

Exploring Co-Regulation in Teams: Strategies to Mitigate Conflict and Burnout

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Abstract

Burnout is increasingly seen as a socially shaped phenomenon, with symptoms circulating among team members through interpersonal interactions and straining the team as a whole. However, we still know little about how collective and individual burnout experiences are constructed in socially stressful team environments and how teams can protect themselves from these effects. The present study integrates threat regulation and social allostatic load theories to investigate whether intra-team conflicts increase the prevalence of team burnout and, in turn, contribute to individual team members' exhaustion. In addition, we hypothesized that team co-regulation

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strategies, defined as interpersonal processes (i.e., conflict management, emotion management, and confidence building), could alleviate the unfavorable effects of intra-team conflict on team burnout prevalence and subsequent individual exhaustion. We collected data from 357 employees working in 63 teams. The results of multilevel modeling analyses showed that intra-team conflict was positively related to team member exhaustion through burnout prevalence at the individual and team levels. As hypothesized, teams could effectively mitigate this process. Specifically, the results showed that when teams actively engaged in conflict management, emotion management, and confidence-building strategies, the indirect relationship between intra-team conflicts and individual exhaustion (explained by burnout prevalence) was significantly weakened at the team level. By contrast, the cross-level interaction effects were not significant. This study adds novel insights into how burnout prevalence shapes individual exhaustion responses to conflict, depending on the use of team co-regulation strategies. Moreover, our results inform targeted interventions to strengthen such strategies and promote both team functioning and well-being.

Keywords

burnout contagion, interpersonal processes, social allostatic load, group or team conflict, threat regulation

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Introduction

Burnout prevalence among employees has reached alarming levels world-wide, earning epidemic status (Bakker, 2026). Where burnout was once framed as an individual response to prolonged work-related stress, it is now increasingly understood as a socially situated phenomenon that escalates its impact on organizations (Bakker, 2026; Bakker et al., 2023). This evolving perspective reflects growing evidence that burnout, marked by exhaustion, mental distance, and impaired self-regulatory functions (Schaufeli et al., 2020), propagates through everyday interactions (Urien et al., 2021). Indeed, research has shown that burned-out employees can transmit their symptoms to others through verbal complaints, non-verbal cues, and deteriorating attitudes and performance (Bakker et al., 2006). Burnout contagion has been documented among colleagues (Bakker et al., 2005; Meredith et al., 2020), between managers and subordinates (Wirtz et al., 2017), and even

between partners at home (Wang et al., 2022). Moreover, a recent study suggests that burned-out individuals may spark new outbreaks of burnout when transitioning between different organizations (Kensbock et al., 2022).

Although a growing body of research has examined burnout in team contexts, studies on how shared work environments contribute to its development and transmission remain relatively scarce, despite these settings being fertile ground for interpersonal exchanges (Mastorilli et al., 2025). Specifically, only a few studies have reported that higher team burnout predicts higher individual burnout among team members (Bakker et al., 2006; Gonzalez-Morales et al., 2012; Westman et al., 2011). While these findings point to an interpersonal process in which individual members absorb and internalize the team's collective states, they represent a simplified picture. Indeed, burnout unfolds within socially constructed and co-regulated team environments where members are jointly exposed to everyday stressors and engage in ongoing interactions (Schaufeli & Buunk, 2003). Through these interpersonal dynamics, they tend to gradually converge on similar cognitive, emotional, and behavioral patterns of functioning (Urien et al., 2021).

A key interpersonal dynamic that may fuel the social construction and transmission of burnout is intra-team conflict, defined as perceived interpersonal incompatibilities and disagreements (Jehn, 1995). The literature is rich in studies investigating the associations between conflict and team effectiveness (e.g., Maltarich et al., 2018; Tekleab et al., 2009). However, conflict is also a social stressor and a common source of individual burnout (Santarpia et al., 2024). Benitez et al. (2018) found that conflict influences team members' collective burnout levels. Moreover, research has suggested that conflict is a conduit for expressing negative emotions and attitudes among team members, triggering dysfunctional contagion dynamics (Jehn et al., 2013; Van Kleef & Côte, 2018). However, no study has yet explored whether exposure to a higher prevalence of burnout complaints and displays among colleagues may shape team members' own burnout responses to conflict. In particular, we focus on exhaustion because it represents the core and most affectively charged component of burnout, and is therefore especially susceptible to early contagion processes (Urien et al., 2021).

Based on insights from threat regulation (Williams, 2007) and social allostatic load (Saxbe et al., 2020) theories, we aim to investigate whether conflicts may ignite higher burnout prevalence and, through the exposure to others' symptoms, increase team members' exhaustion. At the individual level, threat regulation theory (Williams, 2007) explains the interpersonal dynamics through which individuals manage threats. Conflicts threaten team members by signaling potential harm to their goals and well-being (Thiel et al., 2018). In the face of a shared threat, team members engage in a dynamic

process of perspective-taking and behavioral accommodation, seeking to empathize with and adjust to one another's thoughts and emotions about the anticipated harm (Williams, 2007). However, by paying attention to others' burnout cues, team members may become more vulnerable to integrating these cues into their own affective responses and cognitive frameworks (Urien et al., 2021). At the team level, the social allostatic load model (Saxbe et al., 2020) suggests that teams use relationships as adaptive regulators to maintain emotional and physiological homeostasis across members. However, repeated exposure to social stressors can cause "wear and tear" on the team's regulatory function, fostering shared negative emotional states and stress responses.

As conflicts are inherent in teamwork (Gupta et al., 2011), research increasingly emphasizes the importance of examining them alongside the interpersonal processes through which team members manage them (Maltarich et al., 2018). Such interpersonal processes, hereafter referred to as team co-regulation strategies, are implemented by teams to prevent potential disruptions to collective functioning (Marks et al., 2001). They include strongly interrelated actions aimed at managing relationships, namely conflict management (i.e., addressing and resolving conflicts), emotion management (i.e., fostering emotional balance and effective coping), and confidence building (i.e., developing and maintaining motivation toward common goals; Mathieu et al., 2020). However, while research has traditionally focused on their relationship with team effectiveness (Klonek et al., 2024), there is limited evidence on whether these strategies help team members mitigate the impact of shared social stressors on their well-being (Liu & Liu, 2018). In this regard, threat regulation (Williams, 2007) and social allostatic load (Saxbe et al., 2020) theories converge in positing that team members may engage in intentional interpersonal actions to maintain team balance in arousal and emotion as well as mitigate perceived harm from shared threats. Therefore, the present study aims to explore whether team co-regulation strategies act as buffers in the relationships among intra-team conflict, burnout prevalence, and exhaustion at the individual and team levels.

