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Diverse Group Effectiveness:

Co-occurrence of Task and Relationship Conflict, and Transformational Leadership

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3rd August 2021



BRINGING
THE MANAGER
BACK IN **MANAGEMENT**
81st Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management
29 July – 4 August 2021 | A Virtual Experience

Personal Perspective – Dr Kevin

Maher

- Head of Academic School (‘Faculty’) of Business, Law and Computing
- Buckinghamshire New University – a small vocational university in the United Kingdom
- 30 permanent staff + 15 part-time staff; a diverse group in terms of gender, nationality, ethnicity, age, subject expertise, experience, working style and preferences
- As a manager, I am interested in effectively managing work of individuals and teams, towards strong performance and outputs (and work-life balance!)
- Supervisor of Mohanad Dahlan (PhD student)



Motivation – Analysis of the literature

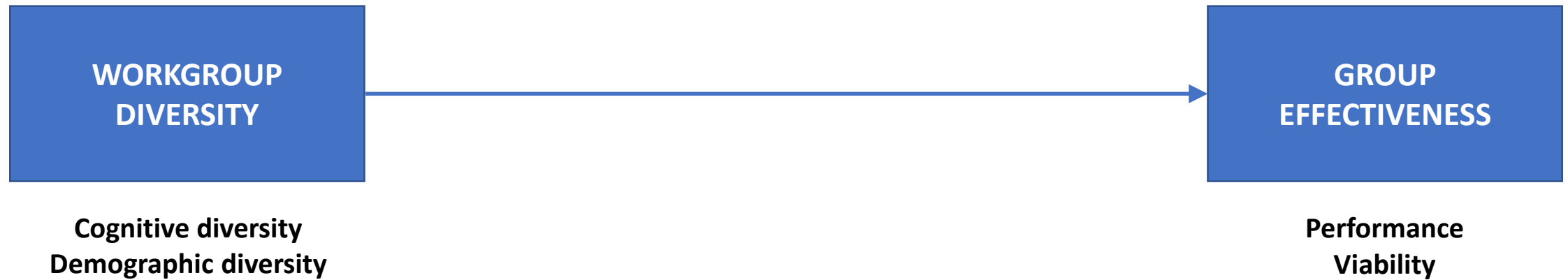
- Group-based work is crucially important for the successful operation of organisations
- Workforce diversity has then inspired research to examine the relationship between group diversity and group processes and outcomes (Horwitz & Horwitz, 2007)
- Studies examining main effect relationships between diversity and group outcomes have reported mixed results - cumulative findings have been weak and inconsistent, so there remains some lack of clarity

(Ayoko & Konrad, 2012; Bell *et al.*, 2011; Harrison & Klein, 2007; Horwitz & Horwitz, 2007; Jackson *et al.*, 2003; Leung *et al.*, 2008; Mannix & Neale, 2005; Neumeyer & Santos, 2020; Shin & Zhou, 2007; Valls *et al.*, 2016; Van der Vegt & Bunderson, 2005; Van Dijk, 2017; Van Veelen & Ufkes, 2019; Van Knippenberg *et al.*, 2004)

