

BEHAVIOURAL SEQUENCES IN THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

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Behavioural sequences in the effectiveness of conflict management. The aim of this study was to analyze whether the use of conflict behaviour over the stages of an escalated conflict episode differs between effective and ineffective negotiators. Participants were asked to solve, on-line, an organizational conflict with a subordinate. The subordinate was a confederate who was instructed to escalate the conflict episode in three levels: trivialization – using avoiding behaviours; norms attacks – using indirect fight behaviours; and personal attacks – using direct fight behaviours. Conflict behaviour and effectiveness were assessed through observational measures. Sequential analysis showed that it is possible to differentiate between effective and ineffective participants, with effective participants reacting in a complementary way to both avoiding and direct fight behaviours.

El propósito del presente estudio fue analizar si los negociadores efectivos e inefectivos difieren en sus respuestas al escalamiento del conflicto. Los negociadores desarrollaron un rol play, mediado por ordenador, con un oponente ficticio que escalaba el episodio de conflicto en tres niveles: trivialización –utilizando conductas de evitación –; ataques a las normas de la empresa –utilizando conductas de lucha indirecta– y ataques personales –utilizando conductas de lucha directa–. Las conductas de gestión de conflicto utilizadas por los sujetos experimentales y la efectividad diádica se analizaron mediante la observación de las interacciones. Los results, derivados del análisis secuencial de la interacción, mostraron que los sujetos efectivos responden de forma complementaria tanto a las conductas de lucha directa, como a las conductas de evitación utilizadas por el oponente.

Negotiation is one of the most effective means of managing and solving disputes between individuals. However, in certain cases this process fails, and the consequences of this for both parties can be disastrous (Munduate, 1993). Analysis of the process of actions and reactions, which occurs throughout a conflict episode, has in the last few years received considerable attention from researchers (e.g., Weingart, Prietula, Hyder & Genovese, 1999). This research has been aimed principally at: (a) permitting precise analysis of the behaviours used by participants in response to the other party during the interaction, and (b) allowing inferences about the intensifying or mitigating effects of conflict management behaviours. Following this line of work, in the present study we analyze those conflict behaviours that prove to be most effective for dealing with a conflict when it is escalated or stimulated by the adversary.

One of the definitions of conflict most commonly used by researchers is that proposed by Putnam and Poole (1987), who define conflict as *a reaction of the individual to the perception that the two parties have different aspirations that cannot be achieved simultaneously*. This definition is based on the premise that conflict has three inherent properties: (a) interaction, (b) interdependence, in the sense that each party has a degree of potential to interfere with the other, and (c) the perceived existence of an opposition or incompatibility in the goals pursued by those in dispute.

The general tendency in traditional research on styles or behaviours in conflict management has been the identification of subjects' behavioural predispositions (e.g., Rahim & Bonoma, 1979; Sternberg & Soriano, 1984). Such studies start out from the basis that the subject is predisposed to using a particular conflict style throughout the conflict episode (Nicotera, 1994). However, some authors have questioned this line of research, stressing, first, the need to observe the actual process of social interaction among the opposing sides in the conflict episode for an understanding of the reasons why subjects choose certain behaviours (Knapp, Putnam & Davis, 1988; Munduate, Luque & Barón,

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1997), and second, how these behaviours influence the effectiveness of this process (Van de Vliert, 1997). Thus, the aim of the present work was to analyze the behavioural sequences in the course of a dyadic interpersonal conflict, and the effectiveness of these sequences.

EFFECTIVENESS OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT BEHAVIOURS

The analysis of the effectiveness of conflict management behaviours has traditionally been approached from three perspectives: *the one-best-way perspective*, *the contingency perspective* and *the complexity perspective* (Van de Vliert, 1997).

The *one-best-way perspectiva* is based on the notion that some conflict management styles are more effective than others. Thus, problem-solving is considered to be the most constructive style, since it allows for the two parties to unite their interests, with a view to reaching an agreement satisfactory to all those in dispute (Van de Vliert, Euwema & Huismans, 1995). In contrast, the most prejudicial results are found when the subject adopts a more dominating or competitive approach, which is expressed in tactical use of information or an increase in personal attacks (Olekalns, Smith & Walsh, 1996; Van de Vliert et al., 1995).