To achieve our aims, we developed a multilevel conceptual model (see Figure 1) that investigates the process linking intra-team conflict to exhaustion via burnout prevalence at both the individual and team levels, contingent on team co-regulation strategies. This study advances the current understanding of burnout by identifying burnout prevalence as a key mechanism linking intra-team conflict to individual exhaustion and by showing how co-regulation strategies may mitigate these effects. Thus, we contribute to the literature in several ways, both conceptually and methodologically. By originally applying the two theoretical frameworks, we integrate an interpersonal perspective with a systemic view of co-regulation in work teams. In doing so, we provide novel

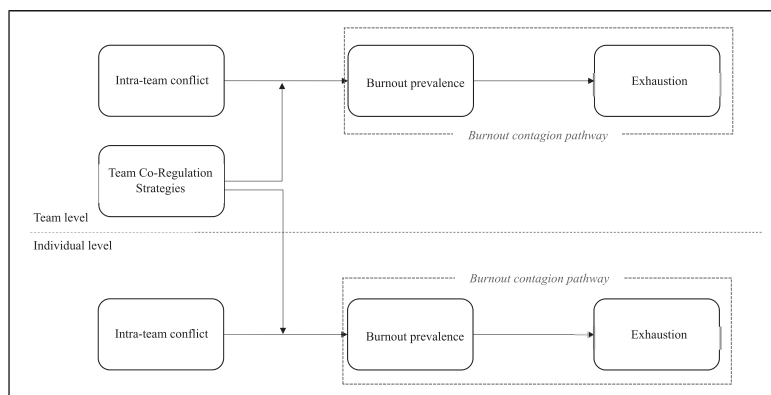


Figure 1. The multilevel conceptual model.

Note. Team co-regulation strategies represent a composite construct encompassing three interpersonal team processes: conflict management, emotion management, and confidence building. Team-level exhaustion in the figure represents the team-average (i.e., intercept) of individual members' exhaustion scores

empirical support for the idea that intra-team conflict can generate social allostatic load, and that interpersonal processes can help alleviate it (Saxbe et al., 2020), shaping the convergence of team members toward a shared experience of strain. We also refine threat regulation theory by suggesting that, in the face of shared threats, the individual perspective-taking and behavioral accommodation processes that are typically adaptive may instead foster the internalization of burnout symptoms. In both frameworks, we also expand the range of co-regulation strategies under consideration. Moreover, we respond to recent calls to disentangle and jointly examine team-level and individual-level dynamics (Huang et al., 2022; Junker et al., 2022). Indeed, unlike prior research that has primarily focused on the team as a whole, we also account for individual variability in how team members perceive, interpret, and construct their responses to conflict (Jehn et al., 2013; Santarpia, Sommovigo, et al., 2024) and others' burnout (Urien et al., 2021). In addition, we conceptualize and measure burnout prevalence as the perception of how widespread burnout symptoms are among teammates, allowing us to more clearly disentangle one's own burnout experience from others' experiences. Overall, our study has practical significance for team management, offering more precise guidance on tailoring interventions to combat burnout and enhance team regulation, addressing both individual- and team-level needs (Santarpia et al., 2024).

Theoretical Background

Intra-team conflict, which arises from divergent perspectives on task execution or interpersonal frictions (Jehn, 1995), varies across individuals and teams. That is, some teams naturally exhibit more animosity and tension than others, and individual team members may perceive and experience conflicts differently (Jehn et al., 2013). In both scenarios, prolonged exposure to antagonistic interactions increases the risk of developing burnout symptoms (Bruk-Lee et al., 2013; Jehn et al., 2013), including exhaustion as well as cynical and disengaged attitudes (Esbati & Korunka, 2021; Santarpia, Sommovigo, et al., 2024).

At the individual level, team members pay attention to all contextual cues that provide information about their goals and well-being, especially when these cues are obstructive (Grand et al., 2016). Drawing on threat regulation theory (Williams, 2007), intra-team conflict poses dual threats to individual team members. It undermines collective effectiveness by signaling that the team is fractured and unlikely to perform well (Maltarich et al., 2018), and it jeopardizes individual well-being by harming one's self-concept and valued conditions, such as a sense of belonging (Tafvelin et al., 2020). In threatening situations, such as conflicts, research has shown that individuals are more likely to focus on negative stimuli, which tend to be more salient than positive ones (Van Kleef & Côte, 2018). In this regard, team burnout may signal, as an inflammatory response does, that the team is not functioning effectively (Urien et al., 2021). Therefore, when exposed to conflicts, individual team members may perceive a heightened prevalence of colleagues as burned out.

At the team level, Benitez et al. (2018) showed that conflict is stressful for all team members and, thus, increases the prevalence of burnout within the team. Drawing on the social allostatic load model (Saxbe et al., 2020), frequent and intense conflicts accumulate social allostatic load, disrupting the team's optimal homeostasis in arousal and emotions (i.e., neutral-to-positive states) and hindering members' ability to regulate and repair stress responses. Indeed, conflicts can escalate negative affect (e.g., anxiety, anger) and diminish positive affect (De Wit et al., 2012; Gerhardt et al., 2021), while also elevating cortisol levels and lowering heart rate variability - psychophysiological markers of impaired regulation in response to environmental stressors (Sommovigo et al., 2023). In addition, as argued by Jehn et al. (2013), the more conflicts escalate, the more individual members become entangled in others' negative emotions and attitudes. Indeed, disagreements and friction within teams facilitate the expression of negative emotions, cynical attitudes, and distress complaints (Thiel et al., 2018). Thus, given that team members'

psychophysiological states interact and synchronize through social interactions, team conflicts may lead to a higher collective prevalence of burnout.

Hypothesis 1. Intra-team conflict will be positively associated with burnout prevalence among colleagues at the individual (a) and team (b) levels.

Burnout complaints or displays can be focal points for the direct spread of burnout among team members (Gonzalez-Morales et al., 2012; Westman et al., 2011). According to threat regulation theory (Williams, 2007), when individuals face threats in a shared, goal-driven context, they engage in intrapsychic processes to imagine, understand, and adjust their interactions with others' thoughts and feelings from their own viewpoints. At the individual level, by paying closer attention to others' exhaustion during intra-team conflicts, team members may integrate negative emotions and attitudes into their functioning, thereby increasing their own exhaustion (Urien et al., 2021). Research has shown that emotional contagion, the tendency to synchronize with another's bodily and behavioral emotional expressions automatically, can drive this process (Barsade et al., 2018). Moreover, individuals may gauge others' exhaustion experiences and tune into them through cognitive and verbal mechanisms (Bakker et al., 2006). For instance, team members may compare their burnout symptoms (Schaufeli & Buunk, 2003), polarize their attitudes toward job issues (Boren, 2014), or recall emotions and cognitions related to past stressful experiences (Bakker et al., 2006).

Drawing on the social allostatic load model (Saxbe et al., 2020), burnout contagion occurs when one team member's emotional or physiological state serves as a convergence point toward which the whole team tends to evolve, pulling other members away from the optimal low-stress homeostatic baseline. Indeed, negative emotional states, such as exhaustion, have a higher contagion potential than positive ones (Block & Burnett Heyes, 2022). Experimental and quantitative evidence show that team members are more likely to transmit negative emotions to one another during conflicts than during neutral or positive interactions (Gamero et al., 2010; Van Kleef & Côte, 2018). As the number of burned-out team members increases, the spread of negative information and emotions is likely to intensify, raising the average level of exhaustion (Urien et al., 2021). This implies that, overall, burnout prevalence, as a form of socio-emotional information (Van Kleef & Côte, 2018), may serve as an explanatory mechanism for how conflict may translate into increased team members' exhaustion.

