

## **The Effect of Confronting Members Who Break Norms on Team Effectiveness**

### **Vanessa Urch Druskat**

Whittemore School of Business and Economics  
University of New Hampshire  
McConnell Hall; 15 College Road  
Durham, NH 03824  
Phone: 603-659-2916 Fax: 603-862-3383  
E-mail: [vanessa.druskat@unh.edu](mailto:vanessa.druskat@unh.edu)

### **Steven B. Wolff**

Hay Group  
McClelland Center for Research  
116 Huntington Ave.  
Boston, MA 02116-5712  
Phone: 617-425-4525  
E-mail: [steve@sbwolff.com](mailto:steve@sbwolff.com)

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### Abstract

We argue that problem behavior in teams is often a specific form of process conflict enacted by team members who choose to "act out" rather than use their "voice" to register complaints about team processes and operations. We also propose that an effective way to manage this form of process conflict is to institute a norm of "confronting members who break norms." A norm of confronting problem behavior ensures that disruptive behavior is discussed and understood in a timely manner. We argue that this keeps team members from making internal attributions about problem behavior and reduces the emergence of destructive relationship conflict in teams. However, not all confrontation is effective. In this chapter, we explore the benefits and costs of confronting problem behavior. We also present a study that examines whether team member skills associated with emotional intelligence (empathy, self-control, persuasiveness, and developing others) moderate the link between "confronting members who break norms" and team effectiveness.

## **The Effect of “Confronting Members Who Break Norms” on Team Effectiveness**

One of the most complicated decisions made by a team is whether to confront or ignore problem behavior. We define “problem behavior” in teams as member behavior that openly defies implicit or explicit team norms, e.g., rudeness, lack of cooperation, skipping meetings, coming to meetings unprepared, general social loafing. On the one hand, confronting a member who breaks a norm may have a negative effect on the member and the group by taking up valuable time and by prompting hurt, anger and emotional conflict that escalates out of control. On the other hand, ignoring the problem behavior may have a negative effect on the member and the group by taking up valuable time and by prompting hurt, and anger as resentment towards the member escalates to emotional or relational conflict. The decision over whether to confront or not to confront problem behavior is a difficult one. Many teams and leaders end up waiting it out in the hopes that the problem behavior will stop (deLeon, 2001; Liden, Wayne & Kraimer, 2001) – this is a decision *not* to confront.

We argue that problem behavior is usually a form of process conflict, e.g., a disagreement about how team members should work together to accomplish their task (Jehn, Northcraft, & Neal, 1999). Problem behavior occurs when at least one team member disagrees with an operating procedure or norm held by the team. For example, a member may dominate conversations because he disagrees with a team norm authorizing certain members’ opinions to carry the most weight, a member may not show up for meetings because she feels the team’s meetings are a waste of time, or a member may not give full effort to the team (i.e., social loafing) because it doesn’t appear that his effort is necessary (Hertel, Kerr & Messe, 2000). We argue that such problem behaviors signal discontent and disagreement with the team’s current operating or process norms.

Therefore, we propose that adopting a norm of confronting problem behavior, as opposed to ignoring it, is an effective strategy. When carried out effectively, it ensures that the team, in a timely manner, discusses the problem behavior and decides whether process norms should be altered to better meet member needs. This can increase team members' willingness and ability to work together effectively and can enhance team effectiveness. Our earlier research (Druskat & Wolff, 1999) revealed that when team member feedback was given in a structured, interactive, face-to-face setting, members who received the most negative feedback about their work and behavior in the team (i.e., feedback about their problem behavior), rated themselves as feeling significantly more positive about their team after the feedback and discussion than they had before receiving and discussing their feedback. Also, at a time subsequent to the feedback session, team members, on average, rated their teams as more task-focused than they had prior to the feedback session. These findings suggest that discussing why team members were breaking norms was helpful for those members who broke norms and for the entire team.

A norm that supports confronting problem behavior when it occurs can also keep process conflict from evolving into a more personal, and emotional form of conflict labeled "relationship conflict." Relationship conflict is defined as conflict that involves personal issues such as dislike among group members and feelings like annoyance, frustration, and irritation (Jehn & Mannix, 2001). It has been consistently linked to lower team performance and lower member satisfaction (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003).

Of course, not all feedback is effectively delivered. Not all teams have members with the skills necessary to handle confrontation in an interpersonally sensitive way (Molinsky & Margolis, 2005; Von Glinow *et al.*, 2004). Unskilled or *ineffective* feedback could easily be perceived as a personal attack, which would be likely to bring about defensiveness and

relationship conflict. Moreover, the greater the number of team members with the skills to deliver effective feedback, the more likely the feedback will be handled and received well.

Our objective with this chapter is to build on our past theory and research examining emotionally competent team norms (i.e., norms that create a productive social and emotional team environment) that support team effectiveness (Druskat *et al.*, 2003; Wolff & Druskat, 2005). The norm we focus on here is labeled “confronting members who break norms,” and is defined as speaking-up (i.e., using voice) when another member behaves in a way that defies team expectations of acceptable behavior. As will be discussed throughout this chapter, we argue that honest, respectful, discussion-focused confrontation builds team-level trust and leads to fuller cooperation among team members and team effectiveness. The goal of this norm is to encourage all team members to offer constructive feedback and challenges (see Van Dyne & LePine, 1998) and to use the opportunity to discuss, revisit and adapt norms and procedures to member evolving needs. The goal is not to promote conformity (see Janis, 1982)

In this chapter, we define when and why a norm of “confronting members who break norms” is constructive for a team. We propose that such a norm would be most constructive if team members had the skills necessary for constructive confrontation. We also present a longitudinal study that examines whether team member skills consistent with emotional intelligence: empathy, self-control, persuasiveness, and developing others, moderate the link between a team norm of “confronting members who break norms” and team effectiveness.

### The Context for Confronting Members who Break Norms

We define a team as “made up of individuals who see themselves and who are seen by others as a social entity, who are interdependent because of the tasks they perform as members of a group, who are embedded in one or more larger social systems (e.g., community, organization),

and who perform tasks that affect others (such as customers or coworkers)” (Guzzo & Dickson, 1996). We use the terms “group” and “team” interchangeably throughout the chapter.

Team effectiveness is defined here as a multidimensional construct that includes: customer satisfaction and the team’s ability to continue working together effectively in the future. In long-term groups, a singular focus on customer satisfaction (i.e., performance) would eventually harm member well-being, group viability, and in due course, customer satisfaction (Hackman, 1987).

### The Tripartite Intra-group Conflict Taxonomy

In this chapter, our definition of process conflict differs from traditional definitions. The conflict literature traditionally divides intra-group conflict into three types: task conflict (sometimes referred to as cognitive conflict), relationship conflict (sometimes referred to as emotional conflict), and process conflict (see Jehn, 1995; Pelled, 1996). Task conflict is defined as differences in viewpoints and opinions pertaining to a group task (Jehn, 1995). As discussed above, relationship conflict involves personal issues such as dislike among group members and feelings like annoyance, frustration, and irritation (Jehn & Mannix, 2001). Process conflict is defined as controversies about aspects of how task accomplishment will proceed including issues of who should do what and how much responsibility different people should get (Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999). Yet, as defined, process conflict does not often factor as distinct from task conflict (for a fuller discussion of this issue see Behfar & Thompson, 2006 in this volume). Thus, theorists have begun to redefine process conflict. Behfar and her colleagues (Behfar, Mannix, Peterson, & Trochim, 2005) identified three types of process disagreements in groups: work pace timing, scheduling conflicts, and workload distribution conflicts. In this chapter, our definition of process conflict is consistent with that posed by Behfar and colleagues,

that is, process conflict involves disagreement about operational procedures and work processes including their timing, scheduling, and workload distributions.