The *contingency perspective* of conflict management maintains that each type of conflict management behaviour is appropriate according to the situation (Thomas, 1992). A relevant difficulty with the *contingency perspective* resides in its lack of consideration that conflict management occurs over the course of a process of interaction, during which the parties frequently change from one behaviour to another in a single conflict episode (Munduate, Ganaza, Peiró & Euwema, 1999; Nicotera, 1994; Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993). Nor does this approach take into account that effectiveness may be determined by the demands of the moment or of the sequence in which a given strategy is used (Olekalns, Smith & Walsh, 1996). Therefore, some authors have proposed a new line of study of effectiveness, called the *complexity perspective*.

In the analysis of the *complexity perspective*, research on the effectiveness of conflict management behaviours has developed in three dimensions: (a) the first of these attempts to analyze simultaneous complexity, assuming that interdependent modes of behaviour may predict the effectiveness of conflict management (e.g., Munduate et al., 1999; Van de Vliert et al., 1995); (b) the second analyzes temporal complexity, focusing on the phases

through which the participant's behaviour passes, and assuming that knowledge of effectiveness requires studying the moment at which each behaviour is employed (e.g., Olekalns et al., 1996); and (c) the third dimension deals with sequential complexity, on the assumption that dyadic effectiveness depends not only on the combination of modes of behaviour, but also on how these occur during the interaction (e.g., Van de Vliert, Nauta, Giebels & Janssen, 1999; Weingart, Thompson, Bazerman & Carroll, 1990). The present work concentrates on some of the aspects involved in the third of the dimensions derived from the *complexity perspective*, that of sequential complexity.

Thus, and following Van de Vliert et al. (1999), we consider dyadic effectiveness to derive not only from the combination of certain conflict management behaviours, but also from their sequence in the course of the interaction. In this context, Weingart et al. (1990) distinguish two types of sequential pattern: *reciprocity*, understood as the response to the other party with the same behaviour as they used in the previous turn; and *complementarity*, understood as the reaction to the adversary's action using opposing behaviours. Many behaviours tend to be reciprocal within a conflict episode, such as comments on matters of procedure, the communication of affective states or certain avoiding behaviours (e.g., Weingart et al., 1990). Other behaviours tend to be complementary, such as defensive responses to an attack, or vice versa (e.g., Putnam & Jones, 1982).

In this sameline of work, Brett, Shapiro and Lyttle (1998) analyzed whether the reciprocity of the confrontation behaviours modifies the course of the negotiation. These authors found evidence that, in a confrontation situation, there is a general tendency to reciprocity, that is, to using aggressive or dominance behaviours in the face of attacks received from the adversary. This result is also found in previous work (Nauta, Van de Vliert & Siero, 1995; Weingart et al., 1990). A second line of research in the study of sequential complexity concerns the analysis of the effectiveness of the sequential patterns employed in a conflict episode. In this regard, Brett et al. (1998) found that reciprocity in response to domination behaviours produces results that are highly unfavourable for the parties in dispute, as it tends to trigger a situation of *impasse* or stagnation. On the other hand, complementary behaviours in hostile situations appear to be highly positive in mitigating the conflict, since they reduce its intensity and permit open communication

between the parties (Janssen & Van de Vliert, 1996).

Nevertheless, the majority of studies that have analyzed reciprocity or complementarity in response to confrontation behaviours have opted for situations in which such confrontation appears from the outset of the interaction. Thus, Brett et al. (1998) stress the importance of studying reciprocity and complementarity, in relation to confrontation behaviours, that occurs when the interaction is already well in progress. Following this line, the present study focuses on conflict situations in which the intensity of the confrontation between the parties gradually increases. Within this context of escalation, the objective of this study is to analyze behaviours of reciprocity and complementarity in the face of the adversary's response, and how these are related to the effectiveness of the negotiators.