Hypothesis 2. Burnout prevalence among colleagues is positively associated with exhaustion at the individual (a) and team (b) levels.

Hypothesis 3. Burnout prevalence among colleagues mediates the association between intra-team conflict and exhaustion at the individual (a) and team (b) levels, such that intra-team conflict has a positive indirect effect on exhaustion through increased burnout prevalence.

Team Co-Regulation Strategies

According to threat regulation theory (Williams, 2007), team co-regulation strategies can be conceived as interpersonal regulatory actions aimed at reducing perceived threats. These strategies aim to alleviate team members' concerns about potential threats to their goals or well-being, such as those signaled by conflicts. Similarly, social allostatic load theory (Saxbe et al., 2020) posits that co-regulation promotes social allostasis, namely the mutual and adaptive regulation of shared stressors to maintain optimal conditions for the co-construction of positive emotions and relational bonds. Indeed, team co-regulation strategies orchestrate interpersonal activities among members, facilitating coordination towards shared objectives (Marks et al., 2001). Such interpersonal strategies underpin team effectiveness and viability in the face of collective challenges or disruptions (Liu & Liu, 2018). Specifically, conflict management involves establishing norms for open communication and negotiation to navigate disagreements constructively and prevent escalation (Benitez et al., 2018). Emotion management refers to strategies for maintaining emotional equilibrium, including techniques to calm down frustrated members or boost positive emotions (Troth et al., 2018). Confidence building involves communicating beliefs about team competencies (e.g., pep talks), simulating successful scenarios, and providing feedback on positive team achievements (Fortuin et al., 2023). Although the literature is still in its infancy (Liu & Liu, 2018), findings support a nuanced impact of conflicts on burnout, contingent on team co-regulation strategies. Among conflict management strategies, Benitez et al. (2018) found that avoidance and integration weakened the impact of team conflict on exhaustion, while compromising increased its impact. During conflicts, emotion management can either aggravate burnout if negative displays are suppressed or ameliorate its symptoms through positive reappraisal (Santarpia et al., 2024; Thiel et al., 2018). Teams with higher confidence in their competencies navigate conflicts better and mitigate burnout risks (Fortuin et al., 2023; Goncalo et al., 2010). While some studies have examined team co-regulation strategies in a fine-grained manner, substantial empirical work has shown that they tend to be strongly interrelated

and often co-occur in team settings (Killumets et al., 2015; Mathieu et al., 2020). As such, researchers have recommended capturing them as an overall construct or fine-grained dimensions (LePine et al., 2008; Marks et al., 2001), depending on the phenomenon under investigation. In our context, their combined use may facilitate conflict management by addressing the emotional aspects of conflicts and redirecting members to their goals, motives, and abilities. For instance, when a team encounters a conflict, effective stress management could involve actively engaging in open dialogue to reconcile opposing views (conflict management), restoring calmness with composure and empathy (emotion management), and reestablishing a strong sense of mutual support and trust (confidence building). Thus, collectively engaging in team co-regulation strategies may prevent conflicts from disrupting team functioning, lowering burnout prevalence and exhaustion levels among team members. Likewise, by participating in such interpersonal strategies, team members may reduce perceptions of conflict and effectively manage exposure to others' burnout symptoms, thereby limiting the detrimental effects on their own exhaustion.

Hypothesis 4. Team co-regulation strategies moderate the positive association between intra-team conflict and burnout prevalence among colleagues at individual (a) and team (b) levels, such that this relationship is weaker in teams making higher (vs. lower) combined use of conflict management, emotion management, and confidence building.

Hypothesis 5. Team co-regulation strategies moderate the indirect association between intra-team conflict and exhaustion through burnout prevalence at individual (a) and team (b) levels, such that this relationship is weaker in teams making higher (vs. lower) combined use of conflict management, emotion management, and confidence building.

Method

Sample and Procedure

The study was conducted within a large Italian financial services organization, involving voluntary participation from teams across various business functions. Each team, identified by a unique alphanumeric code provided by the organization, comprised at least two members with shared goals. We collected data using a self-reported online questionnaire distributed via email, ensuring informed consent and privacy protection in accordance with ethical standards outlined by the American Psychological Association and the principles of the

Declaration of Helsinki. The study received ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board of the Department of Psychology, Sapienza University of Rome (Prot. n. 0000797, 04/21/2022 [UOR: SI000030 - Classif. II/23]). Participants selected their team's identification code to aggregate data, resulting in 357 team members from 63 teams completing the survey. Response rates were 24.4% for individual team members and 43.8% for teams. On average, teams consisted of 6 members ($SD = 2.90$), all of whom were white-collar employees. The sample exhibited a balanced gender distribution, with a slight majority of women overall (53.2%) and within teams ($M = 0.47$, $SD = 0.29$). The largest age group among participants was 46-65 years (57.4%), with a significant proportion having organizational tenure exceeding 15 years (40.1%) and, within their current team, tenure ranging from 1 to 5 years for the majority (68.3%).

Measures

Intra-team conflict was measured using four items adapted from Jehn's (1995) scale, evaluating perceptions of disagreements over task execution and personal matters. An example is, *"In our team, we often have conflicting opinions regarding the work being done."* Participants could respond to the items using a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Task and relational conflicts were jointly examined, drawing from extensive literature highlighting their similar effects on strain outcomes (Bruk-Lee et al., 2013). Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.82$.

Burnout prevalence was measured using four items adapted from the Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT; Schaufeli et al., 2020) to assess the extent to which colleagues exhibit burnout symptoms. All items started with the phrase *"How many of your team colleagues"*, and were then completed by the burnout symptoms: *"...express they feel mentally exhausted because of their job?"* (exhaustion), *"...say they have lost enthusiasm for their work?"* (mental distance), *"...have negative reactions toward others?"* (emotional impairment), and *"...make mistakes in their work because they are thinking about other things?"* (cognitive impairment). Also, participants used a 5-point scale (1 = *nobody*, 5 = *everybody*). Our operationalization of burnout aligns with recent conceptual advancements in understanding the syndrome (Schaufeli et al., 2020) and is informed by previous studies on burnout contagion (Bakker et al., 2005)—Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.71$.

Exhaustion was measured with the validated short, three-item version of the BAT (Hadžibajramović et al., 2022), which assesses the frequency of personal feelings of physical and mental depletion at work. An example item

is, “*At work, I feel mentally exhausted*” (1 = *never*, 5 = *always*). Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.82$.

Team Co-Regulation Strategies were measured with ten items adapted from the Team Interpersonal Processes scale by Mathieu et al. (2020), measuring team members’ agreement with their engagement in conflict management (e.g., “*In our team, we work hard to restore harmony between people during conflicting situations*”, $\alpha = 0.87$), emotion management (e.g., “*In our team, we keep a good emotional balance, even in difficult times*”, $\alpha = 0.81$), and confidence building (e.g., “*In our team, we encourage each other to perform our very best*”, $\alpha = 0.88$). Participants reacted using a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Cronbach’s alpha for the total scale was $\alpha = 0.94$.

