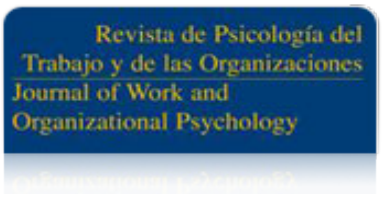

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Status Conflict and Team Creativity: The Roles of Depersonalization and Organizational Awareness

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A B S T R A C T

Status – one's position and influence within a social network – is a psych-social resource which fulfills one's need for social esteem. Striving to gain status in a social setup, including organizational settings, can cause conflict and reduce employees' positive work behavior. This study is aimed at discussing two questions: first, how status conflict in team, a newly established type of conflict, poses a threat toward individual wellbeing and affects team creativity; and second, to what extent organizational awareness, an individual characteristic, might act as buffer against the negative effects of status conflict. The data was collected from 245 healthcare professionals from 55 teams and analyzed through multilevel analysis, after achieving the model fit. The counterintuitive findings at team level revealed that status conflict does not impede team creativity but causes depersonalization that could undermine the overall team creativity. This multilevel study serves to widen the literature, responding to the recent call for new research by investigating the effects of depersonalization caused by status conflict on team creativity. Likewise, from a practical standpoint, it also emphasizes social competency as a moderator that can reduce the negative feelings caused by status conflict. Additionally, the study extends the job-demand resource model by introducing status as an individual requirement in organizational context, arguing that depletion of status creates negative feelings which are ultimately able to lower creativity.

El conflicto de estatus y la creatividad de equipo: los roles de la despersonalización y la conciencia organizativa

Palabras clave:
Conflicto de estatus
Competencias sociales
Teoría de la conservación de recursos
Creatividad
Bienestar de los empleados

R E S U M E N

El estatus (la propia posición e influencia en una red social) es un recurso psicosocial que satisface la necesidad de valoración social. Empeñarse en conseguir estatus en una organización social que incluya escenarios organizativos puede acabar en conflictos y en un menor comportamiento laboral positivo. El estudio pretende abordar dos cuestiones: primera, de qué modo el conflicto de estatus en grupo, un tipo de conflicto recientemente introducido, supone una amenaza para el bienestar de la persona y afecta a la creatividad del equipo y, segunda, en qué medida la conciencia organizativa como característica individual puede actuar como amortiguación contra los efectos negativos del conflicto de estatus. Se recogieron datos de 245 profesionales sanitarios de 55 equipos y se realizó un análisis multinivel una vez se consiguió el ajuste del modelo. Los resultados contraintuitivos al nivel de equipo mostraron que el conflicto de estatus no impide la creatividad del equipo aunque produce despersonalización, lo que podría minar la creatividad global del equipo. Este estudio multinivel permite ampliar la literatura en respuesta a una petición reciente de nueva investigación para analizar los efectos de la despersonalización que produce el conflicto de estatus en la creatividad del equipo. Igualmente, desde un punto de vista práctico, también hace hincapié en la competencia social como moderador que puede aminorar los sentimientos negativos derivados del conflicto de estatus. También el estudio amplia el modelo de exigencias laborales-recursos, al considerar el estatus como requisito individual en el contexto organizativo, sosteniendo que la disminución del estatus conlleva sentimientos negativos que en último término podría mermar la creatividad.

Highly knowledge-driven economies have compelled organizations to restructure their functions with the goal of adopting a team-oriented structure (Osterman, 1994) and of underscoring employee creativity as a primary source for business survival (Gong et al., 2013). Working in a team is identified as being an antecedent of creativity, and likewise causes workplace conflict (De Dreu, 2008).

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Among the notable antecedents of creativity, such as personality (Barrick et al., 1998; Neuman et al., 1999; Peeters et al., 2006), team composition (Bell, 2007; Mathieu et al., 2014; Tasheva & Hillman, 2019), and diversity (Harrison et al., 2002; Horwitz & Horwitz, 2007; Shemla et al., 2016), a plethora of literature has argued that intra-group conflict (De Wit et al., 2012; Greer et al., 2017; Jones & De Bono, 2011), including task, relationship, and process conflict all serve to have an influence on creativity, both positively and negatively (De Dreu, 2006, 2008; Farh et al., 2010). Discussion on the conflict-creativity nexus seemed almost saturated, but recent advancement – as well as the newly-established concept of "status conflict" in organization literature – has led scholars to understand the dynamics of status conflict and its effects on creativity (Sung & Choi, 2021). "Status conflict" refers to the disagreement over prestige and competition for authority and control within the social hierarchy (Bendersky & Hays, 2012; Greer & Dannals, 2017).

