

# Mortality Salience and Conflict Management Styles in Organizations: A Shift Toward Cooperation

Dr. Divya Upadhyay\*

Assistant Professor, Abu Dhabi School of Management, UAE.

**\*Correspondence:**

Dr. Divya Upadhyay, Abu Dhabi School of Management, UAE.

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## ABSTRACT

Death awareness can influence individuals' attitudes, motivation, and behavior. Drawing from terror management theory, this paper explores the potential effect of death awareness on individuals' preferences for competitive and cooperative conflict management styles.

This study employs a survey experiment method to examine the impact of mortality salience on conflict management styles. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (Mortality Salience vs. Neutral), and their preferences for cooperative versus competitive conflict management styles were measured.

The study provides empirical support for the hypotheses, demonstrating that individuals experiencing mortality salience are more inclined toward cooperative rather than competitive conflict management styles. This suggests that heightened awareness of mortality fosters a preference for collaboration, likely driven by a psychological need for social connectedness and group cohesion in times of existential uncertainty.

A richer and deeper knowledge of cooperative and competitive conflict management styles can help people gain better consequences and can potentially contribute to training and talent development by educating conflict management practitioners. Further implications and future research have been discussed.

This paper contributes to the literature by establishing a novel connection between conflict management styles and mortality salience, an area previously unexplored. By highlighting how existential concerns shape individuals' preferences for cooperative versus competitive conflict resolution, this study offers fresh theoretical insights and practical implications for workplace dynamics.

## Keywords

Mortality Salience, Terror management theory, Conflict management styles.

## Introduction

Conflict is an unavoidable aspect of human interaction and organizational life. According to Thompson, conflict arises from individuals' perception of incompatible goals or interests. While traditionally viewed as detrimental, contemporary research recognizes that conflict can have both constructive and destructive consequences. A moderate level of disagreement can stimulate critical thinking, enhance decision-making quality, and prevent groupthink by encouraging the expression of diverse perspectives [1,2]. Conversely, excessive or poorly managed conflict can disrupt

collaboration, generate stress, and deteriorate interpersonal trust within teams. Within organizational settings, this dual nature of conflict, termed functional versus dysfunctional conflict, is well-documented. Functional conflict promotes creativity, innovation, and problem-solving, whereas dysfunctional conflict leads to tension, reduced morale, and performance decline. As Deutsch and later Deutsch and Coleman emphasized, whether conflict yields positive or negative outcomes largely depends on the methods employed to address it. Constructive conflict resolution—grounded in empathy, open communication, and mutual respect—can transform opposing viewpoints into opportunities for learning and organizational growth. In contrast, destructive conflict, seen in extreme social forms such as violence or exclusion, perpetuates harm and dysfunction. Mannix highlighted that conflict and its

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resolution are inherently tied to organizational activities, cultural interactions, and relationships. Given the significant consequences of conflict management, understanding the psychological factors that shape individuals' preferences for different conflict resolution styles is essential.

Understanding the factors that influence whether individuals prefer competitive or cooperative approaches to conflict is crucial for promoting effective conflict resolution. Research increasingly indicates that existential considerations, such as mortality salience, can shape these preferences by affecting underlying motivations and attitudes [3,4]. Terror Management Theory (TMT) offers a key framework for examining the psychological impact of mortality awareness, suggesting that recognizing one's own mortality can activate defense mechanisms that bolster self-esteem and reinforce social connections [5].

According to TMT, reminders of mortality—known as "mortality salience"—can influence a range of social behaviors, including conflict management approaches [3]. Past research has shown that, when mortality is made salient, individuals often shift their behaviors in ways that align with their cultural worldviews and values, potentially favoring prosocial or cooperative interactions to reaffirm their connection to meaningful social groups [4,6]. However, the application of TMT to preferences of conflict management styles remains underexplored, particularly concerning how mortality salience might differentially affect preferences for cooperative versus competitive conflict management styles.

