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Need, an Adequate Reason?

New Insights into Communication Competence in Interpersonal Conflicts.

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Abstract

Psychological research has thus far neglected the role of psychological needs in interpersonal conflicts. The present study was designed to analyze the effect of psychological need-verbalizations on the perception and evaluation of an interpersonal conflict situation.

Participants were 119 individuals who completed an online survey. The experiment consisted of three hypothetical interpersonal conflict scenarios, which varied in their final messages, addressing a displayed behavior. The messages that the participants responded to contained either psychological needs, other reasons or no reason for the behavior. Perceptions of the messages' appropriateness, the message-induced similarity to the partner, and the message-related positive face supportiveness, as well as empathic understanding, and the expectation of conflict development (ECD) were assessed. Results indicated theoretically consistent differences between messages' effectiveness. Overall, findings suggest that a psychological need-verbalization is a manner of competent communication and a highly effective conflict management tool in an interpersonal conflict situation. Resulting implications for theory and practitioners, limitations to the study, and implications for future research are discussed.

Keywords: Psychological need, interpersonal conflict, message-effect,
communication competence

“When we understand the needs that motivate our own and others behavior, we have no enemies.” (Marshall B. Rosenberg)

Need, an Adequate Reason?

New Insights into Communication Competence in Interpersonal Conflicts.

It has been said that “all men are equal.” However, one can’t ignore the fact that everyone differs from each other. There are seven billion people with seven billion individual backgrounds, individual life stories and individual personalities on this planet. As human beings are social individuals, they automatically live in a world of constantly clashing differences. People pursue their goals individually; they deem different ideas as “right” or “wrong”. People’s individualities imply a great diversity of interpretations and opinions. Considering that this world is full of almost unlimited diversity, it is hardly surprising that interpersonal conflict is ubiquitous and a part of everyone’s daily experience.

Imagine any of your personal conflict situations, for instance, with your partner. According to Hartwick and Barki (2004), the presence of three components turns a daily interaction into an interpersonal conflict: You and your partner (1) disagree on something (e.g., Where to go on vacation?). Both of you (2) perceive differences with attaining your goals (e.g., kayak in Sweden vs. lie on the beach in Italy). Furthermore, it is very likely that both of you (3) were experiencing negative emotions in that particular situation (e.g., frustration or anger).

Research provides evidence that managing interpersonal conflicts incompetently entails negative consequences for partners’ relationship quality (Cupach, Canary, & Spitzberg, 2010; Sullivan, Pasch, Johnson, & Bradbury, 2010). Moreover, it is a predictor of negative outcomes for themselves (Cupach et al., 2010; Sullivan et al., 2010) as well as for their children (Amato & Booth, 2001; Booth & Amato 2001). On the other hand, managing interpersonal conflict competently affects relational satisfaction and stability (Carrère, Buehlman, Gottman, Coan, & Ruckstuhl, 2000; Cupach et al., 2010; Huston, Caughlin, Houts, Smith, & George, 2001). Thus, the need to be able to manage interpersonal conflicts

competently is apparent. Luckily, we possess a tool for bridging differences and actively managing interpersonal conflicts: communication (Cupach et al., 2010).

Research on communication and interpersonal conflicts has thus far neglected the role of psychological needs. Thus, the present study attempts to make up this omission.

The objective of the present research is to develop and test a model for the study of psychological need-verbalizations in interpersonal conflict situations. Beginning with Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory (SDT) concept of psychological needs, this research incorporates evidence concerning the role of communication competence in interpersonal interaction. The main purpose is analysing the effectiveness of a psychological need-verbalization compared to other messages. Thus, the model incorporates four psychological processes thought to mediate a message's impact on the conflicting partner's expectation of conflict development (ECD): perceived appropriateness, perceived similarity to the partner, empathic understanding, and perceived positive face support.

