Choosing sides in a conflict

The effect of power and moral perspective on lay third parties' side-taking preferences

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of imbalanced power relations between disputants and third parties on the preference that lay third parties have when taking sides in a conflict. A scenario study among 84 Dutch and German employees revealed that powerful lay third parties are inclined to take sides based more on the interest motive and less on the moral motive in comparison with their powerless counterparts. The effect of power on the interest side-taking motive is mediated through the outcome-based moral perspective. The preference of the powerless for the moral side-taking motive is mediated through the rule-based moral perspective on a marginal significance level. Age and gender also proved to be influential. Age had a positive influence on the moral side-taking motive and a negative influence on the interest side-taking motive. Male participants were more inclined to stick to the moral motive for side taking, whereas women found the interest motive more important.

INTRODUCTION

It seems impossible to go through life without experiencing a conflict with another human being. Everyone can remember a situation in which he/she has been confronted with opposing opinions one way or another. A conflict arises when two disputants have a divergence of interest. These disputants may be individuals, groups, organizations or political units such as nations. Divergence of interest means that the parties have incompatible preferences among a set of available options (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993, p. 2). Conflicts arise in organizations on a daily basis. Managers spend about 20% of their time dealing with conflicts (Thomas, 1992). Dealing with organizational conflicts has thus been an important research topic for years (Baron, 1990; Lewicki, Weiss & Lewin, 1992; Rahim, 1992).

In a conflict, when disputants cannot reach an agreement and resolve their problem, they often need a third party for intervention. A third party is not in conflict with the disputants but helps to identify the problem and/or helps to solve the problem. The intervening third party is brought in through an invitation by (one of) the disputants, at the request of an organization or by their own initiative (Rubin, 1980). The best-known third parties are professional third parties such as mediators and arbitrators. Professional third parties have expertise and experience with the issue under discussion and have specialized in resolving conflicts. They are normally invited to intervene in a conflict (Yang, 2006).

Before the conflict arrives at this stage however, the conflicting disputants search for their own third parties first, usually to support their arguments when they cannot reach an agreement themselves. Yang (2006) identified this type of third party as a lay third party who is confronted with an interpersonal conflict among others but does not have any a priori preference how to

handle the problem. Their behavior is not bound to rules as it is for professional third parties. This makes lay third parties interesting for research and they will be the focus of this study.

Unlike professional third parties, lay third parties have no prerequisite reasons to remain neutral and they do not feel any a priori obligation or responsibility to solve the conflict (Yang, van de Vliert & Shi, 2007). These lay third parties have therefore more options for conflict handling than professional third parties: They can side with one of the disputants, they can avoid the conflict or they can try to resolve the conflict. Van de Vliert (1981) found that an initially neutral outsider who experience pressure to choose between two contradictory parties, will generally react to a conflict by taking sides. This suggests that it is most likely that lay third parties who are confronted with an interpersonal conflict use side-taking as a reaction for conflict handling. The focus of this research lies on this supposedly most frequent used tactic: side-taking.

Side-taking motives in this paper refer to the reasons that lay third parties take sides whether consciously or unconsciously. Previous research has shown that lay third parties taking-sides are often triggered by three factors: justice (moral), relation with disputants, and self-interests (Yang, Li, Wang & Hendriks, 2010).

The purpose of this study is to extend our understanding of what influences lay third parties side-taking reaction. Many factors, especially those relevant to situational factors, can have an influence on the side-taking decision of the third party (Yang, 2006). Based on the previous literature on third party intervention (e.g., Elangovan, 1995; Lewicki et. al., 1992), this thesis specifically focuses on the nature of the relationship between disputants and lay third parties, exploring how authority or power between disputants and lay third parties has an impact on lay

third parties' side-taking motives. Authority in this study is defined as the hierarchal social relation between individuals, such as managers and subordinates. One way that authority reflects itself in organizational settings is through power. Power can be defined as the ability to control resources, one's own and others' (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, and Magee, 2003, p. 454).

To further elaborate the relationship between power and side-taking, moral perspective is added to this research. It is already demonstrated that moral orientation has an impact on side-taking preference (Yang, van de Vliert, Shi, 2009), but moral orientation can be further specified into two directions: rule-based (deontological) moral perspective versus outcome-based (consequentialist) moral perspective (Kant, 1785/1997). This study wants to examine if this distinction in moral perspective has an influence on the relation between power and side-taking motives.

By examining these effects this paper contributes to literature on third party intervention in three ways. First it takes situational relevant factors into account by checking how lay third parties' side-taking motives are shaped by the nature of the relation between disputants and third parties and conflict issues. The second contribution is that this study extends the research on power to the domain of conflict intervention. Past research on power has examined the influence of power on moral perspective (Lammers & Stapel, 2009), goal pursuit (Guinote, 2007a) and stereotyping (Fiske, 1993) and many more topics. However, how power influences third party's intervention has not been fully explored yet. This study will thus extend the research on third party power influences in side-taking. Third, this study also provides insight to side-taking by

adding moral perspective as an explanatory variable. It thus contributes to our understanding how and why morality triggers lay third parties to take sides in a conflict.

