



# The shadow group

## Towards an explanation of interpersonal conflict in work groups

Andrew Hede

*University of the Sunshine Coast, Maroochydore, Australia*

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to introduce the concept of the “shadow group” as a partial explanation of intragroup relationship conflict in organizations. Also, to offer a new model of the “self-in-group” comprising a binary pair of opposite selves (“overt self” and “shadow self”) held in balance by the awareness of the “inner observer”.

**Design/methodology/approach** – It is proposed in the paper that when an individual is triggered into emotional reactivity, especially as a result of projection, their shadow self engulfs their overt self and replaces it as the operational entity. In a group setting, the overt selves of the individual members constitute the overt group while their shadow selves comprise the normally dormant shadow group. As group conflict escalates from one member’s initial emotional outburst, more and more members experience shadow-self engulfment and eventually the shadow group may operationally replace the overt group. The dynamics of the shadow group are illustrated by means of two case studies.

**Research limitations/implications** – The study identifies a number of empirically-testable hypotheses that arise from the shadow group approach including the hypothesis that individuals who have high inner-awareness are less likely to experience negative emotionality (shadow-self engulfment).

**Practical implications** – The paper shows how emotionally-based relationship conflict can be prevented by the exercise of emotional intelligence competencies to keep the shadow group in check.

**Originality/value** – The study builds on Jungian theory to provide new constructs that help explain the dynamics of negative emotionality in relationship conflict.

**Keywords** Interpersonal relations, Conflict, Group work, Emotional intelligence

**Paper type** Conceptual paper

### Introduction

Of all the factors affecting group functioning in organizations, interpersonal conflict is arguably the most important in terms of its impact on performance and on group member satisfaction. This article offers a partial explanation of intragroup conflict based on a new construct, the shadow group. This construct is derived from Jungian psychology, specifically the notion of the shadow (Jung, 1968, pp. 8-9). While each person can be seen as having a shadow or hidden part to their individual psyche, the shadow group is hypothesized to be the collection of all the shadow parts of the various members of a work or other group. The shadow group is no phantasm, but rather a hidden reality that parallels the normal functioning of work groups and which takes over their interaction when one or more individual members are engulfed by their shadow selves during emotionally-based interpersonal conflict.

There is an extensive research literature on the nature and effects of conflict in work groups (e.g. Barsade *et al.*, 2000; De Dreu and Weingart, 2003; Geitzkow and Gyr, 1954; Jehn, 1997, 1995; Jehn and Mannix, 2001; Pelled *et al.*, 1999; Medina *et al.*, 2005; Passos

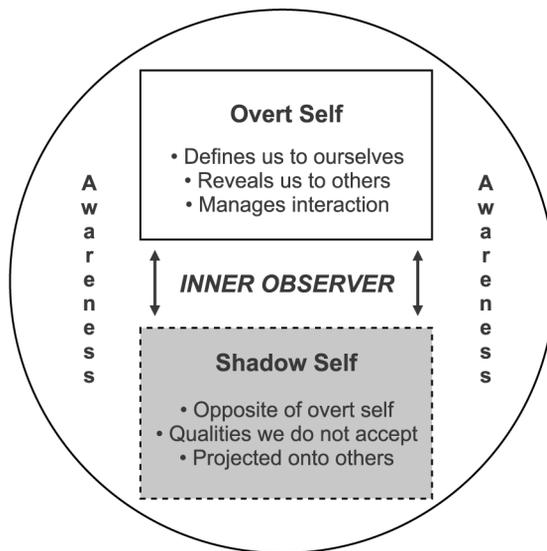


and Caetano, 2005). However, there is a need for further research and theory development exploring the dynamics of relationship conflict that has been found to be generally disruptive of both group performance and member affective reactions. In particular, it is important to understand the role of negative emotionality in relationship conflict so that it can be effectively managed in practice. The following analysis of new constructs in interpersonal dynamics aims to increase such understanding.

