

What motivates third parties to take sides ?

Effect of subjective power and personal characteristics

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ABSTRACT

Side-taking is a main reaction of third parties in interpersonal conflicts. This study focused on third-party side-taking decisions and how they are influenced by subjective power and personal characteristics (individual moral orientation and individual power distance orientation). An experimental study with 46 student participants investigated the effect of these variables on side-taking motives. The results showed that low subjective power had an effect on reward-approaching side-taking motive. High subjective power had no effect on a side-taking preference in this study. The assumed moderating effects of moral orientation and power distance orientation could not be confirmed. Additional analyses showed interesting results: low subjective power and Machiavellianism interacted in moral-based side-taking motive and Ethical Reasoning moderated the relationship between high subjective power and reward-approaching motive. The results are discussed with regard to explanations and implications.

INTRODUCTION

In daily life people are often confronted with conflicts. In occupational life, for example, conflicts arise if not all team members have the same motivation or pursue the same goal in a project. Or in private life, conflicts often occur if the members of a sports team cannot agree on the strategies they will play. Every conflict consists of two sides. On the one side are the conflicting parties, also called disputants, who are directly involved in a conflict with each other because they perceive a divergence of interests or they believe that their current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously (Rubin, Pruitt, & Kim, 1994). On the other side are parties who are not actively involved in the conflict - the third parties. Third party refers to a person who is confronted with an interpersonal conflict as an outsider and has no a priori preference on how to handle the problem (Yang, 2006).

In this study the focus is on the third party. There are different possible ways for a third party confronted with an interpersonal conflict to react. A third party can try to avoid the conflict, help the disputants to solve the problems, or help to mediate between the disputant parties so as to achieve a win-win situation (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993). A third party can also support one of the disputants in their position, form a coalition with one disputant party and take side (Van de Vliert, 1997). This reaction is referred to as side-taking, which is one of the main responses of third parties in reaction to interpersonal conflicts (Glasl, 1980; Van de Vliert, 1981).

Side-taking means that the third-party intervenes in the conflict by supporting one disputant and turning against the other and it can be indicated by the degree to which a third party prefers one disputant over the other (Yang, Van de Vliert, & Shi, 2009). Until now, research on side-taking by third parties has received little attention in the literature of conflict management. Among some exceptional studies (Black, 1993; Murray, 1975; Yang, Van de Vliert, Shi, & Huang, 2008), the topic examined focuses mainly on the effect of cross-national differences on side-taking, as well as on the effects of individual differences. As can be imagined, many other factors, especially those relevant to situational factors, can have an influence on the side-taking decision of the third party (Yang, 2006). In this study the focus is on how subjective power of third parties influences their motive for side-taking.

Subjective power is a psychological state which makes a person feel powerful or powerless. Subjective power arises when an individual's perception is based on individual

differences and power as a situational variable interacts with personal variables (Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001). People's behavior is stimulated through their subjective power. High subjective power means accepting less interference from others and leads to approach-oriented behavior. In contrast, low subjective power means being more dependent on others and leads to more inhibited behavior (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). Previous research has indicated that power influences the behavior of others in interpersonal conflicts and the preference of supporting one side (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993). In this paper, it is expected that subjective power may stimulate third parties to take sides in a conflict.

To further elaborate the relationship between subjective power and third parties' side-taking preferences, individual differences are also taken into account: moral orientation and power distance orientation. Individual moral orientation reflects the justice principles of a person (Proios, 2010). Earlier studies have displayed that personal characteristics in general affect their motives for conflict handling and side-taking motives (Yang, Li, Wang, & Hendriks, 2011). It is already shown that moral orientation has an impact on side-taking preference (Yang, et al., 2009). This study wants to have a look if the effect can be approved for the relationship between subjective power and side-taking. Individual power distance orientation defines the extent to which individuals accept hierarchy or inequality in society. Previous research had ascertained that power distance had a moderating effect on decision-making processes (Brockner, et al., 2001). In this study it should be revised if power distance has also an impact on side-taking motives.

The aim of this study is to examine the joint effect of subjective power and individual differences in terms of moral orientation and power distance orientation on third party preferences for side-taking. The research question is: how does subjective power have an impact on a third party's decision about side-taking? How is this relationship further adjusted by individuals' moral orientation and individuals' power distance orientation? It should be noted that this study assumes that both disputant parties have the same level of power and hierarchy.

By answering these questions the study makes at least three contributions to the current studies on side-taking and power. First, it complements the previous studies in which only the effects of individual differences were examined (e.g. Yang, et al., 2011). This extends the knowledge about how a situational characteristic – subjective power of third parties – influences their side-taking motive. Second, the joint effect of subjective power and

individual difference variables (moral orientation and power distance orientation) demonstrates how a state characteristic and a chronic characteristic of third parties play a role in shaping their preference for side-taking. It provides an insight into understanding complicated side-taking process. Third, as a byproduct, this study provides extra evidence for the validity of the scales of side-taking preference.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Side-taking motives

Side-taking is one of options for a third party to react to an interpersonal conflict. Before the third party takes side with one of the conflicting parties, he or she will collect information to come to a decision. Interests play a key role in the decision-making because they create motivation. These kinds of interests are labeled as ‘need’ or ‘motive’ (Van de Vliert & Mastenbroek, 1998). In the literature on conflict management three types of side-taking motives are distinguished: the moral-based motive, the relationship-based motive and the self-interest-based motive, with the last motive being divided into the sanction-avoidance motive and the reward-approaching motive (Yang, et al., 2011).

Moral-based motive. The moral-based motive for side-taking is developed with a view to taking a fair and morally acceptable decision. In doing so, the third-party has to weight information and decide which party is right and which is wrong. The decision-making is based on the degree to which the activities of the conflicting parties are perceived as ‘the right thing to do’ and to what extent societal well-being is promoted effectively (Suchman, 1995). The extent to which the arguments of a party are conclusive and logical so that they acquire greater plausibility also plays a role (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). In general the decision is based on legitimacy relating to a generalized perception that the actions of a person “are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions” (Suchman, 1995, p. 574; cf. Gross, Mason, & McEachern, 1958; Ginzler, Kramer, & Sutton, 1992; Nielson & Rao, 1987; Perrow, 1970). It should be noted in this connection that legitimacy or justice is rooted in the moral values of each person, thus people perceive fairness in different ways (Tyler, 1990).

