Empowering women for creative solutions in interpersonal conflict at work

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Abstract

Purpose – Creativity plays a crucial role in interpersonal conflict within organizations, yet little research has explored its antecedents in this context. This study aims to investigate power and gender as the main determinants of creativity in interpersonal conflict within organizational contexts.

Design/methodology/approach – Two studies were conducted. The first study involved 226 employees from various organizations (M_{age} = 39.39, SD = 10.39), whereas the second study used a conflict simulation with 160 participants (M_{age} = 36.90, SD = 10.45) forming dyads. Both studies investigated the impact of relative power (i.e. having more power than the other person) on creativity in conflict, with a focus on the moderating role of gender. Study 2 also manipulated contextual creativity, which served as an additional moderator in this relationship.

Findings – Results largely supported our hypotheses, indicating a positive relationship between relative power and creativity in conflict. Importantly, this relationship was stronger among women. Study 2 further focused on the distinct dimensions of creativity, highlighting differences between idea originality and effectiveness.

Practical implications – The findings hold practical significance for organizational leaders and conflict resolution practitioners, and they further underscore the importance of considering gender dynamics in conflict resolution processes within organizations.

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Conflict of interest: Authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Compliance with ethical standards: This research involves human participants. All procedures performed in this study were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Ethics approval was obtained from the university of the corresponding author prior to data collection.

Data availability statement: Data and online Supplemental materials are available from the Open Science Framework at: https://osf.io/tveau/

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Originality/value – This research contributes novel insights into the understanding of creativity within organizational conflicts, emphasizing the interplay between relative power, gender and creativity. Additionally, the exploration of different dimensions of creativity (i.e. originality and effectiveness) adds depth to existing literature in this area.

Keywords Creativity in interpersonal conflict, Relative power, Gender, Idea originality, Idea effectiveness

Paper type Research paper

Interpersonal conflict is common within organizations: work stressors are prevalent, viewpoints differ and opposite personalities clash. Importantly, interpersonal conflict encompasses negative elements, including disagreement, interference and negative emotions (Barki and Hartwick, 2004; Lewicki *et al.*, 2020; Pondy, 1967; Putnam and Poole, 1987; Thomas, 1992a, 1992b; Wall and Callister, 1995), all of which have detrimental effects on individuals and organizations as they can create a toxic environment, dampen enthusiasm for work and impede organizational functioning (Adebayo, 2006).

Nevertheless, conflict is unavoidable and should be better managed constructively to minimize its negative effects (Adebayo, 2006; Zuelke *et al.*, 2020). Approaching conflict creatively seems to be the best way to handle conflicts as creativity brings fresh perspectives, fosters collaborative problem-solving, promotes empathy and encourages continuous learning (Wilson and Thompson, 2014). By leveraging creativity, individuals can experience an "Aha!" moment similar to problem-solvers who discover an elegant solution to a creative puzzle (Metcalfe and Wiebe, 1987; Smith and Kounios, 1996) and can transform conflicts into opportunities for growth and positive change (Fousiani *et al.*, 2022; Wilson and Thompson, 2014).

However, people often fail to be creative in conflict situations (Chen, 2006; Lee *et al.*, 2018; Yong *et al.*, 2014) as negative emotions such as stress, concern and anxiety often emerge due to conflict, which impedes the ability to think creatively (Byron *et al.*, 2010; Byron and Khazanchi, 2011). Nevertheless, other studies show that in certain situations, people can think and behave creatively when confronted with conflicts (Fousiani *et al.*, 2022; Santos *et al.*, 2015), proposing the investigation of the role of both contextual factors (Curşeu *et al.*, 2022; also see Lee *et al.*, 2018) and individual characteristics (e.g. De Clercq *et al.*, 2017) in creativity in interpersonal conflicts.

According to the literature on power (Fiske, 1993; Fiske and Berdahl, 2007; Keltner *et al.*, 2003; Magee and Galinsky, 2008; Thibaut and Kelley, 1959), one of the main contextual factors influencing the ability for creative thinking and generation of creative ideas – outside of a conflict situation – is power. Indeed, Galinsky *et al.* (2008) found that individuals experiencing high power are more likely to generate creative ideas and less likely to be influenced by mundane examples and instructions available in their environment when making decisions (see also Anderson and Thompson, 2004; Fousiani, 2020; Nelson *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, power is associated with the ability to deploy abstract and higher-level thinking, which is also associated with creativity (Smith and Trope, 2006). Yet, to the best of our knowledge, there is no research investigating power's role in creative thinking within a conflict context to date.

Conflict, being a dynamic process that emerges within interdependent relationships and encompassing negative elements and destructive behaviors (Lewicki *et al.*, 2020), presents a unique context to investigate the role of power in creativity. In this study, we investigate how *relative power* (i.e. the comparative influence held by individuals and their perceived sense of control over a situation in relation to the other person; see (Fousiani, 2020; Fousiani *et al.*, 2021, 2022; Van Kleef *et al.*, 2006) influences individuals'

creativity in situations of interpersonal conflict and hypothesize a positive relationship between possession of relative power and creativity.

Despite the crucial role of power in creativity, not all-powerful individuals are expected to think creatively when involved in emotionally laden situations like conflict. Indeed, according to the conflict management literature, power is often associated with self-interested behaviors in conflict and decreased motivation to problem-solve and search for mutual gains (Fousiani, 2020; Fousiani *et al.*, 2021, 2022; Van Kleef *et al.*, 2006), which indicates a decreased motivation to think out-of-the-box and generate creative ideas. Actually, being able to put negativity that accompanies conflicts aside and generate creative ideas requires certain skills and increased motivation to use power in a more responsible than opportunistic manner (De Wit *et al.*, 2017), which seems to occur more frequently among women as compared to men in power. Indeed, according to the social role theory (Eagly and Wood, 2012), women in positions of power, particularly those holding leadership roles, exhibit better crisis response capabilities (Post *et al.*, 2019), superior outcomes (Hong and van der Wijst, 2013) and stronger creative and innovative behaviors compared to their male counterparts (Hong and van der Wijst, 2013). This is attributed to their relational and emotion regulation skills (Eagly and Carli, 2007; Ely, 1995; Post *et al.*, 2019), along with their enhanced propensity to act responsibly (Haslam and Ryan, 2008; Ryan *et al.*, 2011). Drawing from these findings, we argue that gender moderates the relationship between power and creativity within a conflict context such that the positive effect of power will be stronger among women than men.

This study contributes to the existing literature in three significant ways. First and foremost, it fills a crucial gap by delving into the underexplored domain of creativity within workplace conflicts (Adebayo, 2006). While interpersonal conflicts are a common occurrence in organizations (Runde and Flanagan, 2012), the exploration of creative thinking within this context remains notably limited, despite its significance (Wilson and Thompson, 2014). By investigating the paradox of fostering creativity amid emotionally-laden conflict situations, characterized by increased cognitive load and communication barriers, this research sheds light on the potential for creative thinking to serve as a constructive tool in conflict resolution.

Second, our study expands the conflict literature by introducing the role of power on creativity within conflicts (Fousiani, 2020; Fousiani *et al.*, 2021). While previous research has explored the role of power in creative thinking outside of conflict, this study pioneers an investigation into how power operates specifically within the dynamic process of interpersonal conflicts.

Third, this study advances the social role theory by emphasizing the superior creative skills of women in conflict situations (Eagly and Wood, 2012; Ryan *et al.*, 2011; Bruckmüller *et al.*, 2014). By establishing a connection between gender, power and creativity, the study highlights the importance of empowering women in high-power positions, offering evidence-based recommendations for promoting creativity and effective conflict resolution in the workplace. Together, these contributions not only enrich academic discourse but also offer practical insights for organizational leaders and policymakers seeking to enhance workplace harmony and foster a culture of creativity amid conflicts.