### Understanding the self-in-group

The present concept of the shadow group as integral to intragroup relationship conflict dynamics, draws on a new model of the “self-in-group” that distinguishes between the “overt self” and the “shadow self” (see Figure 1). The overt self is the set of personal characteristics or qualities we are aware of in ourselves, that we use to self-define ourselves and that we reveal to others. Further, our overt self is responsible for managing our interaction with the world and with others in the group. The shadow self, by contrast, is the opposite of the overt self and comprises the parts of the psyche that people do not readily recognize in themselves and that they may project onto others (see Figure 1).

Another characteristic of the self-in-group is that the overt self is conscious while the shadow self is normally unconscious. Note that the shadow self is not seen as being essentially negative, only as being the opposite of the overt self. However, it has to be noted that in organizational life, most people adopt a positive rather than a negative overt self in order to bolster their own self-esteem, to gain social acceptance and to prevent alienation from the group. Thus, almost all group members most of the time “try to be nice” – that is, they generally conform to group norms (Feldman, 1984; Pech, 2001) and avoid doing anything that will threaten group cohesiveness (Berntal and Insko, 1993; Janis, 1971) or risk alienation from the group (Harvey, 1988). For most



**Figure 1.**  
Model of the self-in-group

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people, therefore, emotional reactivity causes their normally “nice” overt self to be engulfed by their mainly “nasty” but hidden shadow self.

Further, it is proposed that the overt and shadow selves are not static and immutable. The set of personal qualities that people use to characterize themselves and to relate with others (namely, their overt selves) can vary because of the complex and multi-parted nature of the human psyche. Their shadow self, as their reverse mirror image, changes in constant binary tuning with their overt self. The current approach, therefore, emphasizes the behavior of the overt and shadow selves as they operate in the group on any particular occasion, not as they exist (and vary) over time.

The third and final structural component of the self-in-group is the “inner observer”, the psychic entity that is responsible for monitoring the interplay between the overt and shadow selves via “inner-awareness” (see Figure 1). In emotionally competent individuals, their inner observer gains consciousness over their shadow self and keeps it in a dormant state by maintaining awareness of its ever-present reality and its potential for engulfment of the overt self. For many people, however, their inner observer is unaware of and unable to manage their shadow self which when triggered, can erupt with emotional reactivity so as to engulf their overt self. Self-awareness is a critical competence in emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995; Salovey and Mayer, 1990).

#### *Comparison with Jungian concepts*

The present model of the self-in-group is derived from but is not restricted to Jungian psychology. Jung used the term “self” in an inclusive sense to designate “the whole range of psychic phenomena in man. It expresses the unity of the personality as a whole . . . consisting of both conscious and unconscious contents” (Jung, 1990, pp. 274-5). While Jung’s model of the psyche is more complex, the present model similarly incorporates both conscious and unconscious elements (namely, the overt and shadow selves, respectively).

For Jung (1968, p. 8) the shadow was not simply a part of a binary self as in the current model, but rather one of several “archetypes” that comprise the collective unconscious. Nevertheless, the present concept of the shadow self postulates the same volatile dynamic that Jung identified in the shadow archetype which, as he said:

[. . .] if it is repressed and isolated from consciousness, it never gets corrected and is liable to *burst forth* suddenly in a moment of unawareness (Jung, 1966, p.76, emphasis added).

In the proposed self-in-group model, the inner observer has the potential to maintain awareness of the shadow self thereby preventing it from “bursting forth” in emotional reactivity. This model proposes, therefore, that shadow-self-awareness is a predictor of emotional reactivity leading to relationship conflict. As an empirical hypothesis this can be expressed as follows: individuals who have a high degree of inner-awareness of their shadow self are less likely to become engaged in relationship conflict than those with low awareness. Drawing on Jungian theory (Jung, 1968, p. 9), a defining feature of the shadow self is that its mostly negative qualities that are unrecognized in oneself, are likely to be projected onto any others in the group who are perceived as reflecting these disowned qualities.

The proposed notion of the overt self combines the Jungian concepts of the “persona” and the “ego”. Jung (1990, p. 280) saw the persona as “exclusively concerned with the relation to objects” – it is the face or “mask” we present to others. The ego, on

the other hand, is “the subject of all personal acts of consciousness” (Jung, 1968, p. 3). The overt self is here proposed as both the individual personality as presented to others and the individual-as-subject, that is, comprising the qualities that identify us to ourselves (see Figure 1).

