

The Mediating Role of Trust on the Relationship Between Task Interdependence, Teleworking, Role Clarity, Information Sharing and Cooperation

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Executive Summary

Background: Good cooperation within an organization is necessary for the success of the organization. Many organizations however, find that their cooperation is in need of improvement, but do not know how to change it. Other organizations may not work on improving cooperation since they deem other, short-term oriented, goals as more important. The current paper therefore describes the value of cooperation as well as factors that can help to improve cooperation in an attainable manner. The factors studied are trust, task interdependence, teleworking, role clarity and information sharing.

Methods: In order to investigate how those aspects are related to each other, an online questionnaire was conducted. Employees from a university medical centre answered questions about cooperation, trust, task interdependence, telework, role clarity, and information sharing. The given information was then analysed with mediation analyses.

Results: The analyses yielded the following outcomes: Trust was positively associated with cooperation, meaning that more trust predicted more cooperation within the organization. Task interdependence, role clarity and information sharing predicted cooperation. This means that high task interdependence, greater role clarity and better information sharing lead to more efficient cooperation. This relationship was mediated by trust, meaning that task interdependence, role clarity and information sharing all improved trust and the enhanced trust in turn improved cooperation. This was however not the case for teleworking. The outcome variables, trust and cooperation, were not significant in that case.

Conclusion and Recommendation: Task interdependence, role clarity, and information sharing indeed enhance cooperation, by means of enhancing trust. Since those constructs are more specific than cooperation, they are easier for organizations to target. If an organization wants to improve their cooperation, it is thus recommended, to improve task interdependence, role clarity and information sharing first. This can for example be done by: 1) giving employees tasks that require working together and providing group feedback, instead of individual feedback (task interdependence), 2) creating an open and cooperative feedback policy (role clarity), and 3) gaining insight into communication patterns and creating faster communication channels to make information sharing easier (information sharing).

Abstract

Cooperation is fundamental for the success of an organization. Yet, many organizations do not know how to accomplish efficient cooperation. Since cooperation is such a broad construct, it may be easier for organizations to target smaller aspects instead. Therefore, in the current study several aspects were studied, which might have an impact on cooperation. The studied aspects were task interdependence, teleworking, role clarity and information sharing. Moreover the relationship between trust and cooperation was investigated and the mediating role of trust on the relationship between cooperation and the other four variables was studied. 139 employees of a university medical centre received an online questionnaire, in which they could indicate their view on the six mentioned variables. Based on these data, mediation analyses were performed. The results showed that task interdependence, role clarity and information sharing predicted cooperation. This relationship was mediated by trust. Thus, higher task interdependence, more role clarity, and efficient information sharing enhanced trust. Higher trust then increased cooperation. For telework none of the associations reached significance.

Keywords: Cooperation, Trust, Task Interdependence, Telework, Role Clarity, Information Sharing

Cooperation within organizations is essential for growth. Efficient cooperation increases success of an organization as well as enhances interpersonal relationships between co-workers (Fink & Kessler, 2010; Tanghe, Wisse, & van der Flier, 2010). By definition, cooperation means interacting or working with others, in order to reach a mutual goal (Bruce & Ricketts, 2008). Cooperation can take place within a singular team (intrateam) as well as between teams (interteam) (Shin, Kim, & Hur, 2019). Interteam and intrateam cooperation seem to be two very similar processes and are equally important in increasing an organizations functioning and in helping reach the goals of an organization (Schalk & Curseu, 2010; Shin, Kim, & Hur, 2019). Since they are so similar and equally necessary in many organizations, most studies have focussed on cooperation within an organization, not specifying whether it is within or between teams. In the current study, due to the nature of the current institution, the main focus will lay on interteam cooperation.

Unfortunately, to date not all organizations deem cooperation to be as important and therefore do not enhance it. In many organizations there is a high competition to gain resources. As a consequence, the focus lays on the short-term goal of gaining resources, leading to a decrease of long-term cooperation (Schalk & Curseu, 2010). Lack of cooperation can have several negative consequences, as was shown by study of Morrison and Nolan (2007). In their study, participants in a low-cooperation environment indicated that they felt

discouraged to ask co-workers for help and rather struggled on their own. They also felt a lot of pressure to complete tasks, experienced a lack of willingness to cooperate between teams, and felt a lack of respect for each other. Thus, even if it may seem easier at times to only consider short-term goals, in order to maintain long-term excellence, cooperation needs to be enhanced within one's organization.

Therefore, the current study aims to investigate factors that may be correlated to cooperation. By studying those correlations, it can be seen which factors an organization should enhance, in order to reach ideal cooperation between employees from different teams. To be more specific, trust, task interdependence, teleworking, role clarity, and information sharing will be investigated, since they seem to play an important part in enhancing cooperation.

Trust

A cornerstone for having high quality cooperation is trust. Since trust is such a broad and context dependent construct, there are many different definitions (Pytkizillig & Kimbrough, 2016). In the current study, a definition of trust regarding organizations will be used. According to Coleman (1994), trust can be defined as a commitment to cooperate before there is any certainty about how the trusted people will act. Trust can therefore be seen as a base that permits people to work together (Hakanen & Soudunsaari, 2012). This suggests that trust is a foundation for successful cooperation. Indeed, de Pablo Gonzales, Pardo, and Perlins (2014) stated in their study that trust allows organizations to reach their ideal cooperation. Moreover, Fink and Kessler (2010) have shown that if enhancing cooperation within a company was based on trust, it was the most successful. Literature thus seems to agree that trust is an important factor when it comes to enhancing cooperation. Based on this the first hypothesis is formulated:

H1: Trust is positively associated with cooperation.