Control variables included gender and the team’s gender composition. Indeed, women are typically more responsive to social stressors, such as conflict (Taylor, 2011), and report higher levels of burnout in work settings than men (Purvanova & Muros, 2010). Gender was coded as 0 = woman and 1 = man. Team gender composition was computed as the team-level mean of individual gender, yielding a continuous score, with higher (lower) values indicating a greater proportion of men (women) in the team.

Strategy of Analysis

We conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) to test the extent to which the scales intended to measure the study variables could be empirically distinguished. Given the nested structure of the data with employees (individual level, L1) nested within work teams (team level, L2), we employed hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) using Mplus 8.1 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). We initially estimated null models to calculate the intra-class correlation coefficient (ICC1; González-Romá & Hernández, 2017), which indicates the proportion of total variance in each variable attributable to team clustering, and the reliability of team-level means (ICC2; Woehr et al., 2015). Moreover, within-team agreement was assessed using the $rwg(j)$ index, which compares the observed variance among team members on scale items to the expected variance in the absence of agreement (Woehr et al., 2015). To differentiate the modeling of variables across the two levels of analysis, L1 predictors were cluster-mean-centered, while L2 predictors were grand-mean-centered (Hofmann & Gavin, 1998). Note that our outcome variable, exhaustion, is an L1 construct and was not centered, thereby retaining both within-team and between-team variance, consistent with standard multilevel procedures (González-Romá & Hernández, 2017). However, in multilevel modelling, cross-level direct and indirect effects from L2 predictors can

capture only the between-team component of an L1 outcome (i.e., team-level mean or intercept; Tofighi & Thoemmes, 2014). Thus, such direct and indirect effects can only exist at the team level of analysis (Tofighi & Thoemmes, 2014).

Next, we examined mediation pathways following guidelines for multi-level studies (Mathieu & Taylor, 2007). This involved testing paths from the predictor (intra-team conflict) to the mediator (burnout prevalence), from the mediator to the outcome (exhaustion), and the direct path from the predictor to the outcome to ascertain whether mediation was full or partial. We then integrated the model with team co-regulation strategies and explored the hypothesized two-way interactions and the moderated mediation model. We used the online calculator provided by Preacher et al. (2006) to conduct simple slopes tests of the significant interaction effects. Mediated and conditional indirect effects were assessed using Sobel tests and the index of moderated mediation (IMM; Hayes, 2015). In addition, we employed Monte Carlo simulations to construct 95% confidence intervals (CIs) around these estimates, as they offer greater robustness for evaluating mediation and moderated mediation hypotheses compared to such tests (González-Romá & Hernández, 2017). We compare models based on improvements in the -2 Log Likelihood (-2 LL), Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), and Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) statistics, with lower values indicating better fit (Burnham & Anderson, 2004).

Additionally, to further test the robustness and directionality of the proposed model, we tested two alternative multilevel mediation models. In the first, exhaustion predicted intra-team conflict through burnout prevalence; in the second, exhaustion predicted burnout prevalence through intra-team conflict. This specification was grounded in prior research suggesting that higher levels of exhaustion may lead individuals to perceive greater burnout among colleagues and, through impaired coordination and interpersonal regulation, contribute to increased conflict within the team (e.g., Bakker et al., 2005). Testing these alternative models allowed us to directly challenge a theoretically plausible, yet competing, causal explanation, thereby strengthening the empirical and conceptual support for our hypothesized direction of effects. Moreover, we also examined each of the three team co-regulation strategies (i.e., conflict management, emotion management, and confidence building) separately to estimate their potential unique moderating effects within our hypothesized model. While our composite measure captures the shared variance among these strategies, prior literature has also considered them as distinct strategies (Killumets et al., 2015; LePine et al., 2008), suggesting that they may operate through partially different mechanisms. Disentangling their individual effects enables a more fine-grained

understanding of how specific regulatory processes shape team functioning under conflictual conditions, offering more targeted guidance for theory development and practical interventions.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 reports means, standard deviations, correlations, and multilevel justification indices (ICC1, ICC2, and $rwg(j)$) for our study variables. Intra-team conflict, burnout prevalence, and exhaustion were relatively infrequent phenomena, but they were positively correlated with one another. These variables showed negative correlations with team co-regulation strategies. Exhaustion was negatively correlated with gender, with men scoring lower than women. Similarly, teams with a higher proportion of men reported lower burnout prevalence and individual exhaustion levels. ICC1 values ranged from 0.14 for exhaustion to 0.26 for burnout prevalence, ICC2 values ranged from 0.62 for exhaustion to 0.76 for team co-regulation strategies, and $rwg(j)$ values ranged from 0.73 for intra-team conflict to 0.89 for team co-regulation strategies. These results indicated meaningful variation in all variables at both the individual (ranging from 46.4% to 59.4%) and team levels (ranging from 9.2% to 16.9%). Our results align with the cut-off values recommended in a previous review to support aggregation (Woehr et al., 2015), thus justifying our theoretical conceptualization and multilevel hypotheses testing.

Confirmatory Factor Analyses

In line with Mathieu et al.'s (2020) validation study where the CFA supported a higher-order model of the team interpersonal processes scale, conflict management, emotion management, and confidence building loaded onto a higher-order factor that explained their covariances, indicating adequate fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 75.43$, $df = 32$, $p < 0.001$; RMSEA = 0.06; CFI = 0.98; TLI = 0.98; SRMR = 0.02). Given also the strong observed covariances among the three specific strategies and their correlations with the higher-order composite scale, the results support the appropriateness and empirical parsimony of analyzing them as a bundled construct (Credé & Harms, 2015). Subsequently, we tested a four-factor model including intra-team conflict, burnout prevalence, exhaustion, and team co-regulation strategies as latent variables. This model showed a good fit ($\chi^2 = 407.26$, $df = 183$, $p < 0.001$; RMSEA = 0.06; CFI = 0.95; TLI = 0.94; SRMR = 0.05), confirming the distinctiveness of these constructs. All factor loadings were significant and greater than 0.57.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variables	M	SD	Individual variance	Team variance	ICC1	ICC2	rwg(j)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
(1) Intra-team conflict	1.98	0.85	54.0%	16.9%	0.25	0.68	0.73	-								
(2) Burnout prevalence	2.15	0.79	46.4%	16.7%	0.26	0.71	0.74	0.48**	-							
(3) Exhaustion	2.47	0.83	59.4%	9.2%	0.14	0.62	0.77	0.28*	0.38**	-						
(4) Team Co-regulation strategies	3.85	0.77	48.2%	10.8%	0.19	0.76	0.89	-0.46**	-0.39**	-0.25**	-					
(5) Conflict management	3.85	0.83	54.3%	13.3%	0.20	0.75	0.79	-0.45**	-0.35**	-0.27**	0.93**	-				
(6) Emotion management	3.82	0.83	58.5%	10.0%	0.15	0.72	0.77	-0.41**	-0.33**	-0.19**	0.93**	0.80**	-			
(7) Confidence building	3.86	0.83	57.7%	10.3%	0.16	0.73	0.82	-0.43**	-0.40**	-0.23**	0.93**	0.80**	0.80**	-		
(8) Gender	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.02	-0.04	-0.14**	-0.04	0.03	-0.07	-0.08	-	
(9) Team gender composition	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-0.07	-0.13*	-0.19**	-0.07	0.00	-0.10	-0.10	0.58**	-

Note. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; M = mean; SD = standard deviation; ICC1 = intra-class correlation coefficient; ICC2 = reliability of team-level means; rwg(j) = within-group interrater agreement; Gender (0 = woman; 1 = man). Correlations are calculated on the raw computed scores of study variables, which contain both individual and team variances, using the full sample of 357 individuals nested within 63 teams.