Finally, the proposed concept of the “inner observer” is very similar to the Jungian concept of the “inner personality”. As Jung (1990, p. 282) stated:

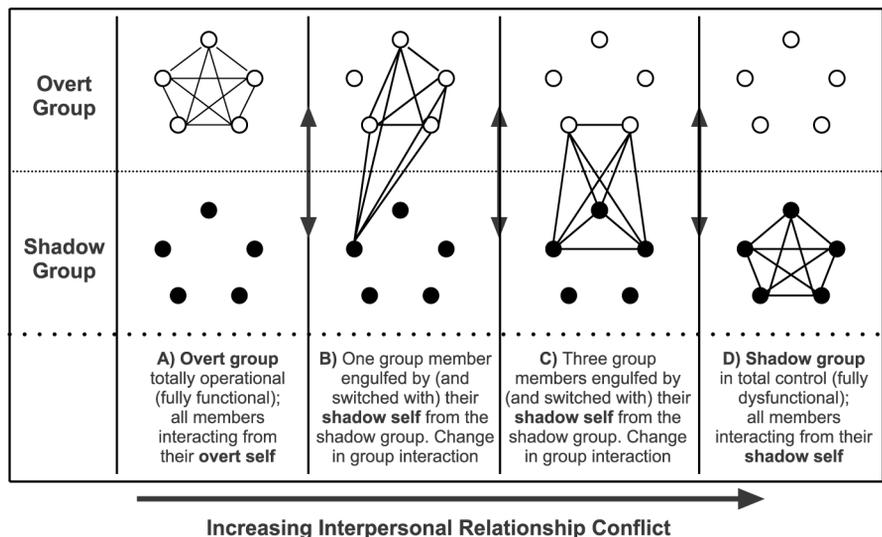
The inner personality is the way one behaves in relation to one’s inner psychic processes; it is the inner attitude, the characteristic face that is turned towards the unconscious.

It is notable that the present inner observer construct, like Jung’s notion of inner personality, is broadly comparable to the Buddhist concept of “the observer, the one who knows, [and] remains ever elusive, standing outside the field of sense perception, outside the world” (Snelling, 1998, p. 64).

### Dynamics of the shadow group

Having seen that the self-in-group can be conceptualized as a binary pair of opposites – the overt self and the shadow self (balanced by the awareness of the inner observer) – we can now consider the distinction between the overt and shadow groups. The proposed model (see Figure 2) defines the overt group as that comprising all the overt selves of the individual group members. The overt group is the group as it presents itself in normal functioning with all members acting out of their overt selves (i.e. with mostly positive behaviors; see phase A in Figure 2). The shadow group, on the other hand, comprises the various group members’ shadow selves. When the overt group is fully functional, the shadow group is dormant with the individuals’ shadow selves being non-operational but ever-present and lurking.

So long as a group member interacts with others from their overt self, their shadow self will remain inactive but will always be very real, always ready to “burst forth” (Jung, 1966, p. 76), that is, to be triggered into action by what has been called “an



**Figure 2.** Conceptual framework for analyzing the dynamics of the shadow group

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emotional hijacking” (Goleman, 1995, p. 61). When one group member becomes emotionally reactive, their shadow self engulfs their overt self and becomes the operative self in the group. It is as though their operational identity switches between their overt self and their shadow self. In effect, they substitute their public and known self for its opposite, a mostly unknown self which is rarely revealed. The group then effectively comprises a number of overt selves and one shadow self (see phase B in Figure 2). Because such shadow-self behavior is often confronting for other group members, another group member may then be triggered into negative reactivity (see phase C in Figure 2). As more and more members become hooked into the relationship conflict episode by their emotional reactivity, the shadow group becomes more dominant and eventually may replace the overt group entirely (see phase D in Figure 2).