Task Interdependence

A factor that seems to be correlated to trust as well as cooperation is task interdependence. Task interdependence refers to the extent to which employees need to exchange information and work together to be able to complete their task (Wageman, 1995). Since higher task interdependence leads to cooperation being necessary, much research has investigated the relationship between those two. Wageman (1995) already suggested that

there is a positive correlation between task interdependence and cooperation. More recent research supports this notion and agrees that higher task interdependence could result in more cooperation (Wang, Yen, & Huang, 2011; Lee, Lin, Huang, Huang, & Teng, 2015).

Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H2: Task interdependence is positively correlated with cooperation.

Research has also shown that high task interdependence has a direct effect on trust within and between teams (Edmondson, 2003; De Jong & Dirks, 2012). A possible explanation for this could be that a high task interdependence, leads to interactions being crucial. This means that employees then consistently need to work together, they are dependent on each other and may therefore be forced to trust in each others work. Jarvenpaa, Shaw and Staples (2004) have argued that when task interdependence is low and employees work independently, trust plays a less significant role. Thus, on the one hand trust is necessary for task interdependence, and on the other hand high task interdependence also seems to increase trust. Therefore, the next hypothesis is formulated:

H3: Task interdependence is positively correlated with trust.

Concluding, it seems that task interdependence enhances trust. This may in turn lead to an enhanced cooperation, since research suggested that trust is positively correlated to cooperation (De Pablo Gonzales, Pardo, & Perlins, 2014). This means that it may be the case that task interdependence enhances trust and this in turn enhances cooperation. Based on this, the last hypothesis with regards to task interdependence is formulated:

H4: Trust is mediating the positive correlation between task interdependence and cooperation.

Teleworking

Next to task interdependence, literature determined other factors that may play an important role in increasing cooperation. A very current factor since Covid-19 is extended teleworking (i.e., working from home). Literature suggests that teleworking negatively impacts cooperation. An explanation for this could be that crucial factors of communication, such as body language and social awareness of each other, are missing and therefore making cooperation harder (Lupton & Hayes, 2000; Hager, 2018). However, currently many

companies do not have a choice: employees must work from home due to Covid-19 restrictions. Thus, currently one cannot impact whether employees work from home, it can however be impacted how they feel about it. Therefore, in the current study it will be researched whether employees attitude towards teleworking impacts cooperation. That way, cooperation could even be fostered in times where there is no other option than working from home. Not much research has been done on this topic yet, but in the qualitative study of Greer and Payne (2014), employees reported that a strategy for positively handling telework is staying accessible. This means that employees who had a positive attitude towards teleworking, also stayed in touch with their colleagues and still tried working together and cooperating. Therefore the following hypothesis is formulated:

H5: A positive attitude on teleworking is positively correlated with cooperation.

The relationship between teleworking and cooperation seems to be similar to the relationship between teleworking and trust. In this case too, research suggests that face-to-face interactions are necessary to maintain trust and positive interpersonal relationships (Beauregard, Basile, & Canoncino, 2019). A possible explanation for this could be that since employees see less of their colleagues work than they would usually, they may assume that the colleagues are working less hard, which could harm interpersonal trust (Golden, 2006). Seeing each other less may also lead to the feeling of a psychological distance (Beauregard, Basile, & Canoncino, 2019). Study by Thomsen, Karsten and Oort (2016) has shown that if one team feels psychological distance to another team, this decreases the trust the teams have in each other. Here again, a positive attitude on teleworking could make it so that employees stay in touch more with their colleagues and therefore fostering trust (Greer & Payne, 2014). Hence, the following hypothesis was developed:

H6: A positive attitude towards teleworking is positively correlated with trust.

Since teleworking-attitude may be positively correlated with trust, it may be the case that this in turn positively impacts cooperation within an organization. If a positive attitude towards teleworking within an organization increases the amount of trust, the high trust level may then enhance cooperation (De Pablo Gonzales, Pardo, & Perlins, 2014). Consecutively, the hypothesis is formulated:

H7: Trust is mediating the positive correlation between teleworking-attitude and cooperation.

Role Clarity

Another aspect that seems to be related to trust and cooperation is role clarity. Role clarity can be defined as the extent to which employees clearly understand their duties, tasks, objectives and the expectations of their role at work (Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2008). It seems logical that role clarity is necessary for cooperation, since employees can only work together if they know what to expect from each other. Indeed, research suggests that higher role clarity ensures better communication and therefore better cooperation within an organization (Klein et al., 2009). Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H8: Role clarity is positively correlated with cooperation.

In previous research a significant positive correlation between role clarity and trust was found (Henderson, Stackman, & Lindekilde, 2018). It is suggested that role clarity enhances trust, since a higher role clarity reduces uncertainty (Henderson, Stackman, & Lindekilde, 2016). A reduction in uncertainty, meaning knowing better what to expect from the other, may make it easier to trust someone. Usually the decision whether or not to trust someone is met with uncertainty, since it is unknown how the person will behave. According to Acar-Burkay, Fennis, and Warlop (2014) a greater degree of uncertainty asks more motivation when deciding to trust someone. Role clarity therefore may make this decision easier, since one knows more clearly what can be expected. In conclusion, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H9: Role clarity is positively correlated with trust.

Seeing that role clarity may enhance trust, this could then lead to an increase in cooperation. If employees clearly know what is expected of them and their colleagues, it may be easier for them to trust each other. This increase in trust may lead to an increase in cooperation within the organization (De Pablo Gonzales, Pardo, & Perlines, 2014). In sum, the following hypothesis is defined:

H10: Trust is mediating the positive correlation between role clarity and cooperation.

Information Sharing

Lastly, a factor correlated to cooperation and trust is information sharing. This can be defined as the sharing of work-related information with co-workers. In order for information sharing to be deemed useful by the co-worker, the given information should be accurate and useful, it should be shared on a timely manner, and the sharing of information should not be done to an excessive extent (Goldhaber, Porter, & Yates, 1977). Information sharing can be seen as a cooperative behaviour, since sharing information is necessary and helpful when trying to achieve a common goal (Toma & Butera, 2015). However, not much research has been done yet on the impact of information sharing on cooperation. But, since information sharing is necessary for cooperation, it can be assumed that more efficient information sharing leads to better cooperation. Therefore, the following hypothesis is defined:

H11: Information sharing is positively correlated with cooperation.