### Team Norms

In any group, norms are potent expectations that control member behavior; they trigger conformity in behavior through a system of positive and negative sanctions (Biddle & Thomas, 1966). Norms do not emerge randomly; over time team member back-and-forth interactions, observations, and sensemaking about common experiences, shape member expectations for one another (Giddens, 1984; Poole, 1999). These expectations become norms or informal rules (usually unspoken) that enable the team to regulate and regularize member behavior, interactions, and processes (Feldman, 1984).

Well crystallized norms (that is, norms around which there is high consensus among members) are considered critical to the effectiveness of teams (Hackman, 1987). They relieve the discomfort of the unknown, free team members from having to continually negotiate procedures, and enable members to focus their time and energy on their task. However, while norms facilitate coordination and efficiency, they suppress member individuality (Peterson, 1999).

Thus, full membership in a team (as opposed to marginalized membership) requires letting go of parts of one's unique individuality (Smith & Berg, 1987). At the same time, team members' unique needs and personalities are an essential source for team growth, renewal and innovation (Miliken, Bartel, & Kurtzberg, 2003). Crystallized norms that become rigid can keep a team from adapting to the evolving needs of members, the team, and the broader organization to which it belongs. Thus, complete cooperation and acquiescence to group norms is not necessary or ideal, and occasional disagreements over group process norms can be effective for group functioning (see Tuckman, 1965). In fact, one study found that process conflict (i.e.,

disagreements over group process norms) in *successful* teams is initially low, but continually increases as members get closer to meeting their deadlines (Jehn & Mannix, 2001).

### Why Problem Behavior Occurs in Teams

Research detailing the team norm development process reveals that team members frequently implicitly or explicitly challenge team norms. This research shows that challenges to existing norms end in one of two ways, they either (1) provoke discussion and negotiation ending in an altered group norm, or (2) are dismissed, thus confirming the team's perception that its current mode of operation is suitable for now (Bettenhausen & Murnighan, 1985).

We propose that problem behavior in teams is most often a challenge to process norms by a member who chooses, consciously or unconsciously, to “act out” (e.g., break a norm) rather than “use voice” to express dissatisfaction with process norms. It would clearly be optimal for team members to challenge norms verbally by using “voice” behavior, defined as “nonrequired verbal activity that emphasizes expression of constructive challenge with an intent to improve rather than merely criticize” (Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers, & Mainous, 1988; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). However, research suggests that “voice” behavior in teams is more likely to come from team members with high levels of global self-esteem and high levels of satisfaction with the team (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998). This description rarely fits all team members.

There are other reasons that a team member might be more likely to break a norm than to “use voice” to express dissatisfaction with current team processes. Using voice requires the belief that one's voice can make a difference in this team. Not all team members have the status necessary to challenge norms and get attention. Research has long shown that high status team members have the most influence over the norms adopted by a team (Hollander, 1961; Ridgeway, 1987), and that they are permitted more leeway in voicing dissatisfactions with the



team (Bales, 1950). Also, the unhappy team member may not use “voice” because he or she is not fully conscious of the cause of the dissatisfaction or of his or her actions, or may not have the interpersonal skills to voice the dissatisfaction in a more constructive manner. Recognizing the root cause of one’s dissatisfaction in a team environment and constructively “voicing” that dissatisfaction requires self-awareness and interpersonal competence. In summary, breaking a process norm (e.g., acting out or loafing) may be the only way some members believe they can get attention. In some teams, it may be the only way they can.

Our previous research lends support to our proposal that team member problem behavior is frequently the exhibition of unarticulated process needs. Also, that in many cases, if these needs are discussed, they can be managed in a way that improves task focus in the team (Druskat & Wolff, 1999). In that time-series study, team members provided face-to-face feedback to one another using a structured feedback process. After the feedback sessions, which had given each team member the opportunity to receive and discuss his or her feedback with the full team, it was the team members who had exhibited the most problem behavior during the semester who reported themselves as most satisfied by the feedback process and who subsequently rated themselves as feeling most positive about the team. Also, well after the feedback session, team members rated their teams as more task focused than they had prior to the feedback session. This suggests that discussions about team member behavior can, in some circumstances, have a lasting positive effect on team effectiveness.

Of course, a team norm of confronting problem behavior can also incur costs. Below we discuss potential benefits and costs of confrontation and propose hypotheses related to the skills required for effective confrontation of problem behavior. The results of the study discussed above also suggest that there are other norms that could reduce the frequency with which

members break norms. For example, it would likely be effective for a team to adopt a norm of periodically holding structured feedback sessions like those used in the study. In our theory of emotionally competent norms, we refer to this norm as “team self-evaluation,” and define it as periodically assessing member satisfaction with team and member operations; we argue that team self-evaluation builds team identity and efficacy (Druskat & Wolff, 2001; Druskat et al., 2003; see also Salas, Sims, & Burke, 2005). Such a norm would help to minimize how often confrontation is necessary.

### Caveats

It is important to point out that there are reasons why team members “act out” or break norms that may not be helped through a norm of confrontation and discussion. For example, the individual may be a chronic “norm breaker” in team settings. Wageman and Hackman (2006) refer to such team members as “derailers.” Derailers may be effective in many areas of their lives, but for one reason or another will not cooperate and resist coaching (Wageman & Hackman, 2006). It may be that they don’t agree with the team’s direction or purpose or that they simply have little interest in sacrificing their own individual needs for the team. One category of team derailers who periodically show up in research studies are those who score high in the Big Five personality trait of neuroticism, which is defined as: anxious, depressed, angry, emotional and insecure (Costa & McCrae, 1994). Research shows that these members receive low peer ratings from teammates (Stewart, Fulmer, & Barrick, 2005) and have a negative influence on team performance (Kichuk & Wiesner, 1998).

Another time when confrontation *may* do more harm than good is when the team has placed a member into the role of team scapegoat, which is defined as a member who is devalued and on whom most, if not all, group problems are blamed (Smith & Berg, 1987). Scapegoat

theory comes from the psychodynamic perspective on group behavior (see McLeod & Kettner-Polley, 2004) and argues that non-conformists are often unconsciously placed into the scapegoat role to allow other members to distance themselves from anxiety and threat (Gemmill, 1989). Once the scapegoated member is labeled “the problem”, team members tend to ostracize him or her, which understandably causes the scapegoat to behave negatively or “act out.” In his treatise on prejudice, Allport argued that only scapegoating could account for extreme forms of prejudice (see Glick, 2005). A fuller discussion of scapegoat theory would take this chapter off track. However, it is pertinent to point out that a norm of confrontation could exacerbate troubles for a scapegoated team member. On the other hand, because of its problem and discussion focus, a confrontation norm may provide an opportunity for scapegoated members to get heard – and may even prevent the emergence of a scapegoat.