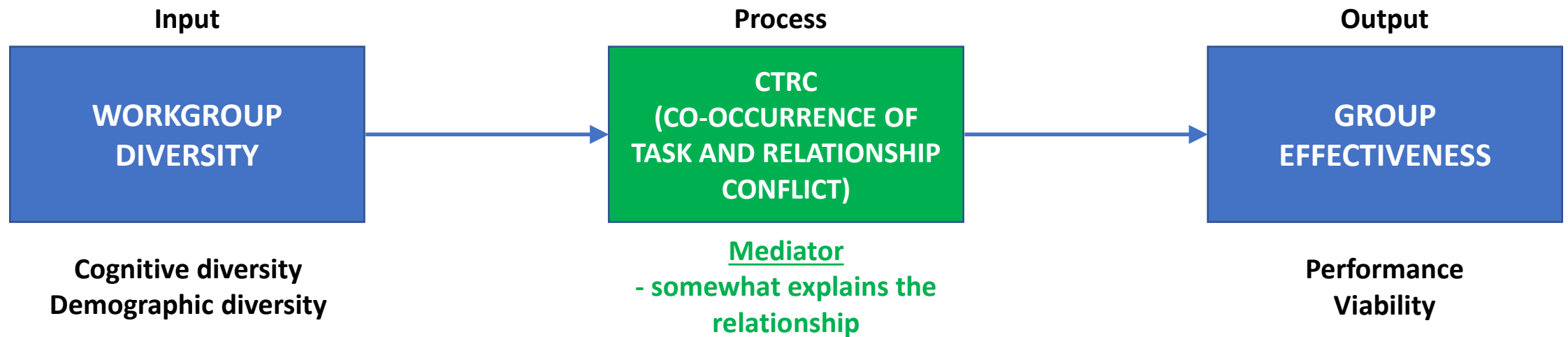
The study's objectives/intentions

1. Offering a fresh treatment of the association between diversity and workgroup effectiveness
2. Emphasising the centrality of the harmful effects of the co-occurrence of task and relationship conflicts (CTRC) on this association
3. Highlighting the potential influence of transformational leadership (TFL) in decreasing this harmful effect