For trust, the relationship seems to be similar. Research has shown that a higher quality of received information is related to higher levels of trust (Simons, 2002). Communication plays a vital role in developing and maintaining trust, since trust is based upon the beliefs of the other party through information (Thomas, Zolin, & Hartman, 2009). In other words, trust can be influenced by the level of information sharing. When a co-worker provides work related information, this will open the opportunity to develop trust. On the other hand, a lack of information or information that is perceived as irrelevant or untimely can reduce the level of trust by making the employee more guarded (Thomas, Zolin, & Hartman, 2009). An explanation for this could be that when information is shared, it will decrease the perception of being vulnerable, increase feelings of relying on your co-worker and thus increase levels of trust. In conclusion, this leads to the formulation of the following hypothesis:

H12: Information sharing is positively correlated with trust.

Efficient information sharing seems to increase trust. An increased trust level may then lead to enhanced cooperation within the organisation (De Pablo Gonzales, Pardo, & Perlins, 2014). Therefore, the following is hypothesized:

H13: Trust is mediating the positive correlation between information sharing and cooperation.

In conclusion, the current study aims to investigate the mediating role of trust on the relationship between task interdependence, teleworking, role clarity, information sharing and cooperation. As mentioned before, good cooperation is an important factor when it comes to the success of an organization. However, many organizations fail to enhance. It is known that in order to reach a certain goal, this goal should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound (Cothran & Wysocki, 2005). So, simply stating the goal of increasing cooperation may be too vague and organizations therefore may not succeed in it. Thus, the goal of this study was to determine smaller factors which in turn have a positive impact on cooperation. The proposed model can be seen in Figure 1. Finding out more about these factors and their relationship with cooperation will bring us one step closer to improving performance as well as employee well-being at organizations. Moreover, few studies have merely focussed on interteam cooperation. As became clear in literature stated above, most studies focused on cooperation in general, not distinguishing inter- and intrateam cooperation. By solely looking at interteam cooperation in the current study, new insights may be established.

In order to test these hypotheses, employees of different functions within a university medical centre were invited to fill out a questionnaire. In the questionnaire they had to answer questions regarding cooperation, trust, task interdependence, teleworking, role clarity and information sharing. It was expected that participants who reached higher scores on task interdependence, teleworking-attitude, role clarity and information sharing would score higher on cooperation, which is mediated by a higher score on trust.

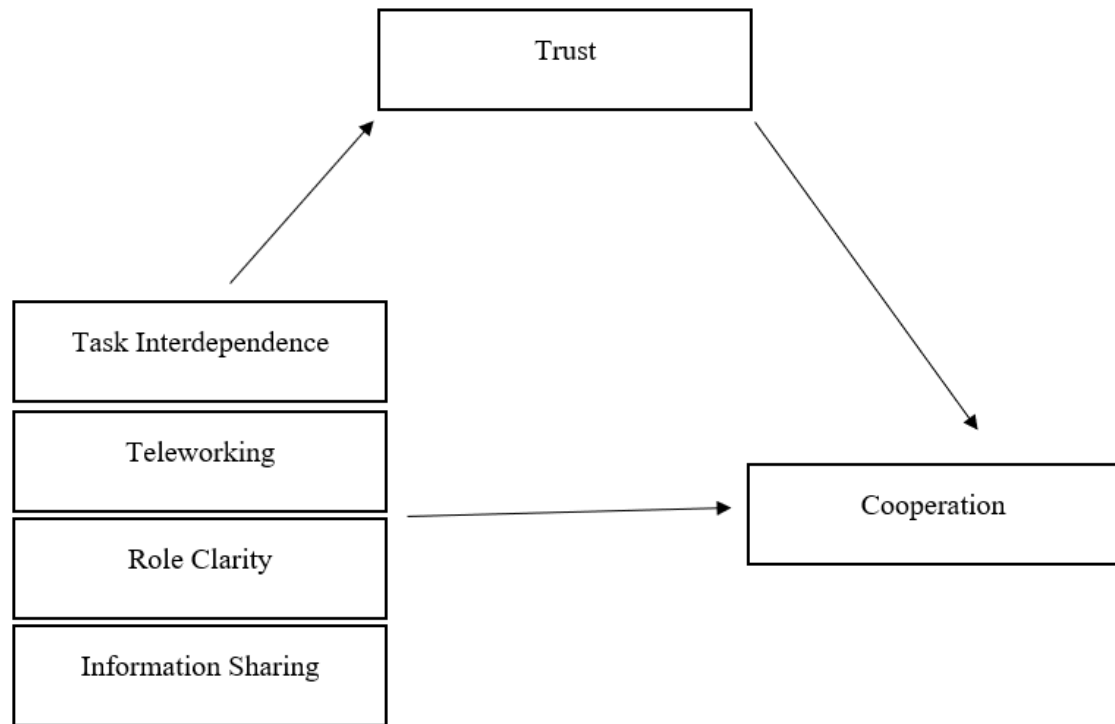


Figure 1. Mediation Model.

Methods

Participants

For the current study a questionnaire was sent to a total of 139 participants. The current study was done at a university medical center, which hired the researchers in order to get more insight into the inter-team dynamics. Therefore the questionnaire was sent to all employees of the concerning teams and there was thus a limited amount of participants that could be reached. 38 participants needed to be excluded since they did not complete any of the study variables. Thus, 101 participants were included in this research. Not all of those participants filled in every variable. Therefore, there were 84 participants included in the analysis regarding task interdependence, 83 participants regarding telework, 96 participants regarding role clarity, and 92 participants regarding information sharing. Participants of this study were either teachers ($N = 63$), members of the educational support team ($N = 25$) or fulfilled a management function at the university medical center ($N = 13$). In order to guarantee anonymity, the gender of the participants could not be included. Participants were divided into four age categories, namely 25 – 35 (12.9%), 36 – 45 (19.8%), 46 – 55 (29.7%), and 56 – 68 (33.7%). Four percent of the participants indicated that they did not want to

include their age. It was made clear to them that participation is on a voluntary basis and that they would not receive any reimbursement. Participants could quit the study at any given time, without it having negative consequences.