Relationship-based motive. An essential point for a coalition with one party is his/her relation with the interaction partner. Hence a third party’s side-taking decision is also determined by whether or not the third party has an equivalent relation to both conflict parties.

Normally, there is a stronger and more intensive relationship with one party, so that this person wins the support of the third party (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993). Individuals make distinctions between those with whom they have close relations and those to whom they have no relational commitment (Gelfand & Cai, 2004). By preferring the closer party, a third party faces the risk that he/she concentrates more on maintaining the relations than on the subject (Thompson, Peterson, & Brodt, 1996).

Self-interest-based motive. It goes with saying that every person needs to take care of their own interests in building an active or passive coalition. When this tendency is reflected in side-taking, it is characterized by third parties maximizing their own benefits. According to rational choice theory this kind of selection is the fundamental logic of action (Hernstein, 1990). This motive is distinguished in two directions: sanction-avoidance motive and reward-approaching motive. Sanction-avoidance motive means that the third party strives to minimize the loss and to avoid punishment (Gross, et al., 1958). Reward-approaching motive means that the third party strives to maximize his or her own benefit and increase the possibilities of obtaining rewards.

In this paper, third parties' side-taking is referred to as their reaction in support of one of the disputants and siding against the other.

Impact of subjective power on side-taking

Power is a fundamental concept in social science as well as a central aspect of daily social life, because power is the primary mode of social influence (Rusell, 1938; Cartwright, 1959). Power is defined as "the capacity to influence and control the behavior of others" (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003, p. 454). In this study the focus is on subjective power. Subjective power is determined through individual perceptions, which can be based on actual power or on a fiction (Lokshin & Ravallion, 2005).

Power has a fundamental impact on how individuals behave. Studies have shown that power affects the way action-oriented individuals are (e.g. Galinsky, et al., 2003), how they perceive other people (e.g. Fiske & Dépret, 1996; Guinote, 2007a; Overbeck & Park, 2001), and how likely they are to behave in line with their dispositions (e.g. Chen, et al., 2001). A recent study by Lammers and Stapel (2009) has revealed that subjective power influences the way people think and judge about morality and dilemmas, like a side-taking dilemma. In a side-taking dilemma the third party has to judge what is fair. The arguments of the disputants

have to be weighted and finally the third party has to choose one side among the two disputant parties. Thus, the third party has two options choosing to side with party A or party B. The decision leads to different consequences for the conflict parties (Velasquez & Rostanowski, 1985). Side-taking by the third party strengthens one disputant but weakens the other party. The subjective power of the third party influences the side-taking decision and whether the third party is aware of the importance of the decision for the conflicting parties.

People with high or low subjective power act and behave in different ways when they are confronted with a side-taking dilemma. According to the *situated focus theory of power* (Guinote, 2007a; 2010) the effect of power on judgment and behavior is context-dependent. The theory distinguishes two kinds of effects of power on cognitive processes. On the one hand power influences the individual's goal system at the basic cognitive level, stimulating selective and flexible attention. On the other hand power affects the mind-set at the higher cognitive level determining which information gains attention and how this information gets processed. Both effects result in more situated judgments and situated behaviors for high power individuals than for low power individuals. In other words, high power stimulates individuals to cognitively process the information which is only relevant to the respective situation. As a result, high power patronizes the achievement of desired outcomes and draws individuals' attention directly to their needs and goals. Some researchers describe this phenomenon as "powerful people are independent of others in obtaining outcomes" (Dépret & Fiske, 1993; Fiske & Berdahl, 2007; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003) or "they control processes and decisions" (Smith & Bargh, 2008).

Overall, the *situated focus theory of power* (Guinote, 2007a; 2010) states that power leads people to have fewer demands and that they only have to process little information from the environment. As a result, through power they can focus their attention better on the core issue under discussion and have more cognitive resources to select the important aspects, which further leads to faster reactions (Guinote, 2007b) and consequently to faster and more focused judgment and behavior. In addition, power also promotes flexibility, because these people have the necessary resources to be flexible at basic cognition level and thus possess greater flexibility in attention. Without a clear demand from situation, people with power favor economic information processes and allow default processes to guide their judgment and behavior. Powerful people can then direct their attention better than powerless people and perform in accordance with the situation. All these effects contribute to the fact that power

leads to a strong sense of control. In summary, the *situated theory of power* (Guinote, 2007a; 2010) means that powerful people adjust better to the situations and show strong flexibility and selectivity in information processing.

Regarding the side-taking dilemma, it can be concluded that power leads people to act according to the expectancies and goals imposed by situation. They concentrate on the conflict and on the arguments of the disputants, because people with high subjective power focus on the core issues of the situation. The core issue of an interpersonal conflict is the subject of the conflict and the arguments for or against the subject. Who the disputant parties are is a secondary issue. Thus people with high subjective power ignore the relationships with the disputant parties because they are not relevant for the situation.

The auto-motive-model of Bargh (1990) implies that the cognitive activation of a construct automatically activates other concepts and behavioral tendencies which are associated with the construct. In applying this model to the research domain of power, several studies have shown that when power is activated, people have the duty to act fairly and legitimately. People with high power, like managers, feel obliged to act according to universal ethical norms, even when these lead to an inner-state conflict in their own beliefs (Weber, 1990). High power people are concerned more about what is right or wrong and pay less attention to pleasure, pain or consequences. Proios (2010) pointed out that for the powerful, it is important to fulfill their duties and judge in line with societal rules. Further, an empirical study conducted by Lammers and Stapel (2009) supported this argument by showing that high subjective power stimulates moral thinking on the basis of rules and norms. Overall, it can be concluded that high power people choose their side-taking motive on the grounds of moral rules. Thus, they act according to social expectations and norms, which give them the possibility of stabilizing their high power position. This leads to the following expectation:

Hypothesis 1: The subjective feeling of being powerful leads people to a moral-based side-taking decision.