This study aims to investigate the effect of Mortality salience on individuals' preferences for conflict management styles, specifically examining whether heightened mortality awareness leads to a stronger preference for cooperative conflict styles over competitive ones. Drawing from TMT, this research hypothesizes that mortality salience will be linked to increased cooperative tendencies as individuals seek to affirm positive social connections [7]. The findings contribute to the literature on conflict management by providing insight into the psychological factors that influence conflict resolution strategies, with potential implications for training and talent development in organizational settings.

Terror Management Theory (TMT) offers valuable insights into how Mortality Salience (MS) influences human cognition and behavior. Humans possess the unique ability to be aware of their mortality, which, according to Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon [3], leads to existential anxiety due to the conflict between the instinct for self-preservation and the awareness of eventual death. This awareness is a result of humans' advanced cognitive abilities. As a result, death awareness significantly impacts both behavior and cognitive processes [8,9]. Furthermore, the reality of death provides individuals with a sense of purpose, as life becomes more than just meeting basic needs (e.g., hunger, thirst) or ensuring survival. TMT draws on the work of Ernest Becker [10,11], who argued that mortality salience and death anxiety are key drivers behind behaviors aimed at protecting oneself or one's social group when threatened (APA Dictionary of Psychology).

MS manipulations typically involve reminding people of death, as opposed to a neutral theme [9]. To cope with death-related anxiety, humans have developed two psychological structures [12]. The first is the cultural worldview, which provides meaning, significance, and purpose to life. The second is self-esteem, which involves the belief that one is adhering to the values and norms upheld by their cultural worldview [13].

Previous research on MS has shown that reminding people of death increases their adherence to cultural norms [14]. Past research has focused on both the negative and positive implications of MS, e.g., studies that have focused on the negative implications of MS are increased prejudice [8], aggression [15], or racism. Research has found that MS increases antisocial reactions and leads to more self-serving behaviors. These negative reactions can be harmful in explaining intergroup conflict and peace processes [16]. Studies with positive implications have reported that MS increases the desire to form and maintain close relationships [17], increases the desire for proximity to parents [18], contributes to prosocial inclinations [19], adherence to norm of reciprocity [20], promotes reactions of forgiveness among people with high empathy [21] and MS reduces individuals' regrets [22].

### **Conflict Management Styles**

An individual's conflict management style refers to the behavioral approach they adopt when addressing and resolving conflict. People develop and follow specific principles to navigate conflicts, which evolve into a recognizable pattern of actions and reactions known as their "style". Scholars such as Blake and Mouton, Follett, Rahim, and Thomas have contributed to understanding how individuals manage conflict. Follett identified three primary conflict resolution approaches—domination, compromise, and integration—as well as secondary methods like avoidance and suppression. Deutsch argued that two main processes—cooperation and competition—underpin conflict resolution. Competitive methods arise when one party's goals hinder the other's, while cooperative methods allow both parties to achieve their goals simultaneously. Thomas proposed that conflict management intentions can be classified into two dimensions: cooperativeness (seeking to satisfy the other party's concerns) and assertiveness (seeking to satisfy one's own concerns). These two dimensions combine to form five strategic approaches to conflict resolution: avoiding, accommodating, competing, collaborating, and compromising. This research focuses on understanding individuals' motivations for preferring competitive or cooperative approaches in conflict management. The intention to act in a particular way is described as conation, or the decision to engage in a specific action. These intentions are often referred to as orientations, approaches, styles, or strategies.

### **Linkage MS and Conflict Management Styles**

Death awareness, or mortality salience, has a profound impact on individuals' attitudes, motivations, and behaviors, particularly in how they navigate social interactions and conflicts. Terror Management Theory provides a theoretical framework for understanding the psychological processes underlying death awareness, proposing that reminders of mortality can activate

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specific defense mechanisms aimed at maintaining self-esteem and reinforcing cultural worldviews [3]. When confronted with thoughts of their own mortality, individuals may seek to align their behavior with societal norms and values, which often include prosocial attitudes and collaborative tendencies [5].

