

## ARTICLE

## Relationship Between Leadership Style and Conflicts in Family Businesses

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### ABSTRACT

The themes of managerial style and interpersonal conflicts in a business context have been discussed, but their relationship, especially in family organizations, has seen little or no attention. A quantitative, descriptive, inferential, and cross-sectional study was undertaken to address this gap. Data were gathered from 410 employees of small and medium sized Brazilian family businesses operating in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. Participants answered a questionnaire consisting of two scales: (i) the Management Style Assessment Scale and (ii) the Supervisor-Subordinate Conflict Scale. In the family businesses in question, three managerial styles (situational, task, and relationship) were identified along with their contribution to conflicts. The 'relationship' style stood out as mitigating such events. These findings may provide insights regarding the theory of management styles and conflicts in family businesses and could offer practical management strategies for such contexts.

### KEYWORDS

Family business, Management styles, Situational managerial style, Task managerial style, Managerial relationship style

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Most companies in Brazil and worldwide have a family configuration (Frezatti et al., 2017). These businesses play an essential role in the national and global economy (Alderson, 2015; Efferin & Hartono, 2015). Along with traditions and values acquired at the origin (Karpinski & Stefano, 2015), the predominant criteria identifying family businesses include the dimensions of ownership, family management, and the intent of succession to the next generation (Efferin & Hartono, 2015).

As all businesses, family businesses strive to achieve goals and obtain positive results in the market. Leadership or managerial style – used here interchangeably – is closely linked to a business' capacity to achieve a desired level of success and its ability to influence employees (Melo & Santos, 2017; Vargas et al., 2018). Previous investigations of family business leadership styles have focused on how they contributed to the organization's success (Soreason, 2017). Studies that related the management styles and governance techniques of Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) with the construction of an organizational climate (Cunningham et al., 2016), and the advent of succession (Mullins & Schoar, 2016) were deemed particularly relevant, as were studies comparing male and female management styles in family businesses (Bass, 1981). More recent studies have analyzed women's leadership style (Chen et al., 2018) and the management style factors that facilitate or hinder organizational change (Vargas et al., 2018).

The origins of conflicts in an organizational environment vary: divergence of personality, poor communication, lack of shared objectives and resources (Ahmed, 2015), and differences between organizational and cultural values (Nuel-Okoli et al., 2018). Thus, a work environment where people have personalities, interests, values, and opinions, amongst other divergent characteristics, favors the existence of conflicts (Alméri et al., 2015).

Conflicts in family businesses have been widely studied, especially concerning intergenerational issues (Davis & Harveston, 1999), individual and group performance (Jehn & Mannix, 2001; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003), power relations (Murad et al., 2017) and conflicts of interest among the various stakeholders (Lubatkin et al., 2005). Further studies have addressed conflicts in family firms linked to gender issues (Glover, 2014), succession processes (Massis et al., 2008) and more personal issues, such as socioemotional aspects (Rousseau et al., 2018).

Though there are abundant national and foreign studies addressing management styles and conflicts in organizations (Saeed et al., 2014), few have addressed the interaction of these themes in the specific context of family firms. It is essential to consider that the inherent tension in the succession process, typical of family businesses, feeds a rivalry between family (domestic) interests and a management model based on tradition and conservation. This leads to greater centralization to preserve the entrepreneurial family's capital (Rivo-López et al., 2017) and the implementation of new management models based on control over administrative processes (Rossato Neto & Cavedon, 2004; Ruffatto et al., 2017). This trend foresees managers focusing on carrying out tasks, prioritizing goals and technical aspects of their work, and observing standards, hierarchies, procedures, and methods (Melo, 2004).

The idea that the organizational base of the family business is associated with socio-emotional factors is based on the Theory of Socio-emotional Wealth (SEW) (Gomez-Mejía et al., 2007; Kellermanns et al., 2012, Berrone et al., 2012). According to this theory, the family business seeks to arrange economical and non-economic goals to achieve its purpose. The theory further

implies the existence of a constant search for control and influence of the family, the maintenance of social ties and emotional attachments between members, and the strengthening of dynastic succession ties (Berrone et al., 2012).

From this perspective, the professionalization of the family company and the entry of professionals who are not family members fuel divergences around management approaches. Considering these aspects, this study postulates that the relationship between members of the family organization represents a peculiar aspect of this context and rivals with traditional management models. These differences can generate relationship and task execution conflicts linked to generational issues. The current generation in such organizations, having been subjected to particular technical and managerial formation styles, often opposes what the previous generation considered good entrepreneurial conduct (Rossato Neto & Cavedon, 2004).

As a research gap exists between these themes, this paper was designed to answer the following question: what relationship exists between leadership styles and conflicts occurring within family businesses? Accordingly, this study's research was intended to specifically describe the relationship between managerial style and the emergence of conflicts in Brazilian family businesses. A quantitative, descriptive, inferential and cross-sectional survey type study was carried out, involving 410 employees of family companies operating in the Rio Grande do Sul state (RS).

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1. MANAGEMENT STYLES

Leadership is a strategic factor in every type of organization (Melo & Santos, 2017), and the primary resource in achieving high business performance (Silva et al., 2019). Leadership thus plays a significant role in team performance since the achievement of competitive advantage may come directly from the performance of its team members (Salomão et al., 2020).

Leadership can be defined as the process whereby one delineates a job that needs to be done and how to do it through actions that facilitate individual and collective efforts to achieve common goals (Northouse, 2017). Such leadership can occur through the encouragement of those led (Vergara, 2000), thereby transforming the foreseen into reality (Davis & Newstrom, 2004). Among the many definitions of leadership in the literature, common elements emerge as a process, mutual influence, group context, and achievement of goals (Northouse, 2017).

Definitions of leadership retain a common denominator: the need for a mandatory bond with a group of two or more people, where the leader intentionally exerts influence toward the achievement of goals and purposes (Fernandes et al., 2014). Thus, directly influencing, encouraging commitment, and achieving high performance are key to effective leadership (Bunn & Fumagalli, 2016). The leader has an influencing role in productivity; it is up to him to develop a profile and interfere with and have an impact within the organization (Nascimento & Bryto, 2019).