Creativity in conflict situations

Creativity is commonly characterized as the production of ideas and products that are both original and useful (Runco and Jaeger, 2012). As noted earlier, creativity is seen as a crucial factor in successful conflict handling (for a review, see Wilson and Thompson, 2014). Indeed, examining alternatives that potentially lead to good solutions and effective problem-solving is possible through creative idea generation (Bazerman and Moore, 2012; Fousiani *et al.*, 2022;

Hyder *et al.*, 2000; Thompson, 2015). For instance, out-of-the-box thinking, which is inherent in creativity, helps come up with novel ideas that can facilitate problem-solving and promote conflict resolution (Guilford, 1959, 1967). Nevertheless, conflict is in itself a very special context hindering out-of-the-box thinking and leading to narrow-mindedness (Chen, 2006; Lee *et al.*, 2018; Yong *et al.*, 2014). Indeed, when in conflict, people experience threat (Lewicki *et al.*, 2020), which is related to inflexible and narrow thinking (Carnevale and Probst, 1998; Staw *et al.*, 1981) and heightened pressure to adhere to norms (Murray and Schaller, 2012). Moreover, individuals in conflict situations often face uncertainty (Lewicki *et al.*, 2020), which has been associated with a reluctance to embrace creative solutions, as novel and inventive ideas are perceived as risky and may potentially exacerbate feelings of uncertainty (Mueller *et al.*, 2012).

Nevertheless, while conflict brings forth negative elements that impede creativity, there are instances where conflict appears to be associated with heightened levels of creative thinking (Chen, 2006; Kurtzberg and Mueller, 2005). For instance, in times of urgent threats – like in interpersonal conflicts – individuals are strongly motivated to address the immediate threat (Turner and Virick, 2008). While their thinking may be drawn to threat-related cues, even within this restricted focus, they may generate creative ideas that enable them to address the threat at hand. In a similar vein, research shows that under high-threat conditions, individuals may demonstrate openness to creative ideas that can potentially provide good solutions (West, 2002). Importantly, individuals tend to exhibit higher creativity when it serves to mitigate the negative consequences of a situation in which they are involved (Roskes *et al.*, 2012).

While creativity plays a pivotal role in effectively addressing conflicts, there is a notable scarcity in the literature regarding the factors influencing creativity in interpersonal conflict, with a particular gap in research investigating the antecedents of creativity in workplace conflicts. Considering that interpersonal conflicts in the workplace are a prevalent phenomenon, consuming up to 40% of leaders' valuable time (Runde and Flanagan, 2012), it becomes imperative to delve into the factors that foster creative conflict management in the workplace.

Power and creativity in conflict situations

The role of relative power in conflict is well-established (Fousiani *et al.*, 2021). Despite some research revealing a positive relationship between relative power and competitive behavior in conflict (De Dreu, 1995; Lawler, 1992), the vast majority of research has demonstrated a positive relationship between power and collaboration in conflict situations (Fousiani *et al.*, 2021; Overbeck and Park, 2006). Indeed, research indicates that powerholders are often more likely to view their power as a responsibility to fulfill shared goals and obligations, treating powerless others with consideration rather than selfishness (Fousiani and Wisse, 2022; Sassenberg *et al.*, 2012, 2014; Chen *et al.*, 2001; De Wit *et al.*, 2017). In contrast, individuals with lower relative power tend to be more self-focused, directing their attention toward masking their inferiority and improving their hierarchical standing (Earle *et al.*, 1983).

Besides the effects of power on conflict management, power also seems to play a pivotal role in creativity. Power boosts confidence in one's own thoughts and perspectives (Anderson and Galinsky, 2006; Briñol *et al.*, 2007) and individuals in powerful positions are better able to rely on their own experiences and emotions when thinking and acting (Briñol *et al.*, 2007; Weick and Guinote, 2008). More specifically, power has an "immunizing effect" on individuals, enabling them to disregard external pressures and social expectations and act based on their inner thoughts, opinions, desires and needs. As such, individuals with high power are less susceptible to external pressures in their environment than those with low power. For instance, in five experiments, Galinsky *et al.* (2008) found that individuals

primed with high power were more likely to generate creative ideas that were less influenced by salient examples in their environment and further, expressed attitudes that conformed less to the expressed opinions of others. These findings show that power psychologically protects people from external influence, liberates their mindset and fosters increased creativity compared to those with low power (Galinsky *et al.*, 2008). In a similar vein, high power, as opposed to low power, has been found to increase psychological freedom (see construal level theory; Liberman and Trope, 2003), which is also related to higher creativity (Smith and Trope, 2006). Besides the immunizing effect that power has on individuals, research has found that powerful people tend to score higher in positive affect, which predicts creativity, innovative thinking and the achievement of win-win outcomes in negotiations (Anderson and Thompson, 2004).

In this study, we conceptualize interpersonal conflict as an "external stimulus" signifying a situation occurring in one's environment that impacts individuals. Interpersonal conflict involves friction, irritation, clashes and disputes over personal preferences and values among the involved members (Jehn and Bendersky, 2003). Moreover, conflict has adverse psychological responses such as tension, anxiety, anger and frustration (Lewicki *et al.*, 2020), which may limit individuals' creativity. Considering the immunizing effect of power on individuals (Galinsky *et al.*, 2008), it can be argued that individuals in conflicts who hold high power are better equipped to distance themselves from the negative aspects of conflict – and thus are less influenced by the negative elements of the conflict itself – which allows them to use higher levels of creativity in conflict resolution compared to their low-power counterparts. This suggests that individuals with higher power may possess a greater capacity to emotionally or psychologically detach themselves from the adverse effects of conflict and thus act in a more creative manner.

The underlying assumption is that the reduced emotional involvement of high-power individuals in conflicts results in fewer negative experiences, which in turn fosters increased creativity. With fewer emotional burdens weighing them down, individuals with higher power have more resources available for creative thinking. Consequently, they are better positioned to generate innovative solutions to conflicts, drawing upon their enhanced ability to focus on problem-solving rather than being consumed by emotional distress. Based on the above, we proposed the following hypothesis:

H1. Relative power will be positively related to creativity in interpersonal conflict in the workplace.

The moderating role of gender

Despite the positive role of power in creativity (Galinsky *et al.*, 2008), power has been found to have a "dark" face in interpersonal relations that might hinder motivation to think creatively in situations of interpersonal conflict. More specifically, research suggests that powerful individuals are less inclined to pay attention to and consider the perspectives of those with less power than vice versa. This is attributed to the abundance of resources and greater independence enjoyed by high-power individuals, whereas low-power individuals, being more dependent on others for outcomes, are motivated to closely attend to those they depend on to regain some sense of control (Fiske, 1993; Fiske and Dépret, 1996; Keltner *et al.*, 2003). Consequently, instead of engaging in problem-solving, which is closely associated with creative thinking (Wilson and Thompson, 2014), high-power individuals often resort to assertive approaches in conflict situations (Fousiani, 2020; Fousiani *et al.*, 2021; Van Kleef *et al.*, 2006). Based on the above, it is reasonable to assume that the role of relative power in creativity in interpersonal conflicts might be

contingent on specific characteristics of the powerful members involved in conflict. We argue that, to use power to promote creativity in a threatening situation like conflict, one should be motivated to construe their power in a more responsible and conscientious manner.