Status, one's position and influence within a social network, fulfills an individual's need for social esteem (Brewer et al., 1993); however, status-acquiring activities are comprised of evolutionary conditions which kindled profound competition amongst employees, because high status is a scant-but-valuable resource for power even at work and control within the (work)group (Huberman et al., 2004; Owens et al., 2001). That being said, members who are attempting to gain status within a workgroup might serve to benefit the team, using creative ideas derived from the traditional status quo and conflict to bring about distinctive resolutions, enabling them to reach a higher-ranked position within the group (Sligte et al., 2011). Conversely, an evolutionary viewpoint highlights the destructive consequences of status conflict, because it is detrimental to wellbeing and has a tendency to cause stress in individuals (Gould, 2003).

Work-related positive outcomes largely depend on individual employees and their wellbeing, towards which status conflict is a potential threat. Put simply, employees' efforts to compete other employee(s) to reduce the existing hierarchical differences in term of power and influence known as status conflict (López-Cabrera et al., 2020). If an individual is unable to obtain their desired status within a group, they may develop negativity, rigidness, disinterest, and an apathetic attitude towards others or towards work in general, a phenomenon which is often referred to as "depersonalization" – a feeling of detachment from the group or organization you are working with (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2000). Individuals attain and maintain their position through effort, politicking, or comparative strategies (e.g., Cropanzano et al., 1997; Duffy et al., 2002), and a failure to attain their desired rank widens the social gap, creating emotional pressure and a feeling of detachment, as well as hindering performance outcomes such as creativity. Creativity becomes difficult when members of a team do not feel a sense of attachment to the group or organization, thus, individual social competencies, such as organizational awareness – the talent to observe, understand, and consider others in wide-ranging social settings – are required in order to work with others, and to achieve optimal performance and professional goals at team level (Blickle et al., 2010; Todd et al., 2009).

Theories and empirical studies have established the detrimental effects of status conflict both in teams (Bendersky & Hays, 2012; Chun & Choi, 2014; Greer & Dannals, 2017) and at the individual level (Aquino, 2000), but these studies were limited to team performance, and neglected to explain how status conflict undermines individual and team efforts (Lee et al., 2018). Particularly, not much understanding in literature exists with respect to how efforts to reduce the existing differences in a team hierarchy affect members of a team and overall team outcomes. Therefore, the present study attempts to understand the psychological process involved in team creativity during status conflict among members of a team via depersonalization. In addition, it highlights the role of organizational awareness as a boundary condition that can potentially reduce the negative effect of status conflict in team.

The contribution of this study covers the aspects of both theory and practice. First, this study widens the literature, responding to the recent call for new research by investigating the effects of depersonalization caused by status conflict on creativity (Lee et al., 2018; Thayer et al., 2018). Likewise, from a practical standpoint, it also emphasizes that managers and team leaders should be taken care of individual characteristics because inducing negative feelings among members can have detrimental effect at individual and team level. Similarly, the HR department should also take this point into account while forming a team. Second, the study extends the job demands-resources (JD-R) model in team (Demerouti et al., 2001) by introducing status as a job demand (Huberman et al., 2004) and a team's property, arguing that members competing for status to increase their relative power creates negative feelings inducing depersonalization, which ultimately affect team creativity (Robbins & Judge, 2017).

Theory and Hypotheses

Team Status Conflict and Team Creativity

Researchers and practitioners have long hinted at there being the existence of a link between status conflict and creativity, and are interested in the factors that attenuate or accentuate an employee's creativity – and specifically in how these factors play out in increasingly dynamic and uncertain work environments (George, 2007). A dispute over member's relative status in a team – conflict over power, control, or respect – generates a long term breakdown in teams (Bendersky & Hays, 2010; Wang et al., 2022). Such conflict is a common feature of group where members maintain their (status) interests, advocate their contributions to group, challenging expertise of others, compete in-group discussions, or allocate resources in self-serving ways (Pai & Bendersky, 2020). According to Greer et al., (2017), power and influence (emergence) in teams create power struggle and conflict to gain a desired position among team members. Desire for status is a requirement of the team members to fulfill the job demands (Anderson et al., 2015). However, lack of desired resources (status) in teams instill desire to gain power and influence and negatively influences the team outcomes (Greer et al., 2017). Following the prior work, we, therefore, posit that status conflict among team members involves the undermining of one another's participation and induces competing behaviors, thus creating an unsafe social environment for employees to conceive of and share their creative ideas (Gould, 2003; Porath et al., 2008) and consequently hamper team creativity (Lee et al., 2018). According to Shin and Zhou (2007), team creativity is defined as "the production of novel and useful ideas concerning products, services, processes, and procedures by a team of employees working together" (p. 1715).