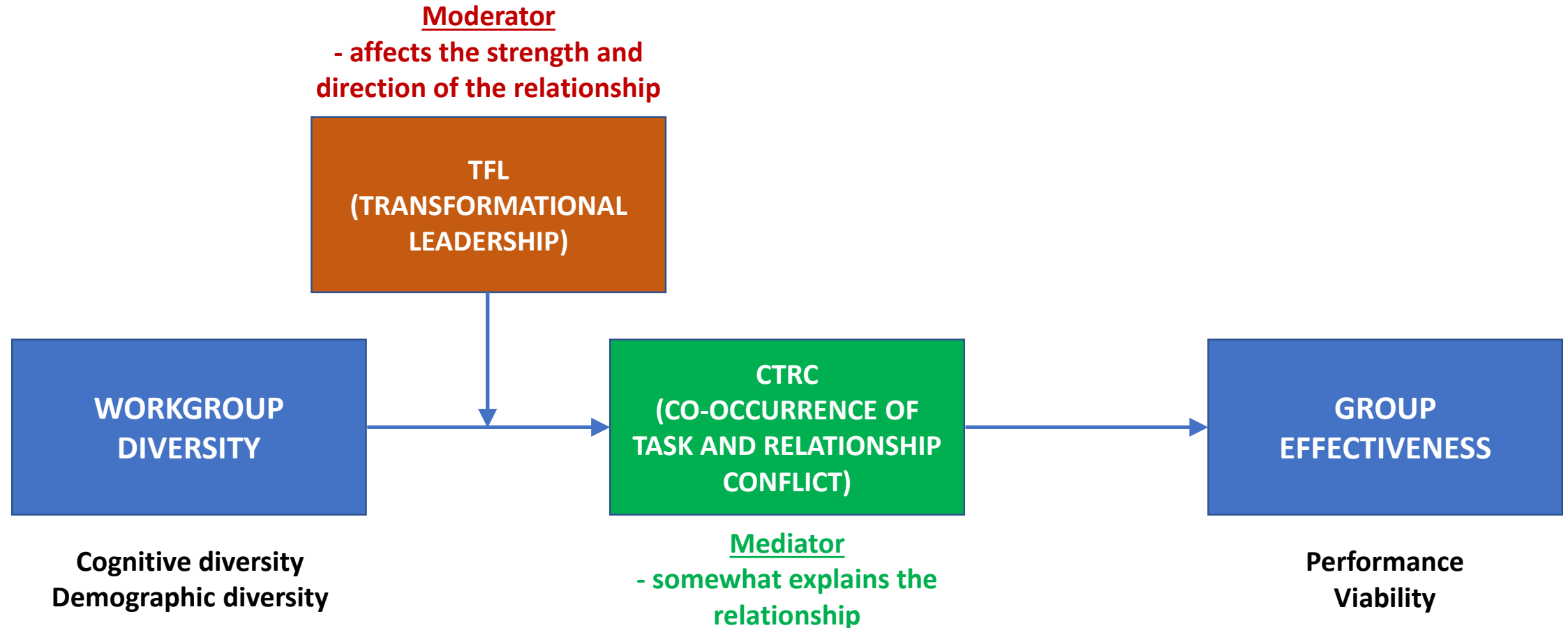
model



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model



Objective 1

- Offering a fresh approach for looking at diversity and its consequences
 - Information processing perspective (cognitive diversity) suggests benefits in terms of variety of skills and knowledge, creativity, problem solving, and enhanced performance (e.g., Chi *et al.*, 2009; Tyran & Gibson, 2008; Van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007)
 - Social categorisation perspective (demographic diversity) suggests undermining factors, such as lack of cohesion, weak communication, personal conflicts (Williams & O'Reilly, 1998)
- Both of these perspectives were appropriately considered when investigating relationships between diversity and two defined components of group effectiveness - group performance and group viability (McGrath, 1984; Sundstrom *et al.*, 1990)

Objective 2

- Researchers have explored processes that have mediated the relationship between group diversity and group effectiveness (group performance and group viability), highlighting dimensions such as learning behaviour, communication, conflict, identification, cohesion, but the picture is still incomplete (e.g., Bui *et al.*, 2019; Kearney & Gebert, 2009; Marlow *et al.*, 2018; Tekleab *et al.*, 2016; Valls *et al.*, 2016; Van der Vegt & Bunderson, 2005)
- This research addresses an omission in the published literature concerning the co-occurrence of task and relationship conflict (CTRC) within a group, and its mediating impact
- CTRC is treated as a single bivariate construct within the research methodology and analysis

Objective 3

- Published studies on leadership attributes and behaviours but limited work about the influence of leadership on group processes and outcomes (e.g., Avolio & Yammarino, 2002; Nishii & Mayer, 2009; Ospina & Foldy, 2009)
- Some studies report inspiration and communication of vision as positive leader contributions that mitigate conflict (e.g., Ayoko & Callan, 2010; Ayoko *et al.*, 2008, 2012; Gibson & Vermeulen, 2003; Marlow *et al.*, 2018; Nishii & Mayer, 2009; Stewart & Johnson, 2009)
- Very few empirical studies have looked at moderating influence of transformational leadership in the context of diversity and performance (e.g., Kearney & Gebert, 2009; Shin & Zhou, 2007)
- This new research argues that team leaders exhibiting transformational leadership (TFL) can moderate the interference of Co-occurrence of Task and Relationship Conflict (CTRC) upon group performance

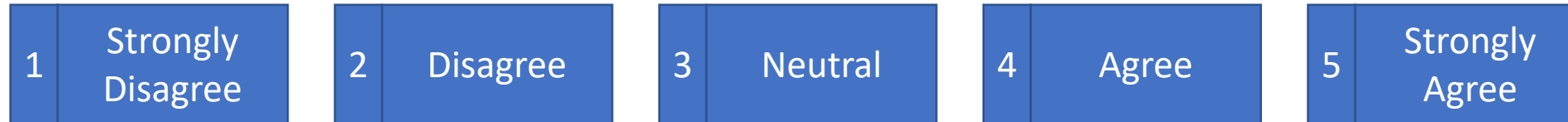
Methodology

- Questionnaire distributed to faculty members at three private universities in the Middle East (Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain)
- Participants gave responses to questions or statements, which afforded some measures of cognitive diversity, relationship conflict, task conflict, TFL, group performance, group viability, several demographic and control variables
- The final sample comprised 354 faculty staff across 56 departments (79.5% response rate)
- Sample demographic data: 54% male, 70.5% PhDs, average age / 39.8 years, average organizational tenure / 4.3 years