Such a characteristic that may influence the effect of power on creativity in conditions of interpersonal conflict is gender. According to the social role theory (Eagly and Wood, 2012) women's behavior in social interactions – such as conflict – is influenced by societal expectations and traditional gender roles. According to this theory, women often adopt communal orientations, emphasizing relationships, collaboration and nurturing behaviors. The expectation of women to fulfill nurturing roles and to be more prosocial contributes to their tendency to provide support and maintain social harmony in social interactions (Post *et al.*, 2019). This theory also suggests that women may exhibit communication styles focused on building rapport and connection, using affiliative language and avoiding direct confrontation. Therefore, although men are in general more creative and produce more original ideas as compared to women, which can be ascribed to their enhanced self-satisfaction, socialization, insensitivity to criticism and unusual cognitive style (Abraham, 2016; Baer, 1997; Bender *et al.*, 2013; He and Wong, 2011; Proudfoot *et al.*, 2015; Stoltzfus *et al.*, 2011), it is noteworthy that women, particularly when in positions of power or leadership, can surpass men in creative endeavors during times of crisis. This shift may be attributed to their heightened relational skills (Post *et al.*, 2019), and strategic capabilities (Torchia *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, high-power women manifest increased responsibility as compared to high-power men by taking the blame for failures and undesirable outcomes in organizations (Ryan *et al.*, 2011). Similarly, men differ from women in how they view and use power whenever they have it, with women being more responsible and conscientious than men (Buschlen and Johnson, 2014; Dugan, 2006a, 2006b; Dugan and Komives, 2007). Finally, unlike men, women in powerful positions are more inclined to adopt cooperative leadership styles that prioritize team goals, demonstrating high levels of emotional expression (Litz and Folker, 2002) and an increased capability to create room for novel strategies (Galia *et al.*, 2015).

Based on the aforementioned literature and building on the social role theory (Eagly and Wood, 2012), we argue that the effect of relative power on creativity in interpersonal conflict will be influenced by the powerful individual's gender. Indeed, women possess the required skills and demonstrate an increased motivation to use their power more responsibly than men, making them more likely to think creatively in situations of interpersonal conflict, with the aim of identifying integrative outcomes that benefit everyone involved. More specifically, we stated the following hypothesis:

H2. The positive effect of relative power on creativity in interpersonal conflict will be stronger among women than men, such that high-power women will exhibit more creativity in interpersonal conflict than high-power men.

The moderating role of contextual creativity

Considering that real-life conflicts do not play out in a social vacuum, but people are unavoidably provided with either many or limited opportunities to think creatively about their conflicts, this study further investigated the moderating role of contextual creativity (high vs low; see Fousiani *et al.*, 2022) in the relationship between power, gender and creativity in interpersonal conflict. Indeed, in order for creativity to emerge, the broader context should foster creativity (e.g. provide sufficient time for the generation of multiple alternatives, encourage flexible thought, suspend judgment, look at problems in a different

or even divergent manner; Guilford, 1959; De Jonge *et al.*, 2023) or any attempts for creative thinking may fail (Woodman *et al.*, 1993). Indeed, previous studies have found that individuals' potential for creativity can be hindered if the broader environment does not explicitly support creative thinking (Shalley and Gilson, 2004). For instance, although competitive work environments promote creativity (Nnadozie *et al.*, 2019), traditional work environments hinder creativity and foster conservative and previously tested ways of approaching challenging situations (Dokko *et al.*, 2014). Importantly, besides the demonstrated direct effects of contextual creativity in effective conflict resolution (Wilson and Thompson, 2014), contextual creativity has been found to interact with power and individual characteristics (i.e. chronological age) in the prediction of people's reaction to conflict (Fousiani *et al.*, 2022).

Accordingly, and based on the above, we hypothesized that the main effect of power (*H1*) and the moderation effect of gender (*H2*) would be observed specifically in the creativity condition, where individuals are encouraged by their environment to engage in creative thinking, rather than when their opportunities for creative thinking are limited. Based on these considerations, we proposed the following hypotheses:

H3a. The positive effect of relative power on creativity in interpersonal conflict will be stronger when the broader context encourages (rather than discourages) creativity.

H3b. The positive effect of relative power of women (as opposed to men) on creativity in interpersonal conflict will be stronger when the broader context encourages (rather than discourages) creativity.

Overview of the studies

To test our *H1* and *H2*, we ran two studies: Study 1 was a field study with employee participants working in various companies where conflicts are prevalent. This study, besides demographic characteristics (including gender) measured participants' relative power in a conflict with a co-worker that participants were requested to recall as well as their overall creativity while dealing with that conflict. Study 2 aimed to replicate Study 1 in an experimental setting, allowing for the examination of causality and further testing *H3a* and *H3*b. Study 2 was an online experiment where participants were paired with another participant forming dyads and engaged in a real-time conflict simulation similar to Steinel *et al.* (2007) and Fousiani *et al.* (2021, 2022). We used the best alternative to a negotiated agreement (BATNA) approach (Fisher and Ury, 1981 see also Van Kleef *et al.*, 2006; Fousiani *et al.*, 2022) to manipulate participants' relative power. BATNA refers to the most favorable outcome an individual can achieve if they fail to reach an agreement through negotiation with the other party. The participant with the strongest BATNA is deemed to possess higher relative power, as they are less dependent on the other party and can pursue their interests to attain a more advantageous outcome (Fisher and Ury, 1981). Accordingly, one of the conflicting parties within the dyad had a stronger BATNA than the other. Subsequently, we requested participants to generate creative ideas for resolving the conflict at hand. Then, experts coded participants' generated ideas for creativity. This approach offers advantages over the self-reported measures used in Study 1 (Paulhus and Vazire, 2007), as it provides increased objectivity and more reliable and detailed data (Meinecke *et al.*, 2016).

Moreover, to test *H3a* and *H3*b, in Study 2 we also manipulated contextual creativity (high vs low) similar to Fousiani *et al.* (2022). Accordingly, participants in Study 2 were requested to generate ideas about the conflict at hand in a context that would either favor or discourage creative thinking based on Osborn's (1957) guidelines (see *Method* section of Study 2 for details).

Method

Study 1

Study design and participants. The sample of this field study comprised 226 employees residing in the UK, who were recruited via Prolific (59.3% female; $M_{age} = 39.39$, SD = 10.39). Around one-third of the participants (30.1%) held a high-school diploma, whereas slightly less than half (42%) had obtained a bachelor's degree. In addition, nearly one-fifth of the participants (19.5%) had achieved a graduate degree. Eligible participants indicated that they were previously involved in workplace conflict. The duration of our study was approximately 10 min and respondents were compensated with £0.70 for their participation. Using *G**Power's sensitivity power analysis, an effect size of $\rho = 0.11$ for 80% power was revealed.

Procedure. We used the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954), according to which, participants were requested to recall a conflict that had occurred between a colleague and themselves within the last six months. Participants were asked to provide a brief description of the recalled conflict. Consequently, they were asked about the nature of the conflict, followed by a few questions about their reaction to the conflict. The complete instructions can be found in the online supplementary material. Ethics approval was obtained prior to the data collection. All participants gave their informed consent before completing the questionnaire. Upon completion, they were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Measures. Relative power. Participants rated their relative power over that of their counterpart in the conflict at hand using the nine-item scale by Van Kleef *et al.* (2006). A sample item included "Who do you think was most dependent on the other?", with items measured on a Likert scale ranging from 1 = *definitely the other person* to 7 = *definitely myself*. Cronbach's alpha was high at $\alpha = 0.91$.

Creativity. To assess participants' creativity while handling the conflict at hand, we used the adapted 10-item version of the organizational encouragement subscale of the KEYS scale (Amabile, 1995; Amabile *et al.*, 1996) [1] as used in Fousiani *et al.* (2022). A sample item is "While discussing possible solutions to this disagreement/conflict [. . .] I solved the problem at hand by thinking creatively", measured on a Likert scale between 1 = *not at all* and 7 = *to a great extent* with a Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.96$.

The complete scales can be found in the online supplementary material.