We argue that the development of new ideas and solutions requires an exchange of information, because employees learning from each other is a primary step in the creative process. Conversely, status conflict creates a hostile environment, inhibits learning opportunities (Bendersky & Hays, 2012), and restricts the exchange of ideas (Fasnacht, 2003). Therefore, it can reduce information-processing capacity (Greer & Jehn, 2007) and can likely lower creativity (Černe et al., 2014). We, therefore, propose that status contests among team members induces competing behaviors (Greer et al., 2011) that hamper their helping behavior as well as information sharing and team learning (Greer & Dannals, 2017). Consequently, this would likely lower team's creativity.

Status conflict based on cutthroat competition among employees builds up a social environment that reduces members' cooperation and information sharing, thus creating a psychologically unsafe social climate (Gould, 2003). We argue that status as a psychological resource provides control in difficult job situations and is directly associated

with one's self-esteem (Schieman et al., 2001). An employee's effort to gain desired status requires energies that leave them with fewer (physical or psychological) resources, causes diversion from the assigned tasks, and devalues the task itself, consequently affecting their creativity (Erez & Nouri, 2010).

We used the theoretical lens of job demands-resources (JD-R) model proposed by Demerouti et al. (2001) to explain the proposed conceptual framework. The model predicts that there are primarily two perspectives, namely energy depletion perspective and motivational perspective, to explain high job demands and low job resources, causing job burnout and disengagement from work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Consistent with energy depletion perspective of JD-R model, we therefore contend that carrying a desired status in workgroup drives members to fulfill the job demands and complete the assigned tasks efficiently, while team status conflict creates a non-conducive work environment and will deplete an employee's psychological resources (Schneider et al., 2017), constraining the exchange of ideas with other members that are essential for doing creative work. It is thus predicted that:

*H*1: Status conflict among team members is negatively related to a team's creativity.

Status Conflict, Depersonalization, and Team Creativity

Depersonalization, a dimension of job burnout and indicator of psychological health in the workplace (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998), refers to mentally distancing oneself from others and seeing others unsympathetically (Chiu & Tsai, 2006), and is characterized by a callous, negative, and detached attitude (Salanova et al., 2005). We propose that a dispute in the workplace in order to gain the desired position in a group social hierarchy induces competitive behavior among employees and encourages them to manipulate status relations (Gould, 2003). We argue that members disagreement on "who should be in higher status positions" or differences in hierarchy initiates power struggles and heightened competition and restricts helping behavior, information sharing, and team learning (Bendersky & Hays, 2012; Pai & Bendersky, 2020, p. 38). This could result in a member being either blamed for another employee's problems or being insensitive to their needs (Gould, 2003), which could potentially distance them from others in the team and result in indifference, detachment, and a lack of empathy (Garden, 1987). Thus, these employees would likely develop feelings of depersonalization with their peers (Russell & Fiske, 2008). Such feelings lead to employees distancing themselves from the task at hand, thereby restricting the processing or sharing of ideas (Hollet-Haudebert et al., 2011) and reducing helpful and participative behaviors (Greer & Dannals, 2017; Lee et al., 2018). This, in turn, will restrict their own personal processing and sharing of ideas, thus lowering overall creativity of team (Salanova et al., 2005).

In light of the above statements, then, we argue that status conflict, a psychological workplace stressor, may create tension and anger among members who are working together in a team. From the motivational perspective of the job demand-resource model, this study contemplates that the members of a team require a desired status to complete various job tasks with creativity; for example, due to physicians power in medical teams, the National Health Service Direct increased the perceived status of nurses because they had creative role in teams (i.e., performing diagnosis) (Voyer, 2013). A scarcity of desired resources to complete the assigned tasks among team members may result in difficulties to accomplish the tasks. Consequently, employees may not participate in team activities and build cynical sentiments towards team members and work to avoid failures (Cho et al., 2020). This may lead to fewer available resources for engaging in personal relationships and feeling connected at work, and therefore will likely increase depersonalization that may decrease overall team creativity. Personal relationships and workplace connections are also important psychological resources, and therefore, when personalization is reduced, it will ultimately have an impact on employees' work behaviour and overall wellbeing (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). Moreover, personal relationships create a conducive environment for generating new ideas (Baer & Oldham, 2006; Dakhli & De Clercq, 2004). As depersonalization depicts a form of disengagement and directly influences other team members, lack of personalization resource would likely lead to reduced team's creativity. We, therefore, predict that:

*H*2: Depersonalization mediates the relationship between status conflict among team members and a team's creativity.