In the following section, I first review the theoretical model of moral, self-interest and relational motives for side-taking and the situated focus theory of power. I then develop the hypotheses based on those two theoretical frameworks. In the empirical section, I collected data from 84 employees to test the hypotheses. The results are presented and discussed in combination with the limitations and implications of this study.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Side-taking motives

There are different ways for a lay third party to react to a conflict, such as avoidance, side-taking and try to resolve the conflict (Van de Vliert, 1981). This thesis will only focus on side-taking, as it is argued by Yang, Van de Vliert, Shi & Huang (2008) that it is the most likely option. They propose three theoretical assumptions: The first concerns situational pressure; the third party will gather information to make a decision about how to react to a conflict, usually after experiencing pressure by (one of) the disputants to take sides. This pressure primes the third party to use the information only to choose sides rather than consider other options such as compromise, avoidance or resolving the conflict (Van der Vliert, 1981). Second, the information gathered by the third party is likely to be one-sided, due to more contact or a better relation with one party than the other. This will occur especially when they are pressured to choose sides by one party only. This asymmetric information perception tends to lead the lay third parties to trust, sympathize, and thus support one party more than the other. Finally, the lay third parties may have no control over the conflict; they can influence neither the process nor the decision

(Sheppard, 1984). By taking sides they form a coalition, through which they can exercise their influence on the conflict (Yang et. al., 2008).

Research on third party side-taking further suggests that third parties usually take three factors into account when taking sides: moral, self-interests, and relationships with disputants (Yang, et. al. 2010). The moral argument refers to the justice and legitimacy of the arguments that the disputants hold. The legitimacy which the third party, based on his/her own norms and values, ascribes to A and B's standpoints, will determine which side he/she will choose (Van der Vliert, 1981). The norms and values that the lay third party holds are based on his/her personal moral values. The motive of siding with right and against wrong is named as the moral-based side-taking (Yang et. al., 2010).

Coalition theorists emphasize the role of self-interest (e.g. Van Beest, van Dijk, & Wilke, 2004; Griffiths & Luck, 2003). The third parties want to promote their own self-interest, and therefore make a decision based on the cost-benefit relation. This self-interest expresses itself in two ways; reward-approach or sanction-avoidance (Yang et. al., 2010). When lay third parties are motivated to maximize their gains and are sensitive to benefits and rewards, they will choose the side of the person who will satisfy their needs most. This is called the reward-approaching motive for side-taking. When lay third parties are self-protective and want to minimize their losses and avoid punishment, they will choose the side of the person who will punish them otherwise. This is referred to as the sanction-avoiding motive for side-taking.

Sociologists state that the ties that the third party has with both sides of the conflict will influence the side-taking decision (Philips & Cooney, 2005). It is most likely that the lay third party has a pre-existing relationship with one or both of the disputants. When the third party has a positive relation with disputant A, he or she might accept the arguments more easily and side

with disputant A over B. When the lay third party chooses a side based on his/her relation with the participants, this motive is named as the relational motive for side-taking (Yang et. al. 2010). In this study the focus lies on the moral- and the self-interest side-taking motives. The relational motive for side-taking was not taking into account, for there were no theoretical implications found that power has an effect on this side-taking motive.

Situated Focus Theory of Power

Power is one of the basic social concepts in social sciences. Galinsky, Gruenfeld, and Magee (2003) define power as 'the ability to control resources, own and others' (p. 454). Power is a property of the social relation (Lammers & Stapel, 2009) and is a central aspect of daily social life (Russel, 1938). There are many theories that try to explain how and why power functions in social live. The results are however contradictorily. For example, some studies found that being powerful leads to stereotyping (Fiske & Dépret, 1996) whereas others conclude that power leads to individuation (Overbeck & Park, 2001; Weick & Guinote, 2008).

The *situated focus theory of power* (Guinote, 2007a; 2007b; 2007c; 2010) offers an explanation for these contradictory results by stating that the way powerful people behave depends on the situation they are in. It proposes that people with power process information more selectively and use a wider range of processes, which triggers situated judgment and behavior (Guinote, 2007b; 2010). For example, when making an investment decision based on calculations, the powerful use rule-driven principles for information processing. However, when the situation has less specific demands, such as deciding what to wear to a meeting, the powerful then tend to apply the principle of a rule of thumb and let past experiences and gut feeling drive them. In contrast the powerless will, no matter the situation, let controlled cognition drive them

to increase predictability and control. This means that the powerless will use rule-based mechanisms in their decisions and will not take the context of the situation into account; they will behave in more similar ways across situations (Cokely, Parpart, & Schooler, 2009).

To explain these differences between powerful and powerless one needs to look at the basic need of control which is present in all human beings (Pittman & Pittman, 1980). Having power increases the sense of control. The powerful have fewer constraints, which gives them the opportunity to focus their undivided attention to the goal given in the situation, also, they will respond to the situation in more flexible ways (Guinote, 2007a). Powerless people however, have more constraints and therefore need to focus their attention to other aspects of the situation and apply controlled cognition in order to create a sense of control.