Results

Gender was coded as: 1= woman, 2= man. Relative power was positively related to creativity ($r = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$) and gender ($r = 0.14$, $p < 0.05$). Moreover, creativity was positively related to gender ($r = 0.18$, $p < 0.01$). We first conducted a confirmatory factor analysis with MPlus 8 (Muthén and Muthén, 2017) to ensure that our variables were distinct from one another. In the analysis, we included relative power and creativity. The model fit was acceptable ($\chi^2 = 453.788$, $df = 148$, $p < 0.001$; RMSEA = 0.096 [CI 0.09; 0.11] [2]; CFI = 0.93; SRMR = 0.045). Moreover, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis with Varimax rotation, which produced two factors: The first factor explained 39.77% of variance and was labeled "relative power" because all relative power items loaded on that factor. The second factor explained 28.37% of the

variance and was labeled "creativity" as all creativity items loaded on that factor. There were no cross-loadings. The factor loadings are presented in Appendix 1.

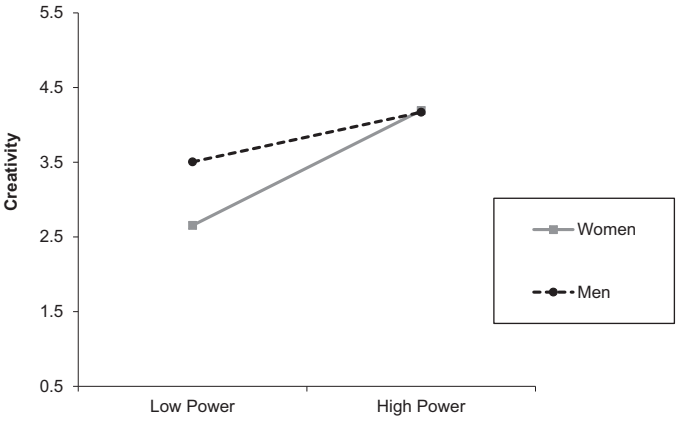
Hypothesis testing

Effects of power and gender on creativity

The overall model was significant $R^2 = 0.20$, $F(3, 222) = 18.38$, $p < 0.001$. As expected, in line with *H1*, the main effect of power on creativity was significant and positive ($b = 0.45$, $SE = 0.08$, $p < 0.001$; 95% CI [0.30; 0.60]). Moreover, the main effect of gender on creativity was significant and positive, showing that men were more creative than women ($b = 0.41$, $SE = 0.20$, $p = 0.03$; 95% CI [0.03; 0.80]). Most importantly, the power by gender interaction came out significant $\Delta R^2 = 0.02$, $F(1, 222) = 4.62$, $p = 0.03$ and in line with *H2*, it showed that the positive effect of power on creativity is stronger among women ($b = 0.59$, $SE = 0.09$, $p < 0.001$; 95% CI [0.41; 0.76]) than men ($b = 0.25$, $SE = 0.13$, $p < 0.05$; 95% CI [0.004; 0.50]) (see Figure 1).

Discussion

Study 1 was a field study with employee participants working in various organizations. Importantly, Study 1 comprised participants who had experienced interpersonal conflict in their workplace, and their task involved reporting on the degree to which they exhibited creativity while managing a specific conflict that they were instructed to recall. Results of study 1 provided support for *H1*, showing that participants experiencing higher relative power (over the other conflicting party), indicated having exhibited higher creativity while dealing with the conflict at hand. Moreover, gender also had a significant main effect on creativity, showing that men are more creative in conflict than women. These findings are in line with previous research – outside a conflict context – showing that men are indeed overall more creative than women (Baer, 1997; Bender *et al.*, 2013; He and Wong, 2011; Stoltzfus *et al.*, 2011). Finally, in line with *H2*, gender moderated the relationship between



Notes: Relative power was measured on a seven-point Likert scale: (1 = definitely the other person, 7 = definitely myself). Creativity was measured on a seven-point Likert scale 1 = not at all, 7 = to a great extent). Gender was coded as: 1 = women, 2 = men

Source: Authors' own work

Figure 1.
Effect of relative power on creativity as a function of gender (Study 1)

power and creativity in conflict, revealing that the positive effect of power on creativity is more pronounced among women compared to men. This finding supports our theoretical framework, suggesting that power produces more favorable outcomes, such as increased creativity in conflict situations, particularly when assigned to women. This could be possibly attributed to powerful women's ability to wield their power responsibly and leverage their enhanced emotional skills to facilitate creative problem-solving.

Despite the interesting results of Study 1, this study was a correlational study and could not test causality. To address this limitation, Study 2 used an experimental approach, manipulating power within a real-time conflict simulation. In addition, according to the creativity literature, creativity involves two main components: originality and effectiveness (e.g. Corazza, 2016; Corazza and Lubart, 2020; Runco and Jaeger, 2012), which were not taken into consideration in Study 1, rendering its assessment of overall creativity limited. To address this, in Study 2, two experts coded participants' actual creativity in dealing with conflict, considering both originality and effectiveness. Finally, Study 1 did not test *H3a* and *H3*b. Recognizing that creativity thrives within a context that explicitly supports it (Shalley and Gilson, 2004), Study 2 also implemented a manipulation of creativity similar to Fousiani *et al.* (2022).

Study 2

Study 2 aimed to replicate Study 1 in an experimental setting. Importantly, Study 2 adopted a dual approach to creativity, considering both idea originality and idea effectiveness. Indeed, creativity can be defined as the ability to generate original and effective ideas, solutions or expressions that go beyond conventional thinking. It involves combining existing knowledge, skills or resources in novel ways to produce something new that is original and valuable/effective (Amabile, 1996; Litchfield *et al.*, 2015). Accordingly, creativity involves two main components: originality and effectiveness (e.g. Corazza, 2016; Corazza and Lubart, 2020; Runco and Jaeger, 2012). *Originality* refers to the uniqueness and novelty of the ideas or solutions generated beyond current standards and practices (Guilford, 1950). If the idea is not novel, unique or original, it is viewed as an ordinary and conventional idea that does not add something new to what already exists (De Jonge *et al.*, 2018). *Effectiveness* refers to the idea's practicality, usefulness and feasibility (Runco and Jaeger, 2012). This dimension evaluates the extent to which an idea can be implemented and whether doing so will likely result in the desired outcome aimed for. In other words, effectiveness focuses on the feasibility of an idea for its effective implementation and on the impact of the idea on the desired outcomes at the same time (De Jonge, 2019). Too much focus on idea originality alone is not sufficient to ensure the successful implementation of an idea. Similarly, too much focus on idea effectiveness alone may lead to ideas that can be successfully implemented, but which are not necessarily novel or original. The key to creativity is to combine originality and effectiveness, by generating ideas that are both original (unique) and effective (practical) (Corazza and Lubart, 2020). Based on the above, Study 2 operationalizes creativity in conflict as the combination of two different facets/indicators, idea originality and idea effectiveness. Accordingly, opposite to Study 1, where a traditional unidimensional creativity scale was used to measure idea creativity, in this study we coded creativity in interpersonal conflict based on these two distinct dimensions.

Participants

We aimed for approximately 150–170 participants to get 80% power for this research design. Eventually, we recruited 160 employees residing in the UK via Prolific. Of the participants, 154 were successfully coupled to a counterpart (50.6% female; $M_{age} = 36.90$, SD = 10.45), comprising 77 dyads in total. 13% of the participants had acquired a

high-school diploma. The majority of our sample (62.3%) had acquired a university/college degree. In addition, 18.2% had obtained a master's degree, and a smaller proportion (5.2%) had attained a PhD. After completing an approximately 30-minute conflict resolution task, they were compensated with £2.50. Computing a sensitivity analysis in G*Power revealed that with 80% power to detect an interaction, our effect size was $f = 0.15$.