Status Conflict, Organizational Awareness, and Depersonalization

Organizational awareness is often used interchangeably with social astuteness – a part of social and political skills – in organization studies, due to the fact that each helps individuals to observe, understand, and consider the other in wide-ranging social settings (Boyatzis & Sala, 2004). However, both are distinct yet come under the umbrella of political skills because a socially astute individual perceptively "observe others and keenly attune to diverse social situation" (Shi et al., 2011, p. 361), while organizational awareness is an individual's competency to read emotional currents and power relationships in a group, and identify influencers, networks, and dynamics within the organization (Goleman et al., 2017; Goleman et al., 2013). In this research, we do not distinguish between the two, because of both constructs' similar social effects and the fact that both facilitate social influence skills in work settings (Semadar et al., 2006; Treadway et al., 2005). We argue that individuals who have high organizational awareness hold a high level of self-awareness, intuitively understanding both the immediate social and political dynamics of their own groups and the ultimate effects of conflict in matters of deviance and social conflict (Boehm, 2000). In this study, we considered organizational awareness or social astuteness to be a positive resource, because individuals with high organizational awareness are better able to manage stress and mitigate burnout as they take interpersonal interaction as an opportunity (Brotheridge, 2001; Harvey et al., 2007; Perrewé et al., 2004). Within a work setting, individuals with high organizational awareness and social skills are able to grow their social network more effectively, due to the fact that they are able to influence others, appear to be sincere, and behave in ways that are socially astute (Ferris et al., 2005). Likewise, with such a degree of organizational awareness, one also knows how to use a social network for one's own benefit by adjusting their behaviors/actions toward the changing situational demands and toning down the negative aspects of social interactions, including status conflict (Fang et al., 2015; Ferris et al., 2012).

Recent studies have indicated that organizational awareness as a social competency diminishes the negative consequences of conflict – such as job burnout (Xu, 2019) – and is positively related to self-monitoring, paying attention to details (conscientiousness) and political savvy (Snyder, 1987). Better understanding of work situations and people – organizational awareness – is an individual resource that one can use to attain personal and organizational goals, an important component of being successful in the workplace. Others at the workplace would thus view them as knowledgeable and skilled, and this would result in increasing their networking resources (Brouer et al., 2011). In line with the buffer perspective of JD-R model, we argue that organizational awareness as a personal resource would help employees to attenuate the negative effects of team status conflict on employee's depersonalization (Ferris et al., 2005; Lee et al., 2018). We contend that, in the case of status conflict in team, an employee with high organizational awareness has a keen understanding of

social interactions within the workplace environment (Ferris et al., 2005; Lee et al., 2018). This would likely help the employees to reduce the negative effects of depersonalization, due to their confidence and capability of handling through self-regulation. Furthermore, in line with JD-R, we argue that such employees also have the ability to accumulate the required resources to replenish and protect resource loss that results from team status conflict, thus providing emotional respite and psychological wellbeing (Ferris et al, 2007). We, therefore contend that organizational awareness as a personal resource would mitigate the negative outcomes of status conflict among team members (i.e., depersonalization) and employees with high organizational awareness will experience less depersonalization than employees with lower level of organizational awareness. It is thus predicted that:

*H*3: Organizational awareness moderates the relationship between team status conflict and depersonalization, such that individuals with less-developed organizational awareness experience more depersonalization, and vice versa.

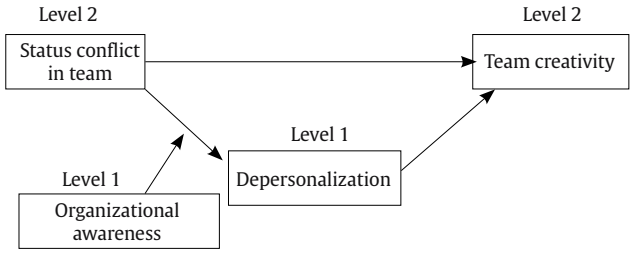

Figure 1. Proposed Model.

