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## MULTIPLE GOALS AND RESOLUTION STRATEGIES IN INTERPERSONAL CONFLICTS

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The purposes of the present study were to measure the goals which individual conflict participant pursues, and to examine the relationships of the goals with the resolution strategies. Sixty-four Japanese undergraduate students were asked to respond to the other party (an confederate) in experimentally created conflict situations. The conflicts were made by combining two experimental factors: the other party's politeness (polite or rough) and verbal tactics (assertive, compromising, or exchanging). The subjects' verbal responses were coded into four strategy types (integrative, indirect, assertive, and aggressive). Also, the subjects rated the degree of attainment of four goals (resource, relational, identity, and justice) after the conversations in each situation. Correlational analyses indicated that the goals were closely related to the subjects' verbal responses in the conflict situations. The relational goals positively correlated with the integrative and indirect strategies, but negatively with the distributive and aggressive ones. The justice goals indicated the opposite correlational patterns to the relational goals. The relational goals induced the subjects to take less confrontational stance, while the justice goals motivated more confrontational responses. Two experimental factors were not found to have any significant effect on either the goals or verbal responses.

**Key words:** interpersonal conflict, goals, resolution strategy, politeness.

### *Interpersonal Conflicts and Types of Resolution Strategies*

Interpersonal conflicts are perceived opposition, disagreement, or incompatible interests. Tedeschi, Schlenker, and Bonoma(1973) defined conflict as a situation in which an individual's goals, wishes, or expectations are interfered with by another individual's action. Because a conflict make people unpleasant, they usually attempt to resolve it with some strategies. Although there are a variety of strategies for conflict resolution, the researchers have proposed several classification systems of these strategies (Falbo & Peplau, 1980; Rahim, 1986; Thomas & Kilmann, 1975). Our own system was made on the basis of these prior ones (Ohbuchi, Chiba, & Fukushima, 1993). We separated four different types of behaviors which people engage in to resolve conflicts. The integrative type is the behavior which is attempted toward constructive resolutions, such as making a proposal of solution or offering information to clarify the conflict situation. The indirect type is the behavior involving some hidden meanings, such as euphemistic refusal of the other party's request, alleviating the other party's anger or distress. The assertive type includes asserting one's own requests, explicit refusal of the opponent's request, or expressions of doubt about opponents'

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explanation. The aggressive type is criticism of the other party or expressions of complaints or anger against the other party.

### *Conflict Escalation and the Multiple Goals*

A main concern implied by the research has been to identify factors which escalate or mitigate conflicts. In this regard, one crucial concept is that of the goal which each participant wishes to achieve during the conflict interaction. The initial goal which sparks the conflict sometimes changes, or another goal or goals may be added to the initial one, thereby complicating and escalating the conflict (Hocker & Wilmot, 1991).

We assumed that participants in conflicts would usually have four different kinds of goals, that is, resource, relational, identity, and justice goals, and that the differences in the relative importance of those goals would influence the participants' choice of strategies.

(1) Most conflicts center on tangible resources such as money, labor, or time, or social resources such as status or position (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993).

(2) Sometimes, participants are also concerned with maintenance of their affective or power relationships with the other parties (Hocker & Wilmot, 1991; Ohbuchi & Takahashi, in press).

The relational goals tend to restrict the range of strategies available to participants.

(3) Third goal, to which conflict researchers have thus far devoted little attention, relates to the social identity. Identity goal is a protection of social reputation or personal 'face' (Brown & Levinson, 1987), which is closely related to potent private sentiments about self, such as a pride or a self-esteem. This goal is assumed to be aroused by the others' rough or disregarding manner. Participants sometimes escalate the conflict in order only to enhance their identities. When their social identity is protected in the process of conflict, they may attempt to mitigate the conflict even at expense of resource or relational goals.

(4) Recently, social psychologists have been much interested in justice as standards of both social action and evaluation. We assumed that participants in conflict are motivated to maintain or restore justice through its resolution and so that they not only value the other party's actions but also choose their own actions alternatives in terms of justice or fairness. The researchers distinguished two different justice: distributive justice, which is related to the consequences or the outcome of the conflict resolution, and procedural justice, which is related to fairness of the process of conflict resolution or appropriateness of the way of being treated (e.g., Lind & Tyler, 1988).

The first purpose of the present study is to measure the four goals in conflict participants and to investigate the relations of them with their resolution strategies.

