Oog om oog en baas boven baas
Nauta, A.

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
1996

Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database

Citation for published version (APA):

Copyright
Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Take-down policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): http://www.rug.nl/research/portal. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.
Chapter 1: Theory
This dissertation is focused on interaction patterns in interpersonal conflict within organizations. Starting point is the interpersonal theory (IPT; Kiesler, 1983; Leary, 1957) that distinguishes two dimensions to describe interpersonal (conflict) behavior, namely dominance-submissiveness and friendliness-hostility. Furthermore, with respect to interaction patterns, which exist when two people influence each other’s consecutive behaviors, IPT poses that dominance pulls submissiveness and vice versa (complementary interaction pattern), whereas friendliness leads to friendliness and hostility to hostility (symmetrical interaction pattern). Former research revealed insufficient evidence for complementary dominance-submissiveness, but amply sufficient evidence for symmetrical friendliness-hostility. Moreover, conflict behavior in organizations has never before been described and predicted with IPT. Therefore, the first goal of this dissertation was to test hypotheses about interaction patterns in interpersonal conflict within organizations.

The second goal of this dissertation was to examine whether the micro phenomenon of conflict interaction is influenced by the macro phenomenon of organizational structure. Organizations can roughly be divided into bureaucratic systems, characterized by low decision participation and by relatively simple, standardized work, versus organic systems, characterized by high decision participation and by relatively complex work that is coordinated by means of mutual adjustment. Former research revealed communication differences between bureaucratic, non-participative systems and organic, participative systems. In organic systems, the communication climate is more open than in bureaucratic systems. Therefore, conflict handling is expected to be more open, assertive, and confrontative than in bureaucratic systems. However, there are only a few studies of differences between bureaucratic and organic systems with respect to interaction patterns in interpersonal conflict.

Another organization variable that probably influences conflict interaction is status difference. In accordance with findings from former research, it might be expected that high-status persons will show more dominant and more hostile conflict behavior than low-status persons. However, no specific predictions can
be derived from former research about the influence of status difference upon interaction patterns in interpersonal conflict.

The third goal of this dissertation was to gain insight into determinants of effective conflict management. On the basis of earlier research it can be stated that more dominant and more hostile conflict behavior is less effective. Once again, no direct indications can be derived from former research about the effectiveness of interaction patterns in interpersonal conflict.

Chapter 2: Research method
Fifty-four dyads from divergent organizations participated in the study. The dyad members consisted of colleagues from the same organization. In twenty dyads there was a status difference between the dyad members. During conferences about conflict management the dyads participated in a conflict simulation. Before actual interaction, dyad members separately read their own role description. One of the role descriptions (the so-called 'Go-getter’) stated that the person had carried through an application procedure (role play #1) or an organization-consultancy project (role play #2), without consulting their colleague, the so-called 'Holiday-maker’. The subsequent conflict interaction was videotaped and transcribed.

Two observation schemes were developed for classifying conflict behavior. Two independent groups of four trained coders reliably rated each speaking turn (i.e. everything one says between the other’s last speaking turn and the other’s next speaking turn) in the transcript in terms of dominance-submissiveness and friendliness-hostility respectively. Three techniques for sequential analysis of the observation data were used. These are time series, lag sequential analysis, and hierarchical loglinear models.

Chapter 3: Interaction patterns
Neither complementary dominance-submissiveness as predicted by IPT, nor symmetrical dominance-submissiveness as predicted in conflict situations could be demonstrated. It appeared that dyads showed no systematic pattern at all in the way they reacted to each other’s dominance-submissiveness. As expected though, friendliness of the one party pulled friendliness by the other, whereas hostility pulled hostility.

Unexpectedly, there appeared to be role differences. Dyad members in the role of 'Holiday-maker’ showed more dominant and more hostile conflict behavior than dyad members in the role of 'Go-getter’. Also, the Holiday-maker seemed to influence friendliness-hostility of the Go-getter more strongly than the other way around. On closer examination, the conflict issue appeared to be asymmetrical: The Holiday-maker wanted to change (attack) an existing situation, whereas the Go-getter wanted to maintain (defend) the status quo.
Chapter 4: The influence of organizational structure and status difference on conflict interaction

The extent to which organization members can participate in departmental decisions was seen as a key indicator of bureaucratic versus organic organization departments. Decision participation was measured by ten items concerning the extent to which subjects are allowed to co-decide on policy matters. As expected, more decision participation led to more dominant and more hostile conflict behavior, as well as to more symmetrical dominance-submissiveness and to more symmetrical friendliness-hostility (although there were role differences). This supported the supposition that in organic, participative organization departments, the communication climate is more open and competitive and there is more room for mutual behavior influence than in bureaucratic, non-participative departments.

There was no support for the supposition that high-status persons show more dominance and more hostility than low-status persons, nor for the supposition that dyads with a status difference show less symmetrical dominance-submissiveness and less symmetrical friendliness-hostility than dyads with status equality. Therefore, it can be doubted whether clear status differences existed in the sample at all.

Chapter 5: Effectiveness of conflict interaction in organizations

Four coders reliably rated the videotapes of the conflict interactions on effectiveness - defined as the extent to which the conflict issue was less severe in the end and the extent to which the relationship had improved. As expected, effectiveness appeared to be greater when the conflict behavior was less dominant and more friendly. However, no support was found for the supposition that less symmetrical dominance-submissiveness as well as less symmetrical friendliness-hostility would be more effective.

Decision participation appeared to have a moderating influence on relations between conflict interaction and effectiveness (although there were role differences once again). However, there was no support for the supposition that less dominant and more friendly conflict behavior would be more effective in non-participative departments, whereas more dominant and more hostile conflict behavior would be more effective in participative departments. Irrespective of the amount of decision participation, exhibiting less dominance as well as more friendliness were more effective, but the relation was weaker with little than with much participation. It seems that conflict behavior ‘matters more’ in participative departments, whereas in non-participative departments it seems more a matter of secondary importance. As expected, it appeared that with little decision participation, weaker symmetrical, even stronger complementary dominance reactions were more effective, whereas with much decision participation stronger symmetrical dominance reactions appeared to be more effective.
Chapter 6: Discussion

The following four points are discussed. Firstly, the IPT is criticized, especially its claim to explain behavior by means of other’s foregoing behavior. For interpersonal conflict behavior it appears that dyad members do not influence each other’s dominance-submissiveness, but they do influence each other’s friendliness-hostility in a symmetrical way.

Secondly, the unexpected findings of this research with respect to conflicts with an attack/defend structure are discussed. Asymmetrical conflicts seem to be the rule rather than the exception. Furthermore, some interesting hypotheses can be derived from the research. An example is the hypothesis that conflict behavior of the ‘attacker’ of the status quo has more influence on the conflict behavior of the status-quo-defender than vice versa, whereas the conflict behavior of the defender has more impact on final conflict outcomes.

Thirdly, suggestions are made for future research on relations between macro and micro phenomena in organizations. For example, it is recommended to thoroughly describe the structure of a restricted sample of organizations using several measure instruments. Subsequently, the differences in communication and conflict management between several types of organization can be studied. Moreover, attention should be paid to intermediating variables between macro and micro phenomena.

Fourthly, more unity is advocated in the application of techniques for sequential analysis. Loglinear analysis should be the standard, because this puts sequential analysis in a well-established statistical tradition that has proven its value.