Examples

- **Diversity**

The members of our department differ in their ways of thinking



- **Transformational leadership**

Our group leader emphasises the importance of having a collective sense of mission when working in the group as a whole

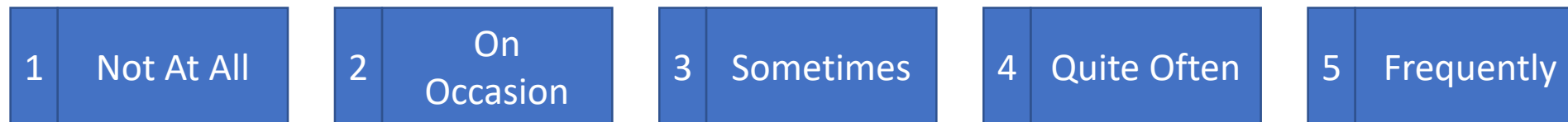


Table 2 - Descriptive statistics

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	Means	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Group size	6.32	4.81	1									
2. Task interdependence	3.84	0.62	0.00	1								
3. Cognitive diversity	2.99	0.71	0.01	-0.12	1							
4. Transformational leadership	2.24	0.64	-0.11	0.02	-0.08	1						
5. Task conflict	2.53	0.61	-0.14	0.09	0.33*	-0.16	1					
6. Relationship conflict	2.07	0.62	0.01	0.12	0.27*	-0.27*	0.29*	1				
7. Co-occurrence	0.57	0.24	-0.19	-0.08	0.28*	-0.18	0.01	-0.01	1			
8. Demographic diversity	0.37	0.13	0.34**	-0.15	-0.11	-0.05	-0.18	0.07	0.09	1		
9. Group performance	3.17	1.16	0.08	0.05	-0.16	0.20	-0.01	-0.08	-0.54**	-0.13	1	
10. Group viability	2.63	0.90	0.19	0.14	-0.30*	0.01	0.02	-0.03	-0.45**	-0.24	0.10	1

Notes: $n=56$ groups. ** $p<0.01$; * $p<0.05$.

Tests of hypotheses

- We used hierarchical regression analyses and MedCurve SPSS macro (Hayes and Preacher, 2010) to test several hypotheses
- Of the THIRTEEN hypotheses investigated
 - Statistical analysis SUPPORTED – NINE hypotheses
 - Statistical analysis DID NOT SUPPORT – FOUR hypotheses
 - THREE of the supported hypotheses are highlighted here

- Hypothesis 1A - Cognitive diversity has a curvilinear U-shaped effect on group performance (**Supported**) ($H1a: B= 1.08, p<0.01$)