Based on the literature mentioned above, our hypotheses are as follows:

- *Hypothesis 1*: Negotiators will use more patterns of reciprocity than of complementarity in an escalated conflict.
- *Hypothesis 2*: Effective negotiators will use fewer patterns of reciprocity than ineffective negotiators in an escalated conflict.
- *Hypothesis 3*: Effective negotiators will use more patterns of complementarity than ineffective negotiators in an escalated conflict.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

We selected 87 people, 33 of whom were men (37.9%) and 54 of whom were women (61.1%) from doctoral students at the universities of Seville and Valencia and the Andalusian Council for Labour Relations. A high percentage of the total sample (97.7%), at the time of the study, were carrying out management-type work in their normal job, with responsibility over others. Age range was 22 to 56 years, with a mean of 29.95 and a standard deviation of 6.96. All participants were unaware of the objectives of the study, which was presented to them as a practical exercise on conflict management.

Procedure

Participants were received by the researchers in a room where they were informed about the phases of the exercise and given instructions of a general nature about the task. They were told that the task consisted in handling a conflict with a subordinate, who would not be in the same place, so that communication would be via com-

puter. At this introduction we took down their sociodemographic data (gender, age, educational level), stressed the importance of paying attention to the messages that would appear on the computer screen, and told them to read carefully the guide to the role they would play in the role-play exercise and to prepare themselves well before beginning the interactions so that they would not be under time pressure. After receiving these instructions, participants were allotted a computer, on which they began the negotiation task.

All participants received instructions on their monitor screen about their role in the negotiation exercise, and were given a pencil and paper so that they could, if they wished, prepare a course of action to guide the interaction. No time limits were set for preparing the negotiation. As indicated above, the participant's task was to resolve a conflict, on-line, with a subordinate. The conflict was related to a serious problem that had recently occurred between the subordinate – a salesman from the company – and the organization's most important client. This subordinate was always a confederate of the researchers, so that his/her responses were standardized and previously designed by them with the aim of escalating the conflict on three levels. These three levels consisted in a first phase of *trivialization*, in which the incident was relativized by means of avoiding behaviours, using phrases such as: '*in reality nothing has happened – Mr. Sage and I know each other quite well, and this is the result of nothing more than that familiarity*'; a second phase of *attacks on company norms*, in which the organization's commercial policy was questioned through behaviours of indirect fight, with phrases such as: '*I understand your concern about what happened with Mr. Sage, but it would be more useful for all of us to concentrate on the origin of the problem, which is in the company's policy*'; and a third phase of *personal attacks*, in which the adversary's behaviour and intentions were questioned, using behaviours of indirect fight, and phrases such as: '*what actually goes on in the real world is quite different from what you see in your office*'. Standardization of the confederate's responses was a priority, in an attempt to ensure that all participants followed the same process of stimulation of the conflict, and this standardization was validated in a previous study carried out with ten students. Transcriptions of all the interactions were recorded for subsequent coding and analysis.

Once the experimental task was over, participants were

debriefed about its aims, and were asked whether they thought they had behaved in a similar way to how they would have behaved in a real situation. They were also asked whether they had detected any artificiality in the responses of their adversary. We thanked them for their participation and requested them not to discuss the objectives or content of the experiment with their colleagues. None of the participants considered the responses of his/her adversary for escalating the conflict to have seemed artificial, and all of them claimed they would act in a similar way in a real situation.

Assessment of the variables

Two variables were analyzed in the present study: a) conflict management behaviours, and b) dyadic effectiveness. Conflict management behaviours were operationalized through observational analysis of the interactions,

Table 1
Conflict management behaviours. Model of Van de Vliert and Euwema (1994)

Avoidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trivializing. - Asking irrelevant questions with the aim of putting an end to the dialogue. - Trying to postpone the problem in order to reflect. <p>Example: <i>'Why don't we shelve the problem until we've spoken to the client?'</i></p>
Accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accepting the other's suggestions. - Acting as the adversary wished. - Making concessions to the other party. <p>Example: <i>'I think you're right and it would be good to do what you say'.</i></p>
Compromise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trying to find middle ways to progress towards a solution to the conflict. - Proposing solutions that satisfy both parties. - Yielding on some points in exchange for others. <p>Example: <i>'If you were to apologize to the client, I could talk to management about what you suggest'</i></p>
Problem-solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Seeking information that permits a thorough approach to the problem. - Analyzing the situation with the adversary together. - Integrating one's own ideas and those of the other party to reach a joint decision. <p>Example: <i>'And how would you feel if I spoke to the client and tried to sort this problem out?'</i></p>
Direct fight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussing openly the issues of the conflict, its causes and the attitude adopted during it. <p>Example: <i>'I'm astonished and angry at your attitude. I don't understand how you could do such an inappropriate thing'.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acting directly, orienting one's actions towards the achievement of the objectives, ignoring the needs and expectations of the other party. <p>Examples: <i>threats, accusations, pressure, abusive language, verbal attacks, unpleasant or hurtful comments.</i></p>
Indirect fight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Raising objections to the other party's plans. - Deliberately twisting the issue of the conflict. - Tangling things up in procedural matters. <p>Example: <i>'We should talk about the rules, about the procedure for assigning clients, not about such concrete issues as those you propose'.</i></p>