Psychological Needs

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) proposes that a full understanding of behavior cannot be achieved without the consideration of psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2008b, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Following SDT, psychological needs are innate and are essential nutriments for healthy development and psychological well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Deci and Ryan (2000) assert that the psychological need for competence, relatedness and autonomy is universal. The need-strength may differ between individuals. Nevertheless every individual must satisfy those needs in order to develop and maintain growth, integrity and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2008a, 2011; Milyavskaya & Koestner, 2011). The psychological need for competence refers to the desire to feel effective in the attainment of valued outcomes. The psychological need for autonomy refers to the experience of freedom, whereas the psychological need for relatedness refers to the experience of feeling connected to others (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

According to SDT one's motives stem from psychological needs. Nevertheless, they may vary in their effectiveness in leading to need-fulfillment (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Therefore, global psychological need satisfaction influences behavior on the situational level (Deci & Ryan, 2011; Hagger, Chatzisarantis, & Harris, 2006; Sheldon & Gunz, 2009). Hence, someone's behavior in a conflict situation – even an unfavorable behavior – may be based on the attempt to fulfill a psychological need. Moreover, negative emotions are a typical response to need-thwarting (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In associating these findings with Hartwick and Baki's (2004) definition of interpersonal conflicts, an interpersonal conflict situation may be characterized by the absence of environmental conditions that allow satisfaction of the conflicting parties' psychological needs. These considerations highlight the important role psychological needs may play in an interpersonal conflict situation. Moreover, they support the assumption that a psychological need-verbalization may influence an interpersonal conflict situation significantly.

Competent Conflict Communication

People often erroneously think that they know how others view them (Kenny & DePaulo, 1993), and mistakenly assume that their goals are discernible from their behaviors (Claude & Vorauer, 1998). Nevertheless, ambiguity regarding motives behind one's behavior leads to miscommunication (Horowitz et al., 2006) and regularly accounts for interpersonal conflicts (Claude & Vorauer, 1998; Krauss & Morsella, 2000). Thus, people require information about each other's goals, motives and intentions in order to understand the behavior of others (Rickheit, Strohner, & Vorweg, 2008; Thomas & Pondy, 1977). One possibility to facilitate understanding in an interpersonal conflict situation is to explain the displayed behaviour (Thomas & Pondy, 1977). For example, the message "I am/did ..., because I..." contains a reason for someone's behavior in need of an explanation.

Canary, Cupach and Serpe (2001) argue that the conflicting parties evaluate a conflict situation, including the messages, using criteria of competence. These evaluations, in turn,

affect their relational development. According to communication competence theory, competent communication needs to fulfill two criteria: (1) it ought to be appropriate (i.e., complying with social and relational norms and expectations), and (2) it ought to be effective (i.e., helping to achieve one's goals) (Rickheit et al., 2008).

Research on message-effectiveness is subject of persuasion research. However, several findings demonstrate that messages can affect people's beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions (Perloff, 2008). This prompts the question of how to select the explanation that has the strongest positive impact on an interpersonal conflict situation.

Choosing the most effective explanation. Cupach et al. (2010) claim that communication in an interpersonal conflict situation can be seen as effective, if it helps the communicator to accomplish preferred outcomes. However, the effectiveness of an explanation seems to depend on its perceived appropriateness (Bies & Shapiro, 1987; Shapiro, Buttner, & Barry, 1994). An explanation is perceived as appropriate, when it clarifies legitimate reasons underlying the action in question (Bies & Shapiro, 1987; Shapiro, 1991; Sitkin & Bies, 1993). This goes in line with Keil's (2006) claim that causal explanations (i.e., explanations highlighting reasons) help people to understand actions or events. Thus, reasons like "I am/did..., because I..." may be effective by elucidating a causal mechanism responsible for a certain effect (e.g., for a behavior). Moreover, Keil (2006) postulated that "people prefer explanations in which the most emphasized features and properties either are early in a causal chain or are the most causally interdependent in a chain" (p. 11). Slusher and Anderson (1996) demonstrated that causal arguments are viable for changing people's attitudes and beliefs. The first experiment, for example, was divided into four different conditions. The causal condition provided material which explained to the participants why AIDS is not spread by casual contact. The non-causal condition called statistical data to show that AIDS is not spread by casual contact. The third condition combined both, causal arguments and statistical arguments. A control condition contained

unrelated tasks. The researchers' analysis revealed that a causal component of an explanation makes the explanation effective. This finding was replicated in a second experiment. Thus, Slusher and Anderson (1996) suggest that causal arguments are strong arguments. According to these findings, explanations ought to be effective when they are of informative-value regarding the causal mechanism responsible for what was being explained.