#### Process Conflict versus Relationship Conflict

Once problem behavior is framed as process conflict, the potential advantages and disadvantages of confronting the behavior can be identified. Like any form of conflict, when process conflict is confronted and made public, it can have constructive or destructive results. For example, some research has suggested that moderate levels of task conflict can be beneficial for group performance on certain tasks (Jehn, 1995). However, when task conflict escalates, it gets personal and easily and frequently turns into destructive relationship conflict. Thus, task conflict has frequently been shown to have a negative effect on team performance (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003).

Indeed, any form of conflict can become destructive to a team and its performance when it spirals out of control, provokes anger and becomes personal (Deutsch, 1973). Decades of research suggests that when conflict becomes personal and turns into relationship conflict, team

performance is hurt in three ways (Pelled, 1996). As described by Pelled (1996), first, the emotional tension in the team is raised, reducing the ability of members to think and assess new information. Secondly, the anger and frustration leave members less receptive to the thoughts and ideas of other members. Thirdly, it wastes time. The longer the conflict remains unresolved, the more time gets wasted.

To maximize team effectiveness, a primary goal of teams who engage in the form of process conflict discussed in this chapter should be to confront problem behavior in a way that minimizes relationship conflict and maximizes the potential benefits of conflict. Those benefits include positive change, the reconciliation of team members' legitimate interests, and, by virtue of the first two points, increased team solidarity (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986). Without the capacity for change brought about by conflict, teams can easily stagnate and lose their ability to be effective.

Attribution theory (Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1967) explains one avenue through which task or process conflict can become personal and spiral into negative relationship conflict. Attribution theorists have shown that people frequently seek information to explain why others behave a certain way. This enables them to determine how to best respond to that behavior. A fundamental distinction made by attribution theory is whether the behavior can be attributed to factors within the person (i.e., an internal attribution) or factors within the environment (i.e., an external attribution) (Heider, 1958). For example, if a group member breaks a norm by not attending a meeting, the action might be attributed to the individual's lazy personality (an internal attribution) or to the group's lack of specificity about the meeting time (an external attribution). There is a discernable difference in how this team member would be treated if the member's behavior was attributed to her personality rather than to the team's situation or environment (Jackson & LePine, 2003). Team members attributing the missed

meeting to something internal to the person are necessarily making the conflict personal. Thus, they are more likely to respond negatively and more likely to inflame relationship conflict. As described by Pruitt and Rubin (1986), this type of conflict easily shifts from one's initial interest in defending one's behavior (or defending the team), to an interest in winning the argument, and eventually to making sure that the other team member is hurt more than oneself. Escalation of conflict happens easily in group settings because as the conflict heats up, more and more members get involved (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986).

#### A Norm of Confronting Members Who Break Norms

We, therefore, propose that one way to keep problem behavior (i.e., process conflict) from turning into relationship conflict is to create a team environment where internal attributions are not so easily applied to problem behavior. Kelley (1968) found internal attributions more likely applied if the behavior in question is *consistently* exhibited by the individual. Adopting a team norm of "confronting members who break norms" would call for addressing problem behavior when it is first exhibited. For example, as soon as the member misses a meeting, the behavior is confronted and discussed. This would help minimize the number of times the person demonstrates problem behavior (e.g., misses meetings) and help minimize the likelihood that the behavior is attributed to internal causes, thus reducing the probability of negative affect and relationship conflict.

However, our previous field research conducted in six diverse organizations (Druskat *et al.*, 2003) suggests that a norm of "confronting members who break norms" is *not* always associated with effective team performance. This makes sense because not all teams have members who exhibit problem behavior or break norms. Thus, they are less likely to utilize, with any frequency, a norm of confronting problem behavior. Team members may not break norms in

these teams because the team is flexible enough to continually assess and adapt its norms as the needs of the team and its members evolve. As discussed above, these teams may have a norm of self-evaluation and continuous improvement (see Druskat & Wolff, 2001). Alternatively, team members may not break norms because their teams are similar to those discussed by LePine and Van Dyne (1998), that is, members use their “voice” to express disagreements over process norms rather than acting out.

Another important reason why there may be no direct association between a norm of confronting members who break norms and team effectiveness, is that team members may not have the skills to effectively confront members who break norms (Molinsky & Margolis, 2005; Von Glinow, Shapiro, & Brett, 2004). Insensitive confrontation could harm the social identity of the member being confronted and cause the member to “lose face”. The affective response to losing face is usually anger and the behavioral response is often revenge (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Thus, ineffective confrontation could lead, rather than alleviate, relationship conflict. We are aware of no research that has examined the skills necessary for effectively confronting problem behavior in teams. Below, we hypothesize a set of emotionally intelligent skills that may increase a team member’s ability to effectively and constructively confront a member who breaks norms.

#### Skills Related to Emotional Intelligence

Group communication theorists provide a number of critical points about effective feedback in teams. Keyton and her colleagues have argued that all messages communicated in teams contain *relational* information (Keyton, 1999). For example, when one member confronts another member’s inappropriate behavior, the latter hears both the content of the message and also its underlying relational message. In the case of confrontation, the relational message might

convey support and caring, or shame, control, and dominance. Thus, confronters need to have the skills necessary to recognize and acknowledge the positive attributes of the member being confronted and to have the self-control to behave in a supportive rather than controlling manner during the confrontation. Without such skills, the confrontation might easily be perceived as a personal attack.

As such, the skills necessary for effective confrontation would likely require emotional intelligence, which has been defined as the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among emotions, and to use emotion information to improve cognitive thinking including the quality of actions and decisions (Mayer & Salovey, 1993). Because emotion pervades every human interaction (Kemper, 1978), emotional intelligence is particularly useful when actions and decisions involve others (Salovey *et al*, 2000).

Work teams are social systems in which interactions among members are fundamental to team outcomes. It is no surprise that emotional intelligence has been labeled a valuable team resource (Elfenbein, 2006). We hypothesize that four skills associated with emotional intelligence will prove an effective team resource by enabling respectful, constructive confrontation that can reduce problem behavior and improve a team's ability to function well. In fact, research suggests that when such respect is conveyed, it not only increases feelings of fair treatment (Tyler, DeGoey, & Smith, 1996) it decreases the emergence of relationship conflict (Cronin & Weingart, 2006 – this volume).

We begin by hypothesizing the relevance of two prototypical emotional intelligence skills (i.e., skills that are included in all models of emotional intelligence, for a review see Druskat, Sala, & Mount, 2006): empathy and self-control. Empathy is defined as sensing another's feelings or perspectives and taking an active interest in the other's concerns (Boyatzis, 1982).

Empathy would enable team members to attend to another member's moods, feelings, and non-verbal behavior and to better understand their cause. It would also help members to effectively interpret how the feedback recipient (e.g., member exhibiting problem behavior) is emotionally reacting to the feedback. Hence it would allow the feedback to be given in a way that it is respectful, least likely to cause defensiveness and anger, and most likely to be seen as a learning opportunity for the team.

The second emotionally intelligent skill we propose to be important to effective confrontation is self-control, defined as the ability to manage (or keep "in check") disruptive emotions and impulses (Boyatzis, 1982). Self-control would allow team members to manage their own emotional reactions to the problem behavior. Managing one's own disappointment or anger over the behavior can help mitigate the escalation of anger during the confrontation and discussion. When the escalation of emotion is stopped, it enables the team to more clearly listen for and seek to understand the situational factors that contributed to the problem behavior.