The effect of disputants' imbalanced power on lay third parties' side-taking motives

According to the *Situated Focus Theory of Power* (Guinote, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2010), powerful people will change behavior more accordingly to the goal that is relevant in the given situation. Several studies have demonstrated this effect: Martin and Harder (1988) found that managers used and endorsed different decision rules for different rewards. Meindl's (1989) study showed that managers varied the principles that they employed according to the context or goals that they were seeking. This goal pursuing behavior of the powerful also occurs in conflict situations (Kabanoff, 1991), because the powerful receive more deferential and more positive communications (Mulder, 1977; Shaw, 1981) and the attempts to influence by more powerful parties tend to be more successful (Kabanoff, 1991).

Relating the *situated focus theory of power* to the situation of side-taking, I therefore argue that the powerful lay third parties adjust their behavior in line with their goals more than the powerless lay third parties. Elangovan (1995) proposes that the powerful third parties can better understand the goals of organizations and groups. They will automatically consider organizational or group efficiency in their intervention strategies. Modern organizations are usually built up in a hierarchical structure. The higher rank a person holds in an organization, the more responsible he/she is for that organization. As a representative of the organization, it is likely that the persons' goals are closer to (or in line with) the goals of the organization. In other words, the interests of a higher position party in general overlap with the interests of their organization. In combination with the *situated focus theory of power*, I then assume that, in an organizational conflict, the powerful may align themselves to the organizational goals and interests better and take organizational interests into account more than the powerless.

Hypothesis 1: In comparison to the powerless, the powerful are more motivated to take sides on the basis of the organizational interests in an organizational conflict.

Powerless people, in contrast, do not adjust their judgment and behavior to the specific situation and tend to behave in more similar ways across different situations (Guinote, 2010). Yang, Li, Wang & Hendriks (2010) and Vopersal (2011) found that in general people prefer the moral motive above the other side-taking motives. I expect that the powerless may hold on to the moral motive for side-taking, regardless of the change of context.

Hypothesis 2: In comparison to the powerful, the powerless are more motivated to take sides on the basis of the moral values in an organizational conflict.

Moral perspective

Moral perspective may provide a detailed explanation to understand lay third parties side-taking choices for self interests or for right-or-wrong judgment. It has proven that moral orientation in general has an effect on side-taking (Yang, van de Vliert, Shi, 2009), but moral orientation can be further specified into two directions: rule-based (deontological) moral perspective versus outcome-based (consequentialist) moral perspective (Kant, 1785/1997). When applying the rule-based moral perspective, the rightness of an act is judged based on the existing rules, norms and principles. The outcome-based moral perspective judges the rightness of an act based on the consequences that follow.

The best example to clarify these two perspectives is probably the Heinz-dilemma of Kohlberg (1973), in which Heinz wants to get the medicine which will save his near death wife. After various failed attempts to get the expensive medicine in legitimate ways, he decides to steal the medicine, for it is the only option he is left with to save his wife. Stealing is wrong (rule-based moral perspective) however Heinz can save the life of his wife (outcome-based moral perspective). When people consider this morally right outcome more important than following the rules they follow the outcome-based moral perspective, which focuses on the consequences of an act (Kant, 1785/1997).

The situated focus theory of power claims that the effect of power varies across situations (Guinote; 2007b; 2010). Following this theory it is plausible that the powerful change their

moral perspective more easily than the powerless as to fit the situational purpose. For example, Lammers & Stapel (2009) found that that the people in power will follow the rule-based perspective when they need to maintain the status quo and secure their power position. Elangovan (1995) in contrast, argues that the powerful will emphasize on the outcome because the outcome has potential implications for the effectiveness of the organization. So people in power will follow the rules when the situation is stable. However, when the situation is that of conflict, and concerns the interests of their organization, the powerful use the outcome-based moral reasoning perspective to adjust their action. When the powerful are confronted by incongruent goals, they tend to rely on the outcome rather than the rules (Meindl, 1989). I therefore state that:

Hypothesis 3: when faced with an organizational conflict, the powerful take sides on the basis of interests more than the powerless due to the assumption that they adopt the outcome-based moral perspective reasoning.

Hypothesis 4: when faced with an organizational conflict, the powerless take sides on the basis of the moral motive due to the assumption that they adopt the rule -based moral perspective reasoning.

METHOD

Participants

An employee sample was used to investigate the influence of power between disputants and lay third parties on lay third parties' side-taking preferences. In total 84 employees (42,9 % male, 57,1% female) participated in this study. They were recruited through personal contacts.

Although four participants worked for the same organization, most participants worked for different organizations. The average age of the participants was 30 years, ranging from 19 to 61. Most of the participants were Dutch (86,9%), the other 13,1% had a German nationality. Of all participants, 52,4% had a Bachelor degree, other education levels were Master's degree (29,8%), Entrance qualification (10,7%) and Secondary school (7,1%). Their profession covered: Finance (6,2%), Technology (12,3%), IT (7,4%), Science (11,1%), Non-profit (21%) and other (42%). The participants did not have to fill out their names for the purpose of anonymity. We also ensure participants that their answers would be used only for scientific purposes.

Procedure

Participation was voluntarily. An invitation was sent to potential participants through e-mail and social media. The invitation included a web link to the digital questionnaire with an option to choose between the Dutch or English version; 105 participants filled out the Dutch version and 13 participants used the English version. Responses from the participants who did not fill out the complete questionnaire were excluded from the final data. The final dataset consisted of 84 participants (43 participants in the powerful situation and 41 in the powerless situation). The participants were randomly assigned to either of the two situations. The questionnaire was developed in English and translated to Dutch by a native speaker. Several bi-linguists checked the translation and concluded that the versions were linguistically equivalent.