It is proposed that the shadow group, once activated, will persist in sustained emotionally-based relationship conflict until one or more members regain their consciousness and reassert their overt selves. This process of reclaiming one’s overt self requires the intervention of the inner observer, that part of the psyche responsible for inner-awareness and for handling the tension between the overt and shadow selves (see Figure 1). It is only when one’s inner observer becomes aware that their shadow self has taken control, that they are able to reclaim their overt self but this requires high emotional intelligence, specifically, high self-awareness (Goleman, 2001). As Jung (1968, p. 8) pointed out:

No one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspect of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge, and it therefore, as a rule, meets with considerable resistance.

### *Triggers for emotional reactivity*

The primary dynamic for activating the shadow group is hypothesized to be emotional reactivity that causes one or more group members to have their overt self engulfed by their shadow self. We can identify six main triggers for emotional reactivity (Hede, 2002), namely: projection, association, threat, verbal abuse, frustration and guilt:

- (1) Projection is the process of seeing in another the qualities of one’s shadow self, qualities that one does not accept as being part of one’s own psyche. This is the most frequent trigger for emotional reactivity. It is commonly recognized as the phenomenon of “having one’s buttons pushed” – that is, things about another person that one simply cannot tolerate (by definition, qualities that characterize one’s own shadow self).
- (2) The trigger of association occurs when one group member reminds another of someone who was responsible for an unpleasant or even traumatic episode in their past (e.g. family or school experiences in childhood; also, previous experiences at work).
- (3) Threat is a common trigger for emotional reactivity. People may react when they perceive that another group member is about to confront them in a serious way (e.g. questioning their integrity, undermining their status, challenging their power, etc.).
- (4) Verbal abuse can also trigger negative emotionality. The most common behavior from a person triggered by projection is to verbally abuse another.

This person in turn will often react with outrage or resentment (e.g. “How dare you!” or “That’s not fair!”); the two people are then acting out of their shadow selves and usually end up shouting/yelling at each other.

- (5) Negative emotionality can also be triggered by frustration. People can become frustrated and angry when their ideas or values are rejected or their interests are blocked by another member of the group.
- (6) The final common trigger for reactivity in groups is guilt. Particularly when someone draws attention to another’s mistakes or failings, that person will often react defensively with an emotional justification of their behavior.

Whatever the trigger, it is proposed that emotional reactivity is manifested in groups by the partial or full emergence of the shadow group via the mechanism of shadow-self engulfment of the overt selves of one or more group members.

*The dynamics of projection in conflict*

It is proposed that projection plays a major role in emotionally-based relationship conflict that is seen as the basis of most intragroup dysfunctionality in organizational settings. By its very nature the shadow self is impossible to observe directly. Similarly, the process of projection can be only inferred rather than directly observed from behavior. Projection as a theoretical construct was initially developed in the discipline of psychoanalysis (see Nitsun, 1996; Zender, 1991). Although the concept of projection has gained widespread acceptance in many academic disciplines, extensive literature searches have revealed almost no empirical research on projection (defined as transferring one’s own unrecognized qualities onto others). One exception is a study by Stein (1998) that used observation in an attempt to interpret group behavior as involving projection of unacceptable personal qualities.

There is, however, a body of research on the “false consensus effect” that relates to “projection” of mental contents (i.e. falsely assuming that others have the same opinions, knowledge or attitudes as oneself) (e.g. Marks and Miller, 1987; Sá and Stanovich, 2001). In these studies, projection was operationalized by having subjects predict other people’s opinions or knowledge. Projection is claimed to be evidenced where a person predicts another’s mental states as more like their own than they really are (Sá and Stanovich, 2001). A related area where projection has been measured is that of “attitudinal projection”. Holtz and Miller (2001), for example, found that projection operationalized as assumed attitudinal similarity, was lower in interactions with other groups that were competitive rather than those which were cooperative.

The essential dynamic of psychological projection is that individuals are generally over-sensitive to qualities in others that they are unwilling to accept or do not recognize in themselves. Projection is the mechanism that people use to avoid having to confront their shadow self. As Jung (1968, p. 9, italics in original) said about projection of shadow qualities:

[...] in this case both insight and goodwill are unavailing because the cause of the emotion appears to lie, beyond all possibility of doubt, in the *other person*.