In conflict settings, the impact of Mortality salience on behavior has emerged as a particularly interesting area of research. Studies have shown that Mortality salience can lead to shifts in interpersonal conflict management styles, as individuals become more inclined to adopt either cooperative or competitive strategies depending on the context [4,6]. Conflict management is generally divided into cooperative and competitive styles. Cooperative styles emphasize collaboration and mutual benefit, while competitive styles prioritize individual success or dominance over the other party. The current study explores how death awareness may push individuals toward cooperative conflict management styles by highlighting the intrinsic value of social bonds and collaboration in affirming one's identity and sense of belonging.

Jonas et al. [19] showed that when people are reminded of mortality they become more generous and judge charitable organizations as beneficial to society. Also, when people were interviewed in front of a funeral home (reminded of mortality) they showed a more favorable attitude toward charitable causes than when interviewed three blocks away from the mortuary. While mortality salience produces negative emotions such as fear and depression [23,24] it also encourages to fostering of peace and good governance [16]. MS has an effect on sustaining peace and prosocial behavior, from the TMT perspective, MS increases the desire to express prosocial attitudes because these prosocial attitudes or behaviors are more desired as per the cultural norms. MS people want to be valuable members of their cultural groups and that is why they try to follow their cultural norms. Based on historical figures and religious parables, societies always encourage people to be generous, kind, and unselfish and this leads to a safe and good life [19]. Research has supported that after being aware of their mortality, participants' collective helping behaviors (e.g., willingness to donate and to volunteer) increase [25]. Jonas et al. [26] found in their research that MS (individuals primed with pacifistic norms) increases pacifistic tendencies. In the same vein, reminding people of the values of tolerance reduces negative reactions to others [27]. Recent research supports that thinking about death makes people less utilitarian. With MS, the emphasis on moral values gets stronger and makes people more emotional. Past research has also found that MS has a motivational effect that encourages people to switch from an analytic to an intuitive, experiential mindset [28].

Past research has supported the link between Mortality salience and altruism and prosocial behavior [29,30], and this link is intertwined with cooperation and competition intentions of managing conflict. Previous research has established a positive connection between empathy and perspective-taking to cooperative conflict management styles [31].

Research has found that when individuals are reminded of their

mortality, they may exhibit increased prosocial behavior as a way to counter existential anxiety. In this context, prosocial behavior serves as a means of affirming the self and aligning with broader social values, reducing the threat posed by death awareness [19]. According to TMT, individuals seek symbolic immortality through social connections, which can manifest as a preference for cooperative conflict management styles that foster positive social relationships [7]. This aligns with findings from a range of studies that highlight mortality salience as a trigger for community-oriented behaviors [6,8]. Conversely, some studies suggest that mortality salience may also lead to competitive behaviors, especially in contexts where individuals seek to assert their significance or demonstrate competence [4]. TMT suggests that individuals may turn to competition to enhance self-esteem and create a sense of personal achievement, thus buffering existential anxiety. However, the influence of mortality salience on competitive conflict styles appears to be context-dependent, as it may depend on factors such as individual personality traits, cultural norms, and situational cues that frame competition as either a threat or an opportunity for personal growth [15].

Overall, it was hypothesized that:

Mortality salience will make individuals more likely to prefer cooperative conflict management styles over competitive ones.

Below is a study designed to test the proposed hypothesis.

### **Study**

The study was designed to examine the hypothesis that Mortality Salience conditions lead to preferring more cooperative styles than competitive styles in managing conflicts. In other words, it was examined whether individuals, when primed with the Mortality salience condition, prefer more cooperative styles in managing conflicts. After priming with the Mortality salience condition, participants also responded to a conflict management styles inventory, adapted from Sternberg & Dobson's work, to measure their conflict management styles.

### **Participants**

Participants were master's students. A total of 124 participants (Male = 71 and Female = 76) ranging in age from 25 to 40 years ( $M = 35.37$ ,  $SD = 7.08$ ), participated in this study. Cohen's work to determine acceptable sample sizes was used in this as well as other studies.