In contrast to powerful people, powerless people care about the consequences of their actions and are attentive to threats, punishments and unfairness (Keltner, et al., 2003; Smith & Bargh, 2008; Anderson & Berdahl, 2002). Keltner, et al. (2003) found out that reduced power activates inhibition-related tendencies. Inhibition means that people are attentive to threats, have negative emotions and systematic controlled cognition, and display inhibited

situationally constrained behavior. The authors compare this with an alarm-threat system, because inhibition is activated by punishment, threat and uncertainty. Once activated, the system triggers affective states such as anxiety, avoidance and response inhibition (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002). That is why powerless people observe their powerful opponents so that they can negotiate successful cooperation and relationships to reduce their anxiety (Chance, 1967). To achieve this, powerless people do not mention whether they think an action is right or wrong. They are more sensitive to evaluations and constraints of other people (e.g. Fiske, 1993), because they are more likely to be the victim of aggression. Through this they are only interested in the consequences of their actions and their judgment is based on this. They strive to promote pleasure and avoid pain (Proios, 2010). Moreover, most people have only a shared understanding of acting according to social norms and values, as well as a shared respect for conventions and laws (e.g. Blasi, 1980). This distinguishes powerless people from the powerful. Powerless people do not think about morality, ethical norms or social rules. In contrast to high power people, the powerless see no sense in decisions which satisfy collective needs (Turner, Barling, Epitropaki, Butcher, & Milner, 2002). Primarily they attend to their own well-being. When they have to decide on a side, powerless people consider which outcome is in line with their self-interest.

Hypothesis 2: The subjective feeling of being powerless leads people to a sanction-avoidance side-taking decision (2a) or a reward-approaching side-taking decision (2b).

Moderating effect of moral orientation on high subjective power and moral-based side-taking

Moral orientation refers to the predominant moral attitude of a person to one or more points in time (Lifton, 1985). It explains an individual's style of acting based on the principles of justice and weighting of consequences (Proios, 2010). In other words, moral orientation prepares individuals to fulfill fair expectations and to ward off unfair ones (Gross, et al., 1985). Researchers agree that internalized standards and principles are part of an individual's moral orientation. This means that every individual has a different moral orientation.

There is, however, disagreement on how to evaluate individuals' moral orientation. Researchers believe that moral orientation plays an important role in influencing individuals' moral judgments and decision-making (Blasi, 1980). This shows that people differ in their decision making because of their justice principles and that it influences their reaction on conflicts as well. As mentioned before personal characteristics such as moral orientation

interact with power (Chen, et al., 2001). Therefore, the attitude towards morality affects the feeling of power. Individuals with a high moral orientation evaluate information on the basis of inner ethical principles, which goes along with the moral-based side-taking motive. Consequently, high moral orientation increases the probability that a side-taking decision of an individual is based on fair and moral reasonable arguments (Yang, et al., 2009). Because of this description and the findings of previous research that moral orientation influence side-taking preference (Yang, et al., 2009) it leads to the prediction that people with high power may even have a stronger preference for moral-based side-taking if their moral orientation is high than if their moral orientation is low.

Hypothesis 3: Third parties' moral orientation will strengthen the positive relationship between high subjective power and moral-based motive for side-taking.

Moderating effect of power distance orientation on low subjective power and sanction-avoidance side-taking

Individual power distance orientation refers to the degree to which people agree that power is unequally shared (Carl, Gupta, & Javidan, 2004; House, Javidan, Hanges, & Dorfman, 2002; Hofstede, 2001). People with a low power distance orientation see power differences between people as unfair and expect equal decision-making. By contrast, people with a high power distance orientation legitimate hierarchical differences and inequalities among individuals (Kim & Leung, 2007).

In relation to decision making, people with a high power orientation see hierarchy as fair: high power people make the decisions and low power people follow the instructions. Individuals with a high power distance orientation are thus afraid of disagreeing with their supervisors and dare not question authority in general (Smith & Hume, 2005). In contrast, low power distance orientation is characterized by disliking inequalities between hierarchy levels and believes that status differentials and power inequalities should be minimized. It thinks that in making decisions, subordinates in the lower level of hierarchy should be consulted by those at higher levels and that the ideal leader believes power resides in the people (Kim & Leung, 2007; Smith & Hume, 2005; Paulus, Bichelmeyer, Malopinsky, Pereira, & Rastogi, 2005). This description shows that power distance has an influence on subjective power as well as on decision-making. People with high or low power distance orientation see themselves automatically as powerless or powerful. It leads to the expectation that power distance orientation affects subjective power. It also indicates that power distance orientation

is related to the individual's beliefs about status, authority, and power (Kirkman, Chen, Farh, Chen, & Lowe, 2009). In decision-making, people low in power distance are accustomed that they are not consulted. However, if they have to come to a decision they getting unsure and nervous while people high in power distance are used to and can act more relaxed. A study of Brockner, et al. (2001) point out that power distance has a moderating effect on decision-making processes. Other studies also found a moderating effect of individual power distance (e.g. Kirkman, et al., 2009).

With the characteristics of power distance orientation described above, it is expected that power distance may adjust the relationship between low power and self-interest based side-taking. The low power parties who have stronger power distance orientation may be even more susceptible for one-way, top-down direction from the powerful and thus try to avoid the possible negative consequences as far as possible. This leads to the expectation:

Hypothesis 4: Third parties' power distance orientation will strengthen the positive relationship between low subjective power and sanction-avoidance motive for side-taking.

METHOD

Participants

A student sample was recruited and used to examine the link between subjective power and side-taking motives as well as the moderating effect of individual moral orientation and individual power distance. In total, 46 students (52.2% male, 47.8% female) participated in the study. They were recruited from the 'University of Twente' and the 'Saxion Universities of Applied Sciences' in Enschede. The average age of the students was 19.6, ranging from 17 to 28. The nationality of all respondents is West-European (97.8% Dutch, 2.2% German). Their studies covered six fields: Electrical Engineering, Mathematics and Computer Science (39.1%), Behavioral Science (17.4%), Management and Governance (6.5%), Science and Technology (2.2%), Engineering Technology (2.2%), and other studies (32.6%). Moreover, 85% of them are studying for a Bachelor's degree and 15% for a Master's degree. 69.6% of the participants had part-time work experience.