Experimental design and procedure

Within their dyads, participants were randomly assigned to a condition based on a 2 (power: strong BATNA vs weak BATNA) × 2 (creativity: high vs low) design aiming to investigate the effects of power, gender and contextual creativity on idea creativity. We manipulated power within dyads with one participant occupying the high-power position and their counterpart the low-power position. Creativity was manipulated between dyads, meaning that both participants operated within the same creativity condition (high or low). Participants' gender was measured. Within their dyads, participants were prompted to imagine being colleagues attempting to resolve two contentious issues related to the exact period of their summer holiday and the exact duration of the holiday (see online supplementary material for the complete description of the topics of conflict). To discuss and settle said topics, participants used a real-time online interaction tool (SMARTRIQS, Molnar, 2019), which is a function within the Qualtrics research suite. Subsequent to a series of conversation instances, participants were presented with a payoff schedule comparable to that used in Fousiani *et al.* (2021) and Fousiani *et al.* (2022) and were asked to reach an agreement based on it. The payoff schedule outlined the alternatives that participants would have to choose from and the corresponding points allocated to each alternative, with variations as in Fousiani *et al.* (2022). Following the conversation and the exchange of ideas with the aim of reaching mutually beneficial outcomes, participants were asked to fill in the measures, were debriefed and thanked for their participation in the study.

Manipulations

Manipulating power. Power was manipulated using the BATNA paradigm, similar to Van Kleef *et al.* (2006) and Fousiani *et al.* (2022). Adhering to the imaginary workplace scenario, participants in the high-power condition (i.e. strong BATNA) were informed that their request would be prioritized by their boss over the request of their low-power counterparts (i.e. weak BATNA) in case they failed to reach an agreement. This created more dependency of the low-power participant (participant with a weak BATNA) on the counterpart (participant with a strong BATNA) and thus created a power asymmetry between the two dyad members. Accordingly, high-power individuals would earn more points than their counterparts in the event of disagreement. However, it is noteworthy that both dyad members would fare even better if they were able to reach a mutual agreement (make a deal by selecting the same option in the payoff schedule).

Manipulating creative context. We manipulated creativity similarly to Fousiani *et al.* (2022) and in line with Osborn's four creativity rules (1957). More specifically, in the high-creativity condition, both members of a dyad were requested to provide a wealth of possible solutions to the two topics of conflict, compounding on each other, remaining open to unusual/strange ideas and avoiding criticizing the ideas of their counterparts. Conversely, low-creativity participants were tasked with providing *one single* solution to the topics of conflict, and then prompted to complete a filler task, by listing the names of American food-chains located in Europe. Participants in either condition were given 10 min to produce their ideas and share them with their counterparts. In the high-creativity condition, upon receiving an idea, the

task was to build and extend it. In contrast, in the low-creativity condition, participants were asked to simply send an offer to their counterpart.

Measures

Manipulation checks. In relation to power, four items were used as manipulation checks, adapted from a similar scale used in Van Kleef *et al.* (2006). A sample item is the following: "My colleague was in a disadvantaged position compared to me", with potential answers ranging between 1 = *totally disagree* and 7 = *totally agree*, and Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.90$. With regard to creativity, four items functioned as manipulation checks, one of which was "I was encouraged to think "out of the box" while generating ideas for possible solutions", with answers ranging from 1 = *not at all true* to 7 = *completely true*. Cronbach's alpha was high, $\alpha = 0.90$. For the full list of the manipulation checks, refer to the online supplementary material.

Creativity (idea originality and idea effectiveness). The creativity of the ideas generated by the participants was assessed on two dimensions, namely, idea *originality* and idea *effectiveness*. Adhering to the guideline recommendations, two independent raters followed a standardized rating procedure (Hallgren, 2012). Initially, they read through the entirety of the participants' output and subsequently rated each idea generated on how novel and unique it was (originality; 1 = *not at all original*, 5 = *very original*) and on how well it would solve the problem at hand (effectiveness; 1 = *not at all effective*, 5 = *very effective*) while being blind to the condition and participant the ideas belonged to (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *very*). For complete rating instructions, see online supplementary material. Cohen's Kappa was chosen as a representative measure of inter-rater reliability with originality yielding a score of 0.842 (*LB* = 0.666, *UB* = 0.925) and effectiveness 0.869 (*LB* = 0.727, *UB* = 0.937).

Demographics. Participants were requested to indicate their age (in years) and gender (1 = *female*, 2 = *male*). In addition, they were asked to indicate their nationality (1 = *American*, 2 = *English*, 3 = *Canadian,* 4 = *Spanish,* 5 = *Italian*, 6 = *Irish*, 7= *Mexican*, 8 = *German,* 9 = *African American*, 10 = *other [please indicate])*, along with their academic (1 = *no formal education*, 2 = *high school diploma*, 3 = *university/college,* 4 = *master's degree*, 5 = *PhD,* 6 = *Other*) and occupational status (1 = *student*, 2 = *employee*, 3 = *self-employed/freelancer*, 4 = *unemployed/searching*, 5 = *retired,* 6 = *other*).

Control variables. The dichotomous item "achieving a deal with their counterpart", with possible answers 1 = *no, we did not make a deal* and 2 = *yes, we did make a deal*, served as a control variable, along with participants' age and occupational status.

Results

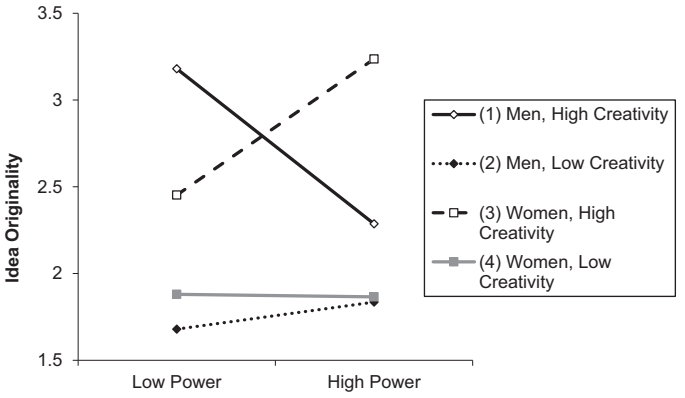
Manipulation checks

The main effect of the power manipulation on the perceived power of participants was significant $F(1, 150) = 92.51$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.38$. Participants in the high-power condition indicated having experienced higher power ($M = 4.29$, SD = 0.63) as opposed to participants in the low-power condition ($M = 3.32$, SD = 0.62). The main effect of creativity manipulation on the perceived creativity of participants was significant $F(1, 150) = 71.78$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.32$. Participants in the high creativity condition indicated having experienced higher creativity ($M = 4.84$, SD = 0.83) as opposed to participants in the low creativity condition ($M = 3.58$, SD = 1.01). The effect of creativity on perceived power was nonsignificant. Also, the interaction between power and creativity was non-significant ($F_s < 1$). Neither the main effect of power nor the interaction effect between power and creativity on perceived creativity was significant. Our manipulations worked as intended.

Hypothesis testing

Both power and creativity were coded as 1 = *low* and 2 = *high*. Gender was coded as: 1 = *woman*, 2 = *man*. Because age has been found to influence both creativity (Binnewies *et al.*, 2008) and response to conflict (Fousiani *et al.*, 2022), we controlled for participants' chronological age. Similarly, occupational status has been found to influence response to conflict (Patel *et al.*, 2002) so we also controlled for participants' occupational status. Finally, achieving a deal in this conflict also served as a control variable. Correlation analyses showed a significant and negative correlation between idea originality and achieving a deal ($r = 0.16$, $p < 0.05$). Moreover, contextual creativity correlated positively with idea originality ($r = 0.28$, $p = 0.007$) and negatively with idea effectiveness ($r = -0.20$, $p = 0.01$). No other significant correlations between the study variables occurred.

