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The Paradox of Intragroup Conflict

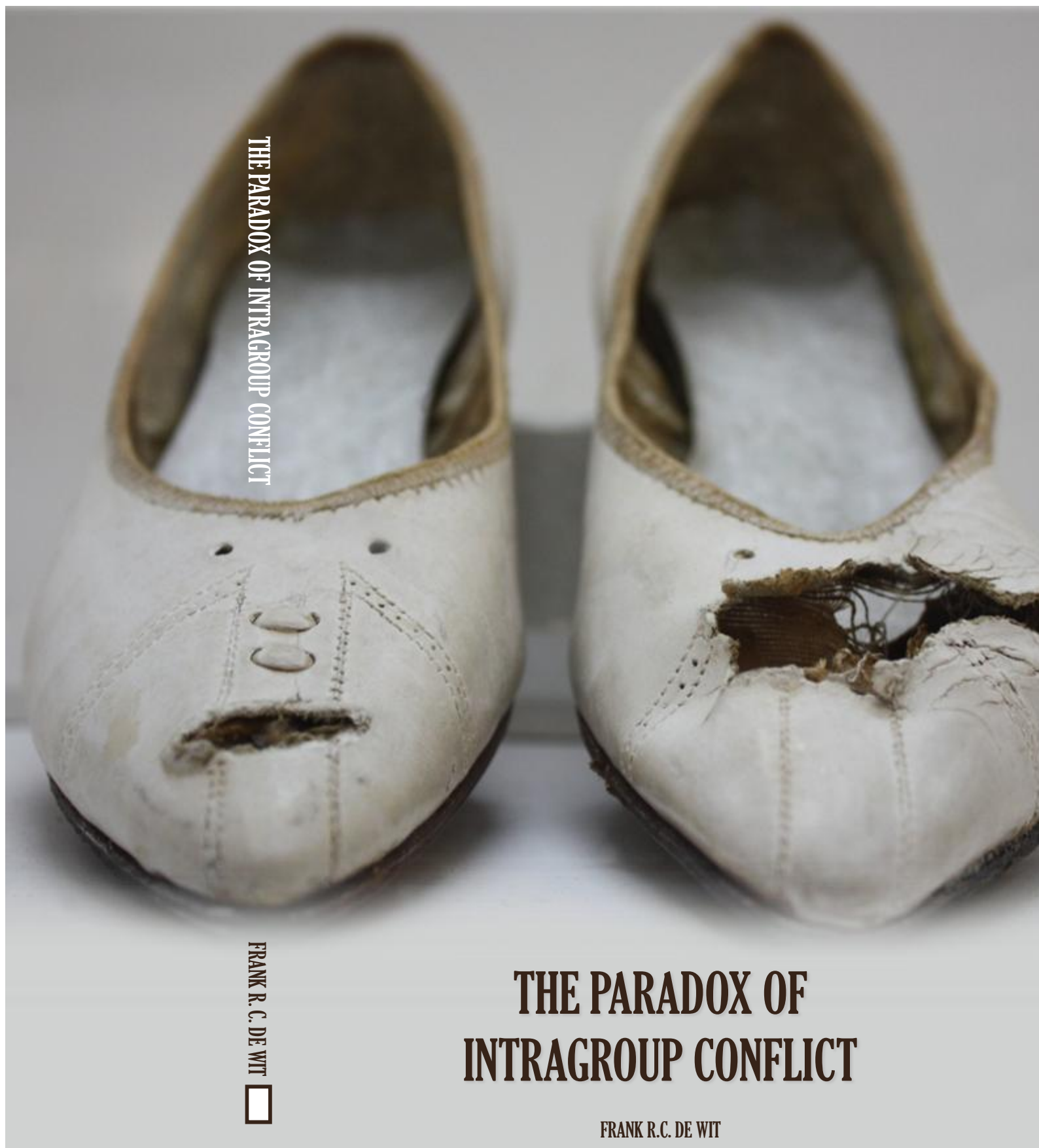
During group decision making, people often experience disagreements in which they need to choose between their own viewpoint and the viewpoint of another group member. Jury members, for example, may disagree about whether the accused are guilty or innocent, cabinet members may disagree about the best decision to tackle a crisis, and members of top management teams may disagree about where they want to invest. These intragroup conflicts often pose a paradox for groups. That is, on the one hand, conflicts may use up precious time, evoke frustration, and reduce group members' motivation to work for the group. On the other hand, conflicts may challenge group members' to more critically evaluate their initial viewpoints which, in the end, may result in more well-informed and superior decisions. In this dissertation I address this "paradox of intragroup conflict" by means of a meta-analysis of past intragroup conflict research and six experiments that examine when conflicts are most likely to help or hinder group decision-making. The findings show that although two types of conflict (i.e., relationship and process conflict) have a strong tendency to hurt group outcomes, a third type of conflict (i.e., task conflict) has the potential to help group outcomes. Yet, whether a group can indeed benefit from a task conflict strongly depends on contextual factors (e.g., the presence vs. absence of a relationship conflict) and individual-level factors (e.g., cardiovascular reactions to conflict). Together, these findings contribute to solving the paradox of intragroup conflict and offer new insights that groups can use to guard against the potential dangers of intragroup conflict, as well as to reap the benefits from it. Moreover, the findings highlight the usefulness of a psychophysiological approach to intragroup conflict, for example, to better understand why people sometimes show such a strong tendency to hold on to their own opinion during conflicts.



Dissertatieeeks

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