Until the late 1940s, the leadership concept focused on the leader's traits, evidenced by his particularities and natural characteristics and qualities (Lopes et al., 2017). However, since then, through a change of focus, the leader's behavior has begun to be considered, with different approaches in leadership being defined (Lopes et al., 2017). Accordingly, it is necessary to identify particularities in the leader's behavior in daily management situations and those of his superiors (Santos & Castro, 2008), thereby defining his managerial style.

Leaders play a fundamental role in organizations, establishing new paths and encouraging their team members (Tucker & Russell, 2004). An effective leader can influence the attitudes of his followers to the advantage of the organization (Costa & De Matos, 2002). Thus, the leader is responsible for showing the proper behavior to his followers (Atkinson & Mackenzie, 2015). Influential strategic leaders face highly challenging and demanding tasks, being aware that the adopted leadership style will directly affect their team's productivity (Ireland et al., 2014). Based on the leader's attitudes toward his employees, Melo (2004) defined such styles as being a relationship, situational, or task-driven (Table 1) (Lima et al., 2012).

**Table 1**

*Management styles (relationship, situational and task)*

| Management styles | Definition  |
|-------------------|---|
| Relationship      | The leader will have working relationships based on mutual trust, friendship, warmth, respect for employees' ideas, and interest for their feelings. The leader's ability is to value individuality and emphasize interpersonal relationships with support, guidance, and facilitation.   |
| Situational       | The leader will have working relationships based on the interrelationship between the task leader's behavior, the relationship leader's behavior, and the employees' ability and willingness to perform tasks (maturity). The leader's ability is to identify the reality of his work environment and adapt his style to the demands of that environment. |
| Task              | The leader will have working relationships based on the definition and structure of his role and his employees in the pursuit of goals. The leader's ability is to emphasize work, technical aspects of the job, adherence to standards, communication channels, hierarchy, procedures and methods, as well as the performance of work tasks.             |

*Source:* developed from Melo (2004).

Based on Melo's (2004) classification of management styles, it is understood that relationship leadership is linked to the leader's availability and attention to his employees, predisposing him to understanding his own failures, respect employee's opinions, and being concerned about their feelings (Fernandes et al., 2014). Situational leadership is based on flexibility in managerial behavior, where the leadership style varies appropriately according to employee maturity. Task-driven leadership, in turn, is linked to the valorization of the hierarchy, priority in the execution of the tasks, and concern for following established rules and norms (Fernandes et al., 2014, Melo & Santos, 2017).

Understanding an organization's management styles is key to the development and behavior of the leader and reflects the attitudes of his team (Santos & Castro, 2008; Saeed et al., 2014). While several opinions may be expressed about the best way to lead, the situational approach argues there is no ideal leadership form (Araújo et al., 2013). Given that leaders must adapt to a wide range of situations, correctly assessing their characteristics, identifying which behaviors or responses are appropriate, and employing flexibility are crucial to identifying not which style is best but which will prove most effective (Melo, 2004).

Employees of a retail trade network indicated that both leaders with a relationship-oriented profile and those focused on the task achieved satisfactory performance, but the leader identified by his subordinates as having a profile focused on the situation failed (Salomão et al., 2020). Under the authors' analysis, leadership profiles focused on relationships or task achievement proved to be more effective than those focused on the situation.

In the context of family businesses, leaders are mainly concerned with aspects of the company's management in light of the familial context (Miller & Breton-Miller, 2005; Mejia et al., 2011); for example, the reputation of the family linked to the business may be of concern (Landes, 2006). In some cases, family leaders behave in a prudent and supportive manner (Miller et al., 2013), being induced to be good managers to lead their leaders in the best possible way (Miller et al., 2012). The role of the leader in this type of company can have a significant influence on employee satisfaction as they identify with the values and realize that they can trust a manager who knows the business, inspires loyalty, and makes employees feel proud to belong to the organization (Sorenson, 2017).

## 2.2. CONFLICTS

Conflicts are defined as an incompatibility between personalities, goals, values, and needs involving more than one person or organization (Brookins & Media, 2002; Granadillo, 2008). They are processes in which one side has interests significantly at odds or even opposite to those of the other side (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014). Executives, managers, leaders, employees, and colleagues face everyday conflicts that can engender disagreements, whether they are about company management issues, internal resource distribution, and/or work relationships (Ahmed, 2015).

Ahmed (2015) identified the leading causes of organizational conflicts as communication problems, personality differences, lack of resources to share equally among employees, stress, and sexual harassment (Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Main causes of conflicts in organizations*

| Cause                  | Definition  |
|------------------------|---|
| Bad communication      | Poor communication is one of the main causes of conflict between employees in the workplace, resulting from a difference in styles of communication. Non-assertive workplace communication can cause employees to make incorrect assumptions and gossip and decrease productivity and morale. |
| Personality difference | Employees come from different backgrounds and experiences, which play a role in shaping their personalities. When they fail to understand or accept the differences of others, problems arise in the workplace.   |
| Lack of resources      | The principle of sharing is recognized as central to crisis resolution and improved management performance. There must be an administrative policy on how to share available resources equitably and sustainably.   |
| Stress                 | The feeling of being under a lot of mental or emotional pressure can turn into stress. It can affect how the employee feels, thinks, behaves, and how their body works, causing conflict in the employee-manager relationship.  |
| Sexual harassment      | Unwelcome behavior that occurs to the employee because of their sex may be solicited for favors or verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Such conditions cause conflict in the organization if there is no appropriate code of conduct on the desktop.                               |

*Source:* developed by the authors based on Ahmed (2015).

These types of conflicts can occur at different levels, both horizontal (between pairs or intragroup) and/or vertical (between employee-leader) (Siqueira, 2014). Taking these issues into account, a conflict between leader and employee is understood to exist in two dimensions: (i) relationship; and (ii) task (Siqueira, 2014).

The first, also known as cognitive conflict, is characterized by interpersonal incompatibilities unrelated to everyday tasks, typically including tension, animosity, and contrariness (Jehn, 1995), resentment, and concerns (Eddleston et al., 2008). Relationship conflicts are the most destructive conflicts within organizations (Siqueira, 2014; Alderson, 2015), as they result directly in a lack of productivity (Grote, 2003) and raise employee stress levels (Siqueira, 2014). Studies have also shown that relationship conflicts are detrimental to job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Jehn, 1995).