Conversely, a three-factor model forcing the items measuring intra-team conflict and burnout prevalence to load on a single factor demonstrated poorer fit ($\chi^2 = 508.36$, $df = 186$, $p < 0.001$; RMSEA = 0.07; CFI = 0.92; TLI = 0.91; SRMR = 0.06; $\Delta\chi^2 = 101.10$, $\Delta df = 3$, $p < 0.001$). A poorer fit was also observed when testing a model in which burnout prevalence and exhaustion were loaded onto the same factor ($\chi^2 = 627.93$, $df = 186$, $p < 0.001$; RMSEA = 0.08; CFI = 0.89; TLI = 0.88; SRMR = 0.09; $\Delta\chi^2 = 220.67$, $\Delta df = 3$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that these variables are distinct.

Hypotheses Testing

Mediation Analyses. The hypothesized mediation model (-2LL = 2299.72, AIC = 2345.72, BIC = 2361.94) fitted the data better than the null model (-2LL = 2525.03, AIC = 2543.03, BIC = 2577.93) and a model including gender and team gender composition as predictors (-2LL = 2369.93, AIC = 2411.93, BIC = 2493.37). Direct and indirect effects are reported in Table 2. At the individual level, we found that perceptions of intra-team conflict were positively related to burnout prevalence ($\gamma a1 = 0.32$, $p < 0.001$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [0.23, 0.41]) which, in turn, was positively linked to individual exhaustion ($\gamma b1 = 0.26$, $p < 0.001$, $SE = 0.07$, 95% CI [0.13, 0.40]). These results support *hypotheses 1a* and *2a*. Being male was negatively associated with burnout prevalence ($\gamma = -0.16$, $p < 0.01$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI [0.04, 0.28]), indicating that men perceived a lower prevalence of burnout within the team than women did. At the team level, we found that shared perceptions of team conflict were positively related to team burnout prevalence ($\gamma a2 = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$, $SE = 0.10$, 95% CI [0.49, 0.86]) which, in turn, was positively linked to team average exhaustion level ($\gamma b2 = 0.48$, $p < 0.001$, $SE = 0.12$, 95% CI [0.25, 0.72]). These results support *hypotheses 1b* and *2b*.

Intra-team conflict did not associate directly with individual exhaustion, at either the individual ($\gamma c1 = 0.12$, $p = 0.05$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI [-0.02, 0.24]) or team levels ($\gamma c2 = 0.06$, $p = 0.62$, $SE = 0.11$, 95% CI [-0.16, 0.28]). Burnout prevalence explained the association between intra-team conflict and exhaustion. The indirect effects of conflict on exhaustion were stronger at the team level ($\gamma a2 * \gamma b2 = 0.33$, $p < 0.001$, $SE = 0.03$, 95% CI [0.14, 0.51]) than at the individual level ($\gamma a1 * \gamma b1 = 0.09$, $p < 0.01$, $SE = 0.09$, 95% CI [0.04, 0.13]). Monte Carlo simulations supported the significance of these indirect effects at both individual (95% CI [0.04, 0.14]) and team levels (95% CI [0.16, 0.53]). These results provide evidence for *hypotheses 3a* and *3b*.

Moderation and Moderated Mediation Analyses. When we introduced team co-regulation strategies at the team level into the hypothesized model, the fit

Table 2. Estimated Direct and Indirect Effects of the Hypothesized Mediation Model

Direct and indirect effects	Unstandardized estimates		
	Coefficient	SE	95% CI
Individual level			
Intra-team conflict→burnout prevalence	0.32**	0.05	0.23, 0.41
Burnout prevalence→exhaustion	0.26**	0.07	0.13, 0.40
Intra-team conflict→exhaustion	0.12	0.06	−0.02, 0.24
Gender→ intra-team conflict	0.10	0.07	−0.04, 0.24
Gender→ burnout prevalence	0.16**	0.06	0.04, 0.28
Gender→ exhaustion	−0.18	0.10	−0.37, 0.01
Intra-team conflict→burnout prevalence→exhaustion	0.09**	0.03	0.04, 0.13
Team level			
Intra-team conflict→burnout prevalence	0.68**	0.10	0.49, 0.86
Burnout prevalence→exhaustion	0.48**	0.12	0.25, 0.72
Intra-team conflict→exhaustion	0.06	0.11	−0.16, 0.28
Team gender composition→ intra-team conflict	0.02	0.21	−0.40, 0.43
Team gender composition→ burnout prevalence	−0.19	0.16	−0.50, 0.13
Team gender composition→ exhaustion	−0.18	0.18	−0.53, 0.17
Intra-team conflict→burnout prevalence→exhaustion	0.33**	0.09	0.14, 0.51

Note. ** $p < 0.01$; SE = standard error; CI = confidence intervals. The confidence intervals are derived from Mplus. Gender (0 = woman; 1 = man).

indices improved ($-2LL = 2280.49$, $AIC = 2334.49$, $BIC = 2353.53$; see Figure 2).

The interaction between team-level intra-team conflict and co-regulation strategies was negative and significant ($\gamma = -0.40$, $p < .05$, $SE = 0.19$, 95% CI $[-0.78, -0.03]$). In contrast, the direct relationship between team-level regulation strategies and burnout prevalence was nonsignificant ($\gamma = -0.13$, $p = .33$, $SE = 0.14$, 95% CI $[-0.40, 0.14]$). Examination of the interaction plot (see Figure 3) indicated that, in teams with low co-regulation strategies, burnout prevalence increased strongly with intra-team conflict ($\gamma = 0.69$, $p < 0.01$, $SE = 0.12$, 95% CI $[0.45, 0.93]$). Conversely, in teams with high co-regulation strategies, this association was less pronounced ($\gamma = 0.33$, $p < 0.05$, $SE = 0.15$, 95% CI $[0.04, 0.62]$). The simple slopes showed a significant difference from one another ($\Delta\gamma = -0.36$, $p < 0.05$, $SE = 0.17$, 95% CI $[-0.69, -0.03]$).

