pattern was expected for seeking dependency-oriented help in the form of the full solution. We also included a measure of the degree to which the help seeker was trying to improve relations between the departments, expecting that help-seeking behavior that goes against the interest of the department will be interpreted as a signal that the help seeker was trying to improve interdepartmental relations.

## Method

Eighty-two students from the VU University Amsterdam (VU; 27 men, 55 women;  $M_{\text{age}} = 21$ ,  $SD = 3.41$ ) were randomly assigned to the cells of a 2 (help type: autonomy vs. dependency oriented help)  $\times$  2 (conflict: task vs. relational) between-participants experimental design.

Upon arrival at the laboratory, participants were seated in separate cubicles in front of a computer, which was used to present the instructions and questions, and

to register the answers. The scenario introduced Ilja, who worked for Department X of a large IT organization. In the *task conflict condition*, but not in the relational conflict condition, participants read that the organization utilized a competitive reward system, in which the members of the most productive department would receive a high bonus. In the *relational conflict condition*, but not in the task conflict condition, it was explained that Ilja had accidentally read an e-mail exchange between several members of Department Y, in which they described the members of Department X as incompetent and not very smart. The scenario further described how Ilja was working late one night on an important programming assignment. This task was so important for the organization that management had ordered everyone to assist Ilja whenever he requested help. Ilja now encountered a problem that he was unable to solve by himself. All members of his department were either in a meeting or had already gone home, but one member of Department Y was still in the building. In the *dependency-oriented help condition*, he asked this person if the person could program for him that part of the computer program that he couldn't do himself. In the *autonomy-oriented help condition*, he asked this person for a referral to a handbook or Internet page where he could find the necessary information that would enable him to solve the programming problem by himself.

After reading the scenario, participants were presented with a series of questions, all starting with, "To what extent do you think that Ilja...". All scales ran from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). One item (*impression management concern*) was included to check whether in the relational conflict condition Ilja was indeed perceived as more concerned about how his help-seeking behavior would affect his department's impression ("...feared that seeking help from Department Y would create the impression that members of Department X are incompetent?"). *Ingroup interest* was measured with three items ("...only had the interest of his own department in mind?", "...thinks his Department X is better than department Y?", and "...wanted to show the members of Department Y that they are inferior to department X?";  $\alpha = .68$ ). *Improve relations* was measured with two items ("...tried to improve relations between the departments?" and "...tried to improve cooperation between the departments?";  $r = .84$ ). After answering these questions, participants were thanked and debriefed.

## Results

All variables were analyzed in separate analyses of variance with help type and conflict as the independent variables. Significant interactions were further explored using tests for the simple main effect of help type within each level of conflict.

Analysis of *impression management concern* revealed a main effect of conflict only,  $F(1, 78) = 8.81$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .10$ . Participants in the relational conflict condition reported believing that Ilja was more fearful that seeking help from Department Y would create the impression that members of Department X are incompetent ( $M = 4.57$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ) than participants in the task conflict condition ( $M = 3.61$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ ). This finding shows that group identity concerns were perceived to be activated in the relational conflict condition.

An interaction was found for *ingroup interest*,  $F(1, 78) = 16.33$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .17$ . The means are presented in Figure 1. In support of H1, in the relational conflict condition, seeking autonomy-oriented help was viewed as more in the interest of the group and a better demonstration of the ingroup's value than seeking dependency-oriented help,  $F(1, 78) = 17.89$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .19$ . In the task conflict condition, this pattern of means was reversed, although not significant,  $F(1, 78) = 2.51$ , *ns*.

An interaction was also observed for *improving relations* between the departments,  $F(1, 78) = 5.07$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .06$ . In the relational conflict condition, seeking dependency-oriented help was viewed somewhat more strongly as a means of improving the relationship between the departments ( $M = 4.54$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ ) than seeking autonomy-oriented help ( $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ),  $F(1, 78) = 1.14$ , *ns*. In the task conflict condition, seeking autonomy-oriented help was viewed more strongly as a means of improving relations ( $M = 4.63$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ) than seeking dependency-oriented help ( $M = 3.84$ ,  $SD = .94$ ),  $F(1, 78) = 4.33$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .05$ .