### **Instruments**

#### **Conflict management styles**

To understand people's conflict management preferences, a questionnaire was developed based on styles of managing conflict from Sternberg and Dobson's work. Participants rated each given style of managing conflict on a seven-point rating scale from "do not like at all" to "my preferred style" based on their personal preferences.

To understand how people prefer to approach conflict, eight questions, adapted from Sternberg and Dobson, were used for cooperative behavior, e.g. Talking with the other party about the

problem, with both exchanging opinions and mutually giving consideration to each other's position; and Four questions were used for competitive behavior, e.g. Using physical force or coercion directed at the other party, Undermining the esteem in which the other party is held by people outside the conflict, emphasizing my position and opinions and de-emphasizing the position of the other party, and Playing on the other party's vulnerabilities or manipulating the situation based on the expectation of how the other party will react (Table 1 for the list of styles).

**Procedure**

In the experimental manipulation condition it was randomly induced one group of participants to the MS condition 1, and another group to the Neutral condition 2. Participants were randomly assigned to write about their respective conditions.

**Condition 1**

*Thinking about dying could be a scary topic to talk about but there are so many things to accomplish before death. A lot of people are on their deathbeds regretting what they did with their lives and have no way of going back and changing it. You only get one life so take advantage of it, and do something great!*

**Please name/list 5 things you would like to do before you die.**

**Condition 2**

Breakfast is good for you because it keeps you going through the day. It helps your mind think and concentrate. Breakfast is good nutrition for your soul. Breakfast is like filling your car with gas in the morning. Breakfast kick-starts your metabolism, helping you burn calories throughout the day. It also gives you the energy you need to get things done and helps you focus at work or school.

**Please name 5 breakfast items you would like to have in your breakfast**

Then, participants were given eight styles in which conflicts can be managed. They rated each given style of managing conflict on a seven-point rating scale from “do not like at all” to “my preferred style” based on their personal preferences. I hypothesize that inducing participants’ MS condition would increase their preference for cooperative conflict management styles and inducing participants to think in neutral ways would increase their preference for competitive conflict management styles.

**Result**

Exploratory (principal component) factor analysis with oblique (direct) rotation and factor retention condition of eigenvalue greater than one supported a two-factor separation of the conflict management styles with the four competitive styles loading on one factor and the four cooperative styles loading on the other (Table 1). (Please refer to Mukherjee and Upadhyay, 2019). Exploratory factor analysis was conducted on 8 styles of managing conflict to discover the factor structure of measure used in the study. To explore how many factors are underlying these 8 styles, exploratory factor analysis was conducted as it was not evident that other than competition and cooperation any other factor was captured through these given 8 styles.

**Table 1:** Loadings for two-factor styles of managing conflict in the Study.

Items	Factor 1 Competitive	Factor 2 Cooperative
<b>Competitive styles</b>		
1. Using physical force or coercion directed at the other party	.73	-.20
2. Undermining the esteem in which the other party is held by people outside the conflict	.47	.06
3. Emphasizing my position and opinions and de-emphasizing the position of the other party	.53	.01
4. Playing on the other party's vulnerabilities or manipulating the situation based on the expectation of how the other party will react	.55	.02
<b>Cooperative</b>		
5. Talking with the other party about the problem, with both exchanging opinions and mutually giving consideration to each other's position	.03	.58
6. Apologizing to the other party or giving in to the party's demands	.11	.64
7. Confronting differences sharing ideas and information and trying to search for integrative solutions	-.12	.54
8. Diffuse the conflict by reducing or negating demands on the other party	-.02	.68