Method

Procedure and Sample

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee where two authors of this study were employed. After obtaining ethical approval, an official confirmation from each participated organization (in our case hospital) in this project was obtained. Then one of the authors personally visited participated hospitals in the provincial capital of Punjab, Pakistan, and distributed a paper-and pencil survey questionnaire to the members of medical teams at first in multiple units and, at a later stage, to the supervisors who rated their team members. Keeping in mind about the education level of the target audience, the survey was administered in English language because English is the official language in Pakistan and medium of instructions in medical studies (Farasat et al., in press).

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. The ethics board of the third and fourth authors' university reviewed the research proposal and verified that the procedures conform with the university's ethical standards and guidelines.

Participation in the survey was voluntary, and study participants were first given details of the project and assured that their responses would be strictly anonymous and reported as aggregate results.

The data collection process took four months. We had two prime reasons for targeting medical teams or hospitals: first, the status differences among healthcare professionals (doctors and nurses) are visible in hierarchy (Lee & Saeed, 2001) because "doctor-nurse relationship has often been described as a dominant-subservient relationship" (Gjerberg & Kjølsrød, 2001, p. 189). Also nurses hold less belief on doctors' team communication because doctors remained a decision-maker in patient care and this created a power-based relation in team instead of relation-based (Voyer, 2013); likewise, irrespective of the medical unit, teams working in public/private hospitals are homogenous in hierarchy and composition (nurses and house officers), where a senior physician work as a lead, hence increasing the generalizability of the study. A separate cover page was attached with each questionnaire, and included informed consent, the purpose of the study, and assurances of the respondent's anonymity and confidentiality.

A total of 279 questionnaires from 60 units were received, with a response rate of 37.2%. However, two team supervisors did not respond to the survey, and members of four teams provided incomplete information, leading us to exclude 25 questionnaires. Members of the team filled in the survey on three variables (status conflict, depersonalization, and organizational awareness) and supervisors/leaders rated each member who filled out the survey on creativity (finding a solution or providing an alternative to the existing problem). Data was collected in two phases (temporal separation) in order to avoid common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2012). In the first phase, members of each team filled out the survey, and when data had been collected from members, then one of the authors approached the team leader/supervisor to obtain a response on employee creativity. For our convenience, each team was marked with an identical number. In the end, 55 teams – with a response rate of 33.9% – were taken for the final analysis (N = 245).

Of the sample, 57.3% were between 26-35 years old, 34.6% were between 20-25 years old, 6.1% were between 36-45 years old, and only 2% were between 46-55 years old. Of the sample, 69.9% were female, 28.5% were male, and 1.6% did not disclose their gender; 76.7% of the sample were single, and the remaining 23.3% were married. The minimum and maximum responses from each team were two to seven and average cluster size was 4.455.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Alpha Values

	Mean	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	27.66	4.74	–					
2. Gender	1.84	1.03	-.11	–				
3. Status conflict	3.10	0.82	.12	.08	(.62)			
4. Depersonalization	2.81	0.88	.15*	.11	.42**	(.72)		
5. Creativity	3.22	1.10	-.13*	.10	-.00	-.18**	(.93)	
6. Organizational awareness	3.40	0.68	-.14*	.11	.13*	-.00	.14*	(.67)

Note. N = 245 (54 teams). Scale reliabilities are noted in the parentheses
* p < .05, ** p < .01.

Measures

Status Conflict

It was operationalized as disagreement over members' relative position in team's hierarchy and measured through four items developed by Bendersky and Hays (2012) on a five-item Likert-scale, from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. A sample item is "I experience conflict because of others trying to assert their dominance" (α = .620 and ω = .626.)

Depersonalization

It was operationalized as individual detachment from job and measured through five items derived from the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981) on a five-item Likert-scale, from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. A sample item is "I worry that this job is hardening me emotionally" (α = .72 and ω = .722.)

Table 2. Discriminant Validity with Comparison of Alternative Measurement Models

Model	Factors	CMIN	*df*	RMSEA	SRMR	TLI	CFI
Baseline model	Four-factor (SC, Dep, OA, & EC)	176.6	127	.04	.08	.96	.96
Rival model 1	Three-factor (combined Dep & OA)	227.8	127	.06	.10	.91	.92
Rival model 2	Two-factor (combined Dep, EC, & OA)	302.8	124	.08	.15	.83	.87
Rival model 3	Two-factor (combined SC, OA, & Dep)	236.2	128	.06	.11	.90	.92
Rival model 4	One-factor (combined all)	335.1	123	.08	.08	.80	.84

Note. SC = status conflict; Dep = depersonalization; OA = organizational awareness; EC = employee creativity.