In family businesses, relationship conflict results from family members' role in the family nucleus while working for the company. The contradiction between meritocracy in business and egalitarianism in the family can generate conflicts (Dewi & Ardyan, 2020). Furthermore, family involvement in the family business exposes members to overlapping business and family roles (Qiu & Freel, 2020).

The task conflict, in turn, is directly linked to the activities being performed in a given organization and can include differences of ideas, opinions, points of view (Jehn, 1995), as well as goals, and strategies (Eddleston & Kellermanns, 2007). This type of conflict is emotion-free, focusing on how individuals' abilities can best be utilized to perform a given job (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). Discussions regarding task conflicts cover how work should be done and employees can be better leveraged, thus facilitating organizational performance (Jehn & Mannix, 2001).

In family businesses, some conflicts are inevitable (Sorenson, 2017; Qiu & Freel, 2020) and often stand out in comparison to other business configurations (Eddleston & Kellermanns, 2007), given that, in addition to common organizational causes, conflicts in family businesses frequently involve emotionally fraught long-term relationship issues, since family members are emotionally connected through long-term relationships (Alderson, 2015; Rousseau et al., 2018). Emotional attachments increase the depth of conflict because members with blood ties do not expect to be abused by family members, and when this occurs, hurt, bitterness, and anger are multiplied (Alderson, 2015), thereby increasing internal disputes (Kellermanns & Eddleston, 2004).

Besides, the closer and more stable the relationship, the more critical the conflict (Grote, 2003). Unlike other types of traditional businesses where members of the same family do not need to work with each other daily, there is daily interaction between the family and the business (Alderson, 2015). Similarly, issues directly related to family problems can contribute to business conflicts (Eddleston & Kellermanns, 2007). This is worrisome, as the impact of conflicts within families can destroy the company (Dewi & Ardyan, 2020).

Moreover, conflicts in family firms may stem from: (i) friction between generations (Davis & Harveston, 1999), (ii) the succession process (Massis et al., 2008), (iii) a power struggle (Murad et al., 2017), (iv) sibling rivalry due to divorce, and (v) incompetence on the part of family members (Alderson, 2015). Adding to these causes, many of the conflicts in this type of business configuration are rooted in the divergence of interests between the parties involved, *i.e.*, the agency employed in its structure (Lubatkin et al., 2005).

The SEW theory allows one to understand the emergence of conflicts in a family business, as this approach considers that family members, owners of the business, operate to value this institution and avoid factors that threaten control over their company. Such targeting occurs

even if it means an increase in risk or performance below expectations (Gomez-Mejía et al., 2007; Gomez-Mejía et al., 2014).

In this sense, SEW involves emotional aspects, defending non-financial elements that meet the family's affective needs (Gomez-Mejía et al., 2007). Thus, the essence of the theory is found in the family's behavioral tradition in business management. Accordingly, the model is closely linked to how family businesses are motivated and committed to preserving the practices of socio-emotional wealth or adequate capital (Berrone et al., 2012; Qiu & Freel, 2020).

In this context, Berrone et al. (2012) characterize five SEW dimensions: (i) family control and influence in the business, resulting from the family's monitoring of the organization's day-to-day activities; (ii) identification of family members with the company, with a fusion between what the family and the company represent, transforming the two characters into one; (iii) social bonds, through the sharing of family values established in the organization; (iv) family emotional attachment, in the sense that emotions result from everyday situations and are not static. As they arise, they evolve through more or less critical events in each family business system, such as succession, divorce, illness, etc., and (v) renewal of family ties through succession. However, Ng and Hamilton (2021) argue that these characteristics of SEW are heterogeneous, reflecting the different circumstances and characteristics of family members involved in the business over time.

The five dimensions of SEW can be seen positively when evaluated by family members. Conversely, they are considered negatively when family control and strong identification with the company make heirs feel trapped and dependent on the family and the organization (Schulze et al., 2001). They can reduce the willingness of family members to maintain a proactive engagement, with a tendency to place greater emphasis on activities that benefit an individual family member or branch (Kellermanns et al., 2012).

When referring to socio-emotional wealth, it is taken that it is formed by a cluster of feelings, emotions, relationships, and bonds exclusive to family businesses. Therefore, preserving this wealth is directly linked with the involvement of the family's efforts to change the business to the point of success or failure of the company (Wilson et al., 2013).

Empirically, the study by Kellermanns et al. (2012) sought to demonstrate that SEM can have a dark side and detrimental effects on family business stakeholders. The study shows that SEW is the first reference in family businesses, serving as a driver of selfish family behaviors. This is because we understand that the family's needs are placed above those of the company and its stakeholders in some family businesses. Furthermore, the authors point out that family members are encouraged to harm or ignore non-clan stakeholders when strong family ties or identities occur.

Yet another recent investigation (Pimentel et al., 2020) explored perceptions of organizational fairness and levels of commitment with 98 family business workers and 107 small non-family business workers. The results showed no differences between non-family employees between the two types of organizations regarding perceptions of organizational justice. However, the data also revealed that there are significant differences in levels of organizational commitment. Thus, they demonstrated that, in family businesses, employees' perceptions of organizational justice are positively related to levels of responsibility, especially concerning the affective dimension.

The study by Ames et al. (2020) investigated how socio-emotional wealth impacts the professionalization process in a family business, concluding that socio-emotional wealth influences professionalization to preserve family values since this phenomenon occurs to maintain the business and allow it to survive. Also, their research revealed that the hiring of non-family professionals allowed different perceptions for decision-making, adding value to this process.

Another source of organizational conflict is that family firms have more centralized decision-making processes and less formal control systems (Granadillo, 2008), contributing to increased conflicts in the family business. Based on these assumptions, it is possible to infer that family businesses have unique characteristics in both multigenerational (Chaudhary & Batra, 2018) and emotional (Berrone et al., 2012) dimensions, thereby revealing the family's peculiarities. The presence of family culture, in this context, can provide a competitive advantage. This is when the family's values and vision are incorporated into the organizational culture, with the founders being sensitive to the needs of family employees (Kellermanns et al., 2012).