## Conclusion

Seeking autonomy-oriented help was predicted to be most in line with the ingroup's need to preserve its

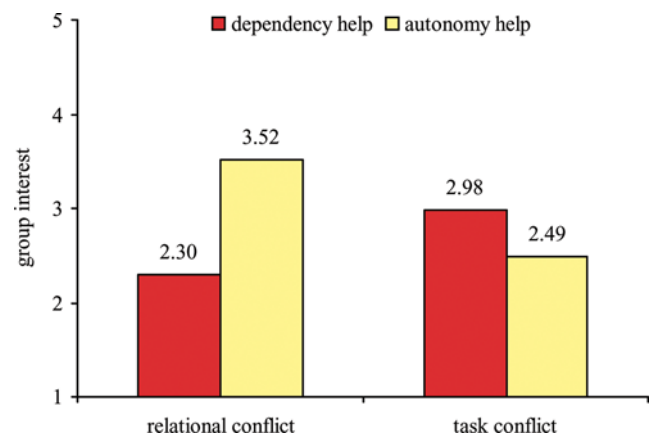


FIGURE 1 Perceptions of group interest in seeking dependency help or autonomy help, Study 1. (color figure available online)

positive distinctiveness in the relational conflict condition. Indeed, relational conflict triggered the belief that seeking help would present the group as incompetent, and seeking dependency-oriented help in this condition was viewed as less in the interest of the group than seeking autonomy-oriented help. In contrast, in the task conflict condition, seeking dependency-oriented help was expected to be viewed as better serving the group's interest than seeking autonomy-oriented help. Although not significant, the pattern of means were in the expected direction. Moreover, help seeking that went against the pattern expected to best serve the group interest was interpreted as behavior aimed at improving intergroup relations. Taken together, these results demonstrate that the perceived psychological implications of seeking dependency-oriented help and autonomy-oriented help vary depending on the context in which this help is sought.

## STUDY 2

In the second study, we investigated actual help-seeking behavior in an interactive group task. Participants were presented with a difficult knowledge task in which a number of opportunities existed to seek help from another group. Participants could choose to seek dependency-oriented help, seek autonomy-oriented help, or avoid seeking help at all. The type of conflict (task or relational) was manipulated between participants, who also received an additional cooperative goal to legitimize the exchange of help. Three hypotheses were tested in this study. First, based on the notions that relational conflict activates identity concerns and that seeking outgroup help is inconsistent with the expression of a positive and distinctive group identity, we expected that more avoidance of help seeking would be observed in the relational conflict condition compared to the task conflict condition (H1). Second, based on the fact that dependency-oriented help threatens the help seeker's autonomy and based on the higher (short-term) instrumental value of dependency-oriented help, we expected that less dependency-oriented help would be requested by participants in the relational conflict condition than by participants in the task conflict condition (H2). We also included a measure of a need for autonomy, expecting that the predicted increase in help avoidance and decrease in dependency-oriented help seeking in the relational conflict condition would be mediated by a striving for more autonomy (H3).

### Method

Sixty-five students of the Friedrich Schiller University Jena (38 women, 27 men;  $M_{\text{age}} = 21$ ,  $SD = 2.35$ ) were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions: relational conflict or task conflict. Participants

were seated in front of a computer, which was used to provide instructions and questions and to register all answers. The computers were separated by screens.

Participants learned that they were part of a team of three to four students that was connected via the computer network to another team of three to four students in a different room. To promote identification with the team, participants were presented with a brief figure estimation task, followed by positive feedback regarding their groups' performance (see Doosje, Ellemers, & Spears, 1995, for a similar procedure).<sup>2</sup>

Participants then received information about the subsequent task, which was a test of general knowledge. They would be presented with 30 open-ended questions derived from the game Trivial Pursuit. To encourage help-seeking behavior, the questions were chosen from the more difficult Genus edition.<sup>3</sup> It was explained that it was important to perform well both as a team, by providing as many correct answers as possible within the team, and as a combination of teams, by providing as many correct answers as possible with the members of both teams combined. The separate as well as the combined performance of the two teams would be compared with that of other paired teams in the study. As such, the situation provided ground for both competitive and cooperative motives.

The competitive motive was further emphasized in the *task conflict condition*, where participants were told that the best performing team (in terms of the total number of correct answers given by the members of that team) would have a chance of winning 50 euros in a lottery. No such incentive was promised in the relational conflict condition. In the *relational conflict condition* (but not in the task conflict condition), participants were

<sup>2</sup>Following the figure estimation task, a brief word completion task was administered after which half of the participants received positive group feedback (60% success) and half received negative group feedback (41% success), the purpose of which was to explore group status differences in help seeking. However, checks showed that this manipulation was unsuccessful, and it did not affect any of the dependent variables reported here, neither as a main effect nor in interaction with the conflict manipulation (all  $F_s < 1$ ). A possible explanation is that the word completion task was of a different nature than the subsequent knowledge task, which was used to assess help seeking behavior. If participants perceived the two tasks as unrelated, a status difference on one dimension is unlikely to transfer to the other dimension. In addition, the difference in feedback scores may not have been big enough to have a meaningful impact. Status was therefore not included as a factor in the analyses reported in this article.