Organizational Awareness

It was operationalized as individual level social skills to observe, understand, and consider others in work settings measured through five items derived from the political skill inventory (PSI) developed by Treadway et al. (2005) on a five-item Likert-scale, from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. A sample item is "I am good at getting people to like me" (α = .67 and ω = .667.)

Creativity

It was measured through four items proposed by Shin and Zhou (2007). The supervisor was asked to rate subordinate creativity on a five-point Likert scale, from 1 = *very poor* to 5 = *very good*. A sample item includes "How well does your team member produce new ideas?" (α = .93 and ω = .928.)

Control Variables

Age and gender were added as control variables, because of their possible effect on status. Age has the potential to affect performance through conflict (Jehn et al., 1999). Gender was controlled, because our sample contained 70% of females mostly nurses, which could potentially affect status and creativity.

Results

Reliability, Correlations, and Confirmatory Factor Analysis

In the first step, reliability, correlations, and confirmatory factor analysis were conducted. Table 1 shows the reliability and correlation between variables. The reliability of status conflict is just above the .60, which is acceptable and sufficient to draw the conclusion (Taber, 2018; van Griethuijsen et al., 2015). Studies in organizational psychology domain, with alpha values ranging between .60 and .69, have been published in reputed journals and are well-cited (e.g., Kircaburun et al., 2020; Lehman & Simpson, 1992; Mayer & Davis, 1999; Spector et al., 2006). In the second step we compared hypothesized model with other four alternate models to see the fit between the data and hypothesized model. Table 2 shows complete results of hypothesized vs. rival models that show our hypothesized model better meet the requirements of multiple goodness-of-fit indices and cutoff values (χ^2/df = 1.39, GFI = .93, AGFI = .90, TLI .96, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .04) than the one factor model (χ^2/df = 2.72, GFI = .84, AGFI = .80, TLI .80, CFI =.84, RMSEA = .08) (Marsh et al., 2004).

Analytical Strategy and Hypothesis Testing

Team was the level of analysis in this study where status conflict and creativity at level-2 were analyzed. Thus, a multilevel analysis was used to assess the 2-1-2 relationship (Preacher et al., 2010) due to its better choice from "micro-to meso-theory testing" (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000). This study aims to understand the configural team properties (i.e., status conflict and team creativity) and a typical bottom-up model is appropriate for conceptual and theoretical understanding of how team level construct contribute to individual-level constructs and later it contributes to the team properties. We aggregated the responses of team members on status conflict and creativity at team level to assess the relationship with random intercepts and slopes (vary across teams), while intraclass correlations coefficient for depersonalization (ICC1 = .27, ICC2 = .62) and social astuteness (ICC1 = .07, ICC2 = .26) represents small to medium effect (LeBreton & Senter, 2008, p. 838).

We used Mplus (version 7.11) to test the hypothesized model through multilevel modeling. The first hypothesis was that status conflict in a team negatively affected team creativity. Results did not support the hypothesis 1 (B =1.08, p-value = .02). The mediation analysis shows that depersonalization caused by team status conflict reduces team creativity (B = – 1.83, p-value = .01), lending support for hypothesis 2. Cross level moderation results indicate that organizational awareness insignificantly moderates the relationship between status conflict and depersonalization (B = –.20, p = *ns*), lending no support for hypothesis 3. Table 3 shows the complete results of the direct, indirect, and moderating role of variables.

Discussion

This study highlighted that in-group status conflict hinders team creativity via depersonalization. Individuals strive to gain influence/rank in-group in order to move upward in their social hierarchy, which they do either by effort, politicking, or competitive strategies (Cropanzano et al., 1997; Duffy et al., 2002; Harris & Kacmar, 2005). Status satisfies one's social esteem needs even at workplace (Brewer et al., 1993), and in the organizational context, high status individual considered as a better performer (Piazza & Castellucci, 2014), while competing for status within a group imposes a threat from their peers and influences cooperation (Bendersky & Hays, 2012). Efforts to achieve (higher) status or to maintain existing status within a group (Anderson et al., 2015) cause members to conceal important information strategically – even their opinion (Anderson et al., 2015). Devoting extra energy toward gaining status produces negative emotions and detachment from work (Roseman, 1996). It creates a gap between individuals and their workgroup, hindering their potential contribution to performing tasks (Gorji & Rahimian, 2011). Organizational awareness among employees provide an opportunity to get along with others, minimizing negative feelings and maximizing cooperation within the team (Ahearn et al., 2004). Consequently, developing and maintaining relationships with different professional communities enables individuals to gain access to salient information for new career opportunities (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Granovetter, 1995), as well as other important resources – such as reputation – offering a competitive advantage to individuals (Gerli et al., 2015).