**Table 2:** Mean and SD of conflict management styles in the two conditions used in the study.

Styles of managing conflict	Cond	Mean	Std. Deviation
Physical force	1	1.81	1.17
	0	2.23	1.37
Talk with the other party	1	5.89	1.07
	0	5.21	1.33
Playing	1	2.24	1.06
	0	2.67	1.37
Apologizing	1	3.19	1.32
	0	4.13	1.50
Confronting	1	5.98	1.20
	0	5.10	1.28
Emphasizing	1	2.71	1.33
	0	3.54	1.27
Undermining the esteem	1	2.58	1.28
	0	3.18	1.55
Diffuse	1	4.37	1.50
	0	3.69	1.51

**Note:** Cond1 is a Mortality Salience and Cond 0 is a neutral condition.

As predicted, it was found that participants in the MS condition reported preferences for cooperative conflict management styles as compared to participants who wrote about neutral conditions (Table 2). Participants who wrote about Mortality Salience conditions reported preferences for cooperative conflict management styles. This was determined by using a t-test. In MS conditions, individuals preferred more cooperative conflict management styles than competitive conflict management styles,

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e.g. “Talking with the other party about the problem, with both exchanging opinions and mutually giving consideration to each other's position” cooperative conflict management styles,  $t(121) = 3.09$   $p = .003$ . With “Apologizing to the other party or giving in to the party's demands”  $t(121) = 3.67$   $p = .001$ . With “Confronting differences sharing ideas and information and trying to search for integrative solutions”  $t(121) = 3.93$   $p = .001$  and with “Diffuse the conflict by reducing or negating demands on the other party”  $t(121) = 2.50$   $p = .013$ .

With competitive styles “Using physical force or coercion directed at the other party”,  $t(121) = 1.84$   $p = .068$ . With “Undermining the esteem in which the other party is held by people outside the conflict”  $t(121) = 2.33$   $p = .021$ . With “Emphasizing my position and opinions and de-emphasizing the position of the other party”  $t(121) = 3.5$   $p = .001$  and with “Playing on the other party's vulnerabilities or manipulating the situation based on the expectation of how the other party will react”  $t(121) = 1.94$   $p = .05$ .

## Discussion

Drawing from Deutsch's work, this research attempts to contribute to our understanding of motivational sources of cooperation and competition in conflict management. This article uncovers a new variable, Mortality Salience, which influences cooperative or competitive conflict management styles. A causal approach was used to establish the connection between death anxiety and its effect on individuals' preferences for cooperative or competitive conflict management styles. The current study sought to investigate the influence of Mortality salience on individuals' preferences for cooperative versus competitive conflict management styles. Drawing from Deutsch's work on the motivational sources of cooperation and competition, this research contributes to the growing body of literature by introducing a new variable—Mortality salience—as a factor that shapes conflict management behavior. By leveraging Terror Management Theory (TMT), this study sheds light on how death awareness, or the reminder of mortality, can impact individuals' approach to resolving conflicts, specifically their tendency to adopt cooperative or competitive strategies.

The findings of this study reveal a significant effect of Mortality salience on conflict management styles, with participants in the mortality salience condition showing a stronger preference for cooperative conflict management than those in the neutral condition. This result supports the hypothesis that reminders of mortality can promote prosocial, cooperative behaviors as individuals seek to manage the existential anxiety triggered by thoughts of their own death. In line with Deutsch's conceptualization of conflict, where cooperation is seen as a means to reduce conflict and competition as a way to assert dominance or self-importance, our results suggest that mortality salience motivates individuals to prioritize cooperation, potentially as a means of fostering social connection and affirming their belonging to a group or community.

This study extends Deutsch's work by demonstrating that external

factors, such as Mortality salience, can serve as a psychological trigger that influences conflict management behavior, potentially reducing competitive tendencies and fostering more harmonious resolutions. While previous research has explored how cultural, situational, and individual factors contribute to the preference for either cooperative or competitive conflict management styles, this study emphasizes the role of existential factors in shaping these preferences. The findings indicate that when mortality is made salient, individuals may feel more inclined to cooperate to reduce existential anxiety, align with social values, and reinforce self-esteem. This aligns with the concept of "terror management" as described in TMT, where individuals adopt behaviors that protect their sense of self-worth and contribute to their symbolic immortality through social connection. One of the key contributions of this paper is the identification of Mortality salience as a new variable influencing conflict management styles. Prior research has typically focused on intrinsic factors such as personality, culture, and individual differences in shaping conflict strategies. By introducing mortality salience into this discussion, the study offers a novel perspective on how existential concerns can drive individuals toward more cooperative behaviors, potentially as a defense mechanism against death anxiety. This insight opens new avenues for research into the role of psychological factors in conflict resolution, suggesting that conflict management strategies may not only be shaped by personality or situational context but also by deep-seated existential concerns.