<sup>3</sup>The knowledge questions were pretested in a comparable student sample. On the basis of this pretest, 10 difficult questions (where most people indicated that they did not know the answer), 10 moderately difficult questions (where most people indicated that they believed they knew the answer but weren't sure about it), and 10 easy questions (where most people indicated that they knew the answer and were sure about it) were selected. Questions in which solution probability was influenced by sex or study major were excluded.



asked to indicate how much they felt that a series of different traits would apply to their own team and to the corresponding team. Following these questions, they were given (false) insight into the responses given by the other team. Participants read that the other team viewed the members of their own team as incompetent and not very smart. Receiving derogatory comments about one's group is known to trigger identity management concerns (Hopkins et al., 2007; Klein & Azzi, 2001).

Before presenting the knowledge questions, participants were informed that each question provided them with three behavioral options: (a) to answer the question directly, by typing in their answer; (b) to send a message to the other team requesting a hint; and (c) to send a message to the other team requesting the complete answer. For example, participants could receive the following question: "What is the capital of Cuba?" They could then decide to type in their answer, to request a hint (e.g., "There is a cigar brand of the same name") or request the complete answer ("Havana"). Whenever possible, a request for help would be directed to a member of the other team who had provided a correct answer to that particular question. It was explained that previous research had demonstrated that the chance that someone in a three-person team like this would have the correct answer was about 90%. Participants were further assured that their requests for help could not be rejected by the other team.<sup>4</sup> When they requested help, it was explained that, because collecting this information would take some time, the question would be skipped and presented again at the end of the study, this time accompanied by the requested form of help. In reality, skipped questions were not presented again. The indices for *seeking autonomy-oriented help*, *seeking dependency-oriented help*, and *help avoidance* consisted of the number of times participants chose each of these three alternatives (cf. Nadler & Halabi, 2006, Study 4). Scores for either of these measures could range from 0 to 30.

After the knowledge task, a brief questionnaire was administered. All items were introduced with the text, "To what extent do the following statements apply to you." The *competitiveness* of the own team, relative to the other team, was measured with one item (1 = *other team is most competitive*, 7 = *own team is most competitive*). The degree to which the teams treated each other

<sup>4</sup>Because it is known that people adjust their help-seeking behavior to their beliefs about the likelihood that a request for help will be granted (Wills & DePaulo, 1991), requests for help in this study could not be rejected by the outgroup. This might lead to an overestimation of the amount of requested help in general but will have no bearing on differences between conditions, which is the primary interest in this study. Moreover, this situation parallels many societal settings in which requests for help are guaranteed to be met, for example, when low-income people are entitled to government subsidies provided that they put in a request, which usually comes at no additional costs.

with *hostility* was also measured with one item (1 = *other team is most hostile*, 7 = *own team is most hostile*). One item assessed how *positively* participants believed their own team was viewed by the other team ("My team is evaluated positively by the other team"; 1 = *not at all*, 5 = *very much*). *Striving for autonomy* was measured with two items that were averaged into a single scale ("It was important to me to solve the tasks on my own," "I tried to avoid being helped by the other team as much as possible"; 1 = *not at all*, 5 = *very much*;  $\alpha = .72$ ). At the end of the study, participants were paid, thanked, and debriefed.

## Results

**Checks.** Participants in the task conflict condition described their team as more *competitive* ( $M = 3.87$ ,  $SD = .72$ ) than participants in the relational conflict condition ( $M = 3.03$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ),  $F(1, 63) = 14.93$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .19$ . Participants in the relational conflict condition described the other team as being more *hostile* toward them ( $M = 3.26$ ,  $SD = .90$ ) than participants in the task conflict condition ( $M = 3.77$ ,  $SD = .76$ ),  $F(1, 63) = 6.02$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .09$ . Participants in the relational conflict condition also reported that the outgroup had a less *positive view of them* ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = .81$ ) than participants in the task conflict condition ( $M = 3.55$ ,  $SD = .77$ ), although this effect was only marginally significant,  $F(1, 63) = 3.05$ ,  $p = .09$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .05$ . The findings attest to the effectiveness of the manipulation.