This study responds to the recent call for new research by investigating the effect of a cognitive process – depersonalization –, that is caused by status conflict, on creativity (Lee et al., 2018). Previous studies highlighted that status conflict on the team level negatively impacts on team psychological safety and inhibits the team's cognitive functioning. The results of this study extends the literature by taking depersonalization as a micro-level psychological

Table 3. Direct, Indirect, and Moderation Results

	Model 1		Model 2	
Outcome	Estimate	*SE*	Estimate	*SE*
Depersonalization				
Team status conflict	0.68***	0.12	1.18**	0.38
Organizational awareness	-1.14**	0.43	-0.34n.s.	0.75
Gender	0.11***	0.02	0.17***	0.05
Age	0.03*	0.01	0.04ns	0.02
Team creativity				
Depersonalization	-1.91**	0.58	-1.55**	0.57
Team status conflict	1.32**	0.46	1.08**	0.45
Gender	0.23**	0.08	0.20*	0.08
Age	0.02ns	0.05	0.01ns	0.05
Mediation analysis				
Team status conflict→Deperson.→Team creativity			-1.83**	0.73
Interaction term				
Team status conflict × Social astuteness → Deperson.			-0.20ns	0.15

Note. $N = 55$ teams. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. Gender and age was entered as control variables. Mediation and interaction term was entered in model 2.
$^{*}p \le .05, ^{**}p \le .01, ^{***}p \le .001, ^{ns}p > .05$.

perspective, and highlights that status conflict in medical teams does not affect team creativity directly but when an individual experiences depersonalization syndrome then it hinders beyond routine tasks, such as team creativity. It is implausible that physicians and nurses do not deal with conflicts because they interact frequently on daily basis where conflicts on tasks and process are very likely and status is no exception (Kaitelidou et al., 2012). There are two plausible reasons for this counterintuitive direct results in medical settings. First, the sample collected from different medical units and the likelihood that the members prevailing perceptions over status are different in different medical units. For example, Liberati et al. (2016) highlighted that neurologists' view of hierarchical status is different where they see a nurse simply to follow orders, whereas doctors in intensive care units view nurses as valuable members because they hold expertise in patient care. Second, a similar plausible reason related to the context is that members of a medical team require adequate autonomy, coordination, and communication, seek help, and practice of using members' different perspectives (Janss et al., 2012). This keeps members performance on track and offset the negative consequences of status conflict at team level. The correlation between status conflict and creativity was negative, which turns a positive in the multilevel SEM for two possible reasons. First, "most correlations do not indicate causal relationships"; similarly, control function of variables was not possible in correlation analysis (McElreath, 2020, p. 127). Second, it is possible in the multilevel SEM for the effect of the intercorrelations between status conflict of the partial latent variable multilevel regression coefficient of status conflict that it may be negative in the face of a positive correlation between status conflict and team-level creativity. On the contrary, if a member of the team experiences a depersonalization syndrome due to status conflict, then it may reduce the team output. The moderate correlation coefficient between status conflict and depersonalization shows a serious negative consequence of status conflict in members' mental health. A similar yet simple example can be seen in any society where one faces emotional experiences while moving upward in social hierarchy (Schieman et al., 2001). We highlighted that personalization is important for an organization, as it provides a strong sense of connection and commitment between the employees and the organization, and increases employee engagement.

Further, organizational awareness, may not be a sufficient individual characteristic to mitigate the negative effect(s) of status conflict on members. A member's skill of observing, understanding, and considering others in work settings may not be enough to escape from negative consequences particularly of status conflict due to unfulfillment of social esteem (Brewer et al., 1993). This conceptualizes that a lack of status may reduce a member's assertiveness and one develops status stigma (Robbins & Judge, 2017).This poses a serious threat to wellbeing that further hampers positive team outcomes (Huberman et al., 2004). A medical employee who serves with limited resources in an organization and consider equal status in team as an individual right but not granting due to the polarity in hierarchy may distract from their assigned tasks (Bendersky & Shah, 2012). Likewise, efforts to claim higher status or maintain an existing status may also drain individuals' emotions and produce negative feelings, which ultimately lower team creativity.