Procedure

A questionnaire was constructed using Qualtrics. This questionnaire was distributed among the employees by the respective team leaders, in the form of an e-mail including the link to the questionnaire. First of all, participants were to read an information letter and give informed consent. Then, demographic data were collected, among which age, function, and length of service. After that it was explained that for the remainder of the questionnaire they should think about the team that one does not belong to, since the institution was interested in behavior between and not within the groups. Thus, if somebody indicated to work as a teacher, they had to consider the educational support team and vice versa. The management either belonged to the teachers or the educational support team and then also had to consider the team they do not belong to. The questionnaire started with items regarding cooperation. Then questions about the trust, task interdependence, telework, role clarity and information sharing followed in a random order. Since this study was done in cooperation with another master's student, their variables, which were psychological safety, empathy, relational coordination, power distance perception were also included in the questionnaire, but not in the current research. At the end of the questionnaire there was space for comments or questions and a debriefing was given. Employees had approximately three weeks to fill out the questionnaire. Participants on average took 20 minutes to fill out the questionnaire. To ensure engagement and transparency, employees were involved throughout the process, by sending them updates and reminders concerning the study on a regular basis.

Materials

To measure the different variables, pre-existing scales were used. All were in English and therefore needed to be translated to Dutch, so that participants from the current institution could easily understand them.

To measure *cooperation*, the cooperative behaviors scale by Costa and Anderson (2011) was used. The scale included six items to which participants could agree to on a 7-point response scale (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree). Costa and Anderson's scale included items regarding cooperative actions and compromising within the team. Since the current study was not interested in cooperation within the team, but between the different

teams, slight changes were made in the wording (instead of “In this team we work in a climate of cooperation”, it was stated “Between the teams we work in a climate of cooperation.”). Empirical research on this scale was done and it was established that it is suitable for organizational settings (Costa & Anderson, 2011). Additionally, in the current study a reliability analysis was done, demonstrating a good reliability of the scale ($\alpha = .86$). The final version of all items used can be seen in Appendix A.

Trust was measured with the trust in co-workers scale (Erdem & Özen-Aytemur, 2014). It included 15 items, to which one could agree on a 5-point response scale, going from completely disagree to completely agree (Appendix B). This scale included three factors: Personal trustworthiness, competence and selfishness. Personal trustworthiness (items 1 – 8) included statements about, for example, the co-worker not lying and being fair (“I trust that my co-worker will keep her/his promise”). Competence (items 9 – 12) measured statements about the co-workers knowledge and intuitions (“I trust my co-worker’s knowledge about her/his job”). Selfishness (items 13 – 15) included items regarding the co-worker being selfish or malevolent (“My co-worker is malevolent in her/ his criticism”). The Trust in co-workers scale has been used in recent studies and was deemed useful for measuring trust in an organizational setting (Ömüris, Erdem, & Aytemur, 2020). Indeed, in the current study a reliability analysis showed high reliability of the scale ($\alpha = .90$).

Task interdependence was measured using the five items as determined by van der Vegt, Emans, and van de Vliert (2000). In their study, it was shown that all items had factor loadings greater than .48 ($\alpha = .75$). A reliability analysis was repeated in the current study, yielding a good reliability of the scale ($\alpha = .83$). The items included statements such as “I depend on my colleagues for the completion of my work”. Participants could agree to those items on a 6-point response scale ranging from completely disagree to completely agree. The scale used in the current study can be found in Appendix C.

To measure *teleworking* the teleworking questionnaire was used (Baert, Lippens, Moens, Weytjens, & Sterkens, 2020). Their questionnaire measured three aspects: 1) perceived impact of telework in general on various career aspects, 2) Perceived impact of extended telework during the Covid-19 crisis on various life and career aspects, and 3) Perceived impact of the Covid-19 crisis on self-view of telework and digital meetings. In the current study, only the second aspect was included. This aspect was chosen because at the current institution, employees were forced to work from home because of Covid-19, and the perceived impact of this on life and career aspects was aimed to be studied. Items included in this scale were for example “I am globally satisfied that I am working more at home” and “I

have more conflicts with my family because I work more at home”. An overview of the items can be found in Appendix D. The questionnaire included 14 items, to which one could agree on a 5-point response scale (1 = completely disagree, 5 = completely agree). Since this is a very current scale, not much research has been done on its reliability. A reliability analysis of the 14 items used in the current study yielded a good reliability ($\alpha = .87$).

Role clarity was measured using the role clarity scale (Henderson, Stackman, & Lindekilde, 2016). In their study, an excellent reliability of the role clarity scale was determined ($\alpha = .91$). A reliability analysis was repeated in the current study and also showed good reliability of the scale ($\alpha = .84$). The scale consisted of 6 items, such as “I feel certain about how much authority I have” or “I know what my responsibilities are”. Participants could agree to those statements on a 7-point response scale (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree). The items can be found in Appendix E.

To measure *information sharing*, the quality of information scale was used (Goldhaber, Porter, & Yates, 1977). This scale measures whether information was shared timely, accurately, excessively, and whether it was deemed useful. The scale included 4 items, to which one could agree to on a 5-point response scale (1 = to a very small extent, 5 = to a very great extent). The scale for information sharing was part of a larger survey with several subscales. According to Goldhaber, Porter and Yates (1977) all of those scales had an acceptable to high reliability ($\alpha = .70 - .90$). In the current study, a reliability analysis was done with the four items used. This analysis yielded a questionable reliability ($\alpha = .62$). When removing one item however, the scale had a good reliability ($\alpha = .86$). Thus, in the current study, three of the original four items were used. The items can be found in Appendix F.