## Theoretical implications

Our findings support the significant positive effect of Mortality Salience on individuals' preference for cooperative and competitive conflict management styles providing support for the terror management processes. From a theoretical implications perspective, this finding can offer valuable insights for conflict management practitioners and academicians for managing conflict taking into consideration an integrative approach.

On further note, this study throws light on how preferring a cooperative approach in managing one's conflict can act as a shield or defensive mechanism against existential anxiety triggered by Mortality salience. These findings support and extend Terror Management Theory by highlighting how heightened Mortality salience influences conflict management choices. This study broadens TMT by linking Mortality salience with conflict management preferences, indicating that mortality awareness not only drives self-preservation behaviors but also shapes interpersonal dynamics in conflict. This insight enhances our understanding of how existential concerns can directly influence interpersonal conflict strategies, opening avenues for exploring TMT in other social and organizational contexts. This study, however, suggests that in contexts involving conflict, individuals may exhibit more nuanced social behaviors—such as an increased preference for cooperation or controlled competition—when mortality is made salient. This widens the scope of TMT, showing that mortality concerns not only drive self-protective responses but also influence interpersonal conflict dynamics. The findings suggest that Mortality salience could be used as a conceptual

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tool in designing interventions to foster group cohesion and effective conflict resolution in high-stakes or existentially charged situations. For example, by making individuals aware of mortality, organizations might indirectly encourage cooperation and productive competition within teams. This application aligns with social identity theory, which postulates that individuals' behavior is shaped by group-based emotions and existential reminders, potentially fostering solidarity or competitive drive within a socially constructive framework.

### **Practical Implications**

The findings from the current set of studies have several interesting implications for conflict management behaviors. Theoretically, the results provide insights into the processes that underlie the preferences for cooperative versus competitive conflict management styles. Moreover, the results offer some additional insights into why people prefer cooperative versus competitive conflict management styles, demonstrating the influence of mortality salience.

The findings of this research have implications for negotiating parties and strategic social interactions. Negotiating parties must often have a deep understanding of the other party's psychological processes and interests to attain the best outcome for themselves and others. Focusing on 'death-related thoughts' can be advantageous for both negotiating parties. The link between MS and conflict management styles can help negotiators find the required balance between cooperation and competition, between other interests and self-interest. Also, a balance of both the self and other interests is critical for facilitating integrative problem-solving in negotiations [32].

Organizations could apply these findings by integrating mortality salience in a subtle, respectful way to encourage cooperative and constructive competition among employees. For instance, workplace training sessions, team-building activities, or resilience workshops that reference common human goals or legacy can foster a sense of shared purpose. This approach could lead to more collaborative behavior, as employees become more inclined to adopt cooperative conflict resolution styles in team settings, and competitive but constructive styles when individual performance matters.

Conflict resolution training can be designed to include elements of mortality salience as a way to promote constructive behavior. Trainers can incorporate exercises or discussions that subtly remind participants of the value of relationships, legacy, and positive impact, which can activate prosocial behaviors. This could help participants approach conflicts with a mindset geared toward mutual benefit (cooperation) or healthy competition, ultimately reducing hostile or overly aggressive conflict responses. HR professionals can design training programs that help employees understand the psychological factors influencing their conflict resolution preferences.

Workshops on emotional intelligence, perspective-taking,

and communication skills can encourage cooperative conflict management styles. Given that mortality salience influences conflict resolution styles, HR can incorporate awareness programs on how existential concerns can impact workplace interactions. This is especially relevant in diverse workplaces where cultural perspectives on conflict and mortality may vary.