Procedure

The students were recruited from academic courses during which they could answer the questionnaires. Participation in the study was voluntary. It is explicitly mentioned that

participation in the study was irrelevant to course evaluation. The study was conducted at two separate times. The temporal separation of one to two weeks between the two measures was necessary to avoid method biases between questionnaire measures (individual moral orientation and individual power distance orientation) and priming of the power. In the first round the participants answered statements about their individual moral orientation and their individual power distance. Two weeks later (in the second round), a study of power manipulation was performed. In this study the respondents were asked to remember a past experience to manipulate their subjective power and finally to fill in the side-taking questionnaire. Three conditions were arranged in manipulating the subjective power: high subjective power, low subjective power and a control group (without manipulating power). The students were allocated at random to one of the three conditions. Both parts of the questionnaire were handed out in paper-pencil-version.

The participants were asked to enter their student number on both questionnaires so that their answers to both questionnaires could be matched. Only completed and matched records from both data collection sets were used for data analysis. The study is thus based on 46 questionnaires. 17 participants were exposed to the arrangement with high power manipulation, 18 students to low power manipulation arrangement and eleven students were in the control group.

To ensure that the order of the side-taking motives is not biased by the order in which they are presented in the questionnaire, the items for side-taking were randomized. The two experimental groups received two different orders of the motives.

The questionnaire was handed out to the students in Dutch. As the questionnaires were evaluated in English, the conventional translation and back-translation technique was used to ensure linguistic equivalence. Moreover, respondents were assured that their answers would be treated confidentially and used for scientific research purposes only.

Measures

Side-taking motives. To measure the dependent variable - the side-taking motive of the participants - a 22-item list was used and the participants answered questions about their agreement on a 5-point Likert-scale (from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). The instrument of Yang, et al. (2011) consists of items addressing the moral-based motive (e.g. “I tend to stand for the side whose arguments sound proper”), the relational-based motive (e.g. “I

give priority to the disputant who is my friend”) and the self-interest-based motive. The last motive distinguishes between the reward-approaching motive (e.g. “I care about what I can gain when choosing which side to support”) and the sanction-avoidance motive (e.g. “My side-taking decision is influenced by whether a disputant can cause me trouble”). Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .52 (standardized items) for the five items measuring the moral-based side-taking motive, .80 for the six items of the relationship motive, .78 for the six reward-approaching items and .68 for the five items measuring the sanction-avoidance motive.

Subjective Power. The participants were asked to describe a past experience where they have been in a position of high or low power (cf. Galinsky, et al., 2003). Previous research showed that the sense of power is anchored in experiences and that it can be activated when past experiences with power are recalled (Galinsky, et al., 2003; Chen, et al., 2001). This task was not assigned to the control group. The instructions were the same for both experimental groups, except for the words referring to a high or low level of power. The pre-test showed that it is helpful for the participants to give an example what kind of experience is meant. The instruction for the high power group was as follows:

Please recall and write down a situation in which you had power over another individual or individuals what give you a **good feeling** of control. By power we mean **a situation in which you had control over someone or were in a position to evaluate someone**. For example, a situation where you were the team leader of a sport team or a research team or a situation where you could evaluate the work of another student. Because of the power that you had, you managed things successfully. Please describe concretely what happened and what the successful outcomes were.

Individual Moral Orientation. Two scales were used to measure the individual moral orientation: the Honesty-Humility part of the HEXACO Personality Inventory (Lee & Ashton, 2004) and the Ethical Reasoning Inventory (Page & Bode, 1980). The sixteen Honesty-Humility items (of the 100-item-version of the HEXACO-PI-R) are measured on a five-point Likert-scale, from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. This frequently used scale measures the tendency to be fair and honest in dealing with others, to cooperate and not to be set on revenge, even if you feel used. The Honesty-Humility domain is composed of four facets, each with four items. *Sincerity* measures the tendency to be honest in interpersonal relationships, e.g. “I wouldn’t use flattery to get a raise or promotion at work, even if I thought it would succeed”. The facet *Fairness* looks at the tendency to avoid corruption and deception, e.g. “I would never accept a bribe, even if it were very large“. *Greed avoidance* shows the non-interest in possessing lavish wealth, luxury and symbols of high social status,

e.g. “Having a lot of money is not especially important to me“. *Modesty* measures the tendency to be modest and unpretentious, e.g. “I wouldn’t want people to treat me as though I were superior to them”. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for the total 16 items in this study is .81.

The Ethical Reasoning Inventory (ERI) of Page & Bode (1980) is a multiple-choice measure of moral reasoning and constructed from Kohlberg's work. The 20 item-scale is measured on a five-point Likert-scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Thirteen items are poled in the positive direction, for instance “It is unacceptable to call in sick in order to take a day off, even if only done once or twice a year” and seven items are poled negatively, e.g. “It is acceptable to read the e-mail messages and faxes of other workers, even when not invited to do so”. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient is .69.

Individual Power Distance. The individual power distance orientation was assessed with two scales as well. First, the power distance scale of Earley and Erez (1997) which measures power distance at the individual level was adopted (cf. Brockner, et al., 2001; Kim & Leung, 2007; Kirkman, et al., 2009). This scale consists of eight items such as, “In most situations, team leaders should make decisions without consulting their subordinate team members”. The original scale measures the acceptance of unequal power distribution in organizations. Because the participants in this study were students, the term “managers” was replaced with the term “team leader” and the term “employee” was replaced with “team member”. The answers were given on a five-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient is .68.

Second, the Mach-IV scale of Christie and Geis (1970) consisting of twenty items about Machiavellianism measuring individual differences in the tendency of deception, cynical behavior and absence of conventional moral was used. Ten items refer to Machiavellianism and Non-Machiavellianism respectively. Responses were given on a five-point Likert-scale ranging from one to five (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). The twenty statements on the Mach-IV scale are classified into three areas. Nine items concern opinions about human nature (*views*), e.g. “Most people are basically good and kind”; nine items describe duplicity tactics (*tactics*), e.g. “It is wise to flatter important people”, and two items concern themes of abstract morality (*morality*), e.g. “All in all, it is better to be humble and honest than important and dishonest”. The Mach-IV scale is the most used scale for testing Machiavellianism, so validity and reliability of the instrument are thoroughly verified

(e.g. Fehr, Samsom, & Paulhus, 1992). In this study Cronbach's alpha coefficient is .69 for all twenty items.

