AI Teammates for Conflict Support: A Taxonomy Refined through Design Fiction in Germany and Japan

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Abstract

AI teammates are increasingly proposed to support teams during conflict, yet builders and researchers still lack a compact vocabulary for describing how such systems intervene. We introduce a taxonomy for AI teammate conflict support that links conflict type and trigger cues to mediator strategy, stance, and intervention goals. We developed a baseline from 23 previous studies and refined it through matched speculative design workshops in Germany and Japan that generated ten conflict scenarios. The taxonomy supports structured analysis of conflict episode segments through a fixed sequence from conflict type and trigger cues to strategy, stance, intervention goals, and optional team and authority descriptors. We also provide coding guidance for recurrent ambiguities and a worked example that shows how the taxonomy can inform analysis and design reflection. This summative taxonomy offers initial cross-site refinement across two settings. It is intended for early analysis and design exploration, and future work should test the integrated taxonomy on real or realistic traces.

CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing** → **Collaborative and social computing**; *Empirical studies in collaborative and social computing*.

Keywords

conflict mediation, AI teammate, taxonomy, speculative design, workplace communication

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1 Introduction

Team conflict is not only about what people disagree about. It is also about whether support can still be used when tension is high. Under time pressure and social risk, teams may lose track of what is contested, what evidence matters, what has already been decided, and who owns the next step. Conflict support systems therefore need a vocabulary that captures both the conflict episode and the intervention, including what that intervention is meant to accomplish [6, 18].

Conflict research distinguishes task, process, and relationship conflict and describes management styles and third-party strategies that shape trajectories [16, 22, 26]. At the same time, research on human autonomy teaming increasingly frames AI systems as teammates in coordinated, interdependent work and decision contexts. This makes conflict support a plausible but delicate design problem. [8, 19, 20]. Yet builders and researchers lack a compact, reusable vocabulary that captures both conflict framing and the mediator move, enabling comparison across scenarios and early prototypes.

We introduce a taxonomy for AI teammate conflict support that links conflict type and trigger cues to mediator strategy, stance, and intervention goals. We describe a two phase development process that combines literature synthesis with matched speculative design workshops in Germany and Japan. The cross-site corpus was then used to refine and consolidate labels across settings. We also provide coding guidance for recurrent ambiguities, a worked example, and an initial account of the refinement process.

2 Background and Related Work

2.1 What Existing Taxonomies Cover and What They Miss for Mediation

Conflict research provides strong taxonomies for describing conflict episodes. Classic work distinguishes task, process, and relationship conflict [16]. Syntheses and reviews further show that consequences depend on how conflict is managed, not only on whether conflict

occurs [11, 22]. Process perspectives emphasize that conflict unfolds over time through interaction, making timing and sequencing of interventions central [7]. These frameworks support episode diagnosis, but provide limited guidance on specifying an interactive mediator. They rarely describe what the mediator does as an interaction move, what stance it signals, and what intervention goals it is trying to achieve.

Facilitation research provides examples of specifying support as structured actions such as prompts, procedures, and guidelines rather than only describing the problem [2]. This aligns with our goal of describing mediator behavior at the level of interaction moves, the actions taken in the moment, the stance signaled by those actions, and the intervention goals those actions are intended to achieve, rather than only labeling the conflict type.

Conversational agent research provides complementary taxonomies for interaction design and evaluation [3, 9]. Social cue taxonomies classify how agents signal intent and social positioning across channels [9]. Evaluation frameworks for conversational information usability organize tasks, user groups, criteria, and methods [3]. These frameworks are useful reference points, but mediation poses a different design problem because it is multi-party, normatively charged, and entangled with authority and legitimacy.

Therefore, we connect the conflict context with the mediator strategy, stance, and intervention goals to support a structured comparison between systems and scenarios. Existing systems motivate this need by demonstrating mediation-like functions at different stages of conflict. AI4PCR, a system for practising relationship preserving conflict language, illustrates preparatory support before a conflict escalates [14]. MediationBot supports negotiation in multi-party privacy conflicts through procedural scaffolding, including consent collection, turn-taking, and proposing middle ground options [24]. These examples show that mediator support can take different forms and pursue different goals. They motivate a compact taxonomy that can describe interventions and intervention goals in comparable terms between scenarios and early prototypes.