Idea originality: effects of power, creativity and gender on generation of original ideas. We ran a moderation analysis using process (Hayes, 2018; Model 3). The overall model was significant $R^2 = 0.26$, $F(10, 139) = 4.83$, $p < 0.001$. Opposite to *H1*, none of the main effects were significant. Moreover, opposite to *H2*, the power by gender interaction – although not far from reaching significance – did not prove to be significant. However, in line with *H3a*, the power by creativity interaction came out significant and showed that the effect of power on idea originality is positive in the high creativity condition $b = 2.46$, $SE = 0.73$, $p = 0.001$; 95% CI [−1.01; 3.91]), $\Delta R^2 = 0.03$, $F(1,139) = 6.05$, $p = 0.01$. Moreover, the gender by creativity interaction was significant showing that men, as opposed to women, generated more original ideas when in the high creativity condition ($b = 2.41$, $SE = 0.75$, $p = 0.01$; 95% CI [0.91; 3.89]) $\Delta R^2 = 0.04$, $F(1,139) = 6.64$, $p = 0.01$. Importantly, and in line with *H3b*, the power by creativity by gender interaction also came out significant $\Delta R^2 = 0.04$, $F(1,139) = 7.36$, $p = 0.008$ showing that the effect of power on idea originality was positive in the high creativity condition when participants were women ($b = 0.78$, $SE = 0.33$, $p = 0.02$; 95% CI [0.14; 1.43]) and negative when participants were men ($b = -0.89$, $SE = 0.34$, $p = 0.01$; 95% CI [−1.57; −0.21]) (see Figure 2) (see Table 1 for the statistics on the main effects and interactions).



Notes: Both power and creativity were coded as 1 = low, 2 = high. Gender was coded as follows: 1 = women, 2 = men. Idea originality was coded as: 1 = not at all original, 5 = very original

Source: Authors' own work

Figure 2. Effect of relative power on idea originality as a function of gender in high and low creativity conditions (Study 2)

Predictor	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*	95% *CI*
Constant	5.27	2.86	1.84	0.06	−0.40; 10.94
Power	−2.83	1.75	−1.62	0.11	−6.28; 0.62
Gender	−3.15	1.74	−1.81	0.07	−6.58; 0.29
Creativity	−3.00	1.68	−1.78	0.08	−6.33; 0.33
Power × gender	2.02	1.10	1.84	0.07	−0.15; 4.19
Power × creativity	2.65	1.08	2.46	0.01	0.52; 4.77
Gender × creativity	2.78	1.08	2.58	0.01	0.65; 4.91
Power × gender × creativity	−1.85	0.68	−2.71	<0.01	−3.19; −0.50
Age	0.02	0.01	1.74	0.08	−0.002;0.03
Profession	−0.26	0.23	−1.17	0.15	−0.71; 0.18
Achieving a deal	−0.12	0.33	−0.36	0.73	−0.77; 0.54

Table 1.
Regression analyses results on idea originality (Study 2)

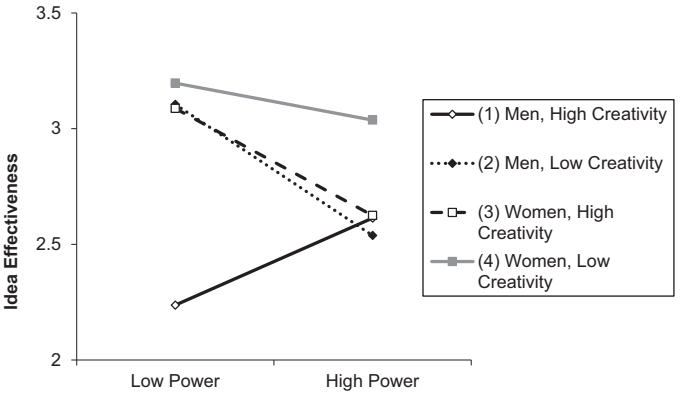
Notes: Power and creativity were coded as 1 = *low*, 2 = *high*. Gender was coded as: 1 = *woman*, 2 = *man*. Achieving a deal was coded as: 1 = *no, we did not make a deal*, 2 = *yes, we did make a deal*, chronological age was measured in years; Occupational status was coded as 1 = *student*, 2 = *employee*, 3 = *self-employed*, 4 = *unemployed*, 5 = *retired*. Idea originality was coded as: 1 = *not at all original*, 5 = *very original*
Source: Authors' own work

Idea effectiveness: effects of power, creativity and gender on generation of effective ideas. The overall model was significant $R^2 = 0.20$, $F(10, 139) = 3.53$, $p < 0.001$. Opposite to *H1*, none of the main effects on idea effectiveness were significant. However, in line with *H2*, the power by gender interaction was found to be significant $\Delta R^2 = 0.03$, $F(1,139) = 4.39$, $p = 0.04$ and showed that power has a negative effect on idea effectiveness among men participants $b = -1.51$, $SE = 0.55$, $p = 0.01$; 95% CI [−2.59; 0.43]). The power by creativity interaction also came out significant $\Delta R^2 = 0.02$, $F(1,139) = 4.02$, $p < 0.05$ and showed that the effect of power on idea effectiveness is negative in the high creativity condition $b = -1.30$, $SE = 0.53$, $p = 0.01$; 95% CI [−2.34; −0.26]). This finding does not provide support for *H3a*. Finally, opposite to *H3b*, the power by creativity by gender interaction also came out significant $\Delta R^2 = 0.04$, $F(1,139) = 6.49$, $p = 0.01$ and showed that the effect of power on idea effectiveness is negative among women participants in the high creativity condition ($b = -0.46$, $SE = 0.23$, $p < 0.05$; 95% CI [−0.92; −0.001]) and among men in the low creativity condition ($b = -0.57$, $SE = 0.25$, $p = 0.02$; 95% CI [−1.05; −0.08]) (see Figure 3) (see Table 2 for the statistics on the main effects and interactions). The unexpected results regarding idea effectiveness are discussed in the *Discussion* section of Study 2.

Discussion

Study 2 aimed to replicate the results of Study 1 using an experimental design and, thus, testing causality. Moreover, Study 2, instead of merely assessing participants' overall creativity in conflict, grasped both dimensions of creativity, namely, originality and effectiveness, as coded by two experts. Finally, considering that creative behavior can thrive only when the broader context explicitly supports it (Shalley and Gilson, 2004), Study 2 further manipulated contextual creativity (high vs low).

When predicting idea originality, power did not have a main effect on this creativity dimension. This finding does not provide support for *H1*. Moreover, opposite to *H2*, gender did not moderate the effect of power on idea originality. However, in line with *H3a*, contextual creativity moderated the effect of power on idea originality showing that power had a positive effect on idea originality when the context explicitly supported creativity. Moreover, in line with *H3b*, power interacted with gender and contextual creativity in the



Notes: Both power and creativity were coded as 1 = low, 2 = high. Gender was coded as follows: 1 = women, 2 = men. Idea effectiveness was coded as: 1 = not at all effective, 5 = very effective
Source: Authors' own work

Figure 3.
Effect of relative power on idea effectiveness as a function of gender in high and low creativity conditions (Study 2)

Predictor	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*	95% *CI*
Constant	0.84	2.06	0.41	0.68	−3.22; 4.91
Power	1.80	1.25	1.43	0.15	−0.68; 4.27
Gender	2.32	1.25	1.86	0.06	−0.15; 4.78
Creativity	2.20	1.21	1.82	0.07	−0.19; 4.59
Power × gender	−1.65	0.79	−2.10	0.04	−3.21; −0.09
Power × creativity	−0.55	0.77	−2.01	0.04	−3.08; −0.02
Gender × creativity	−2.00	0.77	−2.59	0.01	−3.53; −0.47
Power × gender × creativity	1.25	0.49	2.55	0.01	0.28; 2.21
Age	−0.01	0.01	1.74	0.08	−0.002; 0.03
Profession	−0.26	0.01	−1.95	0.05	−0.03; 0.001
Achieving a deal	0.10	0.24	0.42	0.68	−0.37; 0.57