All of our hypotheses assume that, as discussed above, not all teams engage in confrontation. This implies that the relationship between the level of demonstration of the norm confronting members who break norms and team effectiveness will not be linear, i.e., teams with a low level of this norm may very well be high performing because they either effectively minimize conflict with other norms such as a team self-evaluation norm or use "voice" to express disagreements. On the other hand, for those teams with a degree of conflict not addressed through these other means, a norm of confronting members who break norms will help teams effectively address the conflict. Thus, when the team has the requisite skills to confront members who break norms in an effective manner, the relation between confronting members who break norms and team effectiveness is expected to be U-shaped, i.e., high effectiveness with



either low or high levels of the norm and low effectiveness for groups with conflict but that have not developed strong enough levels of the norm to ameliorate the conflict effectively. Such a U-shaped curve can be represented by a quadratic relationship. On the other hand, if the team does not have the requisite skills to effectively confront members, then we expect either that the more the group confronts members who break norms, the more negative effects the confrontation will have, thus, reducing team effectiveness in a linear relation to the degree of confrontation; or, it is possible that the positive and negative effects of confrontation will cancel each other out leading to a neutral condition where the degree of confrontation is not related to the level of team effectiveness.

Thus, we hypothesize that mean level of skill (e.g., empathy, self-control) in the team will moderate the relationship between the level of the norm of confronting members who break norms and team effectiveness. For high levels of the required skill the relationship will be quadratic and for low levels of the required skill the relationship will be either a negative linear one or no relationship if the positive and negative effects of the conflict cancel out. Our first two hypotheses are the following:

**Hypothesis 1:** The effect of a norm of “confronting members who break norms” on team effectiveness will be moderated by the mean level of team member skill at empathy.

**1a:** In teams with high mean levels of empathy, there will be a significant positive quadratic relationship between confronting members and team effectiveness.

**1b:** In teams with low mean levels of empathy, there will be either no relationship or a significant negative linear relationship between confronting members and team effectiveness.

**Hypothesis 2:** The effect of a norm of “confronting members who break norms” on team effectiveness will be moderated by mean level of team member skill at self-control.

**2a:** In teams with high mean levels of self-control, there will be a significant positive quadratic relationship between confronting members and team effectiveness.

**2b:** In teams with low mean levels of self-control, there will be either no relationship or a significant negative linear relationship between confronting members and team effectiveness.

In their treatise on effective feedback, Ashford and Cummings (1983) raise another set of issues that shed light on the skills required for effective confrontation. They argue that effective feedback requires a shift in thinking and behavior. Consistent with our discussion thus far, this shift requires that both parties approach the feedback as a learning and development opportunity. Both parties take an active role in seeking information and discussing the feedback (Ashford & Cummings, 1983). In this context, the learning and development would need to flow both ways with the intent that learning and change occur for both the individual being confronted and for the team.

To facilitate the experience of confrontation as a learning opportunity and not a “top-down” command, we hypothesize the relevance of two additional emotional intelligence skills (see Goleman, 2001; Sala, 2006): persuasiveness and developing-others. Persuasiveness is defined as using tactics to influence another (Boyatzis, 1982). Persuasiveness enables one to gain the “buy-in” of the person he or she is working to persuade. Skill at persuading or influencing others would enable the team members doing the confronting to convince the confronted member that their intent is to open a discussion about team process norms and not to mount a

personal attack. Persuasiveness skills would be an important resource because feedback recipients often feel criticized (Baumeister & Cairns, 1992). Moreover, persuasiveness or influence skills would be useful for convincing both the member exhibiting the problem behavior and all members that everyone's behavior may need to change after the discussion.

Skill at "developing others" is defined as the ability to support, stimulate, and engage someone in learning or developing him- or herself, or to improve his or her performance (Boyatzis, 1982). Such a skill would increase team members' ability to engage the confronted member in a discussion focused on learning and development. We offer the following two hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 3:** The effect of a norm of "confronting members who break norms" on team effectiveness will be moderated by mean level of team member skill at persuasiveness.

**3a:** In teams with high mean levels of persuasiveness, there will be a significant positive quadratic relationship between confronting members and team effectiveness.

**3b:** In teams with low mean levels of persuasiveness, there will be either no relationship or a significant negative linear relationship between confronting members and team effectiveness.

**Hypothesis 4:** The effect of a norm of "confronting members who break norms" on team effectiveness will be moderated by mean level of team member skill at "developing others".

**4a:** In teams with high mean levels of developing others, there will be a significant positive quadratic relationship between confronting members and team effectiveness.

**4b:** In teams with low mean levels of developing others, there will be either no relationship or a significant negative linear relationship between confronting members and team effectiveness.

Below, we present the study used to test our hypotheses.

## Method

### Sample

The present study was conducted as part of a larger longitudinal study of three hundred and eighty-two full-time MBA students, comprising 48 self-managing teams. Teams were composed before the start of the MBA program (during orientation in August) and remained intact working on small or large projects in each course until the end of the first academic year (May). Classes were all lock step and standardized so that all students took the same courses in the same order using standardized syllabi. Teams were composed by faculty in the organizational behavior department who aimed to maximize the demographic diversity within each team. Participation in the study was voluntary. Students were ensured confidentiality. To ensure that participation would not affect course grades, signed permissions were kept in an envelope until after grades were turned in. Ninety-two percent of students agreed to participate in the study. The percentage of members responding from each team ranged from 50% (1 team) to 100% (19 teams), with a mean of 84%. Missing data were due mostly to random absences from the classes at which data were collected. Teams ranged in size from seven to ten members with most teams (27) having eight members and only one team having ten members. The sample consisted of 270 males and 112 females who ranged in age from 20 to 52 with a mean age of 27 (SD = 4.11) and a median age of 27.

Throughout the first academic year, student teams were self-managing; that is, they held full responsibility for executing their work and for monitoring and managing their own process (Hackman, 1986). For example, in their organizational behavior course, teams were required to complete a large team project that involved data collection in an organization around a chosen topic and a synthesis of that data with scholarly information. The team project grade (team-level grade) was worth 35% of a member's individual grade in the course. The project, which was designed to foster team interdependence, culminated in a final written and oral report with recommendations for solving the problem. Written and oral reports were presented to their class and to their participating organizations.

### Individual Skills

To operationalize and measure the four emotionally intelligent skills, we looked to Boyatzis' (1982, 1995) taxonomy of managerial competencies, which is the basis of Goleman's model of EI competencies (Goleman, 2001), and is arguably the most well cited taxonomy of individual knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs). Researchers who have used Boyatzis' coding scheme to code qualitative data have found it to yield reliable and valid indicators of specific skills and abilities (see Spencer & Spencer, 1993). To operationalize the EI skills of empathy, self-control, persuasiveness, and developing others, we used Boyatzis' definitions and coding scheme, which presented in Table 1.

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Critical incident interviews (CII). Individual skills were measured during the first two weeks of the MBA program (late August to early September), through the use of one-hour tape-

recorded, standardized critical incident interviews (see Flanagan, 1954) that were subsequently coded for exhibition of the skills using Boyatzis' (1995) coding scheme.