Power manipulation

I used two methods to manipulate participants' power. First, participants were primed with a subjective powerful or powerless feeling through a word-puzzle. Second, participants were assigned to the role of either superior or subordinate in the conflict scenario.

In the word-puzzle, participants were asked to search for words in a field of letters. Half of the words were related to power for manipulation purposes (Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001; Lammers & Stapel, 2009). Eight words had to be found, of which four were power-related. In the case of power the related words read: 'powerful', 'influence', 'authority' and 'control'. The other words were fillers, like 'household' and 'railway'. This way of manipulating power has been validated in previous studies (Chen et al., 2001, Lammers & Stapel, 2009).

In the scenario, participants in the role of lay third parties were associated with either manager (powerful) or employee (powerless). I adopted the conflict scenario from Yang, et al.'s study (2008). The participant is faced with a conflict between Arca and Barc (cf. Depending on the priming, Arca and Barc were the participants' subordinates (power) or managers (powerless)). In the conflict, the two disputants Arca and Barc cannot reach an agreement on how to allocate a bonus to an employee and both want to be supported by a third party (participants' role). In the powerful situation the scenario begins with:

> You are the manager of the Personnel Department of a company. As manager you take charge of the department work. Two employees, Arca and Barc, work under your supervision. Arca coordinates the work planning of your department and Barc coordinates the work appraisal of your department. Together they arrange the work contracts with the employees of the department. You take charge of both the planning work done by Arca and the appraisal work done by Barc.

In the powerless situation, participants read as follows:

> You are an employee in a Personnel Department of a company. The department has two managers, Arca and Barc. Arca is in charge of the work planning of your department and Barc is in charge of the work appraisal of your department and together they arrange the contracts with the employees of the department. You do both planning work supervised by Arca and appraisal work supervised by Barc.

After clarifying their role, a conflict scenario was presented as follows:

> Arca and Barc made a contract with an employee that a 1000 euro bonus would be awarded when a project is finished within three months. A few days before the deadline, the project is finished and the employee wants to claim the promised bonus. However, the employee has had a lot of help from two other colleagues. Without their help, the employee couldn't finish the project on time.
>
> Due to this fact, Arca and Barc have a divergence of opinion on how to allocate the bonus.
>
> Arca wants to split the bonus over the three employees, so the two other colleagues are also rewarded for their effort. Arca argues that splitting the bonus will show to other employees that hard work pays off, which will have a beneficial outcome for the whole company.
>
> Barc wants to give the whole bonus to the employee, because the project was finished within the three months. Barc argues that finishing on time was the condition mentioned in the contract. Allocation of the bonus should stick to the contract.

Arca and Barc cannot reach an agreement anymore, so they come to you and want to get the support from you to back up their side.

Measures

Side-taking motives. Based on the work of Yang, et al. (2010) a 15-item scale was developed to measure preferences for side-taking motives. The items were measured with a five-point Likert-scale. The items were adjusted to the scenario. Four items were used to measure the side-taking motive based on the legitimacy of the act according to regulations (e.g. 'My side-taking consideration will be based on whose arguments are more in line with the regulations or rules', Cronbach's alpha = .67). The interest (reward and sanction) based motive for side-taking was tapped into lay third parties' interests and the company's interest and was measured with eight items (e.g. 'My side-taking decision will be based on whose arguments benefit the organization most'). One item had to be removed to make the scale more reliable, which left seven items with a Cronbach's alpha of .59.

Moral Perspective. To measure the moral perspective the participants were asked to rate on six statements on a five-point Likert-scale (from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). The items were derived from the study of Lammers & Stapel (2009). Three items measured the rule-based moral perspective (e.g. 'Once the contract is signed, it should be followed anyway, even when it causes negative outcomes', Chronbach's alpha = .72), the other three items measured the outcome-based moral perspective ('I consider that the outcome for the organization is more important than the conditions mentioned in the contract', Chronbach's alpha = .80).

RESULTS

Manipulation check

The power priming through the word puzzle occurs at the unconscious level, thus it is not necessary to conduct a manipulation check. However for the power position manipulation, we need to make sure that participants understood their role correctly. Four questions were used to check whether the participants understood their power position. The first two questions examined the understanding of their position; 'I am the supervisor of both Arca and Barc' (M_{power} = 4.49, SD = .83; $M_{powerless}$ = 1.07, SD = .26; t = -25.23 p < .01) and 'Arca and Barc are both my supervisors' (M_{power} = 1.35, SD = .75; $M_{powerless}$ = 4.61, SD = 1.12; t = 15.78, p < .01). The other two questions checked if the participants felt they had power over Arca and Barc; 'I have more power than Arca and Barc' (M_{power} = 3.39, SD = 1.16; $M_{powerless}$ = 1.34, SD = .69; t = -12.32 p < .01) and 'Arca and Barc are more powerful than I am' (M_{power} = 1.55, SD = .59; $M_{powerless}$ = 4.15, SD = 1.28; t = 11.95, p < .01). These checks suggested that the participants understood their power position well.