Notes: Power and creativity were coded as 1 = *low*, 2 = *high*. Gender was coded as: 1 = *woman*, 2 = *man*. Achieving a deal was coded as: 1 = *no, we did not make a deal*, 2 = *yes, we did make a deal*, chronological age was measured in years; Occupational status was coded as 1= *student*, 2 = *employee,* 3 = *self-employed*, 4 = *unemployed*, 5 = *retired*. Idea effectiveness was coded as: 1 = *not at all effective,* 5 = *very effective*
Source: Authors' own work

Table 2.
Regression analyses results on idea effectiveness (Study 2)

prediction of idea originality showing that power had a positive effect on idea originality among women and when the context supported creativity. Overall, and according to most of our hypotheses, these findings are in line with the findings obtained in Study 1 and show that power is more beneficial (i.e. helps produce more original ideas) when assigned to women than men and when the broader context explicitly fosters creativity.

When predicting idea effectiveness, our findings revealed an interaction between power and gender, indicating that men in powerful positions are less likely to generate effective ideas compared to women. This partially aligns with *H2*. For the rest, our results presented a different pattern when predicting idea effectiveness. Specifically, we observed a negative

effect of power on idea effectiveness among women in the high creativity condition and among men in the low creativity condition. These findings are not in line with *H3b* and suggest that idea effectiveness, which involves practical and less unconventional concepts (Runco and Jaeger, 2012), may necessitate distinct conditions for women and men. Women in positions of power might not perceive the added value of contextual creativity in generating effective/practical ideas, while men may require explicit support for creativity to generate such ideas. Finally, it is noteworthy that contextual creativity correlated positively with idea originality but negatively with idea effectiveness, which may explain the different findings we obtained when predicting each of the two dimensions: Apparently, idea originality, which involves idea uniqueness and novelty, may be a better illustration of creativity than idea effectiveness, which involves the generation of more mundane, ordinary and easily implemented ideas. Further research should explore the role of contextual creativity in understanding these dynamics and the distinct role of idea originality and idea effectiveness.

General discussion

Interpersonal conflict within organizations is a significant issue that consumes a substantial amount of employees' time and has financial implications for organizations. In the USA, employees spend an estimated 2.8 h per week engaged in conflict, amounting to approximately $359bn annually in paid hours focused on arguing rather than positive productivity (CPP Inc, 2008). Similarly, in Europe, 38% of employees experience interpersonal conflict in a given year (CIPD, 2015). Interpersonal conflict requires creative approaches to be effectively managed as creativity brings fresh perspectives, fosters collaborative problem-solving and promotes mutual understanding (Fousiani *et al.*, 2022; Helzer and Kim, 2019; Wilson and Thompson, 2014). However, there has been a lack of research exploring the factors that influence creativity in interpersonal conflict situations despite its importance for organizations.

Power dynamics play a significant role in shaping individuals' creative thinking and problem-solving abilities in conflict situations (Fousiani, 2020; Fousiani *et al.*, 2021). Accordingly, understanding how power influences creativity in interpersonal conflict is essential for comprehending the complexities of interpersonal conflicts and their potential for innovative resolutions. Moreover, gender significantly shapes how individuals wield their power in crisis situations (Bruckmüller *et al.*, 2014; Post *et al.*, 2019), highlighting the importance of understanding how gender influences power dynamics and the diverse strategies and behaviors used by individuals when faced with conflict. Thus, this study built on the social role theory (Eagly and Wood, 2012) to examine the relationship between relative power and creativity in conflict, with a particular focus on the moderating role of gender.

Study 1 was a field study where participants who had experienced interpersonal conflicts in the workplace reported their level of creativity while dealing with a recalled conflict. Results showed that higher relative power of the conflicting member was associated with greater creativity, while this effect was stronger among women than men. These results provided full support for *H1* and *H2*. Study 2 aimed to replicate and expand upon the findings of Study 1 by using an experimental design to establish causal relationships. It also measured both dimensions of creativity (originality and effectiveness) using more objective tools (e.g. experts coded generated ideas for both creativity dimensions, originality and effectiveness) and further manipulated contextual creativity (Shalley and Gilson, 2004). The results showed that power did not have a direct effect on creativity, but it interacted with gender and contextual creativity. More specifically, power had a positive effect on idea

originality for women only when the context encouraged creativity. When predicting idea effectiveness, we found that men with more power were less likely to generate effective ideas compared to women. These findings are in line with our initial hypotheses and highlight the importance of considering gender and contextual creativity in understanding the relationship between power and creative idea generation in conflict situations.

Despite these findings, which were in line with our hypotheses, we also obtained unexpected results in Study 2, when predicting idea effectiveness in particular. More specifically, we found a negative effect of power on idea effectiveness among women in the high creativity condition and among men in the low creativity condition. This suggests that the conditions for generating effective ideas may differ for women and men, with women in power potentially undervaluing contextual creativity, while men potentially requiring explicit support for creativity. Further research should explore the role of contextual creativity in understanding these dynamics.

Taken together, these findings provide evidence supporting a positive relationship between power and creativity, indicating that individuals with higher perceived power tend to exhibit greater levels of creativity when managing conflicts, while this effect is stronger among women. However, the nuances of this relationship become apparent when considering the distinct dimensions of creativity, namely, originality and effectiveness, suggesting the need for further research to elucidate underlying mechanisms and contextual factors shaping these relationships. Given the divergent results between the two studies, we conducted a comparative analysis detailed in Appendix 2 to enhance clarity and provide a deeper understanding of our results.

Theoretical and practical implications

This study makes three significant contributions to the existing literature. First and foremost, it contributes to our understanding of creativity within the landscape of interpersonal conflict in the workplace – an area that, despite its substantial importance (see Runde and Flanagan, 2012), has remained relatively underexplored. This study ventures into the paradoxical challenge of fostering creativity amid conflict, where individuals contend with heightened cognitive load, narrowed focus, fear of judgment and communication barriers (Lewicki *et al.*, 2020). These elements often raise formidable obstacles to creative thinking, as evidenced by prior research (Chen, 2006; Lee *et al.*, 2018; Yong *et al.*, 2014). By delving into this complex terrain, the study seeks to unveil the factors that facilitate creative processes within the context of conflict. The study goes beyond the conventional understanding of conflict as a hindrance to creativity, seeking to uncover the role of contextual (e.g. power) but also individual (e.g. gender) characteristics in creativity in conflict situations. Therefore, this study aims to provide a more profound perspective on how creativity manifests during workplace conflicts, paving the way for a more nuanced and applicable understanding of creative processes in challenging organizational contexts.

Second, this study significantly broadens the scope of existing knowledge on the relationship between power and conflict (Fousiani, 2020; Fousiani *et al.*, 2021) and makes a substantial contribution to the literature on power and creativity (Galinsky *et al.*, 2008). More specifically, this study provides valuable insights into how individuals use creative thinking as a conflict resolution tool within the complex framework of power dynamics during conflicts. In doing so, this study enhances our understanding of the dynamic interplay between power and creativity, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of how individuals leverage their creative capacities in situations of conflict, ultimately shaping organizational outcomes.

Third, this study advances the social role theory (Eagly and Wood, 2012) by emphasizing the importance of recognizing the superior skills, particularly increased creativity, of women in conflict situations. By highlighting the unique strengths that women bring to the table in such challenging scenarios, this research contributes to a nuanced understanding of social roles, creativity and conflict dynamics, ultimately enriching our understanding of these complex interpersonal interactions within the workplace.