Although the individual-level relationship between intra-team conflict and burnout prevalence varied between teams (slope was significant at

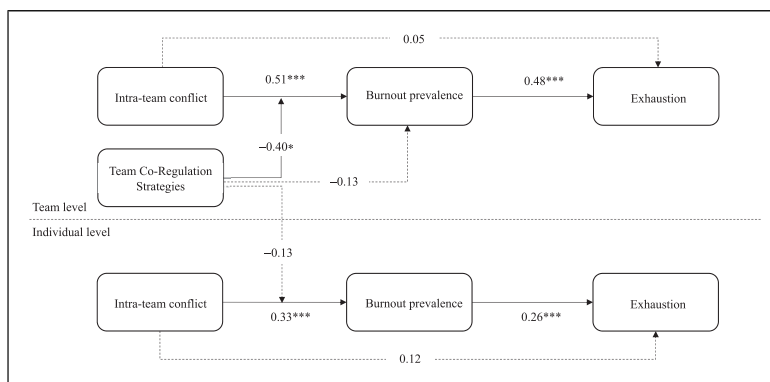


Figure 2. Moderated mediation model path coefficients.

Note. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Non-significant paths are depicted with dotted lines, while significant ones are in bold black. The analyses were controlled for gender and team gender composition, but the effects are not presented here for the sake of parsimony. Team regulation strategies represent a composite construct encompassing three interpersonal team processes: conflict management, emotion management, and confidence building. Team-level exhaustion in the figure represents the team-average (i.e., intercept) of individual members' exhaustion scores

$p < 0.01$), results did not support cross-level interaction effects due to team-level co-regulation strategies ($\gamma = -0.13$, $p = 0.32$, $SE = 0.13$, 95% CI $[-0.37, 0.12]$). Hypothesis 4b (and not 4a) received empirical support: team co-regulation strategies weakened the relationship between intra-team conflict and burnout prevalence, but exclusively at the team level. Thus, when teams used conflict management, emotion management, and confidence-building, the impact of intra-team conflict on shared perceptions of burnout prevalence was weaker.

Furthermore, Monte Carlo simulations ($IMM = -0.20$, $p = 0.06$, $SE = 0.11$, 95% CI $[-0.44, -0.01]$) showed that the team-level indirect effect on conflict on exhaustion via burnout prevalence was significant only for low and medium (vs. high) levels of team co-regulation strategies (see Table 3). These findings indicate that co-regulation strategies weakened the overall team-level process, leading to members' average exhaustion levels due to conflicts, supporting hypothesis 5b (and not 5a).

Additional Analyses

Additionally, we tested two alternative mediation models (see Supplemental Analyses). Fit indices consistently favored the hypothesized model

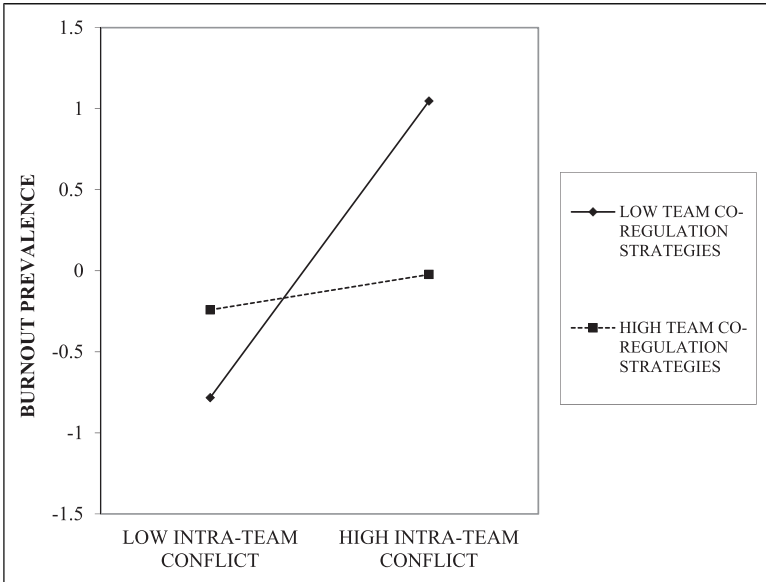


Figure 3. The two-way team-level interaction between intra-team conflict and team co-regulation strategies in the prediction of burnout prevalence.

Note. Simple slopes are plotted at one standard deviation below (-1 SD) and above ($+1$ SD) the mean of team co-regulation strategies. Team co-regulation strategies represent a composite construct encompassing three core interpersonal team processes: conflict management, emotion management, and confidence building

($-2LL = 2299.72$; $AIC = 2345.72$; $BIC = 2361.94$) over both the first alternative model (Exhaustion $\rightarrow$ Burnout Prevalence $\rightarrow$ Intra-team Conflict; $-2LL = 2315.42$; $AIC = 2361.41$; $BIC = 2459.59$) and the second alternative model (Exhaustion $\rightarrow$ Intra-team Conflict $\rightarrow$ Burnout Prevalence; $-2LL = 2317.40$; $AIC = 2364.40$; $BIC = 2452.59$). When comparing the three specifications descriptively, the hypothesized model generally yielded stronger associations in the expected directions than those observed in the reverse pathways. Notably, the path from exhaustion to burnout prevalence in the first alternative model was particularly strong at the team level ($\gamma = 0.70$, $p < 0.001$, $SE = 0.12$, 95% CI [$0.47, 0.93$]). Moreover, in two out of the three models, including the hypothesized model and the first alternative model, the direct association between exhaustion and intra-team conflict was not statistically significant at either the individual or team level. Then, we tested the specific moderating effects of the three team co-self-regulation strategies—conflict management, emotion management, and confidence building—in the

Table 3. Conditional Indirect Effects of Team-Level Intra-Team Conflict on Exhaustion via Burnout Prevalence at Different Values of Team Co-Regulation Strategies

Conditional indirect effects	Coefficient	SE	95% CI
Combined team co-regulation strategies			
Low team co-regulation strategies × intra-team conflict → burnout prevalence → exhaustion	0.33**	0.10	0.13, 0.54
Moderate team co-regulation strategies × intra-team conflict → burnout prevalence → exhaustion	0.25**	0.08	0.09, 0.41
High team co-regulation strategies × intra-team conflict → burnout prevalence → exhaustion	0.16	0.08	−0.00, 0.32

Note. **p < .01; SE = standard error; CI = confidence intervals. The confidence intervals are derived from Mplus. The analyses were controlled for gender and the team gender composition.

hypothesized model (see [Supplemental Analyses](#)). As observed with the composite scale, each specific strategy attenuated the relationship between intra-team conflict and burnout prevalence at the team level. Burnout prevalence was less pronounced in teams exposed to higher intra-team conflict when teams adopted high (vs. low) levels of any of the three strategies. All three strategies also moderated the indirect effect of intra-team conflict on exhaustion via burnout prevalence at the team level. Notably, unlike the composite scale, where the indirect effect became non-significant at high levels of team co-regulation, the effect remained statistically significant for each specific strategy, though progressively reduced in magnitude from low to high levels.

Discussion

This study explored whether, how, and when intra-team conflict contributes to burnout prevalence and individual exhaustion, contingent on team co-regulation strategies, namely conflict management, emotion management, and confidence building. Thus, the study advances the understanding of this phenomenon within and across teams with novel implications for both research and practice.