Understanding of scenario

I also checked participants' understanding about their role in the conflict. Three questions were related to their perception of conflict between Arca and Barc. 1) 'I am faced with a disagreement between Arca and Barc' had an overall mean of 4.60 and the SD was .75 (M_{power} = 4.63, SD = .76; $M_{powerless}$ = 4.56, SD = .74; t = -4.10, *ns*). 2) 'Arca and Barc differ in their opinion about how to allocate the bonus' had an overall mean of 4.83 with a SD of .75 (M_{power} = 4.77, SD = .48; $M_{powerless}$ = 4.90, SD = .30; t = 1.54, *ns*). 3) 'Both Arca and Barc want me to support their side' had a mean of 4.70 with a SD of .51 (M_{power} = 4.67, SD = .53; $M_{powerless}$ =

4.73, *SD* = .50; *t* = .58, *ns*). All these results suggested that participants recognized that they are faced with a conflict situation.

Next to that, participants were asked about their understanding of their role as a third party in the conflict. 1) 'I am somewhat involved in the conflict between Arca and Barc, even though I am not the imitator of this disagreement', the overall mean of 3.92 with a *SD* of 1.29 (M_{power} = 4.05, *SD* = 1.03; $M_{powerless}$ = 3.78, *SD* = 1.53; *t* = -.94, *ns*). 2) 'I don't have a conflict with either Arca or Barc' had an overall mean of 4.48 with a *SD* of 1.02. (M_{power} = 4.33, *SD* = 1.13; $M_{powerless}$ = 4.63, *SD* = .89; *t* = 1.39, *ns*). It can be concluded that the participants understood their role as a third party.

Realism of scenario

The realism of the scenario was checked with four items. In general, the participants found the scenario realistic: 1) 'I think the situation described in the scenario was realistic' scored an overall mean of 3.65 with a *SD* of 1.03 (M_{power} = 3.70, *SD* = 1.13; $M_{powerless}$ = 3.70, *SD* = 1.13; *t* = -.40, *ns*). For the powerful, 2) 'It was easy to think of myself as the manager in this event' scored a mean of 3.18 with a *SD* of 1.04. The question for the participants in the powerless situation, 2) 'It was easy to think of myself as an employee in this event' scored a mean of 3.66 with a *SD* of 1.03. When treated as the same question, the powerless participants scored significantly higher than the powerful ($t = 2.07$, $p < .05$).

Although the participants answered positive on the realism of the scenario they didn't experienced a similar situation themselves or knew somebody who did. 3) 'I have experienced a similar situation in my working life' had an overall mean of 1.88 with a *SD* of 1.11 (M_{power} =

2.00, *SD* = 1.20; $M_{powerless}$ = 1.76, *SD* = 1.00; *t* = -.95, *ns*). 'I know somebody around me who has experienced a similar situation in their workplace' scored an overall mean of 2.04 with a *SD* of 1.30 (M_{power} = 2.12, *SD* = 1.34; $M_{powerless}$ = 1.95, *SD* = 1.27; *t* = -.60, *ns*).

Descriptive statistics

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations and correlations of the relevant variables used in this study. The moral side-taking motive correlates positively with the rule perspective (r = .70; p < .01) and siding with Barc (r = .64; p < .01). The interest motive correlates positively with the outcome perspective (r = .39; p < .01), and siding with Arca (r = .27; p < .01). The moral side-taking motive correlates negatively with the interest motive (r = -.38 p < .01).

Other interesting findings include that gender correlates positively with the outcome perspective (r = .25; p < .05) and negatively with rule perspective (r = -.22; p < .05), indicating that female are more likely to choose for outcome and consequences over rules than male. Age correlated positively with the rule-perspective (r = .25; p < .05), the moral side-taking motive (r = .37; p < .01) and thus siding with Barc (r = .31; p < .01). Age also correlated negatively with the outcome perspective (r = -.36; p < .01), the self-interest motive (r = -.42; p < .01), and siding with Arca (r = -.27; p < .01).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations.

		Mpf	*SDpf*	*Mpl*	*SDpl*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Control Variables																		
1	Gender (female)	NA	NA	NA	NA													
2	Age	28,35	8,33	31,20	10,78	0,014												
3	Nationality (German)	NA	NA	NA	NA	0,051	-0,166											
4	Educationlevel	3,93	0,83	4,17	0,83	-0,037	**-,206***	-0,022										
5	Workfield	NA	NA	NA	NA	**,385****	**-,218***	0,066	-0,006									
Moral perspective																		
6	Rule perspective	3,22	0,83	3,53	0,91	**-,217***	**,247***	-0,152	-0,014	-0,135								
7	Outcome perspective	3,33	0,88	2,81	1,10	**,250***	**-,360****	0,097	0,076	0,175	**-,798****							
Side-taking motives																		
8	Moral	2,75	0,81	3,15	0,93	-0,155	**,373****	-0,032	-0,036	-0,159	**,698****	**-,663****						
9	Self-interest	2,74	0,44	2,52	0,64	-0,123	**-,417****	0,156	0,036	-0,133	**-,456****	**,386****	**-,378****					
10	Relation	2,93	0,88	2,87	1,08	0,03	-0,081	0,078	**,250***	0,051	**-,387****	**,344****	**-,250***	**,237***				
Side-taking decision																		
11	Siding with Arca	NA	NA	NA	NA	0,131	**-,268****	0,056	-0,105	**,193***	**-,498****	**,518****	**-,378****	**,271****	0,127			
12	Siding with Barc	NA	NA	NA	NA	**-,289****	**,314****	-0,089	-0,016	-0,09	**,644****	**-,695****	**,637****	**-,270****	-0,137	**-,410****		
13	Siding with Neither	NA	NA	NA	NA	0,176	-0,086	0,041	0,104	-0,067	**-,219***	**,253***	**-,313****	0,04	0,029	**-,432****	**-,646****	