using a specially-designed system of categories based on the behavioural typology of Van de Vliert and Euwema (1994). Six judges trained for such coding carried out the analysis of the conflict management behaviours. Inter-judge reliability was measured by means of Cohen's K. Mean K index was 0.90 (range 0.87-0.93). A summary of this typology can be seen in Table 1.

Analysis of negotiating effectiveness was carried out by means of observational analysis of the interactions, using the rating scale developed on the basis of the indicators proposed by Van de Vliert and colleagues (e.g., Van de Vliert et al., 1995). Thus, we used eight rating scales with five response options: (a) importance of the issues involved in the conflict; (b) proximity of the solution; (c) quality of a possible agreed solution; (d) possibility of a new conflict between the parties; (e) familiarity between the parties; (f) mutual understanding; (g) climate between the parties, and (h) personal relationships. Two trained observers coded negotiating effectiveness, and correlations between them were very high, with a mean of 0.79, a minimum of 0.66 and a maximum of 0.88. On the basis of participants' scores in negotiating effectiveness, two groups were formed: *effective group*, with scores above percentile 50, and *ineffective group*, with scores below percentile 50.

Results

In order to analyze the sequences of conflict management behaviours we carried out a lag sequential analysis (Sackett, Holm, Crowley & Henkins, 1979). In this analysis, each action or behaviour, in this case each speech turn (the on-line messages), is considered as an observation. Lag sequential analysis recognizes behavioural patterns of negotiation on identifying statistically significant differences between observed frequencies and expected frequencies of the hypothetical sequences of conflict management. These sequences are made up of an antecedent and a subsequent behaviour separated by a lag. A lag is defined as the number of behaviours that occur between the antecedent behaviour and the subsequent behaviour (Bakeman & Gottman, 1989). In this case the standardized messages of the adversary (the researchers' confederate) are always the antecedent behaviours, and the immediate responses of the participants (those making up the sample) are the subsequent behaviours. There is therefore a lag 1, since the two elements in the sequence are consecutive.

In order to carry out the sequential analysis of the data

we used the statistical program *Generalized Sequential Querier* (GSEQ), developed by Bakeman and Quera (1996). This program reads, describes and analyzes sequential data that follow the SDIS (*Sequential Data Interchange Standard*) norm. The program permits analysis of various types of data; those analyzed in the present study are of the ESD (Event Sequential Data) type, characterized by containing information on the order in which events occur.

Table 2 shows the observed and expected frequencies of the conflict management behaviours deployed by the participants in response to the messages of the adversary (the confederate). Behaviours of direct fight, problem-solving and indirect fight are the most frequent, followed by those of accommodation and avoidance. As can be seen from the results in Table 2, the pattern of reciprocity only appears in response to behaviours of indirect fight. That is, when participants receive a behaviour of indirect fight from their adversary they respond with a similar message. On the other hand, we do not find reciprocal patterns when the adversary avoids conflict or presents direct fight behaviour. Thus, there is no confirmation of Hypothesis 1 of the present study, which predicted greater use of reciprocity in the face of the adversary's confrontation behaviour. It is interesting to note that participants respond in a complementary way to avoiding behaviours by the adversary, employing direct fight significantly more than expected. In turn, participants also respond in a complementary way to direct fight behaviours by the other party, employing more avoiding and accommodation behaviours than expected. That is, if we observe in conjunction the reactions to avoiding behaviours and to direct fight behaviours, we find complementary patterns: participants react with direct fight behaviours to avoidance, and with avoiding behaviours to direct fight.