### *Situational Factors of the Goals: Integrative v.s. Distributive Tactics and Politeness*

An individual's reactions to conflicts are assumed to be determined by the relative importance of each goal, and the importance of the goals may depend on both personality and situational factors. With regard to the personality factor, Itoi, Ohbuchi, and Fukuno (1993), which examined cultural differences of the usage of verbal accounts in the harm situations, found that the collectivists or females weighted more the relational goals than the individualists

or males. In a field study of cross-cultural conflicts by Ohbuchi, Sugawara, Tyler, and Lind (1993), the individualists were found to give more value to the justice goals than the collectivists. On the other hand, there is little empirical evidence regarding the situational factors. Therefore, the second purpose of the present study is examine effects of several situational factors upon the importance of goals.

The attainment of resource goals depends on the other's offers. When the other's action is distributive, the individual's resource goals may be threaten, so his or her concern for resource may be heightened. When the other party engages in some integrative tactics, the individual's resource goals may be at least partly assured, so the resource concern may be reduced. Thus, we assumed that importance of the resource goals may change depending on the other's tactics. In the present experiment, the other party engaged in either distributive or integrative tactics in the conflict interactions. Based on the above assumption, we predicted that subjects' resource concerns would be lower when the other party engaged in some integrative tactics than when in a distributive one.

Regarding the identity goals, we assumed that they would be affected by the expressive manner of the other party. Brown and Levinson (1987) argued that people behave politely in order to protect the other person's social face. Even in conflict situations, an individual's face can be saved by the other party's polite manner. The important point is that politeness as a manner of behavior can be changed independently of the content of the other's offer or assertion. In the present experiment, in which we manipulated the levels of politeness, we expected that the subjects' identity goals would be more intensified when the other party behaved impolitely than when the other party behaved politely.

### *An Overview of the Experiment*

In this experiment, the subjects were asked to interact with a female student, who arbitrarily requested them of something including their resource loss. The other party spoke to subjects four times, all of her utterances were programmed in a tape recorder. To each utterance, the subjects were asked to respond. In her speech, the other party engaged in either assertive, compromising, or exchange tactics, the first was distributive and the latter two were integrative. After the conversation, they rated the degrees of attainment of the four goals and also to evaluate the other party's manner. In three different conflict situations, the conversation and measurements were repeated. Thus, the experiment has a design of three levels of the other party's tactics (assertion, compromise, or exchange) and two levels of her speech manner (polite or rough).

## METHOD

*Subjects:* Subjects were 64 undergraduate students (33 males and 31 females). They voluntarily participated in the experiment as a part of course credit.

*Procedures:* When the subject arrived at the experimental room, a male experimenter told the subject that the purpose of the present experiment was to investigate functionality of our

daily communication and, then, he asked the subject to have conversation with another person, imagining himself or herself to be involved in conflicts with the other person. The subject was explained that the utterances of the other party were pre-recorded.

There were three hypothetical conflict situations. In the joint work, the subject negotiated for the time schedule with another student; in the rent situation, the subject was suddenly told of raising the rent by the owner; and in the job situation, the subject was asked by his supervisor to work extra time. At the beginning of each conflict, the subject listened to an audio tape narrating the situation in which he or she and the other party were supposedly located, then a conversation between them began. In every situation, the subject was first listened to the other party's speech, and then allowed to respond to it. The subject was given a total of four opportunities to speak. The other party's utterances were pre-programmed as including an unreasonable request in each situation. In the cases in which the subject complied with the other party's request in the middle of the conversation, the experimenter finished it at that stage. Verbal responses of the subjects were recorded for a content analysis. The order of conflict situations was randomized.

In the interactions, the other party expressed the same request in either a polite or rough manner. In the polite condition, she frequently used polite expressions and showed consideration of the subject, but no high-handed expressions, while, in the rough condition, she spoke in an impolite and inconsiderate manner, and used several arrogant expressions.

The other party also engaged in one of three tactics during her speech: compromise, that is, she spontaneously reduced the levels of her original request in the second half of interaction (the third and fourth utterances); exchange, that is, she offered a reward to the subject in the second half, if the subject accepted her initial request; and assertion, that is, she continued to assert the initial request across all the utterances.