2.2 Cross-Site Refinement Across Two Settings

Previous work suggests that norms around directness, deference, and communication style can vary between contexts [10, 12, 13, 27]. Such differences can shape the way disagreement is expressed and how third-party support is perceived [10, 27]. For this reason, we refined the taxonomy in Germany and Japan using matched prompts and a shared coding and mapping procedure described in the following. Our aim was cross-site refinement and interpretability across settings rather than comparative cultural analysis.

3 Method

3.1 Phase 1. Literature Synthesis

We developed the taxonomy in two phases. Phase one produced a baseline taxonomy from the synthesis of the literature. We searched major digital libraries and indexing services for work on conflict episodes, conflict handling and third-party intervention, and interactive systems for sensitive collaboration, covering 1990 to 2025. We retained 23 sources with operational descriptions translatable into taxonomy dimensions.

3.2 Phase 2. Workshop Refinement

Phase two refined the baseline using a cross-site workshop corpus from speculative design workshops, producing consolidated steps and decision rules. We ran five speculative design workshops in Germany and Japan with $N = 28$, using a shared 2035 horizon to make the scenarios concrete while leaving room for speculation. This process generated ten conflict scenarios. We treat each sticky note as the unit of analysis and retain links to its scenario context. We split notes only when they contain multiple distinct mediator moves and keep trace links to the source scenario artifact.

The materials were translated into English and cross checked by bilingual researchers. We coded elicited concepts for conflict framing, trigger cues, mediator strategy, stance, intervention goals, and optional descriptors, and then mapped them to the baseline. We refined definitions or introduced new labels only when they captured a distinct and reusable design dimension.

The German and Japanese workshops were used for cross-site refinement rather than comparative cultural analysis. Across both sites, the same core families for conflict type, trigger, strategy, stance, and intervention goals remained interpretable, which helped stabilise the overall structure of the taxonomy. Differences across sites mainly affected how some dimensions were framed. In particular, the limits of authority, visibility, and intervention were explicitly stated in some scenarios but left unstated in others. This led us to keep team and authority descriptors optional rather than inferred.

The cross-site material did not produce entirely new top level categories. Instead, it sharpened several relevant triggers in the design. For example, prior literature most clearly supports process conflict around task allocation, responsibilities, and coordination, while workshop scenarios in both sites surfaced expectation mismatch, role boundary tension, and absence related disruption as additional triggers in teamwork settings. We refined the definitions only when such differences exposed ambiguity in the baseline. The repeated review of the workshop material at both sites also informed the guidance on recurrent ambiguities.

As an initial check on reproducibility, we estimated inter-coder reliability on stratified subsets of the sticky-note-level workshop corpus, coded independently by the primary coder and a reliability coder masked to site labels. The agreement was high for key analytic dimensions that informed taxonomy development, including *imagined conflict*, Cohen's $\kappa = 0.93$ for $N = 45$, and *the final resolution story*, Cohen's $\kappa = 0.86$ for $N = 30$. These results provide initial evidence that key distinctions used to develop the taxonomy can be identified between coders. Reliability of the full integrated taxonomy remains for future work.

4 Results

4.1 The Consolidated Taxonomy

The taxonomy supports the structured analysis of a conflict episode segment through the seven steps shown in Table 1. Team and authority descriptors are recorded only when they are explicitly stated in the scenario or trace. When evidence is insufficient, analysts mark *not specified* rather than inferring intent, legitimacy, or internal states that are not explicitly stated in the segment.

Analytic sequence Analysts apply the taxonomy in a fixed sequence. Step 1 selects one conflict type. Step 2 selects any relevant trigger labels. Step 3 records a third-party level strategy label. If the segment includes an explicit change in workflow structure or participation and access conditions, analysts also record one system level strategy label. Step 4 records any applicable stance labels. Step 5 records one or more intervention goal labels. Step 6 optionally records information usability criteria when stress or channel constraints are visible. Step 7 optionally records team and authority descriptors only when explicitly stated.

Step 1. Conflict type Select the dominant conflict type for the focal segment by identifying what is primarily contested: the work itself, *task conflict*, the organization of the work, *process conflict*, or the interpersonal relationship around the work, *relationship conflict* [7, 11, 16]. Code the primary object of disagreement rather than emotional intensity alone. When multiple forms are present, record the dominant conflict type in Step 1 and capture more specific sources of tension through the trigger cues in Step 2.