Research Implications

As a first research implication, we provide further support for and extend the burnout contagion literature by showing that team members are

vulnerable to increased exhaustion levels when exposed to higher burnout prevalence, that is, the burnout complaints and displays exhibited by their colleagues (Bakker et al., 2006). Specifically, we differentiated between individual perceptions and shared team experiences, providing a more comprehensive view of how burnout spreads in work teams. In doing so, we contribute to the existing body of research that has primarily focused on the team level (i.e., explaining variability across teams; Bakker et al., 2006; Gonzalez-Morales et al., 2012; Westman et al., 2011), while also advancing knowledge on the individual level by capturing how team members differ in constructing their own exhaustion responses to others' burnout. The emergence of a parallel pattern across levels highlights a meaningful isomorphism, reinforcing the idea that burnout contagion is both a shared and individually constructed phenomenon, shaped by interpersonal interactions (Urien et al., 2021). These interactions likely occur through everyday informal gatherings or work-related discussions where team members exchange their emotions, attitudes, and complaints about their work environment (Meredith et al., 2020). As the number of burned-out colleagues in the team increases, these exchanges can foster convergence in emotional states (Barsade et al., 2018) and job-related cognitive frameworks (Urien et al., 2021). Moreover, we address a key limitation of prior research by assessing burnout prevalence as the perception of how widespread burnout symptoms are among teammates, thereby isolating social exposure to others' burnout. Indeed, previous studies relied on team-average burnout scores (Westman et al., 2011) or shift-referent measures (e.g., "*we feel exhausted*"; Gonzalez-Morales et al., 2012), thus conflating self- and other-focused experiences. Interestingly, our additional analyses also revealed significant reverse paths, especially at the team level; team members' exhaustion directly and indirectly contributes to burnout prevalence. Rather than suggesting a simple overestimation bias, our results may indicate the presence of feedback loops between individual- and team-level experiences, in which team members mutually shape and reinforce their burnout over time (Urien et al., 2021).

Second, we contribute to workplace conflict and burnout literature by highlighting intra-team conflict as a key social factor that increases burnout prevalence, thereby shaping team members' individual experiences of exhaustion. These findings support the notion that both individual team members and teams vary in their perceptions and experiences of intra-team conflict, leading to differences in burnout manifestation at both levels (Jehn et al., 2013; Santarpia, Sommovigo, et al., 2024). This aligns with previous research demonstrating a positive correlation between workplace conflict and burnout symptoms at the individual (Dijkstra et al., 2009; Esbati & Korunka, 2021;

Shaukat et al., 2017) and team levels (Benitez et al., 2018). Indeed, when individuals disagree or argue with others, the conflict is emotionally and psychophysically burdensome for all parties involved (Sommovigo et al., 2023). In this regard, previous research has primarily explored how conflicts lead to ego-defensive reactions, such as becoming close-minded, withdrawing psychologically, or behaving dominantly (Thiel et al., 2018). However, consistent with Jehn et al.'s (2013) proposition, team members are more prone to becoming entangled in one another's negative emotions and attitudes during conflict escalation. Indeed, conflict enables team members to vent their frustrations, cynical attitudes, and unpleasant feelings during interactions with others (Thiel et al., 2018). Thus, our findings suggest that individual and collective exhaustion responses to conflict may be shaped not only by direct exposure to this social stressor, as supported in previous studies (e.g., Benitez et al., 2018; Shaukat et al., 2017), but also by the observation of others' burnout-related complaints and displays (Schaufeli & Buunk, 2003).

In line with threat regulation theory (Williams, 2007), conflicts are perceived as harmful to one another's goals or well-being in collaborative, goal-oriented environments like work teams. However, since effective teamwork requires cohesion and positive interpersonal relationships (Mastrorilli et al., 2025), individuals strive to understand one another's thoughts, motives, and feelings, and adjust their behavior accordingly (Williams, 2007). Indeed, affiliative processes facilitate the individual tendency to observe, evaluate, and synchronize with others' responses, even if negative (Schaufeli & Buunk, 2003; Taylor, 2011). Under the same threatening circumstances, team members are more likely to internalize others' burnout symptoms through sensemaking, empathetic responses, and emotional contagion (Urien et al., 2021). Threat regulation theory considers affiliative responses - such as perspective taking and behavioral accommodation - to be adaptive strategies that help maintain cohesion and reduce potential harm (Williams, 2007). Our findings, however, suggest that these same interpersonal adjustments may also heighten individuals' exposure to, and absorption of, colleagues' burnout symptoms. Thus, we contribute to the theory by introducing an element it currently does not account for: when burnout cues are prevalent in the social environment, attuning to others' negative states may accumulate personal costs. This dynamic is precarious in high-burnout teams, where emotional inertia and co-rumination may trap individuals in sustained exposure to teammates' strain (Boren, 2014). Moreover, in line with the social allostatic load theory (Saxbe et al., 2020), our findings provide novel empirical evidence that repeated or intense conflicts can disrupt collective functioning, requiring and progressively accumulating social adaptation costs that push the team away from its homeostatic baseline of low-intensity emotional and

psychophysiological states. In this sense, our findings support the view that conflict creates social allostatic load that can fuel burnout contagion. Such contagion reflects a shift away from the team's optimal low-arousal state, in which one member's burnout becomes an emotional attractor that pulls other members' states in its direction (Saxbe et al., 2020). That is, as team members' burnout complaints and displays interact reciprocally, they give rise to positively correlated levels of exhaustion within the team. Together, these insights sharpen the theory's explanatory precision by clarifying both the stressful conditions that may trigger social allostatic load and its psychological consequences on collective functioning in work teams.

A third contribution is that we advance the literature on team co-regulation strategies under stress by identifying conflict management, emotion management, and confidence building as team-level strategies that mitigate the effects of intra-team conflict on burnout prevalence and team members' exhaustion. Prior literature suggested that as team members work together to resolve disputes, maintain emotional stability, and boost their confidence to meet shared goals, they enhance the team's effectiveness and adaptability (Marks et al., 2001; Mathieu et al., 2020). Our study expands the nascent body of research exploring how team dynamics and regulation strategies critically influence the management of collective stressors and the prevention of burnout within teams (Benitez et al., 2018; Liu & Liu, 2018; Troth et al., 2018). Moreover, we corroborate the importance of jointly modeling both intra-team conflict states and the interpersonal processes through which team members manage them to understand better team functioning dynamics (Maltarich et al., 2018). In line with threat regulation theory (Williams, 2007) and social allostatic load theory (Saxbe et al., 2020), when team members face a shared conflict, they engage in deliberate and collaborative threat-reducing behaviors to modulate its adverse effects on members' burnout experiences. Rather than dwelling on negative experiences, collective self-regulation fosters constructive responses, restoring openness, mutual understanding, and shared commitment to team goals. Such interpersonal strategies alleviate each team member's concerns about potential harm or losses posed by conflicts (Thiel et al., 2018) and help maintain an optimal balance in arousal and emotions (Saxbe et al., 2020). Indeed, from an evolutionary perspective, humans have learned to use affiliative strategies in response to potential harm or loss (Taylor, 2011), making regulatory efforts more effective when carried out in groups than when carried out individually (Saxbe et al., 2020). However, for both frameworks, we extend the interpersonal co-regulation strategies under consideration, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of how teams sustain their regulatory capability under conflict. While threat regulation theory has primarily emphasized emotion management

(Thiel et al., 2018; Williams, 2007), our findings reveal that conflict management and confidence building also play a crucial buffering role. Similarly, we refine the social allostatic load model by moving beyond its general emphasis on interpersonal co-regulation (Saxbe et al., 2020) to identify concrete and observable strategies through which teams actively manage shared stressors. Thus, we contribute to both frameworks by highlighting that these strategies tend to operate in an integrated and mutually reinforcing manner, forming a cohesive interpersonal regulation system that supports teams in managing shared stressors (Killumets et al., 2015; Mathieu et al., 2020).