The *demographics* were measured with four questions asking about 1) the team one belongs to (teachers, members of the educational support team, or management), 2) which subgroup one is most connected to (different educational specializations: geriatric medicine, general practitioner, addiction doctor, occupational physician/ insurance doctor), 3) ones age category (25 – 35, 36 – 45, 46 – 55, 56 – 68) and 4) ones length of service (0-2 years, 2-5 years, more than 5 years, or do not want to report).

Data Analyses

Prior to conducting the analyses, the data were exported from Qualtrics to SPSS. Then, several items had to be re-coded since the questions were mirrored. Once this was done, the scores for all variables were computed by calculating the mean of the items belonging to each variable. The analyses were carried out using IBM SPSS Statistics 27 (IBM Corp., 2020). In

order to conduct the mediation analyses the PROCESS macro was used (Hayes, 2017). In total, four mediation analyses were performed. For all four, cooperation was used as the dependent variable (quantitative, range 1 – 7), and trust was used as the mediator (quantitative, range 1 – 5). In each analysis, a different independent variable was used: task interdependence (quantitative, range 1 – 6), teleworking (quantitative, range 1 – 5), role clarity (quantitative, range 1 – 7), and information sharing (quantitative, range 1 – 5).

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

From Table 1, the descriptive statistics and correlations of all study variables can be inferred. It can be seen that there are several significant positive correlations between the variables. Cooperation is significantly positive correlated with trust ($r(89) = .79, p = .00$), task interdependence ($r(82) = .32, p = .00$), role clarity ($r(93) = .54, p = .00$), and information sharing ($r(89) = .74, p = .00$). Trust is significantly positively correlated with task interdependence ($r(82) = .25, p = .02$), role clarity ($r(89) = .55, p = .00$), and information sharing ($r(89) = .69, p = .00$). Task interdependence is significantly positive correlated with information sharing ($r(82) = .31, p = .01$). Teleworking-attitude is significantly positive correlated with role clarity ($r(81) = .31, p = .00$). Lastly, role clarity is significantly positive correlated with information sharing ($r(89) = .52, p = .00$).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

	Variable	M	SD	Min	Max	1	2	3	4	5
1	Cooperation	4.90	1.04	2.67	6.67	-				
2	Trust	3.74	0.49	2.47	4.93	.79**	-			
3	Task Interdependence	5.01	0.66	2.80	6.00	.32**	.25*	-		
4	Teleworking-attitude	3.38	0.63	1.93	4.50	-.05	.02	.12	-	
5	Role Clarity	4.95	0.91	1.00	6.67	.54**	.55**	.04	.31**	-
6	Information Sharing	3.12	0.56	1.00	4.00	.74**	.69**	.31**	.03	.52**

* $p < .05$, two-tailed

** $p < .01$, two-tailed

Mediation Analyses

For the main analysis of the data, several mediation analyses were performed using PROCESS (Hayes, 2017). The number of bootstrap samples used in each analysis was 5000, which was the default given by the program. Trust was the mediator and cooperation was the dependent variable. Task interdependence, teleworking-attitude, role clarity, and information sharing each were an independent variable. Prior to conducting the analyses, the assumptions for a regression analysis were tested. The assumptions of multicollinearity, normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity were met.

Task interdependence

The first mediation analysis tested whether task interdependence was positively related to cooperation and whether this relation was mediated by trust (Figure 2). Task interdependence significantly predicted trust ($b = .18, t(82) = 2.32, p = .02$). Trust significantly predicted cooperation ($b = 1.60, t(81) = 10.71, p = .00$). Task interdependence significantly predicted cooperation ($b = .21, t(81) = 1.97, p = .05$). The total effect of task interdependence on cooperation was .50 (95% CI [.18; .83]). The indirect effect of trust in the association between task interdependence and cooperation was estimated at .29 (95% CI [.05; .56]). The confidence interval did not include zero, indicating a significant mediation by trust. Thus, the mediating effect of trust is significant and explains 58% of the relationship between task interdependence and cooperation.

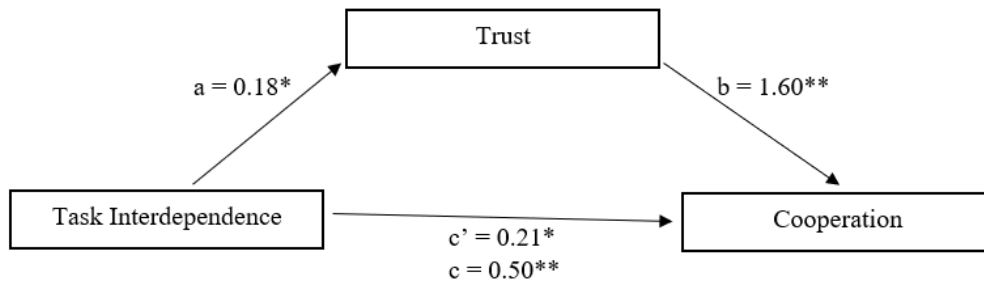


Figure 2. Mediation Analysis: Task Interdependence. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Teleworking

Next, a mediation analysis was performed to test whether there is a positive relation between teleworking-attitude and cooperation and whether this relation is mediated by trust (Figure 3). Teleworking did not significantly predict trust ($b = .02, t(81) = .18, p = .86$). However, trust significantly predicted cooperation ($b = 1.67, t(80) = 11.24, p = .00$). Teleworking did not significantly predict cooperation ($b = -.10, t(80) = -.88, p = .38$). The

total effect of task interdependence on cooperation was $-.08$ (95% CI $[-.44; .29]$). The indirect effect of trust in the association between teleworking and cooperation was estimated at $.03$ (95% CI $[-.23; .30]$). The confidence interval included zero, indicating that there was no significant mediation by trust. Thus, the mediating effect was not significant in the case of teleworking.