However, the risks are heightened when family harmony and the equity involved come into play. In this sense, the relationships between parents and children, siblings or couples, and the founder and family members tend to be quite complex and sensitive. Such factors can generate a high emotional charge, which may be used to manipulate family members (Berrone et al., 2012; Souza, 2020). In this scenario, conflicts caused by the divergence of ideas and expectations among family members are commonly found. Accordingly, such conflicts can overturn the harmony of the family group and even destroy the company's assets in the medium and long term (Souza, 2020).

Considering the SEW concepts and the management styles presented above, the present study built its hypotheses under the notion that they influence the emergence of conflicts in family businesses differently. The expectation was to confirm that the greater the relational and situational leadership, the lower the conflicts, since these styles are associated with better work environments and performance. On the other hand, hypotheses argue that task-oriented leadership has a more substantial influence on conflicts, knowing that this style values aspect related to goals and hierarchy.

- **H1a:** The leadership relationship style is negatively related to conflict relationships.
- **H1b:** The leadership task style is positively related to conflict relationships.
- **H1c:** The situational leadership style is negatively related to conflict relationships.
- **H2a:** The leadership relationship style is negatively related to task conflicts.
- **H2b:** The leadership task style is positively related to task conflicts.
- **H2c:** The situational leadership style is negatively related to task conflicts.

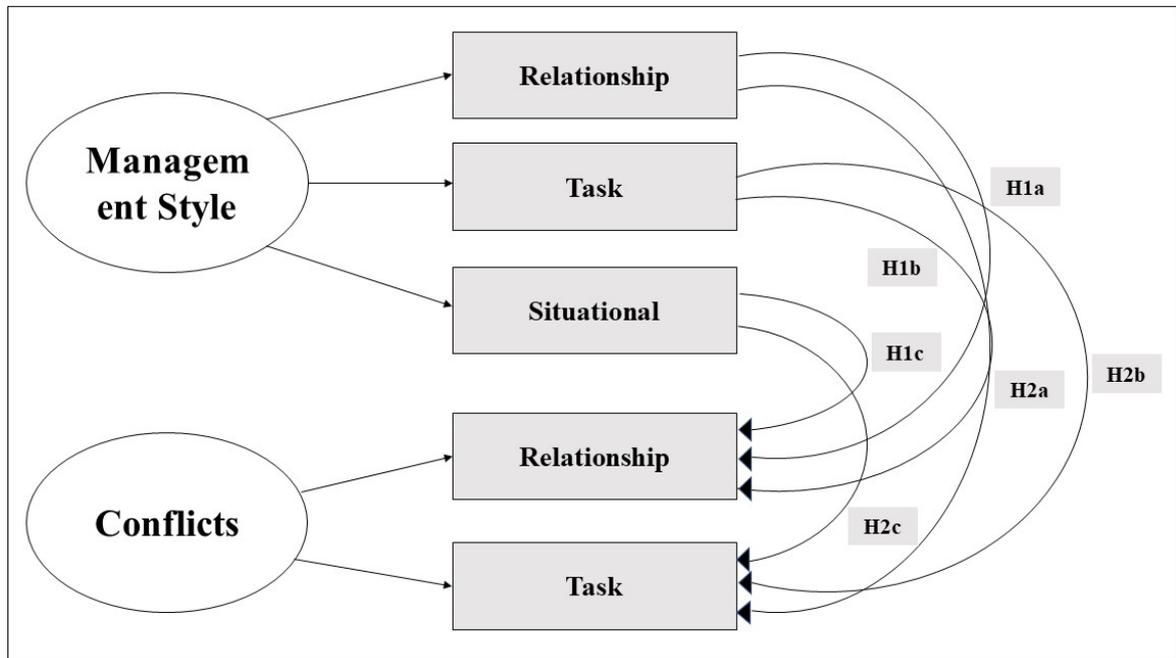
A theoretical model illustrates the relationships amongst these constructs, highlighting the relationships between leadership, situational, and task styles, and relationship and task conflicts (Figure 1).

### 3. METHODS

#### 3.1. SAMPLE AND DATA COLLECTION

This study collected data from 540 participating workers employed by Brazilian family businesses. These were recruited through invitations sent online by the researchers. However, only 410 questionnaires were considered in this study as the remainder were inconsistent or incomplete.

The participants sampled were mostly women [59%;  $n = 242$ ]. The mean age of participants was 32.51 years [Standard Deviation ( $s$ ) = 9.20]. Most respondents had completed higher education (56.1%,  $n = 230$ ), while another 23.2% ( $n = 95$ ) had incomplete higher education, and 20.7% ( $n = 85$ ) only had a high school education. Of the total sample, the majority had worked in the family business for over a year (77.1%,  $n = 316$ ).



*Figure 1.* Theoretical model of the study  
*Source:* Prepared by the authors (2022).

### 3.2. MEASURES

Participants answered three anonymous self-report structured survey instruments (questionnaires), one addressing sociodemographic data (sex, age, schooling, and company time), composed of 32 questions. The constructs in this study were developed by using two measurement scales adopted from prior studies:

a) Management Style Assessment Scale (MSAS; Melo, 2004): containing 19 items, grouped into three factors: (i) relationships – referring to the extent to which the leader will have work relationships that are characterized by mutual trust, friendship, respect for employees' ideas, and interest in their feelings ( $\alpha = 0.94$ ); (ii) situational – referring to the manager's ability to identify the reality of their work environment and adapt their style to the demands of that environment ( $\alpha = 0.82$ ); and, (iii) task – referring to the probability that the leader has to define and structure his/her role and that of the employees, in the pursuit of goals ( $\alpha = 0.72$ ). According to Melo (2004), these three factors cover the different theoretical definitions of leadership. The items on this scale were responded to on a five-point Likert scale (*1-never acts like this; 5-always acts like this*).

b) Supervisor-Subordinate Conflict Scale – (SSCS) developed by Siqueira (2014); translated, adapted, and factorially validated by Martins et al. (2007), evaluates the leader-employee conflict on the basis of the latter's opinion. It is composed of two factors considered: (i) relationship conflict – disagreement or incompatibility of personalities or disposition in the relations between leader and employee ( $\alpha = 0.83$ ); and (ii) task conflict – disagreement between leader and employee about work, some project or how to execute it ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ). Responses to the items were made on a four-point Likert scale ranging from (*1-none; 4-very much*).