Table 3 shows the observed and expected frequencies of the behaviours used by effective and ineffective participants. When the researchers' confederate uses avoiding behaviours the effective participants make more use than expected of direct fight behaviours, and less use of accommodation and problem-solving messages. Ineffective participants, on the other hand, use fewer reciprocal avoiding behaviours and accommodation behaviours. When the confederate emits messages of indirect fight, the most effective participants more frequently use reciprocal behaviours of indirect fight, and present less use of direct fight behaviours. In ineffective participants we also found the pattern of reciprocity for indirect fight behaviours from the adversary. Finally, in response to direct fight messages, effective participants made greater use of problem-solving, accommodation and avoiding behaviours. These participants also used fewer direct fight behaviours. As far as ineffective participants are concerned, it was found that in response to the other's direct fight behaviours, they made significantly more use than expected of avoiding behaviours.

Focusing on the patterns of reciprocity and complementarity in the effective and ineffective negotiators, it should be stressed, in relation to reciprocity, that in res-

Table 2
Frequencies of the participants' conflict management behaviours

Participant's responses	Messages from confederate		
	Avoidance	Indirect fight	Direct fight
Avoidance	4/12 ++	9/10	17/8 **
Indirect fight	43/45	52/39 **	23/33 +
Direct fight	249/213 **	162/183 ++	142/157
Accommodation	3/11 ++	13/10	13/8 *
Compromise	2/7 +	9/6	6/5
Problem-solving	158/171	149/147	136/125

Note: Probabilities of observed frequencies lower than expected frequencies + p<.05 ++ p<.01
Probabilities of observed frequencies higher than expected frequencies * p<.05 ** p<.01

Table 3
Frequencies of the participants' conflict management behaviours and effectiveness

Participant's responses	Messages from confederate					
	Avoidance		Indirect fight		Direct fight	
	Effective	Ineffective	Effective	Ineffective	Effective	Ineffective
Avoidance	1/3	3/8 +	3/3	6/7	5/3 *	12/6 **
Indirect fight	14/17	29/29	22/15 *	30/23 *	9/13	14/20
Direct fight	102/72 **	147/144	54/66 +	108/115	38/56 ++	104/100
Accommodation	3/8 +	0/2 +	9/8	4/2	11/7 *	2/2
Compromise	1/4	1/3	5/3	4/2	4/3	2/2
Problem-solving	102/119 ++	56/49	113/110	36/39	107/93 *	29/34

Note: Probabilities of observed frequencies lower than expected frequencies + p<.05 ++ p<.01
Probabilities of observed frequencies higher than expected frequencies * p<.05 ** p<.01

ponse to direct fight behaviours, effective negotiators use fewer behaviours of reciprocity. These data partially support Hypothesis 2 of the present work: it is confirmed that there is less use of reciprocity behaviours by the effective negotiators in the face of direct fight behaviours, but this lesser use is not confirmed in the case of indirect fight behaviours. As regards complementarity behaviours, effective negotiators use these in response to behaviours of avoidance and indirect fight – that is, faced with avoidance they employ more direct fight behaviours, and faced with direct fight they use more avoiding, accommodation and problem-solving behaviours. It is observed, in this regard, that the effective participants respond in a complementary way to attacks received from the adversary. However, ineffective negotiators only use complementarity through responses of avoidance when faced with direct fight. These data confirm Hypothesis 3, which predicted greater use of complementarity behaviours on the part of effective negotiators.

DISCUSSION

The goal of the present study was, first of all, to analyze the patterns of reciprocity and complementarity between negotiators in an escalated conflict; a second aim was to relate these patterns to the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of these negotiators. The study's most relevant finding relates to the capacity shown by effective negotiators to break the course of action established by the other party for escalating the conflict, using for this purpose behaviours complementary to those of their adversary.

We shall discuss the most relevant findings in accordance with two stages: in the first of these, we shall discuss the patterns of reciprocity and complementarity found in response to escalation of the conflict; and secondly, we shall consider their dyadic effectiveness. As regards the first of these aspects, the most relevant findings were as follows: (a) indirect fight behaviours tend to be reciprocal, (b) avoiding behaviours elicit behaviours of direct fight in the other party, whilst they inhibit the use of avoiding, accommodation and compromise behaviours; and (c) direct fight behaviours produce, in the adversary, greater use of accommodation and avoiding behaviours, and lesser use of indirect fight behaviours.