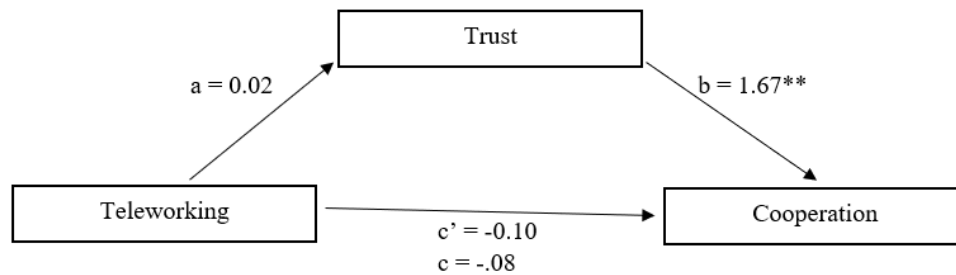


Figure 3. Mediation Analysis: Teleworking. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Role Clarity

This mediation analysis aimed to test whether role clarity is positively related to cooperation and whether this relation was mediated by trust (Figure 4). Role clarity significantly predicted trust ($b = .29$, $t(89) = 6.26$, $p = .00$). Trust significantly predicted cooperation ($b = 1.49$, $t(88) = 9.20$, $p = .00$). Role clarity significantly predicted cooperation ($b = .19$, $t(88) = 2.27$, $p = .03$). The total effect of task interdependence on cooperation was $.64$ (95% CI $[-.44; .85]$). The indirect effect of trust in the association between role clarity and cooperation was estimated at $.45$ (95% CI $[-.29; .63]$). The confidence interval did not include zero, indicating a significant mediation by trust. Therefore, trust explains 70.3% of the relationship between role clarity and cooperation and the mediation effect is thus significant.

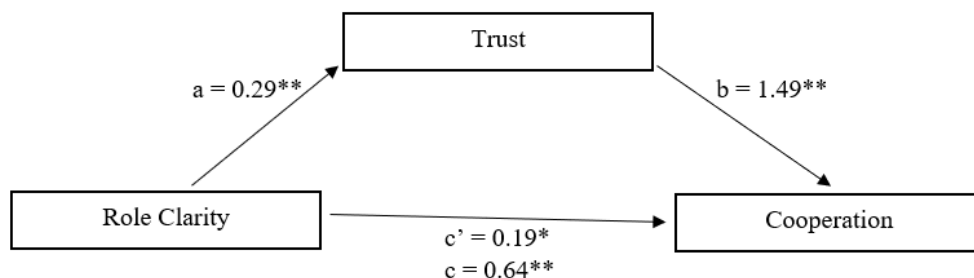


Figure 4. Mediation Analysis: Role Clarity. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Information Sharing

Lastly, a mediation analysis was performed to test whether information sharing is positively related to cooperation and whether trust mediates this relation (Figure 5). Information sharing significantly predicted trust ($b = .47, t(89) = 9.10, p = .00$). Trust significantly predicted cooperation ($b = 1.16, t(88) = 6.64, p = .00$). Information sharing significantly predicted cooperation ($b = .52, t(88) = 4.42, p = .00$). The total effect of information sharing on cooperation was 1.07 (95% CI [.86; 1.27]). The indirect effect of trust in the association between information sharing and cooperation was estimated at .55 (95% CI [.36; .79]). The confidence interval did not include zero, indicating a significant mediation by trust. Thus, 51.4% of the relationship between information sharing and cooperation can be explained by trust.

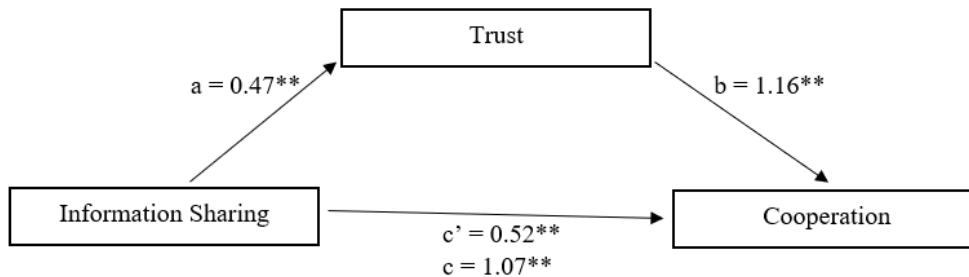


Figure 5. Mediation Analysis: Information Sharing. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Discussion

Many organizations face difficulties regarding their cooperation within and between teams (Schalk & Curseu, 2010). Not much research has been done that looked specifically at cooperation between teams. Therefore, factors which could improve cooperation between teams in an organization were studied. It was hypothesized that trust would be positively correlated with cooperation (H1). Moreover it was anticipated that task interdependence, teleworking-attitude, role clarity, and information sharing would be correlated to cooperation (H2, H5, H8, H11) as well as trust (H3, H6, H9, H12). Lastly, it was hypothesized that trust would mediate the relationship between cooperation and task interdependence, teleworking-attitude, role clarity, and information sharing (H4, H7, H10, H13). The hypotheses regarding teleworking were rejected (H5, H6, H7). All other hypotheses were confirmed.

Trust

The first hypothesis, that trust is positively associated with cooperation, was confirmed. There was a significant positive correlation between trust and cooperation and in all mediation models, cooperation was predicted by trust to a significant extent. This outcome is in line with the expectations and prior research (e.g. De Pablo Gonzales, Pardo, & Perlins, 2014; Fink & Kessler, 2010). Since trust seems to be a base for cooperation (Hakanen & Soudunsaari, 2012), it makes sense that also in the current study higher levels of trust were associated with higher levels of interteam cooperation. In conclusion, trust is an important factor that should be considered when trying to improve cooperation within an organization.