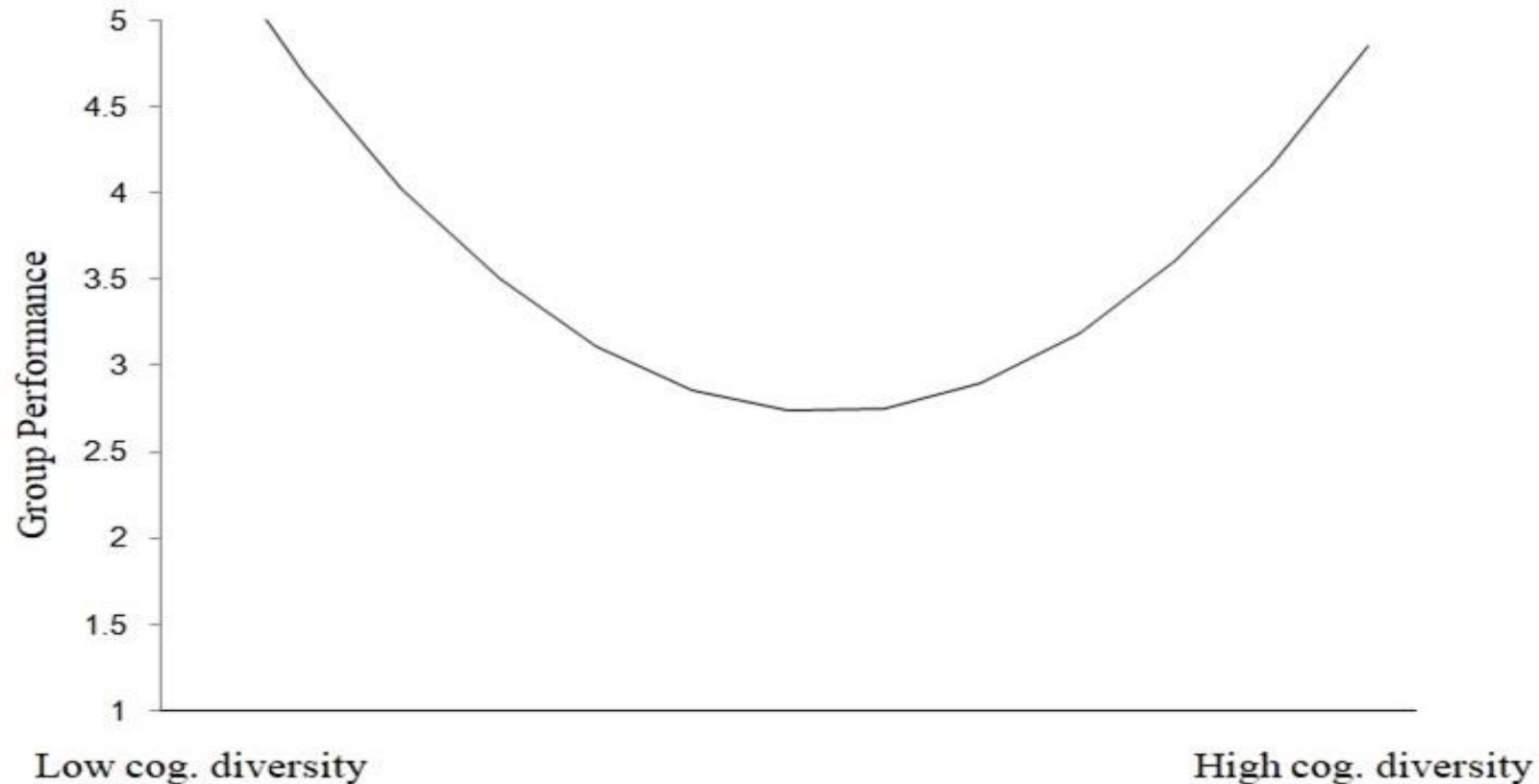


Figure 2

- Hypothesis 3A - Cognitive diversity has a curvilinear inverted U-shaped effect on CTRC (Supported) ($H3a: B = -0.17, p < 0.01$)

