Hoe interdependentie motiveert tot conflictgedrag

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Summary

This dissertation proposes an integration of two prominent conflict theories: the *interdependence theory* of Deutsch (1949, 1973) and the *conflict grid theory* of Blake and Mouton (1964, 1970). According to the former theory people pursue goals through the employment of activities. There is a dyadic conflict as soon as two individuals perceive that their mutual activities are incompatible. The actions the parties take to handle the conflict are determined by the perceived relation between the goals of the parties. The theory formulates two types of goal relation. In case of a *positive interdependence* a party can only reach its goals if the other party also reaches its goals (sink or swim together). Perceptions of positive interdependence activate cooperative behavior, resulting in a process that de-escalates the conflict. In case of a *negative interdependence* a party can only achieve its goals if the other party does not achieve its goals (if one swims, the other sinks). Perceptions of negative interdependence foster competitive conflict behavior, resulting in a process that escalates the conflict. The theory can be more strongly defined if an activity is conceived as a lower order goal (subgoal) in a hierarchy of goals. From this perspective, the incompatible activities are negatively interdependent *lower* order goals to which parties react with two possible modes of conflict behavior: with cooperative behavior if they experience a positive interdependence, and with competitive behavior if they experience a negative interdependence between the *higher* order goals.

In the conflict grid theory conflict behavior is determined by two elementary motives: a concern to realise own goals (*self-concern*) and a concern to realise goals of the opponent (*other-concern*). On basis of the relative strength of both concerns the theory distinguishes five modes of conflict behavior. Equal concern about own and other's goals results in *problem solving* in case of dual strong concern, in *compromising* in case of dual moderate concern, and in *avoiding* in case of dual weak concern. One-sided strong self-concern leads to *forcing*, one-sided strong other-concern to *accomodating*.

The essential difference between the two theories is that the perceived interdependence refers to the social structure between the parties, whereas the two concerns are intrapersonal motives to create and distribute outcomes for oneself and the opponent. It is plausible that these motives are situated closer to behavior than cognitions about the interdependence structure. Consequently, the integration of both theories is founded on the central idea that a conflict about incompatible lower order goals first evokes perceptions of positive or negative interdependence between the higher order goals, and then activates dual concern about own and other's goals which ultimately leads to conflict behavior. This central idea is illustrated in figure 1.

FIGURE 1 *Combination-model*
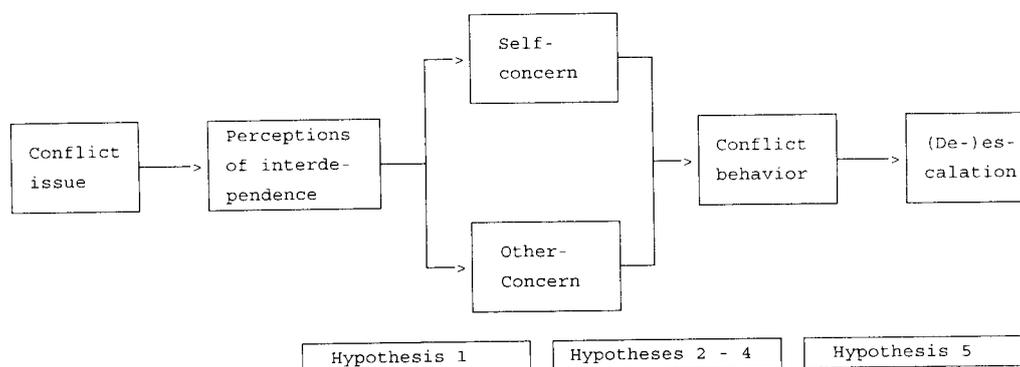
More specifically, we assume that a positive interdependence evokes more symmetrical (more positive or less negative correlation between) concerns about own and other's goals than a negative interdependence (hypothesis 1). Moreover, the more dual concern about own and other's goals the more problem solving will occur, somewhat more compromising, and less avoiding (hypothesis 2). The stronger one-sided self-concern the more forcing and less accomodating will occur (hypothesis 3); and the stronger one-sided other-concern the less forcing and more accomodating will occur (hypothesis 4). Regarding the consequences of conflict behavior we assume that problem solving, compromising and accomodating de-escalate the conflict, while forcing and avoiding cause escalation (hypothesis 5).

The developed combination-model was tested in two scenario studies and in a simulation experiment. In the scenario studies subjects (students of social sciences) were asked to enter into a conflict scenario in which they encounter an interpersonal conflict with a fellow student. After reading the scenario they were asked to fill in a questionnaire in order to measure to what extent they would: (a) develop self-concern and other-concern; (b) use each of the five conflict behaviors, and (c) expect (de-)escalation.