Task interdependence

The next three hypotheses were confirmed as well (H2, H3, H4). Task interdependence predicted trust as well as cooperation. This means that employees who experience their task interdependence to be high, also experience more trust and more cooperation with their co-workers. This is in line with earlier research and our expectations (e.g. Wang, Yen, & Huang, 2011; Lee, Lin, Huang, Huang, & Teng, 2015). The relationship was mediated by trust. So, it can be said that higher task interdependence enhances the trust levels of employees and the higher trust then improves cooperation. This means that if organizations intend to improve their cooperation, they could first focus on enhancing task interdependence, which will then lead to greater trust and in turn more cooperation. Improving cooperation itself is difficult since it is a more voluntarily process. Task interdependence however can be influenced by, for example, 1) giving employees tasks which require sharing materials, information and expertise in order to reach a certain goal, or by 2) giving feedback to the group as a whole, as compared to giving feedback to the individual, after finishing a task (Taggar & Haines, 2006). The latter makes it so that employees need to work together or else the team cannot receive positive feedback.

Teleworking

The following three hypotheses (H5, H6, H7) were not confirmed. Teleworking-attitude predicted neither trust nor cooperation and there was thus also no mediating effect of trust. It was expected that a more positive attitude on teleworking would lead to more cooperation and trust, as suggested by Greer and Payne (2014). Even though Greer and Payne (2014) suggested that a positive attitude on teleworking fosters cooperation, the opposite is thinkable too: employees may have a positive attitude on teleworking, because they get to spend more time with their family and do things more independently from their co-workers.

In that case a positive attitude would lead to less cooperation. Additionally, study by Greer and Payne was not done during Covid-19. It may be the case that choosing to work from home has a different impact on cooperation and trust as compared to being forced to work from home. Moreover, the current sample consisted to 63.4% of employees between the age of 46 and 68, from which more than half were older than 56 years old. In a current study it was found that whereas older employees feel more comfortable cooperating face-to-face, younger workers are comfortable cooperating online as well (Raišienė, Rapuano, Varkulevičiūtė, & Stachová, 2020). For the current sample this could mean that even if employees had a positive attitude towards teleworking, this did not improve their cooperation, simply because it was more challenging for them to cooperate online.

A surprising outcome regarding teleworking-attitude was that it seems to be positively correlated to role clarity. It could be the case, that employees who are more sure about what is expected from them, feel more confident and satisfied with working from home. Since this was not the focus of the current study, this relationship could be studied some more in the future to gain a better understanding of how teleworking could be made more enjoyable for employees.

Role clarity

Regarding role clarity, all hypotheses were confirmed (H8, H9, H10). A better role clarity was associated with more cooperation and this relationship was mediated by trust. This means that having a clearer image of ones own and the co-workers roles at work, enhances trust and therefore improves cooperation. This is in line with the expectations which were based on prior research with similar outcomes (e.g. Klein et al., 2009; Henderson, Stackman, & Lindekilde, 2018). For organizations this means that in order to improve cooperation, they could start by improving role clarity. Role clarity can be enhanced by creating an open, cooperative feedback policy (Whitaker, Dahling, & Levy, 2007). So, supervisors as well as co-workers should get the chance to provide feedback in a positive way regularly, so that expectations from each other are known and clarified.

Information sharing

The last three hypotheses were confirmed as well (H11, H12, H13). More valuable information sharing is associated with more cooperation and this is mediated by trust. Thus, if information sharing is deemed effective, this will enhance trust. Higher trust then improves cooperation. Compared to the other variables, there was less research on this one. However,

the research that was available is in line with the current finding (Simons 2002; Toma & Butera, 2015). Thus, in order to improve cooperation at an organization, it will be helpful to improve information sharing. Hatala and George Lutta (2009) recommended first conducting a social network analysis to gain insight into formal as well as informal communication patterns. In a social network analysis one measures the characteristics of social relations, such as the density of interconnections, taking the context of the relation into consideration (Marin & Wellman, 2011). The goal should then be to create faster communication channels and make information sharing easier within and between groups.

When discussing the results, shortcomings and limitations should be discussed. A majority of the employees were older than 45, which should be considered when interpreting the results. It is unknown whether the relationships found in this study are applicable to all other age-groups as well. As mentioned before, different age-groups may have different cooperation patterns. Younger age-groups for example, find it easier to cooperate online, while for older generations this is easier face-to-face (Raišienė, Rapuano, Varkulevičiūtė, & Stachová, 2020). Another aspect that should be considered was the motivation of the participants. For many participants this was not the first time that research had been done on their working behaviors, so some questioned the use of it. It was visible that several participants did not fill in variables anymore towards the end. Indeed, a shortcoming of an online questionnaire is always that the researchers themselves are not present and thus have little insight into how participants are answering the questions. Moreover, the current study was non-experimental and therefore no conclusions about causality can be made. For future research it is recommended to test the proposed associations in an experimental setting. One could for example apply the advices that were given above to enhance task interdependence, role clarity and information sharing to one group. Then the scores on trust and cooperation between that group and a control group can be compared. Moreover, the current study could be repeated in different companies, including different age-groups, to test whether the relationships are the same there. Even though cooperation has been studied much already, few studies have focused on interteam cooperation only. Lastly, no significant associations were found regarding teleworking-attitude. Since teleworking is becoming more prominent due to Covid-19 and research suggests that it inhibits cooperation, more research should be done on how this can be improved.

Summarizing it can be said that the outcomes of the current study are mostly in line with previous research. Additionally it was shown that in all cases, with the exception of

teleworking-attitude, trust had a significant mediating effect and was thus the main explanation for the increase in cooperation. With the knowledge from this study, organizations could in the future apply strategies mentioned above to increase task interdependence, role clarity and information sharing. All of those interventions are attainable and budget friendly, especially when one considers that they will have a great impact on trust and therefore cooperation.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Cooperation scale

Participants could indicate whether they agree to the following statements on a 7-point response scale (1 = completely disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = neutral, 5 = somewhat agree, 6 = agree, 7 = completely agree).