We used an adaptation of Flanagan's (1954) CII methodology, which was designed by McClelland and his colleagues (McClelland & Dailey, 1972). It focuses on obtaining highly detailed descriptions of job events, rather than on attitudes and attributions. Research has shown this type of CII format to be a reliable, valid, and useful method for obtaining accurate and detailed descriptions of work behavior (Motowidlo et al., 1992; Ronan & Latham, 1974) and for measuring individual skills and abilities (McClelland, 1976, 1998). A primary reason we chose to use the CII method was because it has been found to be an objective measure of the skills with which we were interested (Boyatzis, 1982) and we felt it was a better measure of skills than self-report data could provide.

This CII method we used requires interviewees to alternate between describing job events in which they felt effective and ineffective. The role of the CII interviewer is to obtain detailed information while remaining as unobtrusive as possible. Interviewer questions are limited to: What led up to the event? Who did and said what to whom? What happened next? What were you thinking or feeling at that moment? and What was the outcome. Although the CII method provides a retrospective account of behavior and thoughts, validity and reliability of event descriptions are strong (Motowidlo et al., 1992; Ronan & Latham, 1974) because the interviewer probes for *highly* detailed responses. Further, because the interviewee selects the events to discuss, they are usually salient events for which details are easy to recall. Discussions of both effective and ineffective events were sought because they reveal a range of challenges experienced by the individual.

Ten doctoral assistants who underwent two days of formal interview training with an expert on the CII methodology conducted the critical incident interviews. Each interview began with a standardized introduction. Interviews were included as a course requirement and students were asked for permission to tape record the interview. Students were informed that the interview would be used to provide them with feedback on their skills. (About 6 weeks after the interviews, students received individual reports that showed the skills and abilities for which they were coded). The interviewer then proceeded with the critical incident interview, which consisted of asking the participant to describe events within the past year in which he or she either felt effective or ineffective inside or outside of work. Most events discussed in this study involved work incidents in the year prior to joining the MBA program. Examples of events discussed include overcoming challenges to complete difficult projects at work, managing problem employees during specific incidents at work, and the process from beginning to end of gaining entrance into MBA programs.

Coding the interviews. The tape recorded interviews were coded by doctoral assistants who underwent a two-week training period that involved coding practice tapes and getting feedback from experts on the code (i.e., colleagues of Richard Boyatzis who worked closely with the code) on their level of accuracy in identifying the skills and abilities. To be selected as a coder, doctoral assistants had to achieve a minimum of .70 inter-coder reliability with expert coders for all skills.

Coders who passed the reliability test coded the audiotapes of all student interviews. The end result was a frequency count of the number of times each student was coded for each of the four skills used in the study. The codebook definitions used for coding the abilities are listed in Table 1. The code was applied to a behavior described in an interview if it met two criteria: 1) the interviewee intended to exhibit the behavior, and 2) the behavior was consistent with one of the

specific examples listed in the codebook. Coders erred on the side of conservatism and coded by the rule of thumb—“When in doubt, leave it out.”

### Confronting Members who Break Norms

A questionnaire measuring group norms was administered in November of the first semester at which point teams had been working together in all classes for three months. A scale to measure confronting members who break norms (among other norms) was developed and pre-tested using two sections of MBA students who were not involved in the present study. The final scale for “confronting members who break norms” included the following five items: (1) “In our team we will inform a member if his or her behavior is unacceptable by team standards,” (2) “If someone isn’t pulling his or her weight on our team, we ignore it (reverse scored),” (3) “In our team we figure that if a members is doing something we disagree with its best not to bring it up (reverse scored),” (4) “In our team someone will confront you if you aren’t performing the way the team expects,” (5) “In our team members will flat out tell you if you are doing something considered unacceptable.” The scale was measured using 7-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (Very Inaccurate) to 7 (Very Accurate). Cronbach’s alpha reliability of the scale was .77.

Intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) (James, 1982) indicated the between-group variance was significantly greater ( $F_{48,279} > 1.9$ ,  $p < .001$ ) than the within-group variance, thus allowing us to create a group level variable by taking the mean of individual responses to the questionnaire items.

### Team Effectiveness

Team effectiveness ratings were collected at the end of the first semester (December) and were obtained from course instructors who served as group consultants. Instructors rated effectiveness on four dimensions that assess both customer satisfaction and team viability: group product quality, performance compared to other groups, the group’s ability to be self-directed,



and the group's ability to continue working together effectively in the future. The item response format ranged from 1 (Poor) to 7 (Outstanding). A factor analysis of the ratings yielded a single underlying factor, thus, instructor ratings were averaged to form a single score.

### Results

Table 2 presents intercorrelations among all the variables studied along with descriptive statistics.

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Insert Table 2 about here  
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Our hypotheses propose that skill level moderates the relationship between confronting members who break norms and team effectiveness. For high levels of skill, the relationship between skill level and team effectiveness is hypothesized to be quadratic, with low and high levels of confronting producing the highest level of team effectiveness. For low levels of a skill the relationship between confronting and team effectiveness was hypothesized to be either a negative linear relationship or no significant relationship. To test the hypotheses we first divided the sample into high and low levels of the skill being tested. This was done by dividing the sample into two groups split at the median. For each skill tested we performed both a linear regression and a quadratic regression. If our hypotheses are supported, we would expect the linear regression to show no significant relationships for the high skill group and either no relationship or a negative linear relationship for the low skill group. The quadratic regression would show a significant relationship for the high skill group and no significant relationship for the low skill group.

Tables 3 through 6 show the results of the linear and quadratic regressions for the skills of empathy, self control, persuasion, and developing others respectively. For all regressions with

significant beta coefficients, the overall model was significant at  $p < .05$ . For all models with non-significant beta coefficients, the overall model was not significant. Figures 1 through 4 plot the results of the regressions.

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Insert Tables 3 to 6 and Figures 1 to 4 about here  
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Hypotheses 1 through 3 state that empathy, self control, and persuasion, respectively, will moderate the relationship between confronting members and team effectiveness. Tables 3 through 5 show that the linear model does not show a significant relationship between confronting members who break norms and team effectiveness for either level of skill. It also shows that the quadratic model is also not significant for the low skill group. For the high skill group there is a significant relationship between confronting members who break norms and team effectiveness. Thus, hypotheses 1 through 3 are supported. Empathy, self control, and persuasion all moderate the relationship between confronting members who break norms and team effectiveness. Furthermore, the relationship for the high skill group is quadratic in nature, i.e., U-shaped. The low skill group showed no significant relationships between confronting members who break norms and team effectiveness.

Hypothesis 4 states that developing others will moderate the relationship between confronting members and team effectiveness. The results of the regression are shown in Table 6 and plotted in Figure 4. Although there is a moderating effect, as with the previously discussed skills, it is not as we hypothesized. Similar to the other skills there is no linear relationship between confronting members who break norms and team effectiveness. There is a quadratic relationship but unlike the other competencies, it is the low skill group that shows a significant relationship. The high skill group does not show a significant relationship between confronting

members who break norms and team effectiveness. Although there is a moderating relationship it is not as predicted by hypothesis 4, thus, hypothesis 4 is not supported.

### Discussion

As demographic and value diversity continue to increase in team settings (Jehn & Mannix, 2001; Jehn et al., 1999), team member process needs are increasingly likely to conflict with emergent process norms. In this study, we found that when disagreement over process norms (i.e., process conflict) is enacted in the form of “problem behavior” (i.e., breaking team norms) rather than through using “voice,” confronting and discussing the problem behavior is an effective tool.