**Help avoidance, dependency help seeking, and autonomy help seeking.** Analysis of variance on *help avoidance* revealed a significant effect of Conflict,  $F(1, 63) = 11.52$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .16$ . The means are presented in Figure 2. As predicted in H1, participants in

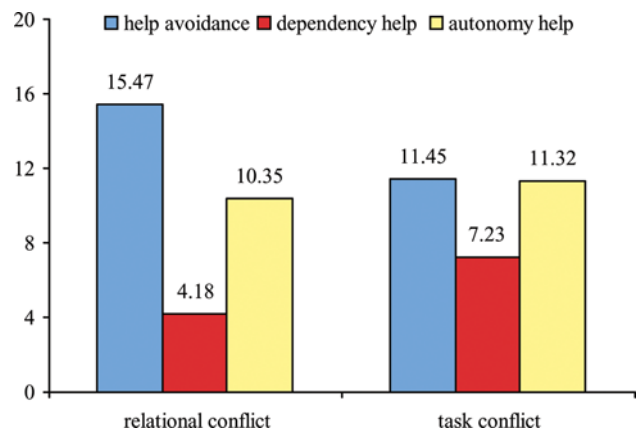


FIGURE 2 Help avoidance, seeking dependency help, and seeking autonomy help, Study 2. (color figure available online)

the relational conflict condition sought less help and more often attempted to answer the questions by themselves than participants in the task conflict condition. A significant effect of conflict was also found on *dependency-oriented help seeking*,  $F(1, 63) = 8.33, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .12$ . As expected in H2, less dependency-oriented help was requested in the relational conflict condition compared to the task conflict condition. The number of times participants requested *autonomy-oriented help* in the knowledge task was unaffected by the manipulation,  $F(1, 63) < 1$ .

To test whether participants in the two conditions differed in the type of help they sought, separate paired  $t$  tests were performed comparing autonomy-oriented help seeking to dependency-oriented help seeking in each condition. Both in the relational conflict condition,  $t(33) = 6.46, p < .001$ , and in the task conflict condition,  $t(30) = 2.37, p < .05$ , participants requested significantly more autonomy-oriented help than dependency-oriented help. In a similar vein, we examined the difference between seeking autonomy-oriented help and help avoidance within each condition. This difference was significant in the relational conflict condition,  $t(33) = 3.24, p < .01$ , but not in the task conflict condition,  $t(30) = .09, ns$ .

**Striving for autonomy.** Participants in the relational conflict condition expressed a stronger *striving for autonomy* ( $M = 3.96, SD = .99$ ) than participants in the task conflict condition ( $M = 3.44, SD = 1.01$ ),  $F(1, 63) = 4.39, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .07$ . Striving for autonomy correlated positively with help avoidance ( $r = .43, p < .001$ ), negatively with seeking dependency-oriented help ( $r = -.40, p < .01$ ), but not with seeking autonomy-oriented help ( $r = -.08, ns$ ). Following Baron and Kenny (1986), we tested whether the direct effects of conflict on help avoidance- and dependency-oriented help seeking were mediated by a striving for more autonomy. Evidence for partial mediation was found both for help avoidance (Sobel's  $z = -1.74, p < .05$ , one-sided) and for dependency-oriented help seeking (Sobel's  $z = 1.69, p < .05$ , one-sided). In both cases, a reduced direct effect of conflict remained (from  $B = -2.01, p = .001$ , to  $B = -1.55, p < .01$  for help avoidance, and from  $B = 1.53, p < .01$ , to  $B = 1.14, p < .05$  for dependency help seeking). In support of H3, the increased help avoidance and reduced dependency-oriented help seeking that were observed in the relational conflict condition compared to the task conflict condition could be partially attributed to a striving for more autonomy.