1. Tussen de teams hebben we een klimaat van samenwerking.
2. We bespreken en behandelen kwesties of problemen open tussen de teams.
3. Wanneer er een beslissing gemaakt wordt, houden we rekening met de mening van collega's van beide teams.
4. Sommige collega's van het andere team houden relevante informatie achter.
5. Collega's minimaliseren wat ze over zichzelf vertellen tegen collega's van het andere team.
6. De meeste collega's van het andere team staan open voor advies geven en hulp bieden aan collega's van mijn team.

Appendix B: Trust scale

Participants could indicate whether they agree to the following statements on a 5-point response scale (1 = completely disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = completely agree).

1. Ik vertrouw erop dat mijn collega's van het andere team hun beloftes zullen nakomen.
2. Mijn collega's van het andere team zijn eerlijk.
3. Mijn collega's van het andere team liegen niet.
4. Ik ben niet getuige geweest van het onrechtvaardig handelen van mijn collega's van het andere team bij hun beslissingen.
5. Mijn collega's van het andere team gedragen zich eerlijk tegenover het aan hun gelieerde personeel.
6. Mijn collega's van het andere team zijn niet partijdig in conflict.
7. Wat ik het meest vertrouw in mijn collega's van het andere team, is dat zij eerlijk zijn.
8. Ik heb zoveel vertrouwen in mijn collega's van het andere team, dat ik vriendschappen met hen kan sluiten.
9. Ik vertrouw op de kennis van mijn collega's van het andere team over hun werk.
10. Ik houd altijd rekening met de suggesties van mijn collega's van het andere team op het gebied van werk.
11. Mijn collega's van het andere team begeleiden hun personeel in relatie tot het werk.

12. Ik vertrouw op de intuïties van mijn collega's van het andere team.
13. Mijn collega's van het andere team zijn kwaadaardig in hun kritiek.
14. Mijn collega's van het andere team stellen persoonlijk belang boven het belang van de groep.
15. Mijn collega's van het andere team zijn bedreven in het laten doorslaan van de balans in hun voordeel, wanneer zij de gelegenheid vinden.

Appendix C: Task interdependence scale

Participants could indicate whether they agree to the following statements on a 6-point response scale (1 = completely disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = agree, 6 = completely agree).

1. Ik heb informatie en advies nodig van mijn collega's van het andere team om mijn werk goed te kunnen doen.
2. Ik heb een eenmansbaan; het is voor mij niet nodig om te coördineren of samen te werken met collega's van het andere team.
3. Ik moet samenwerken met mijn collega's van het andere team om mijn werk goed te kunnen doen.
4. Mijn collega's van het andere team hebben informatie en advies van mij nodig om hun werk goed te kunnen doen
5. Ik moet regelmatig communiceren met collega's van het andere team over werk gerelateerde kwesties.

Appendix D: Teleworking scale

Participants could indicate whether they agree to the following statements on a 5-point response scale (1 = completely disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = completely agree).

De volgende uitspraken gaan over uw ervaring met het toegenomen thuiswerken als gevolg van de huidige Covid-19 crisis.

1. Ik ben over het algemeen tevreden dat ik meer thuiswerk.
2. Ik heb meer conflicten met mijn familie door het thuiswerken.
3. Ik heb meer werk gerelateerde conflicten (bijvoorbeeld met leidinggevende of collega's), omdat ik meer thuiswerk.
4. Ik word vaak gestoord door familieleden tijdens langdurig thuiswerken.

5. Ik vind het moeilijk verschillende communicatiemiddelen (zoals telefoon, e-mail, Zoom en Skype) te combineren tijdens langdurig thuiswerken.
6. Ik voel me goed begeleid door mijn werkgever (of leidinggevende) tijdens het thuiswerken.
7. Het was moeilijk om mijn werkgever te overtuigen om me toe te staan deel te nemen aan het thuiswerken.
8. Ik kan mijn werk efficiënter uitvoeren tijdens het thuiswerken.
9. Ik voel me meer verbonden aan mijn werkgever door het thuiswerken.
10. Ik ervaar een betere balans tussen werk en privé door het thuiswerken.
11. Ik voel een sterkere band met mijn collega's door het thuiswerken.
12. Ik ervaar minder werk gerelateerde stress door het thuiswerken.
13. Ik denk dat het noodgedwongen thuiswerken mijn kans op burn-out verkleint in de nabije toekomst.
14. Ik ervaar een betere concentratie door het thuiswerken.

Appendix E: Role clarity scale

Participants could indicate whether they agree to the following statements on a 7-point response scale (1 = completely disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = neutral, 5 = somewhat agree, 6 = agree, 7 = completely agree).

1. Ik ben er zeker van hoeveel autoriteit ik heb.
2. Er zijn duidelijke, geplande doelen en doelstellingen voor mijn werk.
3. Ik weet dat ik mijn tijd goed heb verdeeld.
4. Ik weet wat mijn verantwoordelijkheden zijn.
5. Ik weet precies wat er van mij wordt verwacht.
6. Uitleg is duidelijk over wat er moet gebeuren.

Appendix F: Information sharing scale

Participants could indicate whether the statements were applicable, on a 5-point response scale (1 = to a very small extent, 2 = to a small extent, 3 = to a certain extent, 4 = to a great extent, 5 = to a very great extent).

In hoeverre is informatie die u van uw collega's van het andere team ontvangt doorgaans:

1. Tijdig (je krijgt informatie wanneer je die nodig hebt, niet te vroeg of te laat).
2. Nauwkeurig (je kunt de informatie vertrouwen, het is over het algemeen geloofwaardig).

3. Nuttig (je kunt de informatie gebruiken).