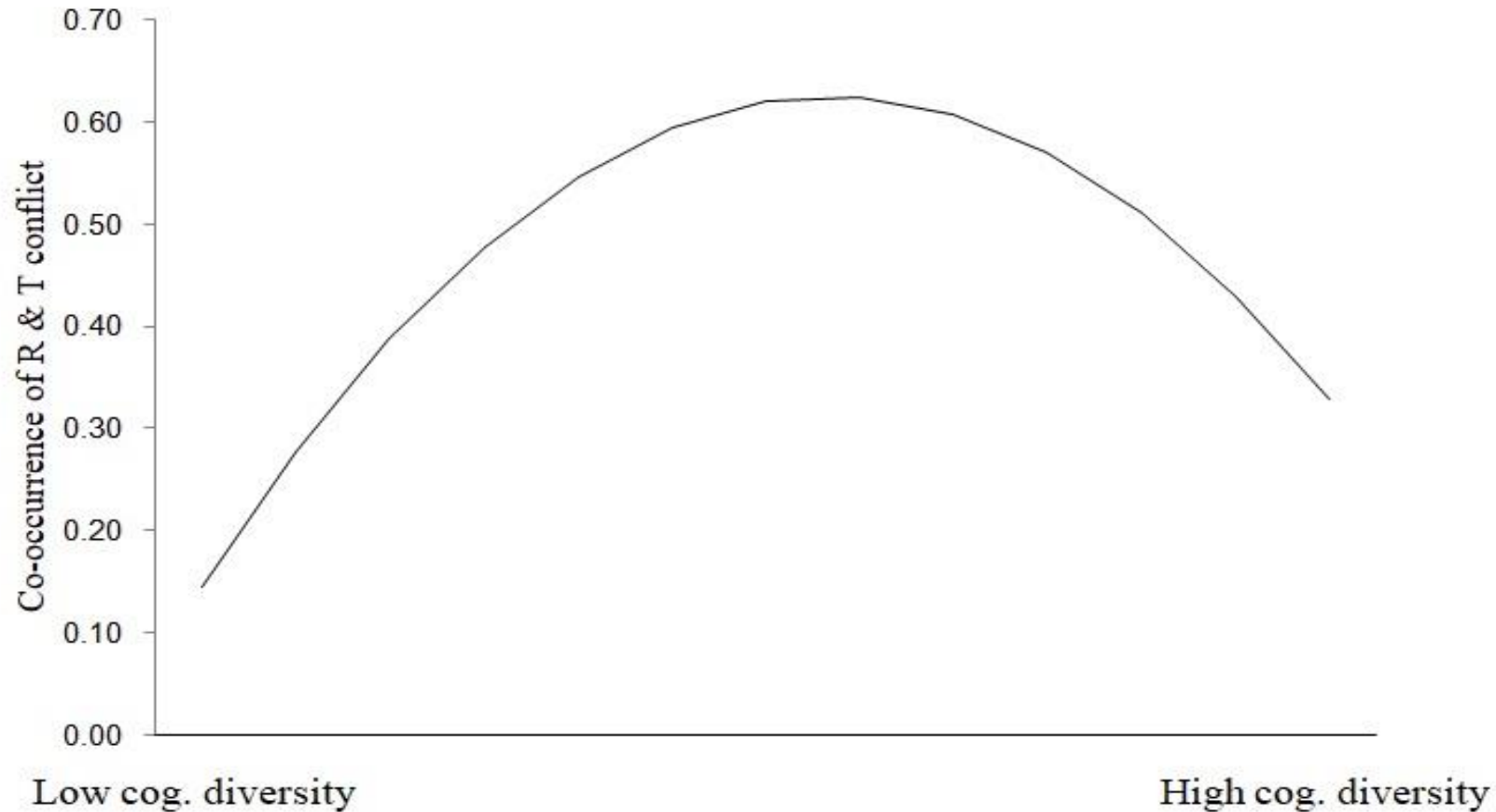


Figure 3

- Hypothesis 6A – TFL moderates a curvilinear relationship between cognitive diversity and CTRC) (**Supported**) ($H6a: B = -0.18$; change in $R^2 = 0.12$, $p < 0.05$)