Promoting Social Cohesion in High-Stress Professions, in fields like healthcare, emergency response, or military operations—where mortality salience is naturally high—these findings could be leveraged to foster teamwork and effective conflict management. In such environments, leaders could frame teamwork and conflict resolution around themes of resilience, shared mission, and service to others. This can encourage cooperative attitudes and constructive competition, promoting social cohesion and improving responses in high-stress situations.

Organizations operating in multicultural or high-diversity settings may use these insights to promote harmony among individuals with different backgrounds. Reminders of shared human experiences, or subtle reminders of legacy, can be incorporated into diversity and inclusion programs, motivating individuals to manage conflicts cooperatively. This approach can help bridge cultural differences, creating a workplace environment where diverse employees feel connected by common values, fostering mutual respect, and reducing conflict escalation.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

In the current study, cultural factors were not considered. Individuals from individualistic and collectivistic cultures may respond differently to Mortality Salience and conflict management styles. Further research could examine whether cultural norms around death, individualism, and collectivism influence how mortality salience affects conflict management preferences in different societies [15]. The current study used an experimental approach to examine the link between Mortality salience and preferred conflict management styles. While priming is effective for identifying causal effects, future studies could benefit from qualitative methods, such as unstructured in-depth interviews, to uncover various psychological factors underlying this relationship.

There is a strong link between intentions and behavior, as shown in Kim and Hunter's [33] meta-analysis, especially in high-involvement decisions [34,35]'. Furthermore, this study aligns with the perspective of Golec and Federico [36], who stated, "While it would have been ideal to examine both attitudinal and behavioral manifestations of competitive approaches to conflict, this study was limited to the former. Although these limitations do not significantly diminish the overall contribution of this research, future studies are encouraged to address them". Another limitation of this study is the reliance on self-report measures, which carry the inherent risk of errors and biases. Further research could examine whether cultural norms around death, individualism, and collectivism influence how mortality salience affects conflict management preferences in different societies [15].

Additionally, while the study provides strong evidence for the link between mortality salience and cooperative behavior, it remains unclear how these effects might vary across different types of conflicts. For example, the impact of mortality salience on conflict management may vary between high-stakes and low-stakes conflicts, or between conflicts involving close relationships and those in professional settings. Future research could explore these nuances, examining whether the effects of mortality salience are moderated by the nature of the conflict or the level of personal involvement.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides compelling evidence that Mortality salience significantly influences individuals' preferences for cooperative versus competitive conflict management styles. By integrating Terror Management Theory with Deutsch's (1973) motivational framework of cooperation and competition, the research highlights how existential concerns—particularly mortality reminders—can shift individuals toward more cooperative strategies in conflict situations. This preference appears to be motivated by a need to mitigate existential anxiety, foster social connections, and affirm one's value within a community, as individuals seek symbolic self-preservation and social belonging when faced with mortality.

The findings of this study contribute a novel perspective to the field of conflict management by identifying Mortality salience as an external psychological factor that influences conflict behaviors. While prior studies have focused on intrinsic factors such as personality, cultural background, and individual differences, this study underscores the importance of existential concerns as an additional, potent motivator in conflict resolution preferences. The research suggests that mortality reminders can encourage more prosocial, cooperative conflict responses, potentially as a defense mechanism against the anxiety associated with death awareness. This insight into the interplay between Mortality salience and conflict management not only deepens our theoretical understanding of TMT and Deutsch's cooperative-competitive model but also opens new pathways for practical application. In settings where mortality or existential concerns are prominent—such as healthcare, emergency response, and high-stress organizational environments—integrating an awareness of these psychological triggers may help practitioners design conflict resolution strategies that foster cooperation and social cohesion. Future research could further explore how mortality salience interacts with cultural, situational, and other psychological factors, offering richer insights into how existential awareness shapes our approach to conflict.

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