### 3.3. DATA ANALYSIS

A Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to verify if the hypothetical model fit the data, *i.e.*, if the data collected in the study fitted the instrument's five factors model (managerial styles

- relationship, situational and task, and conflicts - relationship and task). A CFA is a procedure used to verify a hypothesis-based measurement model-relationship between latent or constructed variables, or variables (unobserved) and (observed) indicators. Latent factors are unobserved variables. Indicators are manifest variables - responses of items or scores in an instrument. Thus, the CFA provides a more robust analytical framework than traditional statistical methods that do not consider measurement errors in the proxies employed (Ling et al., 2000).

Regarding the coefficients considered, the chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) and the degrees of freedom (df) ratios were used, along with indexes of adjustment [*i.e.*, Confirmatory Fit Index (CFI), TLI and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)]. The  $\chi^2$  indicates the magnitude of the discrepancy between the observed and the modeled covariance matrix, testing the probability of the theoretical model fitting the data. The greater this value, the more inadequate the adjustment. However, the ratio of the  $\chi^2$  to df degrees of freedom was also considered, with  $1 \leq \frac{\chi^2}{df} \leq 3$  (Kline, 2005).

The CFI (Comparative Fit Index) and TLI (Tucker Lewis Index) indexes calculate the relative adjustment of the observed model compared to a base model; values above 0.95 indicate a perfect fit, while those above 0.90 indicate an appropriate adjustment (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The RMSEA (Root-Mean-Square Error of Approximation) is also a measure of a discrepancy and should remain below 0.05, but is acceptable up to 0.08 (Hair et al., 2005; Kline, 2005).

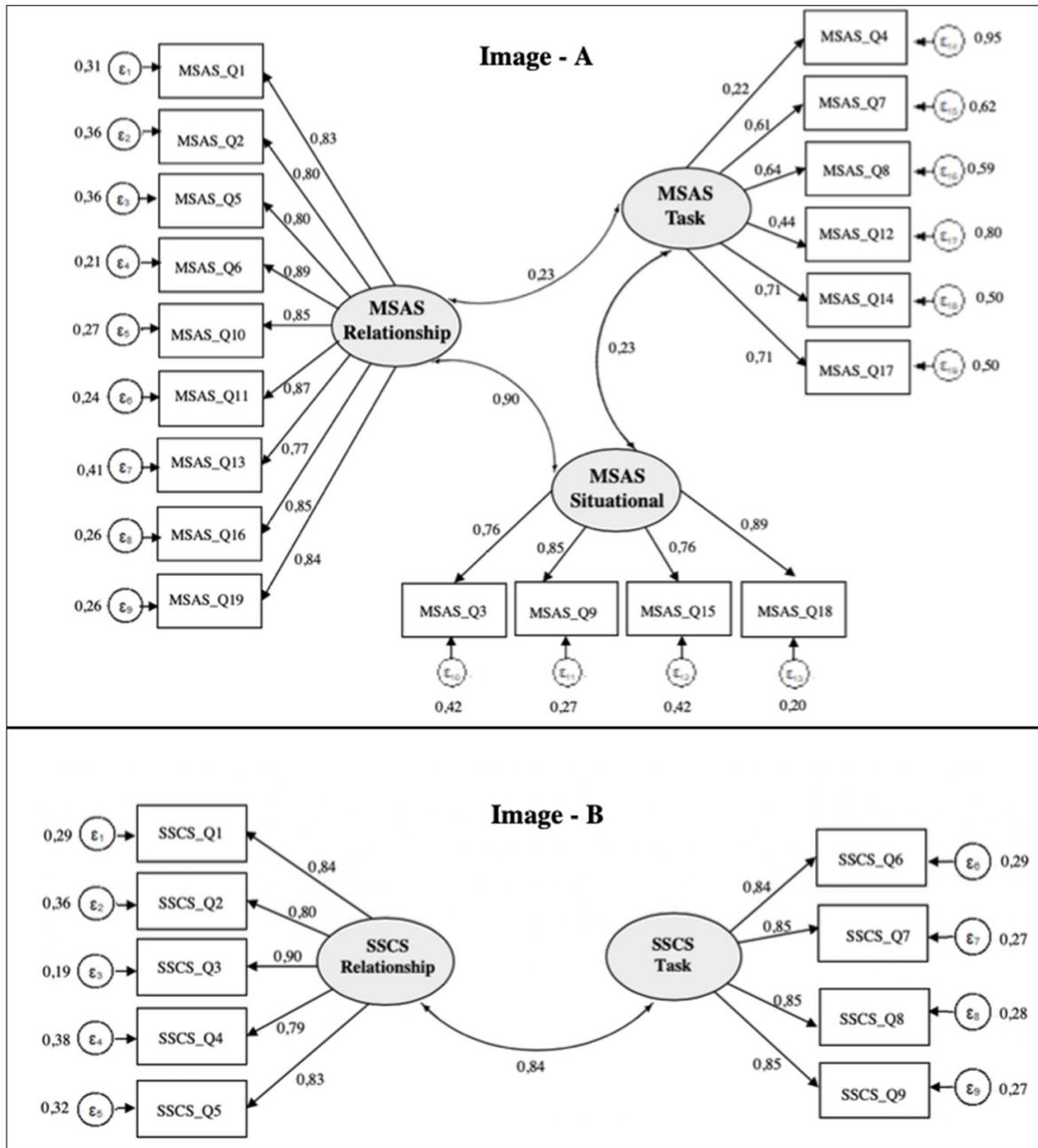
Descriptive statistical analyses and the graphical (Box-plot) and tabular synthesis techniques were employed. Moreover, Pearson's correlation analysis was performed to measure the degree of association between variables. To further explore the data, multiple linear regression was used to test a model in which Managerial Styles (Relationship-oriented (RO), Situational-oriented (SO), and Task-oriented (TO)) predict Relationship Conflicts (RC) and a model in managerial styles predicts Task Conflicts (TC). The CFA was performed in JASP 0.10.2. The descriptive analysis, correlation, and multiple regression were performed with the IBM SPSS Statistics package (v. 23, Chicago IL). We set the significance level to 0.05 in all inferential analyses.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. MEASUREMENT MODEL