## Discussion

The results are in line with predictions. Relational conflict activated a stronger need for autonomy, which

resulted in more help avoidance and less dependency-oriented help seeking compared to task conflict. Of interest, participants in the relational conflict condition did not seek more autonomy-oriented help than participants in the task conflict condition. This should not be interpreted as evidence that autonomy-oriented help does not (at least partially) meet the recipients' need for autonomy. Rather, help seeking in general threatens the need for autonomy, but autonomy-oriented help can reduce this threat to a minimum. Autonomy-oriented help does not *increase* autonomy (as help avoidance does)—it merely allows people to seek help without *reducing* their autonomy (as seeking dependency help does). This notion is supported by findings from other research, in which it was observed that members of groups with unstable low status sought less dependency-oriented help than members of groups with stable status, whereas they did not differ in the amount of autonomy-oriented help they sought (Nadler & Halabi, 2006, Study 4). It is also in line with findings from research on help giving, which shows that members of high-status groups use the provision of dependency-oriented help (but not autonomy-oriented help) as a tool to emphasize their power (Nadler et al., 2009). The battle for power and autonomy thus appears to be fought over the quest for, or the provision of, dependency-oriented help but not autonomy-oriented help.

In the task conflict condition, participants requested more autonomy-oriented help than dependency-oriented help. This finding is surprising, given that dependency-oriented help has a higher short-term instrumental value, which should have made it appealing to group members motivated to deliver a high performance outcome. One explanation is that, in the current operationalization, a hint had a relatively high instrumental value, which could have made it almost as useful as dependency-oriented help (but psychologically less threatening because, technically, it was still labelled "a hint"). Because hints were operationalized as alternative descriptions (e.g., "A type of cigar exists with a similar name" as a hint to the question, "What is the capital of Cuba?"), they could result in the correct answer even if participants did not know the actual answer to the question (one only needs to make an educated guess out of well-known cigar brands for the present example). Another explanation is that activation of task conflict could have simultaneously evoked a relational conflict motive, thereby increasing the desire for autonomy and independence and reducing the motivation to seek dependency-oriented help. As the classic summer camp studies by Sherif demonstrate so clearly, task conflict in the form of competing intergroup goals can easily spill over to conflict in the relational domain, causing negative intergroup attitudes and hostility (Sherif, 1958; Sherif et al., 1961). A future comparison

with a noncompetitive control condition may help shed more light on this problem.

A control condition would be also useful in disentangling the different motives that could underlie variations in help seeking (or help avoidance). Specifically, without a control condition, a finding that more dependency-oriented help is sought under task conflict compared to relational conflict could be attributed to a higher need for instrumentality in the task conflict condition but also to higher need for autonomy in the relational conflict condition. Although mediation analysis showed that the differences in help avoidance and dependency-oriented help seeking were partially attributable to an observed increased need for autonomy in the relational conflict condition, a control condition could contribute further to our understanding of these processes by experimentally disentangling these motives.

### STUDY 3

The aim of the third study was both to replicate the findings from Study 2 and to compare help seeking behavior under relational and task conflict conditions with help-seeking behavior in a control condition, where no conflict was activated. Study 3 further differed from Study 2 in four respects. In Study 3, the teams were based on existing groups (rival universities), because it was assumed that existing group identities are more meaningful and important to participants than identities derived from ad hoc groups. Second, to somewhat reduce the instrumental value of a hint while increasing its autonomous value, a hint was operationalized as receiving the first letter of the solution, rather than a description of the solution. A hint in terms of the first letter of the answer (e.g., “H” as a hint to “What is the capital of Cuba?”) could be helpful only if one has some idea of what the answer might be (but perhaps is not sure between two alternatives). Third, the dot estimation and word completion tasks (see footnote 2) that were administered before the knowledge task in Study 2 were not included in Study 3. And fourth, the knowledge test consisted of 40 questions instead of 30, to allow for more variance in help-seeking behavior.

We expected to observe more help avoidance among participants in the relational conflict condition compared to the control condition, and less help avoidance in the task conflict condition compared to the control condition (H1). We further expected that participants in the relational conflict condition would seek less dependency-oriented help than participants in the task conflict condition or those in the control condition (H2). We also included measures of the perceived instrumentality of dependency-oriented help and autonomy-oriented help, to test the assumption that the latter has

a lower short-term instrumental value than the former. In addition, a measure of the motivation to cooperate with the other team was included. Although in all conditions participants received the same collaborative goal, we reasoned that, if relational conflict triggers a need for more autonomy, this would express itself in an overall desire to reduce interdependency, be it negative or positive. In other words, participants in the relational conflict condition were expected to have both a reduced motivation to compete and a reduced motivation to cooperate with the other team (H3).

### Method

Participants were 62 students from the VU (34 women, 28 men;  $M_{\text{age}} = 21$ ,  $SD = 3.38$ ) who were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: relational conflict, task conflict, or control.

Each participant was seated in a closed cubicle in front of a computer, which was used to present instructions and questions and to register the answers. Participants were told that they were part of a team of three students from the VU that was connected over the Internet with a team of three students from a rival university in the same city, the University of Amsterdam (UA).