Note. Mpf, SDpf, Mpl and SDpl refer to the means and standard deviations of the power and powerless situation respectively

NA, Not Applicable

**p < .01; *p < .05

Test of the hypotheses

To test the hypotheses multiple regression was used. The dependent variables are the interest-based and the moral-based motives for side-taking. The independent variable is power. The rule-based moral perspective and the outcome-based moral perspective are treated as two mediator variables. A dummy variable was used for power (for the hypothesis testing regarding powerful: powerful = 0, powerless = 1; for the hypothesis testing regarding powerless: powerless = 0, powerful = 1).

Table 2. The effect of power on side-taking preferences

	Moral		Self-interest		Arca (split bonus)		Barc (follow contract)		Neither	
	Beta	SE	Beta	SE	Beta	SE	Beta	SE	Beta	SE
Predictor										
Power	-.41*	.20	.22*	.12	.02	.09	-.16†	.11	.14	.11
Demographic variables										
Gender	-.28	.20	-.14	.13	.11	.09	-.29**	.11	.18†	.11
Age	.04**	.01	-.03**	.01	-.01*	.01	.02**	.01	-.01	.01
Effect of power after controlling for:										
Gender	-.39*	.20	.22*	.12	.02	.09	-.15†	.11	.14	.11
Age	-.33*	.19	.16†	.12	-.01	.09	-.12	.11	.13	.11
Age & Gender	-.31*	.18	.16†	.12	-.01	.09	-.11	.10	.13	.11
Education	-.42*	.20	.23*	.13	.01	.10	-.17†	.11	.16†	.11
Work field	-.38*	.20	.20†	.13	-.01	.09	-.14	.13	.15†	.12
Education & Work field	-.41*	.20	.21†	.13	-.02	.09	-.15†	.12	.17†	.12

The scores given in table are unstandardized beta scores. SE means standard error
*†p < .10; *p < .05; **p < .01*

Table 2 presents an overview of the main effect of power on side-taking motives and side-taking choice. The first hypothesis stated that in an organizational conflict, the powerful will take side based on the interests more than the powerless. This hypothesis was confirmed (β = .22, p < .05). The powerless sided significantly more with the moral motive than the powerful did (β = -.41, p < .05), which confirms Hypothesis 2. However, power did not have a significant effect on participant's side-taking choice with Arca (β = .02, *ns* and with Barc (β = -.16, *ns*).

Demographic variables age and gender also proved to have an influence on side-taking preferences in this study. Table 2 shows that the results confirming hypothesis 1 (β = .16, p < .10) and hypothesis 2 (β = -.31, p < .05) still remain (marginal) significant after controlling for these variables. In order to make the study a better representative of the population, the variables education and work field were also controlled for during the hypotheses testing. Again, the results confirming hypothesis 1 (β = .21, p < .10) and hypothesis 2 (β = -.41, p < .05) still remained (marginal) significant.

Hypothesis 3 proposes that the powerful take sides on the basis of self-interests more than the powerless because they adopted the outcome-based moral perspective. Hypothesis 4 states that the powerless take sides on the moral side-taking motive because the powerless adopted the rule -based moral perspective reasoning. To test the mediating effect of the rule- and outcome perspectives the method of Baron & Kenny (1986) was used (see also Kenny, 2011). The results are shown in Table 3.

A mediation effect is established when four steps are met. The first step shows that power has a direct effect on the interest side-taking motive (β = .22, p < .05). Being in a powerless position directly leads to a preference for the moral side-taking motive (β = .41, p < .05). For the second step to be met there should be a significant effect of the independent variable (power) on the mediating variable (moral perspectives). The effect of power on the outcome-based moral perspective was established in this step (β = .52, p < .01). The effect of having a powerless position on the rule-based moral perspective proved to be marginal significant (β = .31, p < .10).