Thus, it is found that subjects tend to act reciprocally in response to the other party's indirect fight behaviours, suggesting that when one of the parties in conflict attempts to reorient the discourse towards collateral

issues – controlling the process or showing resistance to open discussion – there is a general tendency on the part of the other to try and prevent this occurring, reorienting the discussion once more towards the central issue of the conflict. This pattern of behavioural reciprocity in response to procedural strategies has been described previously by other authors (e.g., De Dreu et al., 1999).

Moreover, we observed a tendency in participants to respond in a complementary way to direct fight behaviours with avoiding behaviours, and vice versa. Thus, when the participant wishes to avoid or postpone conflict, the adversary tends to respond through accusations, reproaches or direct orders; in contrast, when the participant receives personal attacks, there is a tendency on the part of the other to avoid conflict. This result can be interpreted in two different ways. On the one hand, it is possible that subjects respond spontaneously, through direct fight behaviours against their adversary, when the latter tries to postpone the conflict or not confront it openly. In this regard, some authors consider that naming behaviour is a highly stable behaviour that depends to a greater extent on the subject's motivational orientation than on the interventions of the adversary (Rhoades & Carnevale, 1999); thus, this behaviour may form part of the natural repertoire of response when the subject faces a conflict growing in intensity. In a similar line, some authors assume, in any conflict episode, two clearly distinguishable stages: an initial one of differentiation, in which each party defends his/her own interests, and an integration stage, in which the parties defend common interests (Van de Vliert et al., 1999). Thus, it may be that subjects tend to differentiate their positions in the early stages of the conflict, so that direct fight behaviours will tend to form part of the behavioural repertoire at the beginning of the interaction. A second interpretation involves the possibility that the subject uses direct fight because he/she perceives a certain weakness in the adversary, on observing that the latter is employing avoiding behaviours (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993). As regards the complementarity of direct fight behaviours, through responses of avoidance and accommodation, it is relevant to point out that these behaviours form part, in other typologies (e.g., Putnam & Wilson, 1982), of the non-confrontational style. This desire for non-confrontation, which appears at a stage in which the conflict is of high intensity, may be understood by the adversary as a defensive response to an attack received, and considered as a form of permitting rela-

tions to be maintained in the future (Ohbuchi & Takahashi, 1994).

These results do not wholly confirm the first of the hypotheses, that is, the use of reciprocity in response to an escalated conflict. Nevertheless, if we analyze the behaviours used by the participants on the basis of *concern theory*, which underpins bidimensional models of conflict management styles – see, for example, the typology of conflict management styles by Rahim and Bonoma (1979) –, we can find an explanation for this aspect. Thus, we find that the behaviours used in the escalation of conflict in the present study – avoiding, indirect fight and direct fight – and the responses with higher frequency than expected form part of the same dimension: the fulfilment of personal interests. This suggests that, in a situation of conflict escalation, subjects will respond reciprocally to the motivation of the other's behaviour – that is, the satisfaction of self-interest. The results of other studies on reciprocity in relation to distributive behaviours (e.g., Weingart et al., 1999) may have the same explanation, since the distributive behaviours considered by these authors (e.g., standing firm, or arguing one's own position insistently and persuasively) are also aimed at maximizing personal interests, to the detriment of those of the adversary.

As regards the analysis of the dyadic effectiveness of the behavioural sequences used by participants in response to escalation of the conflict, the most relevant finding of the present study concerns the fact that effective negotiators respond in a complementary way to their adversary's interventions for escalating the conflict.

Effective subjects use direct fight behaviours when their adversary trivializes the incident. As some authors have pointed out (Rubin, Pruitt & Kim, 1994), this behavioural response pattern in which participants use direct fight in the face of attempts at trivialization or avoidance is effective for the following reasons: (a) it permits differentiation between the diverse positions present in the conflict episode; and (b) it minimizes the probability of the conflict being postponed or stagnating. The behavioural pattern of differentiation-integration, mentioned above, has shown its effectiveness in the management of an escalated conflict (Van de Vliert et al., 1999). According to this idea, the effective resolution of an escalated conflict should begin with a first stage in which the subjects differentiate their positions, to move on to a second stage in which they try to integrate their underlying needs in the final solution to the conflict. The

use of direct fight behaviours permits differentiation between the initial positions of the two participants, so that, once this differentiation has been established, the attempts at integration can be more easily accepted by the adversary, as they are perceived as constructive behaviours aimed at the achievement of an agreement beneficial to both parties (Van de Vliert et al., 1999).