*Dependent measures:* After the conversation in each situation, each subject was asked to respond to the following questions regarding the levels of the goals: "How did you want to avoid your financial or time loss (the resource goals)?", "How did you want not to hurt the other party (the relational goals)?", "How did you want to protect of your own pride (the identity goals)?", and "How unreasonable did you see the other party's request as being (the justice goal)?" Regarding the first three questions, the subjects were asked to rate them on 9 point scales, while on a 13 point scale for the last one. Then, the subject were asked to rate the other party's politeness on a 7-point scale.

The subjects' verbal responses were coded by two raters according to the following system. At first, the responses were coded into thirteen strategies, and then, they were combined into four strategy types. The integrative strategy type included the following strategies: explanation, question, supplication, offering exchange, offering compromise, and offering other solutions. The indirect strategy type was an indirect assertion/rejection or attempt to mitigate the subjects' negative emotions. The assertive strategy type included an explicit assertion, rejection, or doubt against the subjects' offers. The aggressive strategy type was a criticism, intimidating, or expression of anger or annoyance. The two raters judged the degree of the subjects' acceptance of the other party's requests separately in the first and

second half of conversation, using a 3-point scale: entire acceptance (3), partial acceptance (2), or non-acceptance (1). The percentage of agreement in the coding between two independent raters was very high (89.5%), and so the scores of the four strategies for each subject were computed by simply averaging those which were given by the two raters.

## RESULTS

### *Correlations of the Goals and Strategies*

We computed percentages of each of the four response types, and then transformed them by the inverse sine in order to enhance their statistical applicability.

First, we examined the relationships of the goals and the response types with correlational analysis in each conflict situation (Table 1). In the joint work situation, the relational goal correlated positively with the indirect response type and negatively with the assertive one. These results indicate that the more the relational goal was important for the subjects, the more they used the nonconfrontational strategies. The finding that the justice goal showed negative correlation with the integrative response type but positive with the assertive response type suggests that when the subjects perceived the other party's request as less justice, they engaged in the more confrontational strategies, but not in the collaborative ones.

Table 1. Correlation coefficients of goals with response type at three hypothetical conflict situations.

	Response type			
	Integrative	Indirect	Assertive	Aggressive
<b>Resource goal</b>				
Joint work	.14	-.04	.05	-.11
Rent	.21	.13	.30*	.13
Job	-.19	.17	.12	.11
<b>Relational goal</b>				
Joint work	-.08	.53**	-.41**	-.25
Rent	-.11	-.09	-.12	-.25*
Job	-.08	.06	-.10	.10
<b>Identity goal</b>				
Joint work	-.45**	.14	.31*	.24
Rent	-.13	-.06	.15	.16
Job	-.09	.20	-.01	.17
<b>Justice goal</b>				
Joint work	-.26*	-.10	.33**	.18
Rent	.02	-.01	.27*	.30*
Job	-.13	.04	.15	-.01

\* $p < .05$ .

\*\* $p < .01$ .

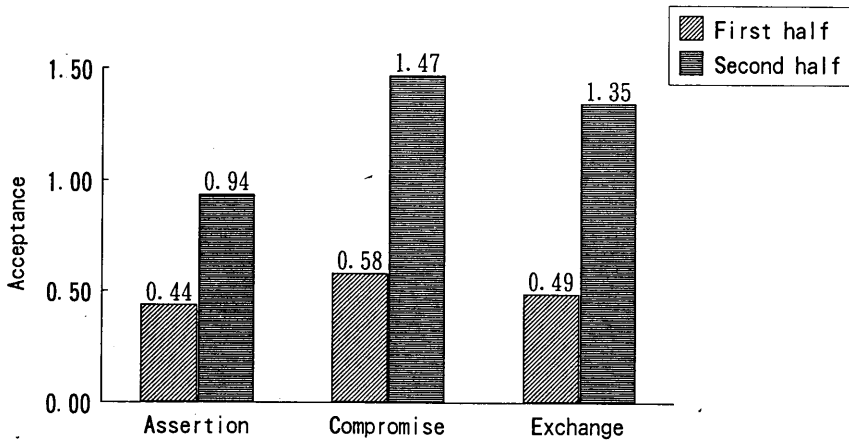


Fig. 1. Effects of other party's tactics and session on subjects' acceptance of other party's request.

Note: The possible range of the acceptance scores was 1 to 3.