Table 3. The mediating effect of moral arguments on side-taking motives

Independent Variable	*Mediator Variable*	*Dependent Variable*	*IV -> DV*		*IV -> MV*		*IV -> DV (MV controlled)*		*Indirect effect (Sobel test)*	
			Beta	*SE*	*Beta*	*SE*	*Beta*	*SE*	*Beta*	*SE*
Power	Outcome-argument	Self-interest Motive	.22*	.12	.52**	.22	.11	.12	.11*	.05
Powerless	Rule-argument	Moral motive	.40*	.20	.30†	.19	.19	.15	.22†	.14
Mediating effect after controlling for variables:										
Controlled for age:			*Beta*	*SE*	*Beta*	*SE*	*Beta*	*SE*	*Beta*	*SE*
Power	Outcome-argument	Self-interest Motive	.16†	.12	.42*	.21	.10	.12	.06†	.04
Powerless	Rule-argument	Moral motive	.33*	.19	.25†	.19	.15	.14	.18†	.13
Controlled for gender:										
Power	Outcome-argument	Self-interest Motive	.22*	.12	.49**	.21	.10	.12	.12*	.06
Powerless	Rule-argument	Moral motive	.39*	.20	.28†	.19	.19	.15	.20†	.14
Controlled for both age and gender:										
Power	Outcome-argument	Self-interest Motive	.16†	.12	.39*	.20	.10	.11	.06*	.04
Powerless	Rule-argument	Moral motive	.31*	.18	.22	.19	.15	.14	.16	.13
Controlled for education level:										
Power	Outcome-argument	Self-interest Motive	.23*	.13	.55**	.22	.12	.12	.11*	.06
Powerless	Rule-argument	Moral motive	.42*	.20	.31*	.19	.20†	.15	.22†	.14
Controlled for work field:										
0Power	Outcome-argument	Self-interest Motive	.20†	.13	.49*	.22	.08	.13	.12*	.06
Powerless	Rule-argument	Moral motive	.38*	.20	.29†	.20	.17	.15	.21†	.14
Controlled for both education level and work field:										
Power	Outcome-argument	Self-interest Motive	.21†	.13	.52**	.22	.08	.13	.13*	.04
Powerless	Rule-argument	Moral motive	.41*	.20	.30†	.20	.19	.15	.22†	.14

†$p < .10$; *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$ at one-tailed level. SE = Standard Error

IV = Independent Variable, DV = Dependent Variable, MV = Mediator Variable

For step 3 to be established, there needs to be a significant effect of the mediator variable on the dependent variable. The outcome-based moral perspective had a positive effect on the interest side-taking motive ($\beta = .21$, $p < .01$) and the rule-based moral perspective had a positive effect on the moral side-taking motive ($\beta = .72$, $p < .01$). Finally, in step 4, the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable is tested when the mediator variable (moral perspective) is controlled. In this step, the effect of power on the interest side-taking motive

proved not to be significant anymore when controlling for the outcome moral perspective (β = .11, *ns*). The same goes for the effect of having a powerless position on choosing the moral side-taking perspective when controlled for the rule moral perspective (β = .19, *ns*).

For complete mediation, the effects measured in the last step should be zero (Kenny, 2011), which is not the case. However, the highly recommended Sobel-test (Kenny, 2011), provides evidence that there is partial mediation, with an indirect effect of power on the self-interest motive via the outcome-based moral perspective of .11 (Sobel test: Z = 2.00, $p < .05$). This test result shows that the positive effect of power on the interest side-taking motives is mediated through the outcome-based moral perspective, which confirms hypotheses 3. Hypotheses 4 was confirmed at a marginal level (β = .22; Sobel test: Z = 1.56, $p = .10$), providing evidence that people in a powerless position choose the moral side-taking perspective, partly due to their preference for the rule-based moral perspective.

For this hypotheses testing I again controlled for the subject variables age and gender and the variables education level and work field. Controlled for each variable individually, the results remained (marginal) significant. However when controlled for age and gender combined, the mediating effect of the rule- argument on the power - moral side-taking relation, ceased to exist. We can conclude that age and gender do have an effect, but only for hypothesis three when both variables are controlled for simultaneously.

Additional results

The demographic variables gender and age are included in table 2, due to their significant correlations with other variables (table 1). The older participants are more inclined to stick to rules and regulations than the younger participants: they reported a preference on the moral

motive for side-taking (β = .04, p < .01), the rule-based moral perspective (β = .02, t(82) = 2.31, p < .05), and siding with Barc (following the contract) (β = .02, t(77) = 2.90, p < .01). Men value rules and regulations more than women: they choose to side with Barc (following the rules of the contract) significantly more than the female participants (β = -.29, t(78) = -2.65, p < .01). In line with this preference, they reported a higher score on the rule-based moral perspective (M_{male} = 3.59, SD = .88; M_{female} = 3.21, SD = .86; t = 2.00, p < .05) and a lower score on the outcome-based moral perspective (M_{male} = 2.79, SD = .86; M_{female} = 3.30, SD = .93; t = -2.29, p < .05) compared with their female counterparts.

DISCUSSION

The aims of this study were to investigate the effect of power on lay third party's motives for side-taking, and to explain these connections by using two types of moral perspective. The results show that in an organizational conflict, people with a powerful position will take sides based on the interest motive more than the powerless. This effect is mediated through the outcome-based moral perspective. The study also showed that employees with a lower position choose sides in an organizational conflict based on the moral motive, mediated through the rule-based moral perspective. This study first demonstrates that power influences employee workplace conflict handling, specifically on side-taking motives. Second, it provides a tentative answer on why employees with different positions take sides differently in an organizational conflict.

Previous research done by Vopersal (2011) also focused on the effect of power on the side-taking motives, but the results showed that power had no significant effect on the moral and interest motive. In contrast to her findings, this study shows that power in terms of organizational

authority does have an effect on their side-taking motives. These differences in finding could be caused by experiment settings. In Vopersal's (2011) study, side-taking motives were measured with a questionnaire. There was no specific conflict situation described, thus it is difficult for participants (both the powerful and the powerless) to form a clear goal to guide their behavior (or behavioral intention). Without a clear context and goals, the powerful thus do not act differently than the powerless. In my study an organizational setting was presented to the participants. Organizational interests and self-interests are more in line with each other for the powerful party than for the powerless party (Elangovan, 1995). In this setting, according to the situated focus theory of power (Guinote, 2007a), the powerful will adjust their behavior to be more consistent with their goal and therefore the interest motive for side-taking becomes more important in this setting.