Our study contributes to theory and research on team conflict and team effectiveness by revealing that a team norm of “confronting members who break norms” is linked to effectiveness when team members have the emotional intelligent skills that help to make confrontation constructive. Specifically, we found that when members of a team averaged high levels of empathy, self-control, and persuasiveness, a norm of confronting members who break norms was associated with team effectiveness. It is important to emphasize that that the relationship between confronting members who break norms and team effectiveness is not linear – it is quadratic. In other words, some teams in our sample were high performing without instituting a norm of “confronting members who break norms.” These teams were likely similar to the teams discussed by LePine and Van Dyne (1998) in which members easily used “voice” to convey their needs and differences of opinion. They also may have had other norms in place (e.g., team self-evaluation) that made a norm of confronting members who break norms less necessary.

Our hypothesis that average team member skills at “developing others” would moderate a link between confronting members who break norms and team effectiveness was not supported.

This may be because skill at “developing others” leads one to think that individual change and development is the most successful route to change. As mentioned, in order to be constructive rather than destructive, a norm of confronting members who break norms must engender a two-way discussion that considers changes to process norms a reasonable action. Also, it is likely most helpful when confronters treat the problem behavior as a conflict over process norms (i.e., process-conflict) and seek to attribute the behavior to external causes (see Heider, 1958). Being skillful at “developing others” may make one more likely to assume that problem behavior signifies the need for individual change.

#### A Unique Perspective on Process Conflict

In this paper, we defined problem behavior as a form of process conflict. This allowed us to conceptualize problem behavior as potentially constructive rather than destructive for team effectiveness. It is this constructive mindset that would enable team members to apply an external attribution to problem behavior rather than an internal attribution, so that problem behavior can turn into a conversation over process norms rather than evolving into relationship conflict. Given the fundamental nature of internal attributions, our perspective is optimistic. Is it realistic? Our study results suggest it is in some circumstances. It appears to be realistic when team members have the emotional/interpersonal skills to facilitate constructive confrontation.

Our findings may also shed light on recent findings about the relationship between task conflict and team performance. In the past decade, researchers and theorists have argued that task conflict, unlike relationship conflict, should be functional for teams because it increases debate and forces the team to confront issues it might otherwise have ignored (see Jehn, 1995; Simons & Peterson, 2000). However, an important meta-analysis recently revealed that task conflict is as negatively associated with team performance as is relationship conflict (DeDreu & Weingart,

2003). This makes sense given the propensity for any type of conflict to escalate and become emotional and destructive (Deutsch, 1973). The results of our study suggest that a relatively high level of emotional/interpersonal skills in the team might ensure that task conflict is delivered and discussed in such a way that it doesn't escalate or become emotional. These skills may even enable task conflict to boost team effectiveness; especially if the definition of team effectiveness includes team development and continued viability.

### Time and Confrontation

As discussed in this volume by Wageman (2006), interventions to address conflict are more successful when well timed. We believe that to be optimally effective, a norm of "confronting members who break norms" should be instituted early in a team's development. This would make it easier to avoid attributing problem behavior to something internal to the individual (i.e., personality or attitude) and make it easier to change process norms before they are well crystallized. In fact, Tuckman (1965) argued that conflict in the form of "storming" (in some ways similar to confrontation) was an early predictable stage in a group's history. He proposed that storming would continue to occur and would prevent a team from becoming fully functional until all members' process needs were sufficiently met.

As we discussed earlier, it would seem optimal for a team to minimize the amount of confrontation required by also instituting a norm of team-self evaluation (Druskat & Wolff, 2001; Druskat et al., 2003). This would necessitate that team members periodically step back and evaluate how effectively the team is performing. It would support the use of "voice" for constructive change (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998) and enable a team to address problems before they escalate and to efficiently adapt to member and team changing needs (Salas, Sims, & Burke, 2005). We propose that confrontation should be used more often in the early stages of a team's

tenure and would become less necessary once the norm of team self-evaluation is trusted to enable necessary change.

### Conclusion

Since we first conceptualized the idea of a norm labeled “confronting members who break norms,” we have had several colleagues (including some at the KTAG conference at which this paper was originally presented) tell us that the term “confrontation” conjures up unsympathetic feedback. We have thought about changing the label, but no other label suitably fits the direct feedback we have repeatedly seen enacted by team members in our field research (Druskat, 1996; Druskat et al., 2003). The term has also been used by others to define a problem-solving approach to conflict resolution (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). In fact, Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) who argued about the importance of confrontation norms in organizations, operationalized “confrontation” with survey items that included: “come now and let us reason together” and “by digging and digging, the truth is discovered.”

Clearly our study has flaws and future research is necessary to support the reliability of our findings. It would be useful to get a measure of the degree to which members of the group perceived problem behavior and the degree to which they perceived those problems were addressed through the norm of “confronting members who break norms.” This would enable and examination of team effectiveness by the perceived degree of problems in the group.

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Table 1

Boyatzis' Managerial Competencies<sup>a</sup> with Definitions and Clusters Used For the Present Study

Skill/Competency	Definition	Examples
Empathy	The intent is to understand others.	<p>a.) Understands the strengths and limitations of others;</p> <p>b.) Listens to others by asking and waiting for their reply, or taking the time to allow another person to explain or describe something at his/her own pace and manner;</p> <p>c.) Demonstrates an ability to see things from someone else's perspective;</p> <p>d.) Demonstrates the ability to accurately read, or interpret the moods; feelings, or non-verbal behavior of others; or</p> <p>e.) Understands the underlying causes for someone's feelings, behavior, or concerns.</p>
Self-Control	The intent is to inhibit personal needs, or desires for the benefit of organizational, family, or group needs, although it is often not visible (i.e., if a person has self-control you cannot easily see them controlling themselves).	<p>a.) Remains calm in stressful settings (e.g., when being attacked);</p> <p>b.) Explicitly inhibits aggressive outbursts or impulsive behavior that may hurt others or hurt progress toward goals; or</p> <p>c.) Explicitly denies a personal impulse, need, or desire for the good of an organizational or group need.</p>
Persuasiveness	The intent is to wield effective tactics for persuasion.	<p>a.) Uses factual arguments to persuade and influence others;</p> <p>b.) Takes symbolic actions to have a specific impact on the audience;</p> <p>c.) Convinces by appealing to people's self-interest;</p> <p>d.) Gains the "buy-in" of influential parties and enlists their help in convincing others; or</p> <p>e.) Gets people to "buy-in" or take ownership of ideas or plans.</p>

Table 1 (continued)

Skill/Competency	Definitions	Examples
Developing others	The intent is to support and stimulate someone to develop his/her abilities or improve his/her performance toward an objective.	<p>a.) Gives someone performance feedback to be used in improving or maintaining effective performance;</p> <p>b.) Provides others with information, tools, other resources, or opportunities to help them get their job done or to improve their abilities (e.g., giving a promotion as part of their development);</p> <p>c.) Invites others to discuss performance problems with the explicit purpose of improving their performance;</p> <p>d.) Explicitly tells another that he/she can accomplish an objective and provides encouragement and support.</p>

Note. <sup>a</sup>Adapted from "Cornerstones of change: Building the path for self-directed learning," by R. E. Boyatzis, 1995, in R. E. Boyatzis, S. S. Cowen, and D. A. Kolb, Innovations in professional education, pp. 82-88. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.