Lombrozo and Carey (2006) considered both, the role of acceptance of explanations and the role of causality in explanations. However, Lombrozo and Carey's (2006) focus was on the function of teleological explanations (i.e, X is the case by supplying Y/ a goal). Nevertheless, a number of experiments demonstrated the variation in the acceptance of different explanations for the same event. The first experiment was conducted to examine whether teleological explanations were interpreted causally. Undergraduate students were required to rate several explanations for why-questions regarding short causal stories. The causal stories varied regarding the object's domains, biological part (e.g., cats), non-biological natural kind (e.g., caves), and artifacts (e.g., satellites). Each object was central to three short causal stories, varying in their causal history. To give an example: In the first story Sally (who is a genetic engineer) enlarges her cats' ears in order to improve the cats' hearing. In the second story Sally enlarges her cats' ears without knowing of thereby advantages. In the third story Sally accidentally enlarges her cats' ears. Students read the prompt "Why do Sally's cats have large ears?" followed by a teleological ("Because cats with larger ears catch mice more effectively."), an intention-based ("Because that's the way Sally wanted them."), and a mechanistic explanation ("Because Sally [accidentally] genetically modified them to be that size."). Findings indicated that the participants' acceptance of the explanations depended on properties of the causal history. Based on additional findings from further experiments, Lombrozo and Carey (2006) suggest a framework for explanations: "[T]he function of explanation is to provide the kind of information likely to subserve future intervention and

prediction—that is, to be exportable to novel cases” (Lombrozo & Carey, 2006, p. 195).

According to this proposal, an explanation’s effectiveness depends on its predictive utility.

The Research Model

Measuring message-effects on an outcome is the subject of persuasion research (O’Keefe, 2003; Perloff, 2008). Thus, the research model underlying the present study (outlined in Figure 1) is oriented towards O’Keefe’s (2003) research claims. Therefore, this study investigates the impact of a message variation on a preferred outcome.

Outcome. In the present study the focus will be set on the ideal goal of conflict management: Conflict resolution. Thus, the provided explanation should ideally help to solve the conflict. An explanation-induced optimistic expectation of conflict development (ECD), as a conflict-related preferred outcome, serves as a predictor for future conflict resolution.

Message-variation. On the basis of evidence from the literature on explanations’ effectiveness, four behavior-related messages are expected to decrease gradually regarding their hypothesized effectiveness: It is proposed here that a psychological need-verbalization has a great informative value regarding a displayed behavior. Therefore, it is assumed to have the strongest positive effect on ECD. A typical example for a psychological need-verbalization indicating the need for relatedness would be: “I am frustrated because I desire more closeness with you.” For validating the effectiveness of a psychological need-verbalization it is compared to a second message-type: This message-type covers an explanation that highlights a situational reason such as “I am frustrated because I don’t like that we don’t spend time with each other”. Furthermore, a situational fixed reason such as “I am frustrated because nothing will change.” is expected to be of less informative value and thereby have less of a positive effect on ECD compared to situational reasons. Moreover, the impact of a statement (e.g., “Let me nag.”) has no informative value at all. Thus, the response to the statement will be assessed as a control condition.

However, O' Keefe (2003) claims the assessment of psychological states mediating the message's effect on the outcome.

Mediating states. As indicated above the message's appropriateness is associated to the message's effectiveness (Bies & Shapiro, 1987; Shapiro et al., 1994; see also Canary & Lakey, 2006). The assessment of appropriateness is common in studies examining interpersonal conflict management (Gross & Guerrero, 2000; Suppiah & Rose, 2006), interpersonal communication competence (Hullman, 2004; Lakey & Canary, 2002; Westmyer, DiCioccio, & Rubin, 1998), and explanations' effects (Shapiro, 1991; Shapiro et al., 1994). Thus, in the present study *perceived appropriateness of the message* is assessed as a mediating state.

According to Deci and Ryan (2000), the psychological needs of relatedness, competence, and autonomy are universal. This suggests the assumption that people may perceive similarity regarding to psychological needs. There are several findings indicating that perceived similarity positively affects a person's perception and evaluation: For example, Sitkin and Bies (1993) claim that explanations which place emphasis on value-similarities have a positive effect on a person's interpretation of events. Furthermore, those explanations can lead to increased cooperation. Jehn, Chadwick and Thatcher (1997) showed that value similarity of group members regarding group processes decreased perceived conflict. Moreover, similarity increases liking, thus it increases compliance and decreases reactance (Silvia, 2005). Seyfried (1973) showed that need-similarity positively affects a person's perception in regard to interpersonal attraction. Thus, in the present study message-related *perceived similarity to the partner* is assessed as a mediating state.