Given the primacy of status in social life and organizations, social psychology, sociology, and management researchers have made a substantial effort to describe the role that status plays. Prior studies have generally focused on exploring how status influences an individual's psychological approach and actions, but undermines the relational character of status (Rhee & Choi, 2017). This study argued that depersonalization caused by status conflict in teams may further complicate individual position within the hierarchy. The current research makes a significant contribution to the organization literature by embedding status in the work context and investigating the process through which status conflict impedes team creativity by mediation. This study offers a new team and individual level perspective through multilevel analysis in challenging work contexts, as status conflict at team level may be less detrimental at a team level but once the member of a team experience depersonalization syndrome then team creativity is at risk. As is evident in the literature, it was not a foregone conclusion that the conflict may be functional for the team and at the same time dysfunctional for the individual, because various factors influence team creativity, which was not the scope of the present study, such as problem-solving in teams, members' interaction, and communication (Thayer et al., 2018). However, is it worth exploring further what are the conditions in which status conflict in team can be functional for teams? Further, is it also an interesting line of research if status conflict is functional for individual members? If not, then what individual characteristics can help individuals, teams, and organizations to avoid or minimize its negative effects?

Implications

The findings of this study delineate several implications for practicing managers, which can act as remedies against status conflict. Considering that depersonalization, in the context of status

competition, disrupts creativity by boosting feelings of detachment, managers should improve team culture and contribution that every team member should value and appreciate. Creativity is an outcome of the amalgamation of systematic knowledge, and is inseparable from communication between team members. Therefore, managers should develop a friendly attitude toward others, establish strong alliances, and consider interpersonal disagreements to be opportunities, rather than threats. It is necessary for managers to educate team members about how they can channel personality traits and political skills for decoding social cues and consider conflict as an opportunity to flourish.

Moreover, organizations need to be vigilant and realize that not all employees have high organizational awareness, and that this can create a political environment. Therefore, managers must take steps to provide training and coaching in order to equip employees to manage stressful situations, such as competition over status that may arise due to the actions of a coworker or team leader.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The results of this study should be taken with caution, as this study – like others – has limitations. First, data was collected from Pakistan, a high-power distance society, in which formal authority is maintained between leader and subordinate (Hussain et al., 2017; Shackleton & Ali, 1990). In such culture high power-distance culture status conflict might not be visible and may serve as "a heuristic to guide conflict resolution in team where members have a low level of power" (Greer & van Kleef, 2008, p. 4). The relatively new scale, status conflict and organizational awareness, achieved acceptable level of reliability (.62 and above) in an Asian context. Additionally, the model achieved good-fit that supported us to continue with the model. However, future researchers may test this model in other industries and cultural contexts in order to gain a better understanding of the outcomes of status conflict. Moreover, cross-cultural studies may provide a wider picture, particularly concerning which cultural aspects dominate to claim the status. Second, leadership style was not in the scope of the current study, which is crucial in conflict management and bringing about creativity (Bai et al., 2016; Imam et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2011). It would be an interesting line of research to investigate how leaders manage status conflict within their teams or which kind of leadership style can effectively handle status conflict and how. Third, single industry and one-time data collection may have another limitation, as it does not show change in behavior over time – therefore, a longitudinal and/or qualitative study in different industries may bring greater insight into the competition over status in team, and how it affects creativity and performance at individual as well as at team level. We have used an aggregation approach to analyze variables at cluster level, which was different when we collected the data, so there is a chance of aggregation bias (Kreft & De Leeuw, 1998). We suggest that future researchers collect team level data to analyze team level outcomes. Similar to this, team composition in maintaining status and performance in teams is another worth examining aspect because adding some low and mid-status individuals with high-status individuals in a team could be a performance strategy, because adding too many high status individuals or granting equal status to all members can hamper group performance (Robbins & Judge, 2017).

Conclusion

Competing for status in the workplace may have a detrimental effect and threaten individual wellbeing. It may not directly affect work outcomes, but it has the potential to decrease productive outcomes, and there can be other variables involved that decrease with claiming status in the workplace. Organizations should take care of employees through work engagement and training in order to develop employees' social skills so that they can exploit situations by using their skills. These methods are not only important for nurturing new ideas, but also to help employees achieve organizational goals as one unit.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of this article declare no conflict of interest.

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