Elsewhere, Jung (1976, p. 160) pointed out that when someone “projects negative qualities and therefore hates and loathes the object, he has to discover that he is projecting his own inferior side, his shadow, as it were, because he prefers to have an optimistic and one-sided image of himself”.

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In an organizational context, the present approach posits that individuals seek to find in others their own unrecognized negative qualities, that is, their own reverse mirror image. In groups people tend to seek out the one person who most resembles their own opposite, their shadow self. This person is most likely to become the focus of their projections and is the group member with whom they are most likely to have relationship conflict. While Jung (1968, p. 71, italics added) was commenting on global rather than intragroup conflict, of relevance is his observation that:

[...] when the individual remains undivided and does not become conscious of his *inner opposite*, the world must perform act out the conflict and be torn into opposing halves.

This leads to a testable hypothesis, namely, that relationship conflict is more likely to occur between group members whose perceptions of each other are the opposites of their perceptions of their own personal qualities (i.e. those who reflect each other's shadow qualities). Empirical testing of this hypothesis would require the development of an instrument to determine the personal quality dimensions people most perceive as belonging to those with whom they have relationship conflict. A further dynamic in relationship conflict is that when one person becomes engulfed by their shadow self and treats another member or members as having the negative qualities they reject in themselves, those others can become "seized by the projections" (Perlman, 1992, p. 178) and may be provoked into negative emotionality as they react out of their own shadow selves. This is the process by which the shadow group is hypothesized to expand its operability and its conflict-based dysfunctionality (see Figure 2).

### Case studies of the shadow group in action

Two anecdotal case studies are presented to illustrate the shadow group in operation. It should be acknowledged that I was a participant observer in both groups; consequently, some non-critical contextual details have been altered or are unreported in order to preserve confidentiality.

#### Case 1

The first case study focuses on a committee in an educational institution charged with developing policy and procedures for the improvement of teaching. The group comprised the committee chair, representatives of five different academic disciplines plus the head of administrative support services. The committee chair had a natural style as a collegial leader and was well accustomed to coordinating divergent views towards consensus.

The four committee members of relevance to this case are the committee chair, the representatives of two of the five academic disciplines (Dr AB and Ms CD) and the head of administration (Mr EF). A specific policy on course assessment was being championed by the committee chair, and, on the day in question, she was presenting the draft guidelines for final committee approval after extensive discussion at many meetings over the previous year. She stated that she was hoping for full endorsement by the committee. Dr AB reacted with emotion by accusing the chair of "expecting the committee to simply rubber-stamp your guidelines". The chair responded defensively with an unguarded comment questioning Dr AB's commitment to teaching quality and this drew an angry response. It would appear that these two individuals who had previously clashed within the committee, had now, in effect, switched their overt selves with their shadow selves after being triggered by emotional reactivity. Both had a

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record of behaving with reasonable decorum but were now evidently uncontrolled in their reactive responses to each other. At this point, the group operationally comprised five overt group members and two shadow group members.

Next in the current episode, Ms CD who was usually very reserved in the group, intervened by asking almost hysterically why the chair and Dr AB could not get beyond their own “petty issues” in order to address the policy under discussion. Other members of the committee appeared surprised by Ms CD’s outburst. Then, Mr EF expressed his frustration with the academic committee members and launched into an emotional tirade about the need for academics to adhere to established administrative procedures. It appears that in a very real sense, the group at this stage consisted of four shadow group members and three overt group members. The shadow group had engulfed four of the seven members of the overt group causing an episode of intense relationship conflict.

### *Case 2*

The second case study involves the community advisory committee of a not-for-profit organization engaged in counseling and support services for people in crisis. The new CEO of the organization had a background in business and had a much “harder” management style than the organization was accustomed to. Previous CEOs had come from the caring professions and were perceived as having a much “gentler” style of management.

At one meeting with eight people present, a committee member from the social work profession expressed concern about a recent incident in which the CEO had terminated a particular service program because he had discovered that the qualifications of the relevant staff member did not meet government standards. The committee member who seemed genuinely concerned about the clients of the cancelled service, confronted the CEO about his decision. When challenged, the CEO became emotionally reactive and slipped into an impassioned defense of his decision and the managerial/legal justifications for it. With an emotionally-charged voice the committee member reiterated her concern about the clients’ welfare when the program was cancelled. Clearly, there was a difference of perspective and values, but in addition, the two people involved were obviously emotionally reactive.