Two other closely related constructs are said to affect conflict-management situational: empathy and perspective taking. Empathy is generally defined as the ability or state to understand and share another's emotional state (Davis, 1994; Segal, 2011; Waite, 2011). By leading to a better understanding of another's position empathy is thought to

promote good communication (Davis, 1994), to mitigate psychological reactance (Shen, 2010a), and to facilitate constructive acts (de Wied, Branje, & Meeus, 2007). Taking perspective means to see another's point of view and understand how a situation appears to the other person. It is the ability to understand how another person reacts emotionally and cognitively to a specific situation (Johnson, 1975). Perspective taking is associated with fostering cooperation (Johnson, 1975), and solving conflicts (Deutsch, 1993; Stein & Albro, 2001). Exline. Baumeister, Zell, Kraft, and Witvliet (2008) termed the cognitive, perspective taking aspect of empathy empathic understanding. In line with Shen's (2010b) argumentation regarding state empathy, it is argued that empathic understanding is a process which is associated to the recipient's comprehension and processing after having received a message. This indicates that empathic understanding as an important mediating state.

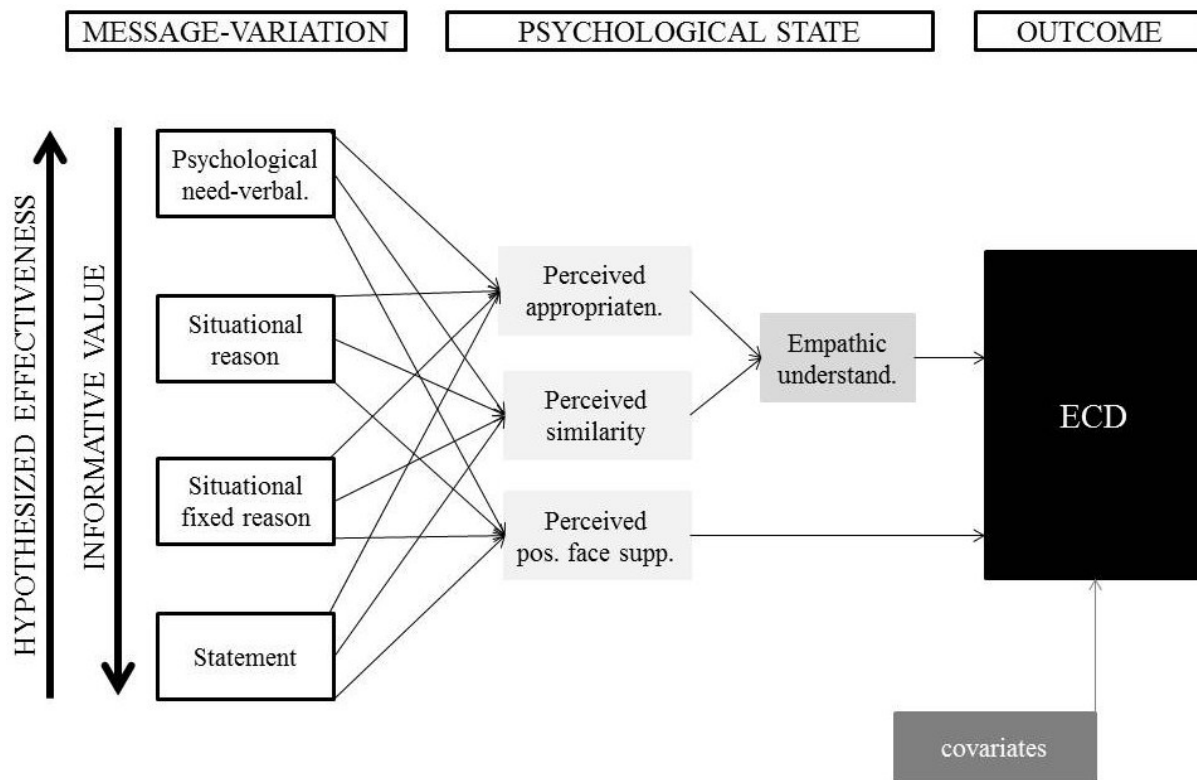


Figure 1. Research model, analyzing the effect of message-variation on ECD. Message-variation consists of four different messages, varying regarding their hypothesized effect on ECD. Messages are: psychological need-verbalizations; situational reasons; situational fixed reasons; statements. The hypothesized psychological states mediating the messages' effect on ECD are: perceived appropriateness, perceived similarity and perceived positive face support in a first step, and empathic understanding in a second step of mediational analysis. Pattern of mediation is controlled for potential covariates (i.e., dispositional agreeableness, dispositional mindfulness, dispositional empathy, and socio-demographics).