RESULTS

Influence of item order on participants' response to side-taking

First, it was tested whether the order of the side-taking items had an influence on the respondent's answers. As mentioned, the order of the side-taking motives varied in the two experimental groups. Some participants answered the statements about the side-taking motives in the original order as described in the instrument of Yang, et al. (2011). This order starts with the moral-based side-taking motive, followed by the relationship-based motive. It ends with the reward-approaching motive as well as the sanction-avoidance motive. Other participants answered the motives the other way around. One-way ANOVA showed that there is no significant difference in response on the subscale of the moral motive ($F_{(1,44)} = 1.93$; *ns*) and the sanction-avoidance motive ($F_{(1,44)} = .37$; *ns*). In contrast, a significant difference was shown on the subscale of the relationship-based motive ($F_{(1,44)} = 7.10$; $p < .05$) and the reward-approaching motive ($F_{(1,44)} = 5.49$; $p < .05$). As the focus of this study is on the moral-based and sanction-avoidance side-taking motives, these results imply that the different order in presenting items had no effect on participants' evaluation for their moral-based and sanction-based side-taking motives.

Check of the manipulation

It was also checked whether respondents had understood the task correctly. Of the participants who were arranged in either a high power manipulation or a low power manipulation group, some participants produced unsuitable answers to the power manipulation task in order that these questionnaires were useless for analysis. For example, in the high power manipulation task one female participant reported, "If I am in such a situation (with high power), I will always try to do something to make it different. I will come to an outcome that makes both parties satisfied". Apparently, this participant did not recall a past experience in which power gave her control over the situation. This check resulted in 35 participants who reported the experience in accordance with the intended purpose of the manipulation task being left for further analysis. An example of the experience reported by one participant is: "I was president of a student union for one year. In this function I was often in the situation that I had to come to a decision how things should be done. The other members of the executive board did what I told them. That leads to an effective organization."

(High power manipulation). Another student described his experience as follows: “I had such an experience in my earlier studies during my internship in the second year. The relation between me and my supervisor was bad. I did not mention things on which I had another opinion because I was afraid to influence my supervisor in his evaluation. After the evaluation, which was worse than I thought, I felt powerless.” (Low power manipulation).

Descriptive statistics

Table 1 shows means, standard deviations and correlations of the relevant variables used in the study. Ethical Reasoning Inventory (ERI) correlated positively with the moral-based motive ($r = .20$; $p < .10$), whereas the Honesty-Humility domain had a negative correlation with the sanction-avoidance motive ($r = -.32$; $p < .05$). The power distance scale showed a positive relationship with the moral-based motive ($r = .22$; $p < .10$) and the Mach-IV scale had a positive relationship the sanction-avoidance motive ($r = .31$; $p < .05$).

The individual difference variables showed some correlations with the two other side-taking motives as well. ERI was correlated with the relationship-based motive ($r = .32$; $p < .05$) and with the reward-approaching motive ($r = .52$; $p < .01$). Honesty-Humility was correlated negatively with reward-approaching motive ($r = -.40$; $p < .01$). Also, the reward-approaching motive was correlated with both power distance variables: negatively with Power Distance Scale ($r = -.28$; $p < .10$) but positively with Machiavellianism ($r = .24$; $p < .10$).

Further, there was a positive correlation between the two self-interest motives sanction-avoidance and reward-approaching ($r = .23$; $p < .10$). Likewise the sanction-avoidance-motive had a positive correlation with the relationship-based motive ($r = .26$; $p < .10$) as well as the moral motive ($r = .27$; $p < .10$). Moreover, there was a negative correlation between the Honesty-Humility and ERI ($r = -.58$; $p < .01$) as well as Machiavellianism scale ($r = -.62$; $p < .01$). ERI was correlated positively with the Machiavellianism scale ($r = .50$; $p < .01$) but negatively with power distance scale ($r = -.34$; $p < .05$).

In addition, age was correlated negatively with power distance scale ($r = -.29$; $p < .10$), whereas gender was correlated negatively with Machiavellianism ($r = -.30$; $p < .05$), but was correlated positively with Honesty-Humility ($r = .35$; $p < .05$). This means women scored lower on Machiavellianism but men scored higher on Honesty-Humility.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations for relevant variables

	M_H	SD_H	M_L	SD_L	M_C	SD_C	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<i>Side-taking motive</i>																	
1 Moral	3.95	.63	3.88	.32	3.85	.35	-	.27 [†]	-.06	.06	.06	.20 [†]	.22 [†]	.14	.01	-.04	.19
2 Relationship	3.35	.87	3.40	.67	3.53	.54		-	.21 [†]	.26 [†]	-.09	.32 ^{**}	-.08	.15	-.14	.09	.11
3 Reward-approaching	3.54	.50	2.85	.77	3.27	.42			-	.23 [†]	-.40 [*]	.52 [*]	-.28 [†]	.24 [†]	.04	-.05	.02
4 Sanction-avoidance	2.49	.56	2.29	.72	2.45	.59				-	-.32 ^{**}	.19	.08	.31 ^{**}	.07	.06	-.02
<i>Moral Orientation</i>																	
5 Honesty-Humility	3.30	.71	-	.55	3.51	.39					-	-.58 [*]	-.04	-.62 [*]	-.04	.35 ^{**}	.09
6 ERI	3.04	.39	-	.44	2.79	.31						-	-.34 ^{**}	.50 [*]	.01	-.19	-.10
<i>Power Distance Orientation</i>																	
7 Power Distance Scale	-	.68	2.57	.65	2.59	.23							-	.14	-.29 ^{**}	-.18	.13
8 Mach-IV	-	.40	2.79	.37	2.62	.40								-	.04	-.30 ^{**}	.11
<i>Control Variables</i>																	
9 Age	20.5	2.98	19.50	2.57	18.55	1.13									-	.18	-.22 [†]
10 Gender	1.29	.50	1.44	.51	1.82	.40										-	-.16
11 Work experience	1.35	.49	1.28	.47	1.27	.47											-

Note: M_H and SD_H refer to the means and standard deviations in the high power group.