The general instructions, and the activation of relational and task conflict, were identical to those in Study 2. In the control condition, no conflict was activated. The instructions for the knowledge test were the same ones used in Study 2, and the procedure was also identical, except that a hint was now described as receiving the first letter of the answer. Participants were then presented with 40 open-ended knowledge questions and provided with the opportunity to answer them immediately, or to request a hint (autonomy-oriented help) or the complete answer (dependency-oriented help).

After the knowledge task, a questionnaire was administered. Scales were created by averaging the items. The *motivation to compete* with the other team was measured with three items (e.g., “I did my best to deliver a better performance with the VU team than the UA team”; 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*;  $\alpha = .89$ ). The degree to which participants viewed the other team as having a *hostile attitude* toward them was measured with three items (e.g., “To what extent do you think the members of the UA team have a hostile attitude towards the VU team?” 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*;  $\alpha = .83$ ). The perceived *instrumental value* of dependency-oriented help and autonomy-oriented help was measured by asking participants to report, expressed as a percentage, what they believed the chances were that help in the form of a complete answer, and help in the form of a hint, would result in them providing the correct answer. The *motivation to cooperate* with the other team was measured with two items (“I did my best to produce

as many correct answers as possible in collaboration with the UA team” and “I did my best to use the exchange of help to produce as many correct answers as possible together with the UA team”; 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*;  $\alpha = .80$ ).

## Results

**Checks.** Participants in the task conflict condition reported a stronger *motivation to compete* with the other team ( $M = 4.94$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ) than participants in the relational conflict condition ( $M = 3.76$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ) and participants in the control condition ( $M = 3.88$ ,  $SD = 1.66$ ),  $F(2, 59) = 4.35$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .13$ . Tukey post hoc tests confirmed that the task conflict condition differed from the relational conflict condition and the control condition ( $ps < .05$ ), whereas the latter two did not differ significantly from each other. Participants in the relational conflict condition described the other team as having a more *hostile attitude* toward them ( $M = 5.02$ ,  $SD = .93$ ) than participants in the task conflict condition ( $M = 3.29$ ,  $SD = .51$ ), or participants in the control condition ( $M = 3.32$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ),  $F(2, 59) = 25.44$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .46$ . Post hoc tests (Tukey) confirmed that the relational conflict condition differed from both the task conflict condition and the control condition ( $ps < .001$ ), whereas the latter two did not differ from each other. Taken together, these results attest to the effectiveness of the manipulation.

Analysis of the *perceived instrumentality* of a hint and of the complete answer as the two levels of a within-subjects factor (“help”), with conflict as a between-subjects factor, revealed a main effect of help only,  $F(1, 59) = 128.12$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .69$ . As intended, dependency-oriented help was perceived as having a higher instrumental value ( $M = 76.90$ ,  $SD = 19.26$ ) than autonomy-oriented help ( $M = 44.89$ ,  $SD = 11.99$ ). Perceived instrumentality of these types of help did not differ between the three conditions.

**Help avoidance, seeking dependency help, and seeking autonomy help.** To test H1, we examined *help avoidance* in an analysis of variance with added contrasts for the linear and quadratic effect of conflict. The analysis revealed a significant overall effect of conflict,  $F(2, 59) = 3.26$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .10$ . Inspection of the contrasts shows that this effect was related to the linear contrast ( $p < .05$ ) but not the quadratic contrast. The relevant means are presented in Figure 3. In support of H1, participants in the relational conflict condition more frequently avoided seeking help than participants in the task conflict condition, followed by those in the control condition. Tukey post hoc tests showed that only the

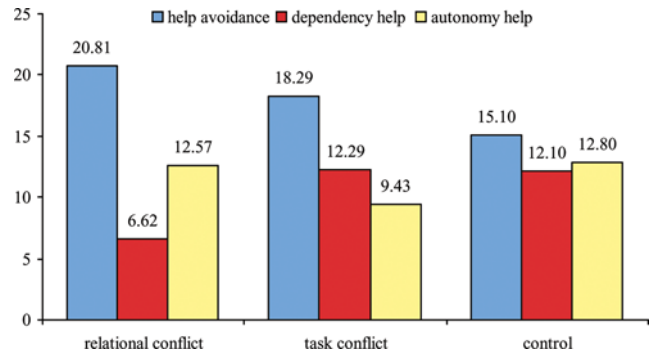


FIGURE 3 Help avoidance, seeking dependency help, and seeking autonomy help, Study 3. (color figure available online)

difference between the relational conflict condition and the control condition was significant ( $p < .05$ ).