Everyone in the group seemed to register the emotionality of the interchange; some even appeared startled at the vehemence of their colleagues’ reactivity. It was as though two new people had been substituted in the group. The CEO who had previously been quite calm and controlled was now almost strident in defense of his decision. The committee member, who up until this exchange had been exemplary in her interpersonal behavior, was apparently consumed by concern that the CEO might have damaged the psychological health of clients by canceling the service. As well as these two who had evidently switched with their opposite or shadow selves, the committee chair who was usually fully capable of facilitating discussion and smoothing group processes, seemed to have become totally incompetent. While the chair’s overt self had been apparent over an extended time as very confident and capable, in this situation this person seemed to be taken over by their shadow self that was the opposite – unsure and totally *laissez-faire*. The chair appeared completely unable to intervene appropriately to resolve the relationship conflict between the CEO and the committee member.

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## Implications for managing conflict

### *Lessons from the case studies*

In case 1, we see that the initial conflict was an emotional interchange between the chair and Dr AB. These two had a history of relationship conflict so each of them brought their “emotional baggage” to the meeting. As outlined above, the dynamics of emotional reactivity are complex and it is not known what triggered the initial reactive outbursts in these two individuals. After the reported incident with negative exchanges involving four group members, the chair finally intervened realizing that the group had become dysfunctional and that some leadership direction was required to restore normal interaction. Without such leadership, it is possible that all group members would have been triggered into negative emotional reactivity, that everyone’s shadow selves would have engulfed their overt selves and that the shadow group would have taken full operational control resulting in an outbreak of total relationship conflict (see phase D in Figure 2).

In case 2, we again see the shadow group in action. Emotional reactivity seems to have triggered three of the group members into acting out of their shadow selves rather than their overt selves resulting in relationship conflict and group dysfunctionality. It is likely that projection was a factor in the dynamics of this case in that the initial clash involved two individuals known to have very different styles and values. That is, each person’s shadow self is likely to have been projected onto the other. In this case, the chair was not directly involved in the negative emotional interchange, but evidently was triggered to switch with their shadow self and thus failed to exercise effective leadership to defuse the relationship conflict by appropriate intervention.

Both of the above cases involve negative emotional reactivity and this is postulated as the central dynamic in the emergence of the shadow group. As will be elaborated later, the management of emotional reactivity in groups requires the exercise of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995; Salovey and Mayer, 1990). Ideally, each group member will demonstrate appropriate self-control in order to manage their own reactivity and avoid being drawn into emotionally-charged interchanges. However, in the event of a negative emotional incident, other group members will ideally use their interpersonal skills to quickly restore harmony and will use empathy to anticipate the negative emotionality and thereby prevent the outburst from occurring in the first place.

### *Managing group conflict*

There are many approaches to understanding the nature of conflict at work (e.g. Hede, 1990; Kilmann and Thomas, 1978; Lewicki *et al.*, 1992; Pinkley, 1990). While Pondy’s (1967) conflict stages model and Thomas’s (1976) conflict styles model are extensively cited in the literature, perhaps the most significant classificatory model of conflict is that advanced by Jehn (1997). This model that is based on extensive observational research on work groups, proposes four conflict “dimensions” and three “types” of conflict (namely, task, process, relationship). The conflict dimensions are: negative emotionality (i.e. “negative affect exhibited and felt during the conflict”); importance of the conflict; acceptability of conflict in the group (i.e. “group norms about conflict and communication”); and resolution potential of the conflict (Jehn, 1997, pp. 541-5). These four dimensions (each of which can range from low to high) are seen as applying to all three types of conflict (Jehn, 1997) and need to be addressed in the effective management of conflict.

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According to Jehn (1997, p. 552):

[...] the optimal profile for high-performing groups includes important, moderate task conflicts, no relationship conflicts, little or no procedural conflict, with norms that task conflict is acceptable and resolvable and with little negative emotionality.