Finally, our findings underscore the complexity of team dynamics under conflict, demonstrating that while co-regulation strategies benefit the team as a whole, they are not necessarily experienced as protective by individual members. Specifically, the individual-level associations between intra-team conflict, burnout prevalence, and exhaustion were not moderated by the team's use of co-regulation strategies. From the systemic perspective of the social allostatic load model (Saxbe et al., 2020), this finding aligns with the logic of load sharing: when teams engage in co-regulation, individual members often shoulder part of others' strain to stabilize collective functioning. For example, when one member steps in to de-escalate a tense discussion, the tension in the room may decrease, yet the regulator may walk away feeling emotionally burdened. Thus, even when team co-regulation successfully restores collective balance, those who take on regulatory work may pay the cost of retaining part of the strain they helped manage. By integrating an individual-level perspective, our findings contribute to the social allostatic load model (Saxbe et al., 2020) as we suggest that regulatory dynamics in teams are not cost-free: collective equilibrium is not achieved by simply returning to the original baseline and eliminating social load, but by investing resources in a new, redistributed configuration of that load. In this regard, our findings also point to a possible refinement of the threat regulation process. While the theory already acknowledges the reflective processes individuals use to assess whether their affiliative responses help reduce conflict and restore relational harmony (Williams, 2007), it is plausible that, for the threat regulatory process to be genuinely effective, individuals must also attend to how these same responses affect them. For instance, individuals may engage in self-reflection to disentangle others' strain from their own, allowing them to regulate their responses in ways that sustain collaboration while protecting their personal goals and well-being (Hibbert et al., 2022). Moreover, the theory could also be refined to consider recovery strategies (Sonnentag et al., 2022), as individuals who participate in co-regulation may need moments of detachment or time off to release the strain they have taken on.

Practical Implications

This study presents valuable insights for human resource management, particularly in addressing and preventing burnout within teams. Interventions should be multi-level, addressing team dynamics holistically while also targeting the needs of individual team members. At the team level, training and coaching programs can be implemented to help teams shape effective interpersonal strategies to address and resolve conflicts. These can be targeted at strengthening team members' soft skills in active listening, effective communication, and win-win negotiation techniques (Sommovigo et al., 2023). In addition, team members can be supported through targeted knowledge and role-playing exercises to mobilize their emotional awareness and skills for practicing conflict de-escalation, that is, by learning how to recognize and manage both their own emotions and those of others (Santarpia et al., 2024). Emotions can, in fact, serve as a diagnostic tool, allowing team members to identify potential conflicts early and provide appropriate emotional support to one another (van Kleef & Coté, 2018). Moreover, team-building exercises (e.g., problem-solving tasks or outdoor challenges) can help enhance team confidence, providing opportunities to reflect on collaborative-competitive dynamics and practice constructive feedback to celebrate team successes and strengths (Mastorilli et al., 2025).

However, focusing solely on team dynamics may not suffice. Individual team members may still experience burnout due to their subjective perception of conflict and the symptoms displayed by others. Therefore, employees may benefit from regular debriefing sessions, whether one-on-one or team-based, conducted by trained team leaders or external professionals (e.g., coaches, counselors). These sessions should encourage employees to assess their perceptions of conflict and its roots critically, and to view threats from a more distanced or alternative perspective to defuse the negative experience. During these sessions, facilitated discussions can also help team members distinguish their own strains from others', clarifying how conflict experiences may have entangled complaints, negative emotions, and attitudes. This metacognitive and dialogic approach reframes negative experiences as valuable opportunities for both individual and collective growth, fostering the development of strategies to sustain a positive and effective team environment (Santarpia, Sommovigo, et al., 2024). Finally, employees can also be provided with tools and resources to better recognize and manage the early signs of burnout, such as behavioral changes and shifts in emotional expression, through stress management workshops and access to wellness and psychological support systems (Santarpia et al., 2024).

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Our findings should be interpreted in light of the study's limitations. First, reliance on self-reported measures could introduce common-method bias and social desirability bias. To address these issues, we followed Podsakoff et al. (2024) by using different anchor labels for variables and collecting minimal socio-demographic data to ensure anonymity. While self-ratings align with our focus on subjective experiences, future research could incorporate other-ratings (e.g., leader evaluations of team conflicts and burnout) and qualitative data (e.g., observed teammate interactions or interviews). Second, the cross-sectional design limits causal inferences, necessitating experimental or longitudinal studies. For instance, experimental designs could involve team conflict scenarios to induce burnout contagion, with actors simulating burnout symptoms. Such studies might also include external observers or employ neurophysiological tools (e.g., fMRI, electromyography) to assess arousal and mirroring effects (Santarpia et al., 2023). Longitudinal studies could further examine potential reinforcing loops between intra-team conflict and burnout (Urien et al., 2021). Third, since burnout prevalence has been assessed subjectively, network-based designs could offer nuanced mappings of perceived burnout among teammates (Meredith et al., 2020). Future research should also examine other burnout symptoms beyond exhaustion to refine our understanding of contagion dynamics. Fourth, future studies should also investigate how structural team characteristics, such as interdependence, team size, and degree of virtuality, shape the co-regulation of conflict and burnout contagion, as these factors may critically influence how such dynamics unfold within teams (Barsade et al., 2018; Mastrorilli et al., 2025). Finally, it is imperative to examine further individual (e.g., differences in emotion regulation; Troth et al., 2018) and team-level factors (e.g., team leaders' behaviors; Santarpia, Sommovigo, et al., 2024) that may boost or prevent these dynamics.

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Ethical Considerations

The study received ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board of the Department of Psychology, Sapienza University of Rome (Prot. n. 0000797, 04/21/

2022 [UOR: SI000030 - Classif. II/23]). The research adhered to the principles of the Helsinki Declaration and complied with European data protection standards as outlined in the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Additionally, it followed the relevant provisions of Italian privacy law, specifically Law Decree DL 196/2003 and Article 89 of EU Regulation 2016/679.

Author Contributions

Ferdinando Paolo Santarpia: Conceptualization, Data Curation, Methodology, Formal analysis, Visualization, Writing –original draft, Writing – review and editing, Investigation, Project Administration. Valentina Sommovigo: Writing –original draft, Writing – review and editing. Laura Borgogni: Project Administration. Arnold B. Bakker: Writing – review and editing, Supervision. All authors have approved the final version of the manuscript being submitted. Neither the manuscript nor any parts are currently under consideration or published in another journal. All materials used in the article (tables and figures) are original contents created by the authors.

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Data Availability Statement

Data that support the findings of this study and the Italian version of the items are available upon reasonable request from the first author.

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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