The found preference for the outcome-based moral perspective by the powerful and the preference for the rule-based perspective by the powerless contradict with the findings of Lammers and Stapel (2009). They found that the powerful prefer the arguments based on the rule-based moral perspective, and the powerless choose the argument based on the outcome-based moral perspective. They argue that stability is appealing for the powerful individuals. Rules have a stabilizing nature; therefore, the powerful are inclined to the rule-based perspective. In contrast, the powerless desire a social change which can only be achieved by a focus on the consequences of an act and ignoring the rules. The powerless then favour the argument based on the outcome-based moral perspective (Lammers & Stapel, 2009).

Those two seemingly contradictory findings can be understood by combining the situated focus theory of power and the variability of moral reasoning. Kohlberg describes several stages of moral reasoning (Kohlberg 1971; 1973). Stages four and five are interesting for this study,

because they are most used by adults and very similar to the rule- and outcome moral perspectives of Lammers and Stapel (2009). At stage four, moral judgments consider the rules and laws of social, legal or religious systems that are designed to promote the common good. At stage five, the emphasizes still lies on rules and laws, but considers the possibility of changing the law for socially useful purposes. Stage four (laws are to be upheld and rules are inflexible) is similar to the rule-based argument. Stage five (consider the possibility of changing the law for socially useful purposes) is in line with the outcome-based argument.

People vary in stages of moral reasoning, not only across individuals (Flavell 1971; Martarano 1977; Piaget 1972), but also across social contexts (Trevino, 1992). Kohlberg (1981) argued that stage five judgment is more cognitively complex (more differentiated) than the lower stages. The function of power, according to the situated focus theory of power (Guinote, 2007b; 2010) is to activate more cognitive resources to process complex information. Therefore it is likely that powerful people can more easily reach the stage five judgment when the situation demands it, as in this study, for their cognitive skills are more differentiated than the cognitive skills of the powerless.

Limitations

Just like any other study, this study suffers some limitations. First, the self-interest side-taking motive had a Chronbach's Alpha of .59, which is a questionable score according to George and Mallery (2003). The low alpha is probably caused by merging of the reward and sanction motive into the self-interest side-taking motive. Although both the reward- and sanction scale deal with self-interest, their items might be too different from one another to reach a high alpha score.

Second, the side-taking motives were treated as independent dimensions for measurement convenience, but they might overlap and even reinforce one another in reality. Also, the moral

perspectives are in reality not as black or white as suggested in theory. It was stated in the scenario that dividing the bonus had a better outcome for the whole organization. Some participants argued that sticking to the contract (rules) would give a signal to the rest of the organization that this organization follows the rules, which also has a good outcome in the long run. So in reality, rule-based and the outcome-based moral perspective may be closely connected with each other and cannot be separated as stated in theory. The findings therefore might be more ambiguous in real life than in this study.

Third, the participants were recruited through personal contacts, which may cause bias within age, education level and work field in this sample compared to the population. In order to make the study better representative, these subject variables were controlled for.

Fourth, the power positions in this study where manipulated through a word puzzle and an assigned position in the conflict scenario. Although these manipulation techniques have been used and proved effectively in previous study (i.e. Lammers & Stapel, 2009; Yang, *et. al,*. 2007, 2008, 2009), they suffer from some limitations. The word puzzle works on an unconscious level, which makes it hard, if not impossible, to measure its effect. The assigned position in the conflict scenario tackles this problem with questions which measure the participants understanding of their power position. Still, a scenario is not the same as a real workplace with real people having a real conflict. In order to measure real behavior one should do a survey in organizations and let employees talk about their conflict experiences. The drawback of such a survey is that it is hard to compare one conflict experience to another. A conflict in a scenario may not be as life-like, but it has the advantage that it gives comparable answers of participants.

The last limitation concerns the scales used in this study. Even though the moral perspective scale had an acceptable reliability, the validity of the items has not been established yet. Also, the side-taking motives scale is a relatively new scale and not widely used. All in all, the scales

need to be further improved and tested in future research to gain a solid validity and a better reliability.

Implications

The results of this research have some implications for the practice of conflict management. A suggestion can be given for managers and employees who want to persuade other colleagues and make a coalition in a workplace conflict: they should be aware of the power positions their potential allies hold when they want to form a coalition. When they use arguments that support the organizational interests and goals, they will be more persuasive for powerful potential allies. When their possible allies stand lower on the hierarchal ladder of the organization, he or she is more likely to be persuaded by arguments that follow the rules and regulations.

The effect of power on side-taking preferences can also be used as a tip for managers and professional third parties. When they are trying to resolve a conflict it is good to know what motivates the disputants and their allies for side-taking. The insight that the powerful will act towards a positive outcome and the powerless to rules and regulations can not only be used for comprehensive purposes, but also to bring parties closer together to give them insight in each other's motivation.

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