Recent research by Medina *et al.* (2005) indicates that a high level of task conflict is likely to generate relationship conflict within a group. The present approach proposes that when negative emotionality arises for whatever reason within a group, the resulting conflict is always relationship conflict (i.e. both interpersonal and affective). Thus, if a strong disagreement about the task triggers one or more group members into negative emotional reactivity, the result is best understood not as task conflict with negative emotionality as Jehn (1997) proposes, but rather as relationship conflict involving interpersonal ill-feeling or even hostility depending on the strength of the emotion. This theoretical perspective has important implications for managerial practice.

To get the best performance out of a group, a manager has to develop in the members a capacity to perform the task (task skills) and also the ability to interact effectively with each other (team skills). Disagreements about tasks are inevitable in effective groups. Indeed, without the ability to constructively debate differences of opinion, a group runs the risk of groupthink (Janis, 1971) or of the Abilene Paradox (Harvey, 1988) both of which result in poor decisions. Thus, moderate levels of task conflict in the sense of functional debate, are to be encouraged provided the group members also have the team skills to avoid becoming emotionally reactive when their views are challenged. In addition, managers need to exhort all group members to be positively assertive in sharing their views but to do so without triggering emotional reactivity in others. In this way, relationship conflict can be avoided or if it arises, can be quickly defused before it impacts negatively on group functioning. In short, managers need to stimulate productive debate about different views but at the same time, to prevent it from escalating into disruptive relationship conflict.

In this context it is relevant to question the practical implications of labelling differences of opinion as “task conflicts” rather than simply as “disagreements”. It is quite possible that the use of the term “conflict” to describe both “debates” and “fights” (Rapoport, 1960) leads group members to blur the distinction between task and relationship conflict (Simons and Peterson, 2000). The likely consequences of this confusion are twofold: first, members may become reluctant to openly share their contrary views for fear of starting a fight in the group; second, it may facilitate the escalation of task conflict into relationship conflict because of negative emotionality. These two possibilities are offered as empirically-testable hypotheses.

#### *Managing the shadow group*

As noted earlier, intragroup relationship conflict involving negative emotionality can be seen as resulting from a failure by group members to exercise emotional intelligence. This concept originally proposed by Salovey and Mayer (1990) is gaining increasing acceptance in management research as well as in management education and practice (e.g. De Dreu *et al.*, 2001; Dulewicz and Higgs, 2000; Goleman, 2001, 1998, 1995; Huy, 1999). Following Goleman (1995), emotional intelligence is here understood to comprise several sets of personal and social competencies, the former determining how well we manage ourselves and the latter determining our effectiveness in relating

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to others in a group. Goleman's (2001) model proposes a 2×2 matrix with a self-versus-other dimension and an awareness-versus-management dimension that yields four categories of emotional competencies: self-awareness, self management, social awareness and relationship management. All four sets of competencies have a bearing on managing the shadow group.

First, self-awareness is seen as the ability to monitor one's own emotions, to accurately self-assess and to be self-confident (Goleman, 2001). But on the present approach, high levels of self-awareness also require the activation of one's inner observer to maintain the balance between one's overt and shadow selves. If an individual has low inner-awareness of their shadow self, it will actively seek an emotional trigger to engulf their overt self and unleash itself onto the group in relationship conflict.

The second set of competencies in the Goleman (2001) model is self management covering the skills of: emotional self-control, adaptability, conscientiousness, trustworthiness achievement drive and initiative. The key skill needed for managing the shadow group is self-control, specifically, the ability to control one's own emotional reactivity. This involves being able to:

- identify one's own habitual emotional triggers;
- detect the physical warning signs of an "emotional hijacking" (e.g. increased heart rate, rush of blood, surge of adrenaline, etc. (Goleman, 1995);
- avoid identification with the reactive thoughts that accompany and enflame an acute emotional response; and
- implement effective protocols for defusing one's own emotional reactivity thereby avoiding any behavioral outburst.

The five-step READE technique (Hede, 2002) has proved successful for training managers how to control emotional reactivity.