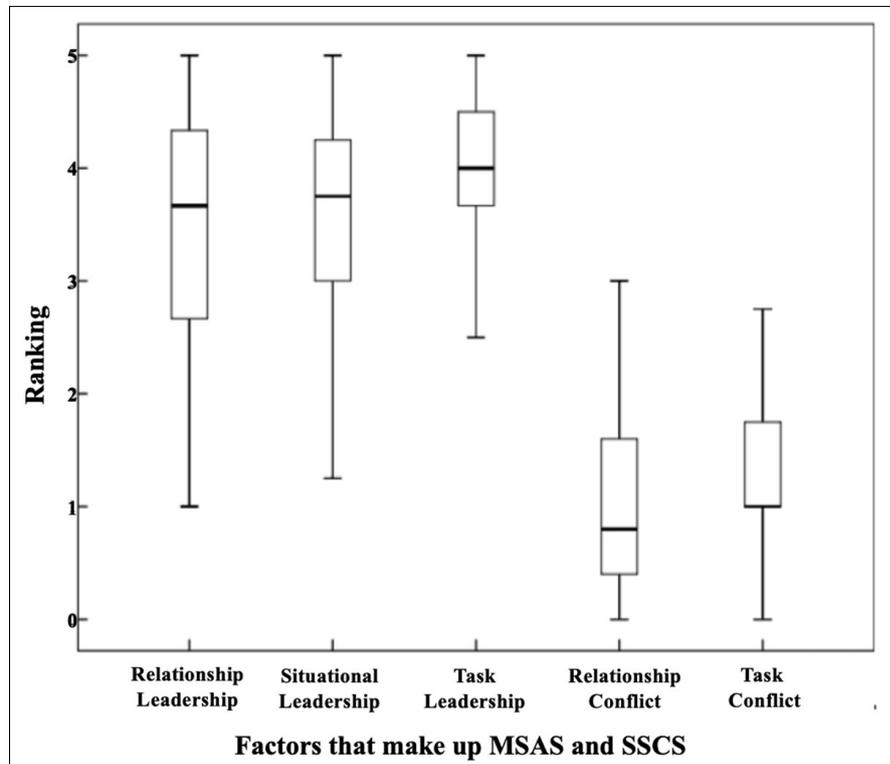
A Confirmatory Factorial Analysis (CFA) was employed to evaluate the convergent and discriminant validity of the study's measures. The goodness-of-fit indexes suggested the model's plausibility ( $\frac{\chi^2}{df} = 2.90 < 3.0$ , CFI = 0.982, TLI = 0.920, RMSEA = 0.068) (Hu & Bentler, 1999, Hair et al., 2005, Kline, 2005). The factorial structure of the first analysis is presented according to a model made up of the three latent managerial style factors (Figure 2A) and the two latent conflict factors (Figure 2B). In all, 28 variables were observed.

The factorial loads of the 28 items were clearly adjusted to the presented structure. In this sense, the loads of the "RO" items varied between 0.77 and 0.88; those of the "SO" between 0.75 and 0.89; and those of "TO" between 0.21 and 0.71. The items related to "RC" showed loads of between 0.78 and 0.89, while those for "TC" were between 0.84 and 0.86.



**Figure 2.** Confirmatory factor analysis. MSAS, Management Style Assessment Scale; SSCS, Supervisor-Subordinate Conflict Scale  
**Source:** Prepared by the authors (2022).

Employee-attributed values for each of the five factors mentioned are illustrated in Figure 2, where the extreme traces (lower and upper) indicate the lowest and the highest values assigned on the scales, with 1 and 5 being the MSAS (total) and 0 and 3 for SSCS (total). The dash inside the boxes (horizontal) indicates the averages that divide the employees into two equal parts. For example, in the relationship leadership category, 50% of the employees attributed values up to 3.66 for this factor, while the other 50% attributed values above 3.66. The box's height provides the limit of values assigned among 50% of employees. In the case of relationship leadership, the box's height includes information that the set value limit was 4.33 (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Box-plot of the factors that make up MSAS and SSCS  
**Source:** prepared by the authors (2022).

Additionally, a Cronbach test was performed to assess the internal consistency of the scales. The results are in the following table (Table 3):

**Table 3**

*Factors and items that compose and Cronbach's alpha of the scales used in this research*

| Scale | Factors      | Items                          | Cronbach's Alpha |
|-------|--------------|--------------------------------|------------------|
| MSAS  | Relationship | 1, 2, 5, 6, 10, 11, 13, 16, 19 | 0,941            |
|       | Situational  | 3, 9, 15, 18                   | 0,822            |
|       | Task         | 4, 7, 8, 12, 14, 17            | 0,721            |
| SSCS  | Relationship | 1, 2, 3, 4, 5                  | 0,827            |
|       | Task         | 6, 7, 8, 9                     | 0,896            |

**Source:** prepared by the authors (2022).

## 5. DISCUSSION

The descriptive analysis showed that when analyzing managerial styles, it was noted that the style of the leader highlighted by the employees was that of task ( $\bar{x} = 4.00$ ;  $s = 0,61$ ). This result corroborates earlier research reports (Vargas et al., 2018; Araújo et al., 2011; Ruffatto et al., 2017) that noted a predominance of the task style when analyzing employees' opinions. This indicates that leaders are more concerned with a search for goals and are oriented towards quick and profitable results, with a low capacity to effect changes (Melo, 2004), reinforcing the company structure and commitment to developing routines and activities (Melo & Santos, 2017). Similarly, in the SSCS, the highest average was also for the task dimension ( $\bar{x} = 4.22$ ;  $s = 0.68$ ).

Therefore, one can infer that the heads of family companies surveyed were task-oriented, both in managerial style and in conflict. Thus, they were particularly focused on concerns related to activities and results rather than on establishing relationships with their employees.