M_L and SD_L refer to the means and standard deviations in the low power group.

M_C and SD_C refer to the means and standard deviations in the control group.

* $p = .01$.

** $p = .05$.

† $p = .10$.

Test of the Hypotheses

The procedure suggested by Aiken und West (1991) for testing the hypotheses was followed. Multiple regression analyses were performed. The dependent variables were the side-taking motives. The independent variables were subjective power, individual moral orientation (ERI and Honesty-Humility) and individual power distance (power distance and Machiavellianism). The independent variables were standardized (*z-scores*) before the interaction term was calculated. The variable *power* was included as a dummy variable (in the low-power condition: control group = 0, low power = 1; in the high-power condition: control group = 0, high power group = 1). In the first step all three predictors were entered in the equation and in the second step their two-way interactions were followed. Three demographic variables – age, gender, and work experience – are comprised in the analysis as control variables.

Table 2. The impact of high subjective power and moral orientation on side-taking motives

	Moral	Sanction	Reward	Relationship
<i>Control Variables</i>				
Age	.04	.09	-.002	.05
Gender	-.08	.06	.06	.04
Work experience	.16	-.06	.08	.21†
<i>Predictors</i>				
Power	-.07	-.13	.13	-.16
Honesty-Humility	.21	-.09	-.21†	.23
ERI	.23†	.32**	.06	.42**
<i>Two way interactions</i>				
Honesty-Humility * Power	-.13	-.07	.12	-.31
ERI * Power	-.10	-.22	.28**	.13
<i>F</i>	.59	1.63†	1.97**	1.54†
<i>R</i> ²	.20	.41	.45	.39

Note: Regression coefficients shown are unstandardized beta weights in step 2.

**p* = .01.

***p* = .05.

†*p* = .10.

Hypothesis 1 predicts a main effect of high subjective power on the moral-based side-taking motive. Hypothesis 2 predicts a main effect of low subjective power on the self-interest motives: the sanction-avoidance (2a) or the reward-approaching motive (2b). The results showed that in both the high power and the low power group, the moral-based side-taking

motive was the most preferred ($M_{\text{HighPower}} = 3.95$; $M_{\text{LowPower}} = 3.88$). Sanction-avoidance side-taking was the least chosen option ($M_{\text{HighPower}} = 2.49$; $M_{\text{LowPower}} = 2.29$). The same pattern was also applied to the control group ($M_{\text{MoralMotive}} = 3.85$, $M_{\text{SanctionMotive}} = 2.45$). There was no significant difference across the three groups in response to the moral motive ($F_{(2,43)} = .18$; *ns*) and to the sanction-avoidance motive ($F_{(2,43)} = .51$; *ns*). For the reward-approaching motive, however there was a significant difference between the low power group and the control group ($F_{(2,43)} = 5.64$; $p < .01$), as well as between the high and low power groups ($F_{(2,43)} = 5.64$; $p < .01$). The results in Table 2 and Table 3 indicate that by comparison with the control group, subjective power did not have any significant effect on either the moral-based side-taking motive ($\beta = -.07$; *ns*) or on the sanction-avoidance side-taking motive ($\beta = -.04$; *ns*). But low subjective power had a negative effect on reward-approaching side-taking motive ($\beta = -.24$; $p < .05$). Thus, Hypotheses 1 and 2a were not supported by data, but Hypothesis 2b was well supported.

Table 3. The impact of low subjective power and power distance on side-taking motives

	Moral	Sanction	Reward	Relationship
<i>Control Variables</i>				
Age	.06	-.09	-.09	-.14
Gender	.06	.28**	-.09	.22†
Work experience	.02	.02	-.15	.02
<i>Predictors</i>				
Power	.001	-.04	-.24**	.03
PDS	.11	-.12	-.27†	.09
Mach-IV	.05	.34*	.07	.16
<i>Two way interactions</i>				
PDS * Power	-.07	.30	-.15	-.19
Mach * Power	-.11†	-.004	.03	.10
<i>F</i>	.73	1.14	1.65†	.73
<i>R</i> ²	.23	.31	.40	.23

Note: Regression coefficients shown are unstandardized beta weights in step 2.

* $p = .01$.

** $p = .05$.

† $p = .10$.

Hypothesis 3 states an interaction effect of individual moral orientation and high subjective power on moral-based side-taking motive. By comparison with the control group, the results indicated that the construct was similarly relevant to both groups. A closer look on both scales

separately showed higher scores of the control group for Honesty-Humility ($M_{\text{HighPower}} = 3,30$; $M_{\text{ControlGroup}} = 3,51$). For ERI the finding was reversed. Results showed that the high power group scored higher on this scale ($M_{\text{HighPower}} = 3,04$; $M_{\text{ControlGroup}} = 2,79$). For both scales the means of the two groups differed non-significantly. The two groups were thus not significantly different in either the Honesty-Humility domain ($F_{(1,30)} = .86$; *ns*) or the ERI ($F_{(1,30)} = 2.49$; *ns*). Regarding their influences on the moral-based side-taking motive, firstly the Honesty-Humility domain ($\beta = .21$; *ns*) did not show any significant effect on the moral side-taking intention, while ERI ($\beta = .23$; $p < .10$) did. Secondly, both the interaction between high subjective power and Honesty-Humility ($\beta = -.13$; *ns*) and the interaction between high subjective power and ERI ($\beta = -.10$; *ns*) did not show any significant effect on moral side-taking motive. Thus, Hypothesis 3 is not supported.