Another interesting result of the present study is that the most effective participants tend to respond to direct fight in a complementary fashion, using behaviours of accommodation and problem-solving. As far as accommodation is concerned, this result suggests that on certain occasions unilateral yielding may be an effective behaviour for mitigating the detrimental effects of conflict escalation. The use of accommodation is a quite simple form of resolving conflicts, and which may be valid in certain contextual circumstances (e.g., Thomas, 1992). While it is true that unilateral yielding, whereby the yielding party's problems remain unresolved and his/her needs unsatisfied, is a far from optimum or creative solution (Friedman, Tidd, Currall & Tsai, 2000; Spitzberg, Canary & Cupach, 1994), some components of deferent behaviour may indeed be productive for managing an escalated conflict. Such behaviour may be perceived by the adversary as a sign of willingness to reach an agreement, more than a sign of weakness (Van de Vliert, 1997), and can facilitate positive affect between the two parties, as well as mutual positive appreciation (Wayne, Liden, Graf & Ferris, 1997).

As regards problem-solving behaviours, the present work shows that it is more productive for the participant to respond to the provocations of the other party, and to his/her personal attack, attempting to understand his/her reasons and seeking a creative solution that may satisfy both. Thus, the most effective negotiators respond in a complementary way to the distributive behaviours of their adversary (e.g., Weingart et al., 1990) – that is, effective negotiators try to reconcile joint interests, in response to the other's discriminative and competitive intentions. It has been demonstrated, in this regard, that the most integrative styles reduce the experience of conflict and stress at work, while styles of domination and avoidance increase the perception of these aspects (Friedman et al., 2000).

In sum, both problem-solving behaviours and accommodation behaviours have a great advantage with respect to other conflict management behaviours: they are capable of reducing the intensity of the conflict, and

consequently, its escalation. Some studies have shown that both types of behaviour have mitigating effects on conflict, more so than other behaviours, such as compromise or avoidance (e.g., Janssen & Van de Vliert, 1996; Rubin et al., 1994).

Van de Vliert (1997) proposes an explanation of the mitigating power of accommodation and problem-solving, based on *concern theory*, as mentioned above. Thus, a change in the dimension of self-interest to the dimension of the other's interest – which is what occurs when the subject uses accommodation or problem-solving behaviour in response to direct fight – has mitigating effects on the dynamic of conflict, whilst a behavioural change within the same dimension, which is what occurs when the subject changes from avoidance to direct fight, for example, does not produce changes in the tendency to escalation or de-escalation, but rather leads simply to a change in the dynamic of cooperation between the parties. In this sense, the results of the present work are in accordance with the findings of Janssen and Van de Vliert (1996), who showed, using diverse methodologies, that high levels of concern with the other's interest, expressed in behaviours such as accommodation or problem-solving, lead to a reduction in intensity of the conflict and an improvement in relations between the parties. The present study, then, shows that effective negotiators take into consideration, on carrying out their proposals, the interests of the other party in a situation of conflict escalation, despite the fact that the adversary's response may be oriented towards the fulfilment of his or her personal interests.

Certain limitations of this study may have affected the results found. It is possible that the irreversible behavioural course used by the researchers' confederate meant that the participant used particular behaviours in response that are less likely to be found in a more natural situation. Indeed, greater flexibility in the conflict escalation process may help in future research. Thus, for example, avoiding behaviour by the confederate might not appear exclusively at the beginning of the conflict episode (where it coincides with the differentiation phase), and direct fight behaviour might not appear exclusively at the end (where it coincides with the integration phase).

In spite of such recommendations for improvement in future studies on behavioural sequences, it should be stressed that the design of the present work has made possible relevant findings with important practical implica-

tions. The fact that the effective participants respond with complementary behaviours to the attacks received from their adversary suggest the need to train negotiators to break the course of action established by the other party for escalating the conflict. The strategy of not replicating positions of threat, and of disarming the adversary through behaviours of complementarity, has proved to be effective for managing an escalated conflict.

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