We examined *dependency-oriented help seeking* in a similar analysis of variance with contrasts for the linear and quadratic effect of conflict. The overall effect of conflict was again significant,  $F(2, 59) = 3.83$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .12$ . The linear contrast was significant ( $p < .05$ ), but the quadratic contrast was not ( $p = .15$ ). Tukey post hoc tests revealed that, as expected in H2, the amount of dependency-oriented help seeking in the relational conflict condition was lower than that in the task conflict condition ( $p < .05$ ) and marginally lower than in the control condition ( $p = .06$ ). The task conflict condition and the control condition did not differ from each other.

Analysis of *autonomy-oriented help seeking* did not reveal an effect of conflict. This observation is in line with expectations and replicates the results from the second study.

To test whether participants in the three conditions differed in the type of help they requested, separate paired  $t$  tests were performed comparing autonomy-oriented help seeking to dependency-oriented help seeking in each condition. Participants in the relational conflict condition sought significantly more autonomy-oriented help than dependency-oriented help,  $t(20) = 3.18$ ,  $p < .01$ . The difference between autonomy- and dependency-oriented help seeking was significant neither in the task conflict condition,  $t(20) = -1.02$ , *ns*, nor in the control condition,  $t(19) = .20$ , *ns*. In a similar vein, we examined the difference between seeking autonomy-oriented help and help avoidance within each condition. Both in the relational conflict condition,  $t(20) = 2.58$ ,  $p < .05$ , and in the task conflict condition,  $t(20) = 4.08$ ,  $p = .001$ , the difference between help avoidance and seeking autonomy-oriented help was significant. The difference in the control condition was not significant,  $t(19) = .97$ , *ns*.

**Cooperation.** An effect of conflict was found on the reported *motivation to cooperate* with the other team,

$F(2, 59) = 4.35, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .13$ . Participants in the relational conflict condition were less motivated to cooperate with the other team ( $M = 4.79, SD = 1.12$ ) than participants in the task conflict condition ( $M = 5.62, SD = .99$ ) and participants in the control condition ( $M = 5.60, SD = 1.01$ ). The relational conflict condition differed significantly from both other conditions in Tukey post hoc tests ( $ps < .05$ ), whereas the latter two did not differ significantly from each other. In support of H3 and consistent with an increased desire for autonomy and independence, relational conflict reduced both the motivation to cooperate with the outgroup and the motivation to compete over material outcomes.

### Discussion

Relational conflict, which was experienced as increased perceived hostility of the outgroup toward the ingroup, resulted in more help avoidance compared with a control condition. When participants did seek help, they more frequently requested autonomy-oriented help than dependency-oriented help. Relational conflict also resulted in a decreased motivation to cooperate with the other group as well as a decreased motivation to compete. This finding is consistent with a striving for more autonomy, which implies that group members wish to diminish the interdependency between the groups, both cooperative and competitive.

Task conflict, which was experienced as an increased motivation to compete with the outgroup, resulted in more dependency-oriented help seeking in comparison to relational conflict, but not in comparison to the control condition. Participants in the task conflict condition requested as much dependency-oriented help as autonomy-oriented help. This latter finding differs somewhat from the second study, in which more autonomy- than dependency-oriented help seeking was observed in the task conflict condition. However, in Study 2, autonomy-oriented help still had a relatively high instrumental value, whereas in Study 3, this value was reduced such that the perceived instrumentality of autonomy-oriented help was indeed experienced by participants as much lower than that of dependency-oriented help. The observed finding that autonomy-oriented help was no longer preferred in the task conflict condition is consistent with this change. Nonetheless, given the competitive motivation that was triggered in the task conflict condition, it is surprising that not more dependency-oriented help was sought. Rather than seeking dependency-oriented help, participants most frequently opted to avoid seeking help altogether. In fact, although somewhat less help avoidance was observed in the task conflict condition compared to the relational conflict condition, this difference was not significant. We return to this point in the General Discussion section.