Step 2. Trigger cues Record any trigger labels that are clearly supported by the segment evidence. Trigger cues capture more specific sources of tension within the conflict episode. Apply multiple labels only when they reflect distinct tensions in the same segment, and do not infer triggers that are not explicitly supported by the trace or scenario.

Step 3. Strategy The System level strategy captures how the system shapes interaction conditions. Use *Process intervention* when the system structures workflow, turn-taking, or order. Use *Structural intervention* when it changes participation or access conditions. Record a third-party level strategy when the segment shows the mediator approach enacted through interaction moves. Do not infer a system level strategy unless the segment explicitly changes workflow or participation conditions.

Step 4. Stance Rapport building appears as both a third party strategy and a stance. Code *Rapport building* as a strategy when reducing tension or restoring face is the primary intervention. Code it as a stance when it only modifies another strategy and is not the main action in the segment. If evidence for stance is insufficient, leave the stance unspecified.

Step 5. Intervention goals The intervention goals capture what the mediator move is intended to accomplish in the segment. Use *Decision clarity* when the move introduces criteria, justification, or an explicit basis for choosing among options. Use *Conversation structuring* when the move organizes turn-taking, issue separation, or agenda flow without adding decision criteria. Use *Access speed* when the move reduces time to obtain needed information in the moment. Use *Referential retrieval* when it supports later reuse of prior decisions or artifacts. Use *Proactive framing* when the move anticipates likely conflict by setting expectations or guardrails before escalation. Use *Responsive filtering* when the move prioritizes relevant items and suppresses irrelevant or distracting content under overload. Use *Real time assistance* when the move provides in the moment help such as summaries or clarifications aligned to the ongoing exchange. Use *Decision support and guidance* when the move proposes options, trade offs, or safeguards linked to criteria. Use *Operational guidance* when the move provides concrete next steps, assignments, or procedural instructions. Use *Bypassing resolution* when the move explicitly routes around the conflict, such as deferring, escalating, or isolating parties, without addressing the contested issue. Assign multiple intervention goals only when they are clearly distinct and supported by segment evidence.

Step 6. Information usability Record information usability criteria only when stress, channel constraints, or access problems are visible in the trace or scenario. Do not add this rubric by default when the segment is already captured adequately without an access constraint.

Step 7. Team and authority descriptors Record team and authority descriptors only when they are explicitly stated in the segment or scenario. When evidence is insufficient, mark *not specified* rather than infer whether the AI decides, whether humans decide, or how the AI is framed in the team.

Table 1 summarizes the seven step taxonomy, showing for each step the code family, available labels, conceptual anchors, whether it came from literature synthesis or workshop refinement, and whether it is coded as single label, multi label, or optional.

4.2 Worked Example

To illustrate the taxonomy, we use one scenario from the workshop corpus that informed its development.

Illustrative scenario. A product team disagrees on whether to use privacy related data to increase sales. One side emphasizes near term revenue. The other emphasizes compliance and user trust. The AI summarizes both views, states decision criteria such as legal requirements and risk thresholds, and proposes a few options with safeguards and a clear next step.

Coding rationale. The dispute concerns what the team should do and which goal should take priority, rather than interpersonal dislike or process friction. It is therefore coded as **Conflict type: Task conflict**. Revenue and compliance compete as objectives, team members appeal to different norms about acceptable risk, and the contested issue is whether privacy related data use is legitimate and under what constraints.

The segment is coded with the following **Trigger cues: Disagreements about priorities, Disagreements about values and beliefs, Disagreements about AI and data use**.

The mediator supports the deliberation by clarifying the claims, identifying the criteria, and structuring the evaluation. This is coded as **Strategy: Educational**. The mediator treats both concerns as legitimate and searches for an option that satisfies multiple constraints. This is coded as **Stance: Integrating**.

AI makes criteria explicit, offers safeguarded options with a clear next step, and reduces the time spent reestablishing definitions across channels. These are coded as **Intervention goals: Decision clarity, Decision support and guidance, Operational guidance, Access speed**.

The output is easy to scan and supports action through concrete next steps. These are coded as **Information usability: Understandability, Actionability**. The storyline also explicitly frames AI as advising while humans retain the decision. These are coded as **Team and authority descriptors: Human decides, As team member**.