Future research in this field can take several paths based on the contributions of this study. First, scholars may delve deeper into the contextual factors influencing creativity during workplace interpersonal conflicts, exploring specific contextual elements and individual differences. For instance, the motivational climate at work (e.g. performance-oriented or mastery-oriented climate; Buch *et al.*, 2015; Nerstad *et al.*, 2018) may influence how creative employees behave when facing conflicts within their team. Similarly, various individual characteristics (i.e. chronological age; Fousiani *et al.*, 2022) but also personality traits (Amabile, 1996) may influence how creatively employees in a powerful position may approach workplace conflict (Curşeu *et al.*, 2022; De Clercq *et al.*, 2017; see also Lee *et al.*, 2018). Second, the dynamics of power and creativity could be extended beyond conflict situations to various organizational contexts such as decision-making processes or team collaborations. Finally, further investigating the gendered aspects of creativity in conflict, considering societal expectations and biases (see Eagly and Wood, 2012), would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of gender dynamics in professional settings.

Besides its theoretical implications, this study has strong practical implications for organizations and workplaces. First, recognizing the potential for creativity in conflict situations can help organizations view conflicts as opportunities for growth and positive change. By fostering a supportive environment that encourages creative thinking and problem-solving during conflicts, organizations can harness the innovative potential of their employees and transform conflicts into constructive outcomes. Second, this study emphasizes the need to empower and promote women in high-power positions, especially in conflict-prone environments. Unfortunately, despite their value, creative ideas from women often face a higher likelihood of rejection rather than implementation within organizational settings (Foss *et al.*, 2013), which happens because individuals from minority groups, including women, frequently encounter exclusion, ridicule or a lack of attentive listening (Carter *et al.*, 2003; Fairfax, 2011; Khatib *et al.*, 2021). Overcoming this barrier necessitates assigning women to high-power roles within organizations. Given the superior skills and increased creativity demonstrated by women in conflict situations, organizations can benefit from leveraging their unique perspectives and abilities to effectively manage conflicts and generate creative solutions. Moreover, by promoting gender diversity and providing equal opportunities for women to hold positions of power (Taneja *et al.*, 2012), organizations can enhance their capacity for creativity and innovation, leading to improved organizational performance and success.

Strengths, limitations and future directions

This study has several strengths that contribute to its robustness. First, the study used a mixed-methods approach, combining both a field study (Study 1) and an experimental design (Study 2), allowing for a comprehensive examination of the relationship between power, gender and creativity in conflict. This methodological diversity enhances the validity and generalizability of the findings. Second, this study incorporated multiple measures of creativity, assessing both the dimensions of originality and effectiveness. Moreover, by using objective coding by experts, the study ensured a more rigorous evaluation of the creative ideas, enhancing the reliability and validity of the results (Study 2). Finally, the

study considered important contextual factors by manipulating contextual creativity in Study 2. This approach allowed for a deeper understanding of how the situational context can interact with power and gender to influence creative thinking in conflict situations.

Despite its strengths, this study has several limitations as well, which offer directions for future research. First, the absence of a mediator in any of the studies restricts our understanding of the underlying mechanisms that explain the relationship between power, gender and creativity in conflict. Including a mediator could have shed light on the specific processes through which power and gender influence creative thinking in conflict situations. Future research should explore potential explanatory mechanisms to gain a deeper understanding of these dynamics, such as investigating how individuals construe power as either responsibility or opportunity, offering valuable insights into these complex relationships (De Wit *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, examining other potential mediators, such as relational skills (Eagly and Carli, 2007; Ely, 1995; Post *et al.*, 2019), emotion management skills (Lively and Heise, 2004) or cognitive processes (Abraham, 2016), could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how power and gender interact to influence creativity in conflict situations. Another limitation is the cross-sectional design of Study 1, which does not allow us to draw causal conclusions. Although Study 2 (experiment) partly addressed this limitation, adopting a longitudinal design could provide stronger evidence for causal relationships and better control for confounding variables.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the effects of power dynamics and gender on creativity in interpersonal conflicts in the workplace. The findings underscore the positive impact of power, particularly when assigned to women, in fostering constructive outcomes and growth during conflicts (e.g. more novel and original ideas). Consequently, there is a need to empower women in high-power positions. Recognizing the significance of power and gender dynamics may enable organizations to harness creativity for conflict management, leading to improved collaboration and organizational functioning.

Notes

1. Items from KEYS are reprinted, for research purposes only, with the permission of Teresa M. Amabile, PhD. We used an adapted version of the questionnaire after acquiring written permission. The adapted questionnaire has been previously used in Fousiani *et al.* (2022).
2. Although the RMSEA is below the recommended threshold, the other indices demonstrate a good fit to the data. Accordingly, we consider the overall fit to be acceptable.

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Appendix 1

Item	Factor loading 1	2
Factor 1: Relative power		
1. Who do you think had the strongest position?	0.869	
2. Who do you feel had most influence?	0.826	
3. Who do you feel had the most power?	0.858	
4. Who do you think had the best basis to negotiate?	0.676	
5. Who do you feel had the best negotiation position?	0.763	
6. Who do you feel was most in control of the situation?	0.839	
7. Who do you feel was the most powerful person?	0.825	
8. Who do you think was most dependent on the other?	−0.500	
9. Who do you feel needed the other most?	−0.472	
Factor 2: Creativity		
1. I solved the problem at hand by thinking creatively (out-of-the-box)		0.868
2. I felt free to think of new ideas on how to deal with the conflict/disagreement at hand		0.899
3. I was free to develop creative ideas on how to solve the issue at hand		0.903
4. I could "take risks" (come up with unusual ideas) when thinking of possible solutions to this disagreement/ conflict		0.822
5. I was free to think of creative solutions to the conflict/ disagreement at hand		0.843
6. I could come up with creative ideas on how to deal with this issue		0.870
7. I was free to express unusual ideas on how to solve the conflict or disagreement at hand without the fear of being called stupid		0.845
8. I felt recognized for coming up with creative ideas when trying to find a solution to the disagreement at hand		0.837
9. I felt rewarded for thinking of creative ideas when trying to solve this conflict/disagreement		0.833
10. I had a free flow of ideas		0.766

Source: Authors' own work

Table A1. Exploratory factor analysis with Varimax rotation on relative power and creativity (Study 1)

Appendix 2

Both Study 1 and Study 2 investigate the relationship between power and creativity in conflict management, albeit using different research designs and methodologies. Study 1 adopts a field study approach, collecting data from 226 employees who recall workplace conflicts and rate their relative power and creativity levels. The study finds a positive relationship between power and creativity, while men exhibit higher creativity than women (main effect). In addition, gender moderates the relationship between power and creativity, indicating that power has a stronger positive effect on creativity among women. Conversely, Study 2 uses an experimental design involving 154 dyads of participants engaged in real-time conflict simulations. Unlike Study 1, Study 2 assesses both idea originality and effectiveness, finding that power positively influences idea originality, particularly in contexts explicitly fostering creativity and among women, which is in line with the findings of Study 1. However, Study 2 reveals a negative effect of power on idea effectiveness, especially among women in high-creativity contexts and men in low-creativity contexts, deviating from the findings of Study 1. Taken together, these findings provide evidence supporting a positive relationship between power and creativity, indicating that individuals with higher perceived power tend to exhibit greater levels of creativity when managing conflicts, while this effect is stronger among women. However, the nuances of this relationship become apparent when considering the distinct dimensions of creativity, namely, originality and effectiveness, suggesting the need for further research to elucidate underlying mechanisms and contextual factors shaping these relationships.

Supplementary material

The supplementary material for this article can be found Open Science Framework: https://osf.io/tveau/

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