Table 2

Correlations and Descriptive Statistics (n=347 individuals; n= 48 teams)

	Mean	S.D.	Team Effectiveness	Confronting	Empathy	Self- Control	Persuasion
Team Effectiveness	5.18	1.16					
Confronting Members	4.22	.59	.157				
Empathy	1.05	.65	.080	.011			
Self-Control	.27	.21	.124	.030	.36*		
Persuasion	1.37	.55	-.036	.139	.67**	.43**	
Developing Others	.41	.25	-.051	.146	.29*	-.04	.33*

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3

Linear and quadratic regression models of team effectiveness on “confronting members who break norms” with Empathy as the moderating variable (n=48)

Model	Empathy	Independent Variable	Standardized	t	Sig.	R-Sq. of Model	
			Coefficients				
			B				
Linear Model	Low	Confronting Members	-.134	-.651	.522	.018	
	High	Confronting Members	.343	1.674	.109	.118	
Quadratic Model	Low	Confronting Members	-1.396	-.550	.588	.029	
		Confronting Members ** 2	1.266	.499	.623		
	High	Confronting Members	-5.197	-2.300	.032	.323	
		Confronting Members ** 2	5.559	2.460	.023		

Table 4

Linear and quadratic regression models of team effectiveness on “confronting members who break norms” with Self-Control as the moderating variable (n=48)

Model	Self-Control	Independent Variable	Standardized	t	Sig.	R-Sq. of Model	
			Coefficients				
			B				
Linear Model	Low	Confronting Members	.093	.456	.652	.009	
	High	Confronting Members	.264	1.225	.235	.070	
Quadratic Model	Low	Confronting Members	-2.147	-.888	.384	.045	
		Confronting Members ** 2	2.248	.930	.362		
	High	Confronting Members	-5.718	-2.319	.032	.291	
		Confronting Members ** 2	6.001	2.433	.025		

Table 5

Linear and quadratic regression models of team effectiveness on “confronting members who break norms” with Persuasion as the moderating variable (n=48)

Model	Persuasion	Independent Variable	Standardized	t	Sig.	R-Sq. of Model	
			Coefficients				
			B				
Linear Model	Low	Confronting Members	.026	.119	.906	.001	
	High	Confronting Members	.250	1.237	.229	.062	
Quadratic Model	Low	Confronting Members	-.511	-.222	.827	.003	
		Confronting Members ** 2	.488	.212	.834		
	High	Confronting Members	-6.635	-2.665	.014	.305	
		Confronting Members ** 2	6.902	2.772	.011		



Table 6

Linear and quadratic regression models of team effectiveness on “confronting members who break norms” with Developing Others as the moderating variable (n=48)

Model	Developing Others	Independent Variable	Standardized	t	Sig.	R-Sq. of Model	
			Coefficients				
			B				
Linear Model	Low	Confronting Members	.164	.760	.456	.027	
	High	Confronting Members	.158	.769	.450	.025	
Quadratic Model	Low	Confronting Members	-6.459	-2.348	.029	.246	
		Confronting Members ** 2	6.639	2.414	.025		
	High	Confronting Members	-2.565	-1.119	.275	.084	
		Confronting Members ** 2	2.734	1.193	.246		

Figure 1: Fit of linear and quadratic curves relating “confronting members who break norms” to team effectiveness for low and high levels of empathy.

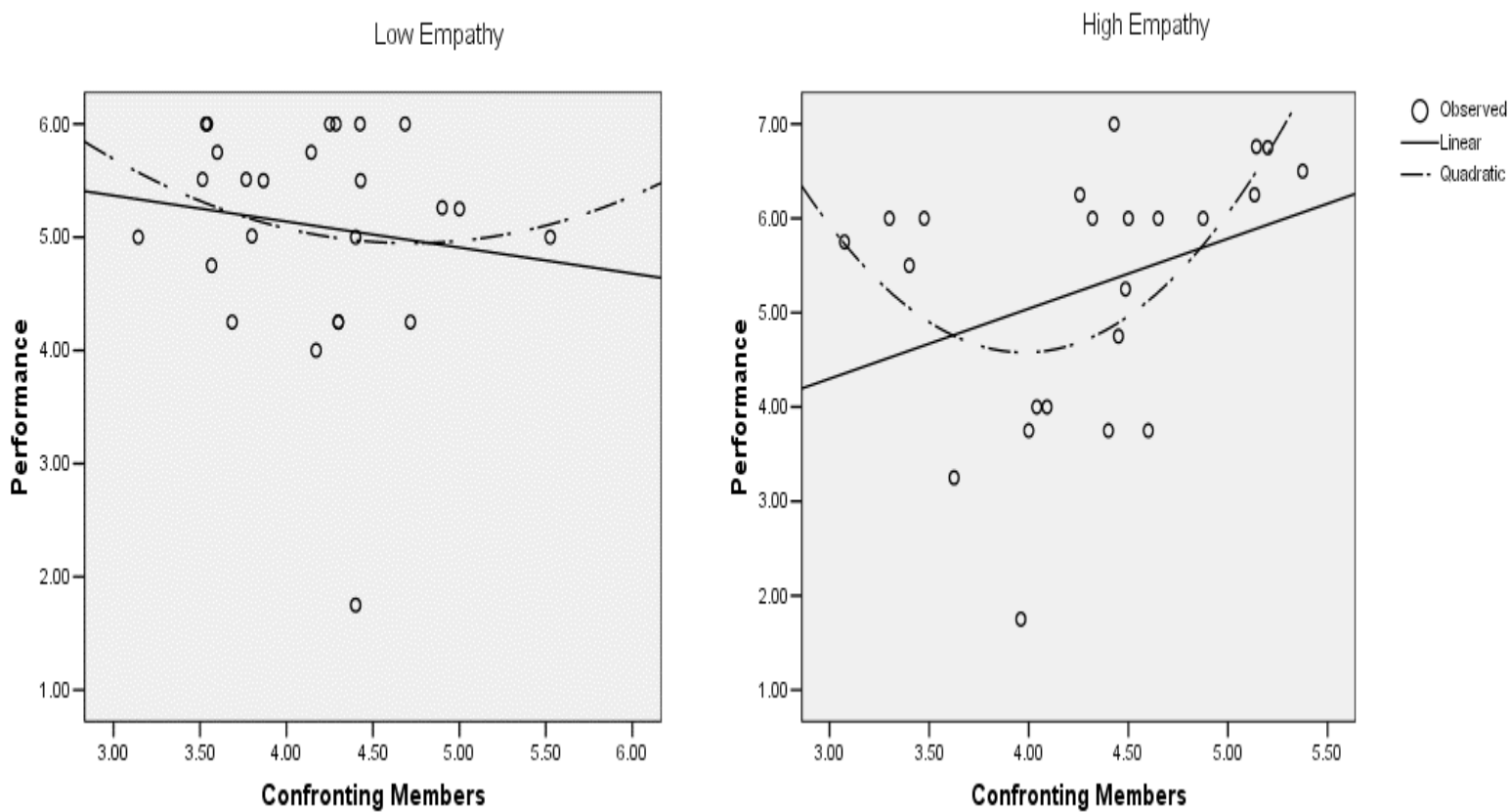


Figure 2: Fit of linear and quadratic curves relating “confronting members who break norms” to team effectiveness for low and high levels of self control.