In the rent situation, the resource goal significantly correlated with assertive response, meaning that the strong desire for monetary incentive motivated the subjects to engage in the assertive strategies. A negative correlation of the relational goal and the aggressive response type suggests that, when the subjects wished to maintain the relationships with the other party, they tended to reduce attack. In this situation, also, the justice goal was found to positively correlate with the assertive response type, and with the aggressive one. In the job situation, no significant correlation was found.

#### *Effects of the Situational Factors*

In this experiment, two situational factors were manipulated: speech manner and tactics of the other party. For manipulation check of the speech manner, we examined its effects on the subjects' perception of politeness by an ANOVA with two situational factors as independent variables. The scores used in this analysis were the means across three conflict situations. Only the effect of speech manner was highly significant ( $F(1,58) = 44.14, p < .001$ ). As we manipulated, the subjects in the polite manner condition perceived the other party's speech manner as more polite ( $M = 4.99$ ) than those in the rough manner condition ( $M = 3.60$ ).

Regarding the effects of situational factors on the goals, we hypothesized that the other party's tactics would influence the subjects' resource goal, and her speech manner would influence their identity goal. In order to examine these hypotheses, the scores of these goals were analyzed by a two way ANOVA, but neither of the main effects nor interaction effects was significant (all  $F_s < 1$ ). On the relational and justice goals, these situational effects were also not significant.

We measured the subjects' acceptance of the other party's request separately in the first half and in the second half, and introduced the session into an ANOVA as a within-subject

effect. The analysis revealed the significant effects of tactics ( $F(2,58) = 3.12, p < .06$ ), and of session ( $F(1,58) = 153.8, p < .001$ ), and of their interaction ( $F(2,58) = 4.34, p < .05$ ). The interaction effect mean that the effects of tactics on acceptance was significant only in the second half ( $F(2,58) = 6.14, p < .01$ ). Figure 1 shows that the subjects increased acceptance of the other party's request from the first to the second half in every tactics condition, and that two integrative tactics elicited more acceptance than the distributive one only in the second half.

Then, we examined the effects of situational factors on the subjects' verbal responses to conflicts. The transformed % scores of verbal responses were tested by a four way ANOVA (tactics  $\times$  speech manner  $\times$  session  $\times$  response type). The effects of tactics ( $F(2,58) = 3.82, p < .05$ ), session ( $F(1,58) = 83.87, p < .001$ ), and response type ( $F(3,174) = 82.37, p < .001$ ), tactics  $\times$  session ( $F(2,58) = 5.36, p < .01$ ), and session  $\times$  response type ( $F(3,174) = 4.90, p < .01$ ) were significant. However, neither of the expected effects, that is, speech manner  $\times$  response type ( $F(1,58) < 1, ns$ ) nor tactic  $\times$  response type ( $F(6,174) = 1.61, ns$ ) was significant. These results indicates the differences of the other party's speech manner and tactics had little effect on the subjects' verbal strategies, at least, in the present experimental conflict situations.

#### DISCUSSION

The goals were found to be closely related with the subjects' verbal responses to the conflict situations. It suggests that the resolution strategies of conflict were determined depending on what kinds of goals were highly aroused. The facts that the relationship was found only in some conflict situations, not in every situation, and that the experimental factors did not affect the goals means that it was even influenced by some other situational factors which we had never focused in the present experiment. To investigate those factors may be an important task in our next studies. However, we conditionally obtained some findings of response-mediating functions of the goals in conflict management, providing an empirical basis for the multiple goals theory of conflict.

Our expectation on the acceptance of the other party's request was supported. When the other party offered a compromise or an exchange at the second half, the subjects were more acceptable than when she continued to assert. We assumed that the levels of acceptance would be determined by the resource goal. However, any clear evidence for the assumption was not obtained, since the other party's tactics did not significantly give any impact on the resource goal as well as on any other goals. We should elaborate the measures of the goals in the future research.

In the present experiment, neither of the experimental factors influenced the subjects' verbal responses. Ohbuchi et al.(1993), which manipulated the other party's manner and time pressure found strong effects of the other party's manner on the subjects' verbal responses. A difference in the experimental procedures between Ohbuchi et al.(1993) and the present study was reality of the other party. In Ohbuchi et al.(1993), a female student



actually interacted with each subjects, while, in the present experiment, the subjects only heard the recorded statements as the other party. Lack in reality of the other party in the present experiment might have weakened the effects of experimental factors.

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