The results of the first study demonstrate that a positive interdependence leads to slightly more symmetrical concerns about own and other's goals than a negative interdependence. The effects of the two concerns on conflict behavior mainly support the expectations based on the combination model. Testing the total model reveals that the effects of interdependence on conflict behavior can be explained through a mediating role of other-concern. A positive interdependence elicits stronger other-concern than negative interdependence. This stronger other-concern then activates more problem solving, compromising and accomodating, and less forcing. Finally, the results demonstrate that problem solving, compromising and accomodating are related to de-escalation of the conflict, while forcing goes hand in hand with escalation, and avoiding does not correlate with (de-)escalation.

In the first scenario study dual concern about only the *lower* order goals were measured. Additionally, a second scenario study was conducted to examine the role of the dual concern about the *higher* order goals. As predicted, the results reveal that interdependence highly

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effects the relation between self-concern and other-concern about higher order goals. In case of a positive interdependence the two concerns are symmetrical: a stronger self-concern goes hand in hand with a stronger other-concern. In case of a negative interdependence the concerns are asymmetrical, which means that stronger self-concern co-occurs with weaker other-concern. The results further demonstrate that conflict behavior is mainly activated by concerns to realise higher order goals. Only in case of forcing is the own lower order goal an additional motivational source. Besides the effect on the correlation between the two concerns, interdependence has also a strong effect on the level of concern about other's higher order goal. In case of a positive interdependence this other-concern is much stronger than in case of a negative interdependence. This stronger other-concern next activates more problem solving, compromising and accomodating and inhibits less forcing. The nearly perfect mediating part of other-concern corresponds with the results of the foregoing study, albeit in the first study other-concern regards only other's lower order goal. The second study makes clear that concern about other's higher order goal as a mediator fully overpowers concern about other's lower order goal.

A disadvantage of scenario research is that no real behavior is measured but an intention to behavior as a reaction to an imaginary situation. Uncertainty exists about how this cognitive behavior relates to real behavior. Consequently, a simulation experiment was conducted, wherein subjects had to handle a real dyadic conflict. The results of this experiment are highly consistent with the second scenario study on the following three important aspects. First, a positive interdependence leads to symmetrical concerns about own and other's higher order goals, whereas in case of a negative interdependence the concerns are asymmetrical. Second, the higher order goals possess more motivating power than the lower order goals. Last, concern about other's higher order goal plays the main part in the mediating of the effect of interdependence on conflict behavior.

The more important contributions of this dissertation can be summarized in four conclusions. The *first conclusion* is that the combination-model as a newly developed theory meets the four criteria of a scientific theory. The model is logically consistent, parsimonious, empirically testable and has a clearly defined empirical domain of reference.

The *second conclusion* is that a positive interdependence evokes symmetrical concerns about own and other's goals, while in case of a negative interdependence these concerns are asymmetrical. This means that in case of a positive interdependence parties tend to unite self-concern and other-concern to one unipolar dimension. This dimension can be defined as the motivation to integration. It characterises the degree a party is motivated to cooperate with the opponent in order to reach mutually satisfying outcomes. In case of a negative interdependence there is a tendency to contrast self-concern and other-concern on one bipolar dimension. This dimension can be defined as the motivation to distribution. It characterises the degree a party is motivated to distribute the desired outcomes in one's own advantage (one-sided self-concern) or in opponent's advantage (one-sided other-concern).

The *third conclusion* is that conflict behavior is mainly determined by concerns to realize

higher order goals. This suggests that parties do not get entangled in the conflict about perceived incompatible subgoals in the foreground, but do keep a general view of the more essential higher order goals in the background of the conflict.

The *fourth conclusion* is that other-concern plays a much more interesting part in social conflicts than self-concern. There are four reasons for that. First, the present research demonstrates that interdependence has a strong effect on other-concern and no or a much weaker effect on self-concern. This suggests that other-concern can more easily be manipulated through interventions in the environment than self-concern. Moreover, other-concern mediates the effect of interdependence on conflict behavior, while self-concern plays no or a minor part in this mediating. Third, other-concern discriminates much better between a cooperative and a competitive orientation than self-concern. Last, other-concern possesses more motivating power than self-concern and appears to be the crucial motive towards effective and de-escalating conflict behavior. Research demonstrates again and again that stronger other-concern evokes problem solving and compromising, and simultaneously inhibits forcing, which results in de-escalation of the conflict and positive outcomes for both parties. The crucial part of other-concern in our research reveals the shortcoming of the dominant, traditional conflict management paradigm, in which self-concern is paramount and little attention is paid to other-concern. Therefore, we support the appeal of Pruitt and Carnevale (1993) to break through the limits of the traditional paradigm by putting self-concern in combination with other-concern in the spotlights both in theory and research.