Hypothesis 4 expects that the link between low subjective power and sanction-avoidance side-taking motive would be stronger for individuals with a power distance orientation. A comparison with the control group showed that the construct is equally important to both groups. This is indicated by the results of the Power Distance Scale ($M_{\text{LowPower}} = 2,57$; $M_{\text{ControlGroup}} = 2,59$) as well as the Machiavellianism scale ($M_{\text{LowPower}} = 2,79$; $M_{\text{ControlGroup}} = 2,62$). The results of the Power Distance Scale were nearly equal while the responses on Machiavellianism indicated a minimum difference. This finding suggests that there is no difference between the low power group and the control group regarding the dimension of the Power Distance Scale ($F_{(1,34)} = .02$; *ns*) as well as for the Machiavellianism scale ($F_{(1,34)} = 2.01$; *ns*). As regards their impact, the results in Table 3 indicate a significant positive main effect of Machiavellianism on the sanction-avoidance side-taking motive ($\beta = .34$; $p < .01$). Likewise, there was a positive main effect of gender on the motive ($\beta = .28$; $p < .05$). Neither were the interaction effects between power distance measures (power distance and Machiavellianism) and low subjective power on the sanction-avoidance motive significant (for power distance scale: $\beta = .30$; *ns*; for Machiavellianism scale: $\beta = -.004$; *ns*). Hypothesis 4 is not confirmed.

Additional analysis

Additional analysis was performed for the other two side-taking motives. The high power did not reveal any significant main effect on the other three types of side-taking motives ($\beta_{\text{Relationship}} = -.16$; $\beta_{\text{Reward}} = .13$; $\beta_{\text{Sanction}} = -.13$; *ns* for all). Regarding the moral orientation variables, a main effect of Honesty-Humility on reward-approaching motive ($\beta = -.21$;

$p < .10$) and a main effect of ERI on relationship-based motive ($\beta = .42$; $p < .05$) and sanction-avoidance motive ($\beta = .32$; $p < .05$) were observed. Furthermore, one interaction effect between high subjective power and ERI on reward-approaching motive turned out to be significant ($\beta = .28$; $p < .05$).

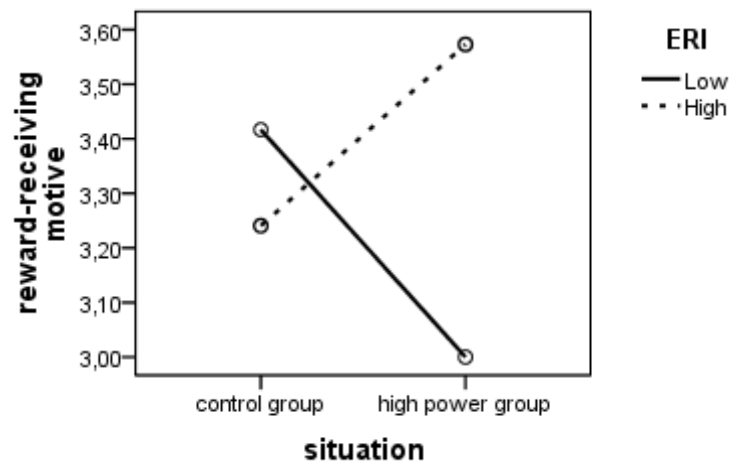


Figure 1. Moderating effect of Ethical Reasoning Inventory (ERI) on relationship between high subjective power and reward-approaching side-taking motive.

The results for the low power condition in Table 3 indicate that the low power had a significant main effect on reward-approaching motive ($\beta = -.24$; $p < .05$). Moreover, a significant interaction effect between low subjective power and Machiavellianism on the moral-based side-taking motive was observed ($\beta = -.11$; $p < .10$). However, the overall model was not significant ($F = .73$; *ns*), which limits the confidence for concluding that power and power distance have a significant impact on moral side-taking preference.

Two subscales of Honesty-Humility and Machiavellianism are taken into account in the additional analysis as well. In the Honesty-Humility domain, greed avoidance had a positive effect on the moral-based motive ($\beta = .30$; $p < .10$), and the fairness had a negative impact on the reward-approaching motive ($\beta = -.57$; $p < .01$). Sincerity ($\beta = .31$; $p < .05$), fairness ($\beta = -.56$; $p < .05$), and modesty ($\beta = -.38$; $p < .10$) all had a significant effect on the relationship motive. Interestingly, the interaction effect of greed avoidance and power had an effect on the relationship motive ($\beta = .40$; $p < .10$); the corresponding F-Test was also

significant ($F = 1.97$; $p < .10$). In the Machiavellianism domain, only tactics showed a main effect on the relationship-based motive ($\beta = .24$; $p < .10$).

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to identify the effect of subjective power on preference for side-taking motive. Additionally it examined the joint impact on this decision of subjective power together with individual moral orientation and with individual power distance orientation. The empirical results support the hypothesis that low subjective power has a significant impact on preference for reward-approaching side-taking, but not on the sanction-avoidance motive. The impact of high subjective power on moral-based side-taking motive is not confirmed: neither is the interaction effect between high power and individual moral orientation verified. Despite the disappointing hypothesis testing, some additional findings are quite informative. For example Ethical Reasoning showed a main effect on moral-based side-taking motive, and Machiavellianism a positive main effect on sanction-avoidance side-taking motive. Besides, the additional findings showed an interaction effect of low subjective power and Machiavellianism on moral-based side-taking and an interaction effect of high subjective power and Ethical Reasoning on reward-approaching motive. Built on the disappointing findings from hypothesis testing and the interesting findings from additional analysis, four points are elaborated further.

First, a closer look was taken at the connections between subjective power and side-taking motives. Some studies (e.g. Lammers & Stapel, 2009) suggest that high power stimulates moral thinking and acting according to rules and norms. The present study could not verify this argumentation. The empirical results did not show that high subjective power led to a moral-based side-taking decision. On this point it has to mention that the reliability of the moral items was very low what leads to an underestimation of coherence between the two variables. Thus, it can be that this important effect is undetected in the study. Likewise, previous studies (e.g. Lammers & Stapel, 2009) also suggest that low subjective power leads to decision-making based on self-interest. The findings from this study supported this prediction well: low subjective power led to third-parties taking sides based on the rewards they can receive from disputants. All in all, this study confirms the function of low power for decision-making, but fails to demonstrate the function of high power in decision making processes. Earlier research on coalition formation (e.g. Zartman & Touval, 1985) has shown the importance of self-interest for third parties and how this influences their side-taking

motive. For third parties it is important to act according to their self-interest and to advance this through their side-taking. Based on this argument, one might reason that low power may stimulate people to look at rewards. This study showed that the low power group actually reported less reward-approaching motivation than the control group. The effect of low power seems opposite to the expectation. Indeed, the findings of this study are more in line with the classic assumption of powerlessness (cf. Keltner, et al., 2003), according to which it leads to inhibition. It is assumed that powerless people behave in inhibited fashion because of uncertainty. They are more sensitive to evaluations of others and aware of threats and punishments from more powerful people. Without other social constraints on power (for example legitimacy), powerlessness may inhibit people from taking any action, also in terms of approaching benefits. Certainly this finding should be investigated further and replicated.