Prototype implication. This example shows how the taxonomy can support early prototype reflection for a specific conflict segment.

Table 1: Overview of the seven step taxonomy for AI teammate conflict support

Step	Family	Category	Child labels	Key literature citations	Phase	Data form
1	Type	Conflict type	Task conflict • Relationship conflict • Process conflict	[16]	1	Single label
2	Triggers	Value and belief misalignment	Disagreements about priorities • Disagreements about values and beliefs • Disagreements about AI and data use • Expertise gap	Workshop derived, conceptually related [1, 8, 11, 17, 19, 22]	2	Multi label set
2	Triggers	Strategic and procedural misalignment	Disagreements about process or strategy • Workflow delays • Missing organizational framework	Workshop derived, conceptually related [1, 11, 17, 22]	2	Multi label set
2	Triggers	Expectation and role misalignment	Expectation mismatch • Unclear task ownership • Role encroachment • Work disruption from absences	Workshop derived, conceptually related [11, 17, 22]	2	Multi label set
2	Triggers	Relational and emotional tension	Emotional friction • Dysfunctional team interaction • Feeling overruled or sidelined • Miscommunication	Workshop derived, conceptually related [1, 16, 22]	2	Multi label set
2	Triggers	Fairness and threat perceptions	Perceived unfair treatment	Workshop derived, conceptually related [11, 16]	2	Multi label set
2	Triggers	Structural breakdown	Disrupted team structure	Workshop derived, conceptually related [11, 22]	2	Multi label set
3	Strategy	System level	Process intervention • Structural intervention	[7, 22]	1	Single label
3	Strategy	Third-party level	Mediation • Inquisitorial • Motivational • Educational • Rapport building	[21, 22, 26]	1	Single label
4	Stance	Behavioral resolution stance	Integrating • Dominating • Obliging • Avoiding • Compromising • Rapport building • Emotional expression	[4, 23, 26, 28]	1	Multi label set
5	Goals	Intervention goals	Access speed • Referential retrieval • Decision clarity • Conversation structuring • Proactive framing • Responsive filtering • Real time assistance • Decision support and guidance • Operational guidance • Bypassing resolution	Conceptual anchors [2, 14, 24]	2	Multi label set
6	Information usability	Access under stress and channel constraints	Receivability • Understandability • Actionability • Retrievability • Ownership	[5, 15, 29]	1	Optional
7	Team and authority descriptors when stated	Decision mode	AI decides • Human decides • Joint decision • Not specified	Conceptual anchors [19, 20, 25]	2	Optional
7	Team and authority descriptors when stated	AI role framing	As team member • As leader • No AI • Not specified	Conceptual anchors [19, 20, 25]	2	Optional

Note. Phase indicates label provenance, 1 literature derived, 2 derived from speculative design workshops. For Phase 2 rows, citations are conceptual anchors, not sources of label definitions.

A prototype for this kind of segment should do more than summarize positions. It should make decision criteria visible, present safeguarded options, and end with a concrete next step while preserving final decision authority for the human team. The workshop corpus suggests at least two ways such support may be framed. In one German scenario, AI support took a more analytical form by helping teams compare alternatives through explicit pros, cons, and likely consequences. In one Japanese scenario, AI support took a more synthesis oriented form by summarizing points of contention, surfacing analogous cases, and generating options that reflect stakeholder concerns. These examples illustrate how the taxonomy can inform early prototype reflection in different ways without making comparative cultural claims.

5 Discussion

This work contributes a compact taxonomy for describing AI conflict support in teamwork by linking conflict framing with mediator strategy, stance, and intervention goals. Its main value is not to claim that AI conflict support has already been validated in real workplace settings. Instead, it offers a structured vocabulary to describe what kind of conflict is being addressed, how the AI intervenes, what stance it takes, and what kind of resolution work the intervention is intended to perform. Information usability remains an optional secondary lens when traces make access constraints visible.

5.1 From Conflict Diagnosis to Mediator Specification

Existing typologies identify the type of conflict present, but do not consistently capture mediator moves, signaled stance, and intervention goals [16, 22, 26]. The taxonomy addresses this limitation by separating conflict framing from intervention description and by treating intervention goals as first class codes. This structure is especially useful for traces in which timing and sequencing matter [7]. It also aligns with facilitation work that treats support as a structured action rather than as a label for the problem alone [2].