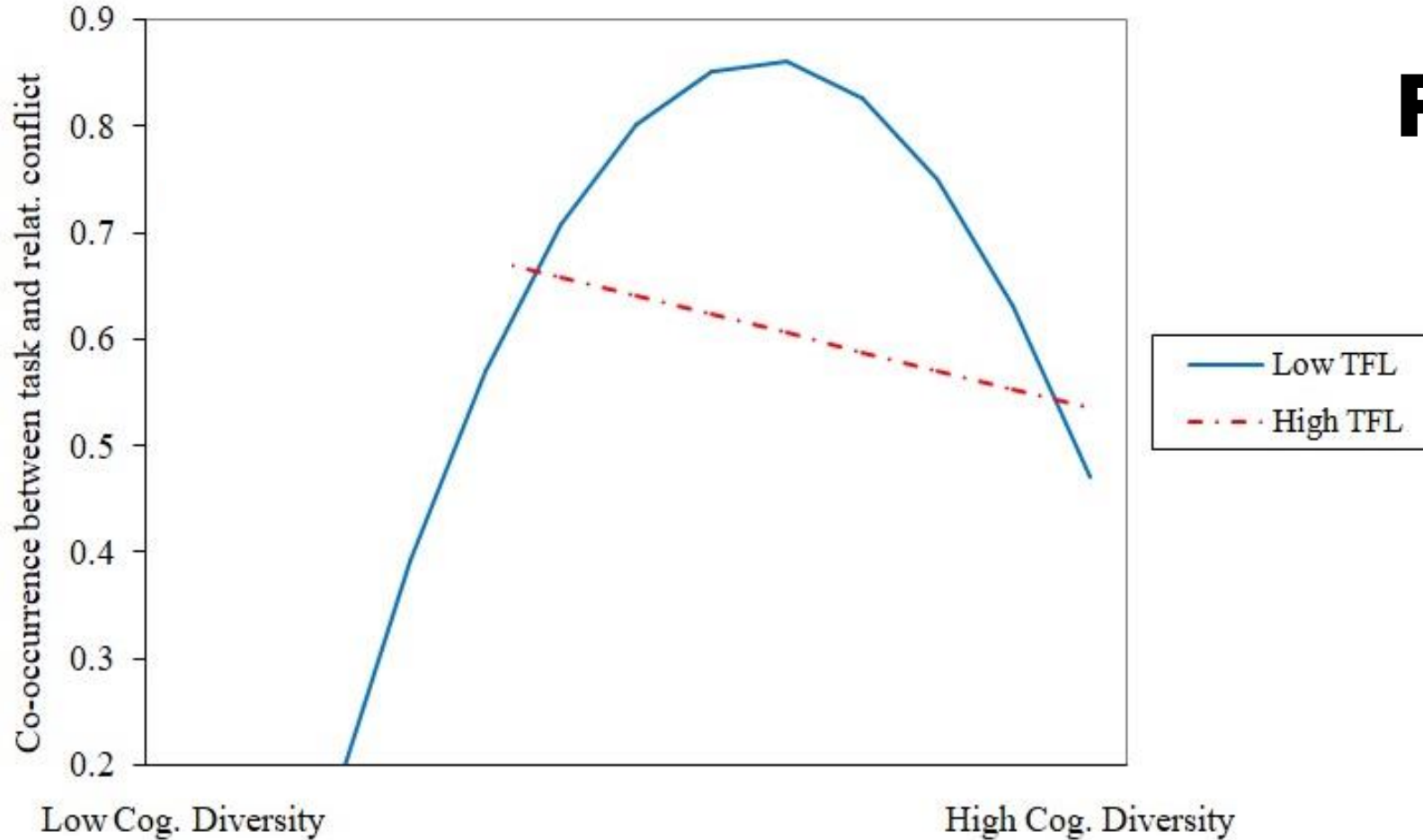


Figure 4

Conclusion

- This study provided new perspectives on the relationship between group diversity and group performance
- Curvilinear relationships:
 - between cognitive diversity and group performance
 - between cognitive diversity and Co-occurrence of Task and Relationship Conflict (CTRC), with CTRC having a mediator role
- Transformational leadership (TFL) has a (moderator) role to play such that it can mitigate, limit, avoid or manage the potential task conflict and relationship conflict within cognitively diverse groups

Implications

- Important messages for organisations who are targeting high performance of teams and departments
 - A moderate level of diversity can impact negatively on team effectiveness; low and high levels of cognitive diversity can be associated with relatively strong group performance and relatively low levels of conflict
 - Noting the potential benefits of harnessing cognitive diversity towards creativity, innovation and problem-solving
 - Transformational leadership and good management can mitigate conflict and inspire positive team performance
 - Consideration must then be given to the composition of teams and the recruitment and training of team leaders