Second, some connections between side-taking motives and the individual difference variables should be pointed out. Although ERI and Honesty-Humility both measure individuals' moral orientation, the findings showed that only ERI, not Honesty-Humility, has a positive effect on moral-based side-taking motive. When Honesty-Humility is divided into the four dimensions, the results showed that greed avoidance – one of the subscales – has a positive effect on moral-based side-taking motive. Thus, it seems that the Honesty-Humility scale was too general for this research. Future research should use a domain-specific instrument for measuring moral orientation. The findings also showed that only Machiavellianism but not the power distance scale had an effect on sanction-avoidance motive. The main effect of Machiavellianism suggests that people with a strong orientation to Machiavellianism prefer taking sides based on avoiding sanctions. People with high scores on Machiavellianism believe that most people are only concerned with their own well-being. They also believe that the best way to get by is to use deception, promises, and flattery to manipulate others to reach one's own goals (Christie & Geis, 1970). Thus, the link between Machiavellianism and sanction-avoidance motive for side-taking is quite self-evident. Further studies on side-taking should certainly take account of the third party's personality in terms of Machiavellianism.

Third, the results of the interaction hypotheses have to be considered. In this study, none of the proposed interaction effects has been confirmed. It can be suspected that this failure may have something to do with the broad concept of power. Subjective power manipulated in this study can be based on real power or fictional power (Lokshin & Ravallion, 2005; Lammers &

Stapel, 2009). In this study the participants were asked to recall power in connection with a past personal situation. This way of manipulating power may be too limited. This can explain why the empirical study showed no significant interaction effect of power and moral orientation on moral-based side-taking motive and of power and Machiavellianism on sanction-avoidance motive. Another reason for this failure may be the fact that the participants were students. Studies have shown that age has a crucial influence on moral decisions (e.g. Ruegger & King, 1992). The older the persons, the less they are influenced by self-interest and the more they are capable of taking a moral decision (Dahl, Mandell, & Barton, 1988). In this study only student participants were sampled. It might be the case that the young students participating in this study are not (yet) at the age of find out the importance of acting according to their own moral beliefs. However, this expectation is not actually supported by the additional results: moral orientation has a positive influence on self-interest motives. Rather, the positioned theory cannot be proved by this study. Results showed that moral orientation has an influence on side-taking decision in general, but not simply on moral-based side-taking motive. Future analysis should take a closer look at the joint impact of moral orientation on side-taking decision.

The study also failed to detect the interaction effect of powerlessness and power distance orientation on self interest-based side-taking. This may be due to the manipulation of the powerless and conceptualization of power distance orientation. The manipulation used in this study primes participants as subordinates to take part in the decision-making process. If the decision making process is democratic, both subordinates and supervisors may value it highly (Hwang & Francesco, 2010). Then this would rule out the effect of power distance orientation.

In conclusion, some findings of the additional analysis have to be addressed. The additional analysis on the subscales of Honesty-Humility depicts a significant negative interaction effect of high power and modesty on the moral motive for side-taking, which is in line with Hypothesis 3. This suggests that the theoretical prediction of the joint impact between the moral orientation and high subjective power and moral-based motive for side-taking is not totally wrong, but it should certainly be refined in the future study. Another interesting finding is that a significant interaction effect of powerlessness and Machiavellianism on moral-based motive is detected. This suggests that the powerless party may interpret the sanctions from their supervisor in terms of right or legitimacy. It then

triggers an interesting question about how the powerless view and interpret power. It might be the case that their interpretation of power is not directly opposite to the powerful, but completely different from the powerful.

Limitations

When interpreting the results of this study some limitations should be noted. First, it has to be considered that the sample in this study consisted exclusively of students. It is not ensured that students had enough experience of handling interpersonal conflicts. Likewise, the sample is quite small so that the results are not representative. Second, the study assumes that when participants filled in the side-taking scales, they were confronted with a conflict in which both disputants have the same level of power and hierarchy. In practice this is rarely the case. According to Ury, Brett, and Goldberg (1993), the power of the disputants could have a strong effect on the side-taking preference.

Third, in this study the subjective power is aroused through a manipulation task. This task predetermined the participants' answers in the side-taking scales. However, one cannot exclude the possibility that their remembrance of a specific situation may actually have a broader influence on the overall side-taking perception.

The fourth point concerns the side-taking motives. It is convenient to divide the motives in to different facets in order to achieve clarification. However, in practice all motives are interconnected and related. It might be the case that both moral motive and sanction-avoidance motive work simultaneously in shaping a powerless party to take side.

Implications

The results of the study show implications for the practice of conflict management. In conflict the disputants aim to reach a coalition with a third party to acquire support. The study shows that power and individual differences matter in predicting side-taking because they influence the third party's decision. Conflict participants seeking support from a third party should first take a look at the power and personality characteristics to form an efficient coalition. The more powerless people feel, the less they are concerned about rewards. For a potential coalition partner, this means that the third party expects no or only a small fair return. The same is true for honest and humble people. They act in a more altruistic way. Thus it is easier for a disputant to gain support from such people. However, people who are looking at ethical reasons are only willing to support the disputant if the latter's case is morally

acceptable and compatible with their conscience. They will prefer to support closer friends or colleagues.

Conversely, people who only pursue their own well-being and power position want to avoid punishments as effectively as possible. This makes a coalition delicate. As a minimum, the third party expects consideration from the disputant he/she will support. But if the interests of the two coalition partners are the same, the disputant can be sure that the third party will do his/her very best to be the winner in the conflict. The potential coalition partner has to decide what characteristic is more important to him/her in the conflict and which third party personality can support him/her best in the interpersonal conflict.

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