A key outcome of the study is therefore the distinction between identifying a conflict episode and specifying the form of mediation. The same conflict type may still require different kinds of support depending on what the AI is expected to do. One intervention may clarify criteria and propose safeguarded options, while another may primarily structure participation, separate issues, or help the group recover shared understanding. By making these distinctions explicit, the taxonomy provides a more precise way to describe the support for imagined AI conflict than conflict labels alone. The taxonomy does not yet prescribe which intervention strategy should be selected for a given conflict segment. Rather, it

provides a shared vocabulary for describing and comparing alternative mediator strategies, stances, and intervention goals.

The cross-site workshops mainly refined this structure rather than replacing it. They sharpened several trigger labels and clarified that authority and team descriptors should remain optional unless explicitly stated. In this sense, the cross-site contribution is best understood as refinement across two settings, not as a broad claim of generalizability.

5.2 Value for Early Analysis and Design Reflection

The taxonomy is most useful at an early analytic and design stage. It can help researchers and designers check whether a proposed AI intervention is aligned with the conflict it is meant to address and make explicit what the AI surfaces, how it intervenes, what intervention goal it serves, and where decision authority remains. In the worked example, a privacy and sales dispute is coded as a task conflict with triggers around priorities, values, and AI and data use. That pattern supports a more precise description of one possible intervention concept, including an educational strategy, an integrating stance, and intervention goals such as decision clarity, decision support and guidance, and operational guidance. In this sense, the taxonomy supports more explicit comparison and reflection across prototype concepts rather than prescribing a single correct intervention.

More broadly, the taxonomy offers a common language for distinguishing intervention patterns that might otherwise be grouped under a general claim of conflict support. Two concepts may both aim to help a team through conflict, yet one may act through procedural structuring while another acts through explanation, synthesis, or guidance. Recording system level strategy alongside the coded mediator move also helps make workflow assumptions and authority boundaries more visible, which matters for how AI teammate support may be perceived in collaboration [19, 20, 25]. In this way, the taxonomy may support early comparison across scenarios and concepts by clarifying what the AI surfaces, how it intervenes, and where decision authority remains.

Speculative scenarios also suggested that acceptance of AI support may depend on how intervention boundaries are framed, especially around authority and overreach.

5.3 Limitation and Future Directions

The taxonomy offers a more structured vocabulary for describing AI conflict support, but some category boundaries remain interpretive, especially across strategy, stance, and intervention goals. It should therefore be understood as an analytic scaffold with explicit decision rules, rather than as a fully stabilized coding scheme or a complete design method. In addition, the taxonomy was refined through literature synthesis and speculative design workshop materials, rather than real workplace traces, because AI conflict support agents are not yet widely available in practice. The reliability evidence reported here also covers key upstream distinctions used during development, rather than the full integrated taxonomy. Finally, this paper does not yet demonstrate in enough detail how it guides concrete design activities such as generating intervention concepts, comparing prototype directions, or evaluating alternative AI teammate behaviors.

Future work should test the taxonomy on real or realistic traces of AI supported teamwork and examine how reliably the full set of code families can be applied across settings and systems [7, 11]. For example, card sorting could be used to examine how clearly child labels are understood within each category. It would also be valuable to study whether the taxonomy helps designers generate clearer intervention concepts, compare alternatives more systematically, or critique existing designs more effectively.

6 Conclusion

We introduced a taxonomy for AI teammates that links the type of conflict and trigger signals to the mediator strategy, the stance, and the intervention goals, while keeping the descriptors of team and authority explicit and optional. We developed it through literature synthesis and matched speculative design workshops in Germany and Japan, yielding a structured taxonomy and decision rules with initial cross-site refinement. The taxonomy is intended to support early stage analysis and design iteration for conflict support systems. Our results provide initial evidence that key distinctions used to develop the taxonomy can be identified between coders. Future work should test the integrated taxonomy on real or realistic traces.

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7 Supplementary Material

The supplementary material, including participant-generated design storylines and detailed coding tables. The materials are available at https://osf.io/pvjd6/overview?view_only=f054eddb13774729b615864b1d566ef5.

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