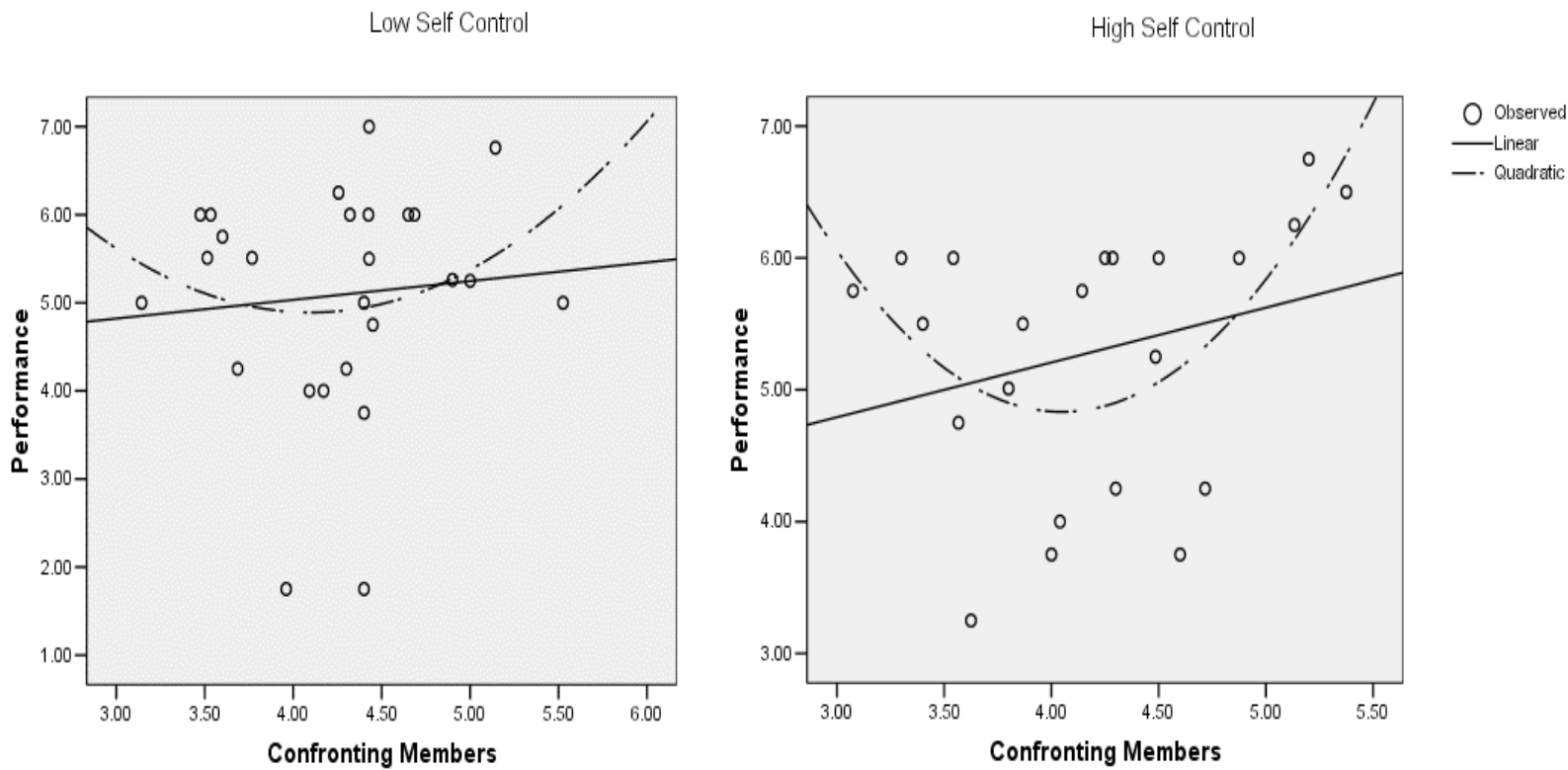


Figure 3: Fit of linear and quadratic curves relating “confronting members who break norms” to team effectiveness for low and high levels of persuasion.

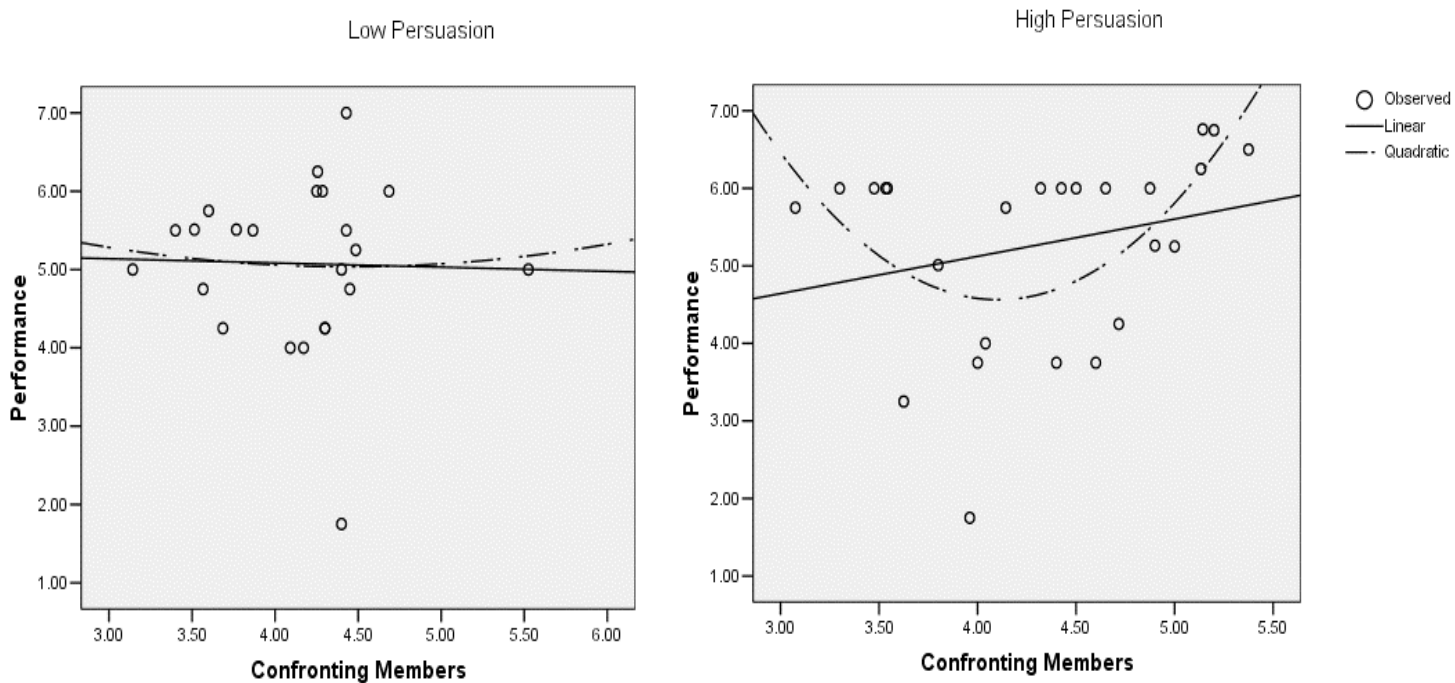


Figure 4: Fit of linear and quadratic curves relating “confronting members who break norms” to team effectiveness” for low and high levels of developing others.