When the averages that make up the MSAS were analyzed individually, they were higher in the questions: "Put the work first" ( $\bar{x} = 4.21$ ;  $s = 0.87$ ), followed by "Value respect for authorities" ( $\bar{x} = 4.10$ ,  $s = 0.88$ ). While lower averages were found for "Employees' feelings" ( $\bar{x} = 3.23$ ;  $s = 1.22$ ) and "Stimulates the presentation of new ideas at work" ( $\bar{x} = 3.27$ ;  $s = 1.34$ ).

Regarding SSCS parameters, employees attributed higher values to: "How much difference of opinion is there between you and your boss?" ( $\bar{x} = 1.31$ ;  $s = 0.710$ ) and "During a decision process, how much difference of ideas is there between you and your boss?" ( $\bar{x} = 1.28$ ;  $s = 0.749$ ). However, the questions with the lowest average were: "How much anger is there between you and your boss?" ( $\bar{x} = 0.60$ ;  $s = 0.72$ ) and "How much personal friction is there between you and your boss during the decisions?" ( $\bar{x} = 1.00$ ;  $s = 0.921$ ). In this sense, values higher than 2.5 indicate that the conflict is high within the organization, while values lower than 2.4 show uncharacteristic (Siqueira, 2014). In the present study, all the averages were below this value, indicating that conflicts exist but are not highlighted when the employees' opinions are scrutinized.

The Pearson's correlation analysis between managerial style and conflicts between managers and employees showed a strong negative influence amongst the variables analyzed ( $r = -0.731$ ,  $n = 410$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ ). This allows one to infer that the existing conflicts in the family companies surveyed are related to managerial leadership style.

The results indicate a common belief that managerial aspects, such as the organization of processes, the setting of goals, the analysis of indicators, and the organization of administrative activities and flows, are essential to protecting family assets. Such beliefs seem to underlie the conflicts. According to SEW, the family organization's socio-emotional wealth shapes management tools to preserve family assets and values (Gomez-Mejía et al., 2007). However, new management models impose beliefs and values that rival consolidated practices, establishing two opposing worlds. The rational management of family business resources generates conflicts because it clashes with tradition (Pauli et al., 2016). Such divergences occur with the previous generation, whose positive results were based on the founder's entrepreneurship (Rossato Neto & Cavedon, 2004; Rivo-López et al., 2017). Still, conflicts are common reasons for social ties and the affective basis of the relationship between generations being put at risk (Berrone et al., 2012).

The correlation analysis also showed that when the association between the management style and individual conflict factors was undertaken, all correlations were statistically significant. The most strongly negative association was found between the managerial style of relationship and the relationship conflict ( $r = -0.699$ ,  $n = 410$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ ) and the managerial style of relationship and the task conflict ( $r = -0.676$ ,  $n = 410$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ ). This allows us to conclude that, for the employees surveyed in this study, the more the managerial style tends towards a relationship or task-oriented leadership, the lower the existence of a relationship and task conflicts, respectively.

Although the task-oriented management style was significant, its influence in terms of relationship conflicts was deemed as weak by employees ( $r = -0.221$ ,  $n = 410$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ ) and tasks ( $r = 0.212$ ,  $n = 410$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ ). This finding is consistent with the observation that when there are differences of opinion among employees, managers try to keep control of their negative emotions and when receiving contrary points of view, do not take them as a threat (Xin & Pelled, 2003). According to these authors, leaders learn how to distinguish work conflicts from employee relationship conflicts.

The present results show that family businesses present varied and complex issues to be considered when managing their conflicts. Collaboration, accommodation, and commitment seem to have more effective and lasting results than competitive strategies (Sorenson, 1999). On the other hand, this question illustrates the influence of the oriented management style on the occurrence of conflicts and points out its limits to resolving them or placing them in a positive perspective for the organization's development.

Managerial styles (relationship, situational, task) adopted by managers were related to conflicts (relationship and task) in organizations. It cannot be argued that within the sample of employees of family businesses investigated, there was a single managerial style (relationship, situational, or task) responsible for conflicts. Still, two of the three managerial styles exerted a greater or lesser influence. This may indicate that there are at least two of the three types of styles operating commonly in family organizations or even that leaders behave in different ways depending on the work situation presented (Lima et al., 2012) or the positional hierarchies involved in the conflict (Xin & Peddel, 2003). Table 4 shows the results of the linear regression and confirms the influence relationship, confirming the hypotheses of the study:

**Table 4**

*Influence of management styles on the emergence of conflicts (n = 410 employees)*

|  | $\beta$ | Error | t      | Significance | Inferior limit | Upper limit |
|--|---------|-------|--------|--------------|----------------|-------------|
| Dependent variable:<br>Relationship conflict ( $R^2 = 0.479$ ) |         |       |        |              |                |             |
| Constant   | 3.343   | 0.190 | 17.570 | < 0.001      | 2.969          | 3.719       |
| Relationship Leadership  | -0.371  | 0.047 | -7.874 | < 0.001      | -0.463         | -0.270      |
| Situational leadership   | -0.191  | 0.050 | -3.792 | < 0.001      | -0.290         | -0.090      |
| Task leadership  | -0.087  | 0.045 | -1.955 | - 0.051      | -0.175         | 0.000       |
| Dependent variable:<br>Task Conflict ( $R^2 = 0.504$ )         |         |       |        |              |                |             |
| Constant   | 3.181   | 0.172 | 8.521  | <0.001       | 2.844          | 3.519       |
| Relationship Leadership  | - 0.318 | 0.043 | -7.460 | <0.001       | - 0.401        | - 0.234     |
| Situational leadership   | - 0.152 | 0.046 | -3.348 | <0.001       | -0.242         | - 0.063     |
| Task leadership  | - 0.075 | 0.040 | -1.858 | 0.06         | - 0.154        | 0.005       |

*Source:* prepared by the authors (2022).