The third set of emotional competencies proposed by Goleman (2001) is social awareness comprising empathy, service orientation and organizational awareness. In relation to shadow group management, empathy plays a crucial role. As Goleman *et al.* (2002, p. 182) have pointed out:

An emotionally intelligent team . . . has the collective equivalent of empathy, the basis of all relationship skills.

If group members have a high level of empathy, they understand each other's sensitivities and can read each other's emotional state. This enables them to anticipate a negative emotional reaction in another group member and to avoid behaviors that could trigger an outburst via shadow-self engulfment.

The fourth and final set of emotional competencies in the Goleman (2001) model is relationship management. This includes the following skills: developing others, influence, communication, conflict management, visionary leadership, catalyzing change, building bonds, teamwork and collaboration (Goleman, 2001). Many of these skills are called for in shadow group management. High levels of interpersonal skills are required to prevent task conflict ("debates") from escalating into relationship conflict ("fights") because of negative emotionality (Rapoport, 1960). The shadow group can be held in check if all members undertake that in the event of one member's experiencing shadow-self engulfment and launching an emotional outburst, they will

maintain their own overt selves and resist becoming emotionally reactive as well. Then they need to use appropriate conflict management interventions to restore harmony by helping the reactive person to regain overt-self-control.

To summarize, emotionally-based relationship conflict caused by shadow-group dominance can be effectively managed by using the following strategies:

- Having all group members take individual responsibility for maintaining inner-awareness of their own shadow self and its tendency to seek an emotional trigger for its engulfing release.
- Encouraging group members to develop their emotional intelligence, particularly their capacity to control their shadow self's potential to trigger emotional reactivity and engulf their overt self.
- Having the group as a whole maintain awareness of the shadow group that constantly parallels the overt group with potential to engulf it.
- In the event of one individual's emotional outburst and the partial emergence of the shadow group, having all group members prepared to intervene by challenging any shadow selves that are operative.
- Encouraging the group to openly debrief after each emotional (relationship) conflict episode so that the group may learn from the experience (Stein, 1998) and develop improved procedures for preventing/managing any future episodes.

### **Conclusion**

Recent research has highlighted that different types of conflict differentially affect group effectiveness, in particular, that moderate levels of task conflict may enhance performance but that any level of relationship conflict is likely to impact negatively on both performance and member affective reactions (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003; Jehn and Mannix, 2001; Simons and Peterson, 2000). This paper has introduced the notion of the shadow group as a factor in the dynamics of intragroup relationship conflict. The shadow group construct draws on a new model of the self-in-group comprising the overt self and the shadow self that are held in balance by the awareness of the inner observer. Groups that are able to manage their shadow both individually and collectively, are predicted to have less emotionally-based conflict resulting in better outcomes for group functioning.

A limitation of the present paper is that although the proffered constructs and propositions are derived from published theory and research, they have not yet been empirically tested. However, a number of testable hypotheses have been identified, specifically that:

- individuals who have high inner-awareness are less likely to experience negative emotionality (shadow-self engulfment) in groups;
- individuals are most likely to experience relationship conflict with the group member they perceive as having the most characteristics which are opposite to themselves; and
- escalation of task into relationship conflict is more likely to occur in groups that use the same terminology for "debates" and "fights".

In addition, there are a number of questions which need to be addressed in future research, including:

- What is the role of factors such as cohesiveness and trust in preventing the escalation of task into relationship conflict?
- What factors cause different individuals to be triggered into negative emotionality by some group members but not others?
- What is the role of projection in relationship conflict, for example, in causing group members to “gang up” on one member whom they all dislike?
- How can the various emotional intelligence competencies best be used to prevent emotionally-based relationship conflict in groups?

The answers to such research questions will have important implications for management practice. This paper has considered a range of managerial interventions for training group members to control the emergence of the shadow group. It has shown how the emotional intelligence framework can be applied to manage negative emotionality and thereby avoid dysfunctional relationship conflict while still allowing constructive disagreements to stimulate group productivity.

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### About the author

Andrew Hede PhD is a Registered Psychologist and is currently Professor of Management at the University of the Sunshine Coast where he was Foundation Dean of Business (1995-2000). Andrew Hede can be contacted at: [hede@usc.edu.au](mailto:hede@usc.edu.au)

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