### GENERAL DISCUSSION

The decision to knock on the outgroup's door for help seems to be influenced by a careful reflection of two competing motives. On one hand, group members may appreciate the instrumental value of help in terms of realistic advancement and goal attainment. On the other hand, the psychological costs in terms of creating a negative group impression and becoming dependent on the outgroup can reduce the likelihood of seeking help. Previous analyses of helping behavior have acknowledged the fact that both instrumental and psychological factors affect the decision to seek help (Nadler & Halabi, 2006; Nadler, Harpaz-Gorodeisky, & Ben-David, 2009). In the present article, we investigated how the motivation to seek dependency-oriented help or autonomy-oriented help from another group is affected by conditions of task or relational conflict. Mixed-motive situations are part of everyday life (Bornstein, 2003), yet their impact on outgroup help seeking had not been empirically investigated. The present study is the first to look at how variations in the conflict nature of intergroup relations affect the willingness to seek help from the other group.

The results from the studies presented in this article show that relational conflict triggered a need for more autonomy, which resulted in more help avoidance in general, and avoidance of dependency-oriented help in particular. The effects of task conflict, on the other hand, were less pronounced. We reasoned in the general introduction of this article that, when conflict revolves around task completion, the high short-term instrumentality of dependency-oriented help may stimulate group members to seek dependency-oriented help from the outgroup. It is interesting, then, to observe that participants in the task conflict conditions significantly sought neither more dependency-oriented help than autonomy-oriented help (in fact, the opposite was observed in Study 2) nor more dependency-oriented help than participants in the control condition in Study 3. Realistic group conflict theory provides a possible explanation for these findings (Campbell, 1965; LeVine & Campbell, 1972). This theory states that opposing claims to scarce resources generate antagonism between groups. In a competitive environment, differences between groups are strengthened and exaggerated, and people develop a perceptual and evaluative bias in favor of their ingroup (Sherif et al., 1961). In principle, this bias is functional in an environment where one group's profits equal another group's losses, because it is easier to inflict losses upon another group when that group is viewed as unkind and undeserving of any rewards. However, it also means that identity concerns are activated that could inhibit the quest for help, in particular dependency-oriented help. As a result, task conflict develops into a complicated dilemma. Group members need to select between a

behavioral alternative that is best for their own group in terms of completing the task (i.e., seeking help that is highly instrumental in achieving the goal) and an alternative that is best for their group in terms of the identity concerns that may have risen from the task conflict (i.e., help avoidance or seeking autonomy-oriented help). Future research is needed to acquire more insight into the specific dynamics of this dilemma.

The aversive consequences of relational conflicts are well recognized in the literature (e.g., De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jehn, Greer, Levine, & Szulanski, 2008), but there continues to be debate about the effects of task conflict (Tjosvold et al., 2003). In fact, task conflict is often explicitly stimulated because it is presumed that it will increase employees' performance and creativity (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jehn et al., 2008; Tjosvold et al., 2003). Task conflict is probably even more prevalent at an implicit level, where excellence is defined as "being better than the others" (Tjosvold et al., 2003). However, results from a meta-analysis showed that task conflict has a strong negative correlation with team performance and team member satisfaction (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). Likewise, task conflict in the current research also did not increase the quest for needed help in comparison to a nonconflict control condition. An existing strong, positive relationship between the competing partners could help to make conflict a more positive experience (Tjosvold et al., 2003), but, as discussed in the previous paragraph, a decrease in relationship quality is often an automatic result from conflicting group goals. Thus, contrary to what is often thought (and acted upon by managers), task conflict can raise serious barriers to collaboration, which is ultimately detrimental to organizational performance and creativity.

One possible route to improve intergroup collaboration under conditions of task or relational conflict is in fact suggested by the results from Study 1. By acting in a manner that seemingly goes against the interest of the group in a specific context, behavior can be interpreted as a signal of good intentions. Consider, for example, two university departments that have a history of antagonism between them. In the interest of the university, and probably also in the interest of the departments at a long term, it is important that they collaborate on a variety of tasks, such as grant proposals. An autonomy-oriented request to a member of the other department, along the lines of "Would you mind telling me the name of that fund that provided you with a grant last year, so that I can find more information about it on my own, and see if I might fit the criteria for a grant application?" could signal that the help seeker wishes to depend on the helper as little as possible. In contrast, a dependency-oriented request to the other department, along the lines of "Would you mind telling me more about that fund that provided you with a grant last year,

such as their criteria for grant application?" could communicate that the help seeker trusts the helper, values the helper's expertise in this case, and does not object to relying on the helper for support. Signals of trust and respect are crucial in conflict resolution. Future research should investigate to what extent help seeking can contribute to a reduction of intergroup conflict by communicating feelings of trust and respect.

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