Therefore, the results of linear regression confirm the relationship of influence between management styles and the emergence of conflicts in organizations. However, the hypotheses of negative relationships between the relationship-oriented and situational styles did not show negative effects on the emergence of conflicts. Table 5 shows that task- and situation-oriented management styles strongly influence the emergence of relationship and task conflicts, not allowing the establishment of a single style as responsible for the emergence of conflicts in family businesses. Table 5, below, presents the results of the hypotheses:

**Table 5**  
*Result of the study hypotheses*

|     | <b>Hypothesis</b>  | <b>Result</b> |
|-----|--|---------------|
| H1a | The leadership relationship style is negatively related to conflict relationships. | Not supported |
| H1b | The leadership task style is positively related to conflict relationships.         | Supported     |
| H1c | The situational leadership style is negatively related to conflict relationships.  | Not supported |
| H2a | The leadership relationship style is negatively related to task conflicts.         | Not supported |
| H2b | The leadership task style is positively related to task conflicts.                 | Supported     |
| H2c | The situational leadership style is negatively related to task conflicts.          | Not supported |

*Source:* prepared by the authors (2022).

On the other hand, the preponderance of the task-oriented management style identified in the sample of this study supports the idea that family businesses depend upon it as a strategy for the preservation and continuity of the family business. In this sense, conflict management strategies need to consider the socio-emotional aspects present in the organizational culture, consolidated by the entrepreneurship of previous generations that constituted a large part of the capital to be managed. There is, therefore, a current view that the entry of people from outside the family into the organization, especially to occupy strategic roles, is necessary for its expansion. This trend poses new challenges and requires different strategies so that the act of organizing does not destroy social-emotional assets and put the company's continuity at risk.

In this sense, SEW provides essential elements to understand this organizational continuum established over the generations that manage family businesses. Such potential is based on the fact that this model brings light to two worlds in opposition but needs to be articulated to prevent conflicts from destroying the organization (Kellermanns et al., 2012). Nevertheless, it is essential to consider that the tension between the managerial model and the family business's socio-emotional assets (or wealth) can be mitigated by analyzing conflicts since SEW is also in constant development. The study by Miller and Le Breton-Miller (2014) contributes to the understanding that socio-emotional priorities are different among the organization members and can vary throughout the organizational cycle.

The survival and continuity of family-owned enterprises depend on, amongst other things, the leadership capacity of the bosses. This, when exercised assertively, contributes to the business's survival insofar as it defines roles and ensures information transparency, which helps to reduce conflicts between peers and between employees and leaders.

Finally, the data and discussion presented show that conflict is widespread in the organizational environment of family businesses. This conflict-laden atmosphere is significantly influenced by the leadership style in the business. It is critical to recognize that in this particular type of business, the closeness of the leader to the team members is often very close. However, this closeness does not necessarily equate to motivation, and can sometimes even be a hindrance when it comes to discussing work-related issues with the leader. The interplay between leadership and conflict

becomes even more complicated in the business-family relationship, adding to the complexity of management. Consequently, the importance of investing in leadership development is underscored, as human capital plays a central role in the company's productivity.

Companies, when seeking to intervene to reduce conflicts between work/family and increase their development and productivity, should not stop only in communicating rules established by the leadership, but in applying changes based on reality, aiming to reduce conflicts between leadership and subordinates, being aware that employees must have their needs met.

The research results do not exhaust the subject; on the contrary, they highlight the need for new studies to assess the reasons for the emergence of conflicts, the type of leadership, and its management strategies.

## 6. FINAL REMARKS

Evidence of the occurrence of all leadership styles (relationship, situational, and task) studied was found across all companies sampled. However, our findings also show that the management approaches of the organizations surveyed were more focused on the task style; that is, leaders were focused on achieving results, and the organizational routine imposed those goals and activities. Regarding the types of conflicts generated (relationship and task), the occurrence of both was documented.

Concerning the relationship between managerial style and the emergence of conflicts in family businesses, the present study showed that a relationship between these existed in the family companies surveyed. Thus, it is understood that leaders need to influence conflict management strategies and encourage employees to work together effectively for an ideal and enabling environment to exist. Saeed et al. (2014) concur with this position, pointing out that it becomes imperative for a leader to achieve organizational goals, focusing on conflicting issues' rational and emotional aspects. Concomitantly, the leader must resolve disputes or conflicts that occur at any level of the corporate hierarchy.

It can be concluded that implementing a relational leadership style reduces the occurrence of relational and task conflict. When leaders prioritize fostering emotional relationship with their employees based on trust, friendship, partnership, support, and guidance, they create an environment where conflict is less likely to occur (Melo, 2004).

In such a case, an appreciation, by employees, of relationships that attribute value to personal bonds take hold. At the same time, based on the present results, these bonds are more clearly perceived in the work relationships between leaders and employees. Furthermore, there is a trend toward reducing conflicts, as leaders with a managerial style focused on relationships show appreciation, consider employees' expectations, and are concerned with team cohesion.

In general, in analyzing the influence of leadership style on the emergence of conflicts, the present results suggest that a more significant portion of the conflicts between leaders and employees in family companies arise from the leadership style adopted. Accordingly, it is up to these organizations to review the managerial styles adopted by their leaders and to devise strategies that, over time, improve work management relationships and ensure employee retention (Ahmed, 2015), particularly when the style of managing the business had been identified as influencing the emergence of conflicts.

It should be noted that the present study's sample did not stratify the inherent diversity of the family business segment, such as the company's lifetime, size, and economic sector of activity. In this sense, future studies can carry out these analyses following the influence of managerial styles in the emergence of conflicts, thereby contributing to the generalization of the hypotheses tested and discussed in this research.

Finally, this research seeks to contribute to the theory of managerial styles and conflicts in family businesses and draw the attention of professionals working in these companies to the style of management they adopt, the existing conflicts, and the strategies used to manage them. However, this research does not intend to exhaust the issues associated with these themes but rather open up possibilities for future studies that may extend investigations to differences in managerial style between men and women or even analyze managerial styles in different generations of family businesses (first, second and third-generation). Moreover, future qualitative studies to verify the leaders' perceptions about the existing conflicts in their companies and the strategies used to manage them are recommended.

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#### **AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION**

The authors declare that they worked equally on the stages of elaboration of this article.

#### **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

The present paper's authors declare that they have no conflict of interest concerning the objects addressed in it.

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