It is assumed that high perceived appropriateness is positively associated with high empathic understanding. Moreover, based on findings by Silvia (2005) and Williams, Parker, and Turner (2007) it is expected that perceived similarity is strongly related to empathic understanding. Therefore, it is hypothesized that *perceived appropriateness* and *perceived similarity* mediate the message's effect on ECD via *empathic understanding*.

Findings from research on communication competence (Johnson, 2007), fairness (Carson & Cupach, 2000), and negotiation (White, Tynan, Galinsky, & Thompson, 2004) indicate that another mediating state could affect an outcome: perceived face threat. Face is central to politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Brown and Levinson (1987) distinguished between two types of face, negative and positive: Negative face refers to the need for autonomy: People want their actions be unimpeded by others. Positive face refers to people's need for things valued by themselves to also be valued by others. This involves the approval and acceptance of one's attributes, personality, or feelings among others. There are several reasons for including the assessment of perceived positive face threat in this paper: First, positive face is threatened for example by expression of disapproval, criticism, complaints, accusations, insults and disagreements (Brown & Levinson, 1987), all typical components of an interpersonal conflict. Second, findings on message-induced face threat indicate its importance for conflict management: Messages inducing a low perception of positive face threat, increase the perception of interactional fairness and diminish anger (Carson & Cupach, 2000; Cupach & Carson, 2002). However, face-threatening messages are associated with defensive reactions by the recipients (Cupach & Carson, 2002). Third, research has indicated that maintaining or supporting face, is an important component of communication competence (Carson & Cupach, 2000; Cupach et al., 2010; Johnson, 2007). Thus, messages that support a recipient's positive face are worth striving for in interpersonal conflict. In the present study message-induced *perceived positive face support* is assessed as a mediating state.

Covariates. Numerous factors can affect interpersonal conflict situations (Wall, 1995; Cupach & Canary, & Spitzberg 2010). Research on individual factors revealed that several traits can influence a person's conflict-management. This suggests the assumption that some traits may also affect a person's ECD.

One of those traits may be dispositional empathy. Empathy-related processes produce empathic behavior (Davis, 1994; Duan & Hill, 1996; Hoffmann, 2008). Empathy is positively linked with problem solving, skillful conflict management (Davis, 1994; de Wied et al., 2007), and forgiveness (Exline et al., 2008; Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010).

A trait which potentially affects conflict-behavior is agreeableness (Bono, Boles, Judge, & Lauver, 2002; Jensen-Campbell & Graziano, 2001). Agreeableness is associated with motives to maintain harmonious social relationships (Jensen-Campbell & Graziano, 2001). A highly agreeable person tends to be compliant and typically retreats in conflict situations (Ostendorf & Angleitner, 2004).

Another individual factor which potentially affects conflict-management is mindfulness (Burgoon, Berger, & Waldron, 2000; Canary & Lakey, 2006; Horton-Deutsch & Horton, 2003). Mindfulness is generally defined as the self-regulated attention to and the awareness of the immediate experience (Bishop et al., 2006). A mindful person has a broad perspective on experience (Bishop et al., 2006). Thus, mindful people are more capable of developing a good understanding of a conflict situation. Moreover, they are even more likely to be sensitive to another person's goals and needs (Canary & Lakey, 2006).

Hypotheses

It has been demonstrated that explaining ones' behavior has a conflict-mitigating effect in an interpersonal conflict situation (see for example Sitkin & Bies, 1993). By elucidating causal mechanisms, reasons are informative in regard to explain a behavior (Keil, 2006; Slusher & Anderson, 1996). Thus, it is expected that not giving a reason for a behavior

which is in need of an explanation is counterproductive in interpersonal conflicts. The following hypothesis is of interest for the study:

Hypothesis 1: Giving a reason for a displayed behavior in an interpersonal conflict situation (psychological need-verbalization, situational reason, situational fixed reason) has a stronger positive effect on recipient's ECD than not giving a reason (statement).

Research has shown that reasons are effective explanations. Apparently causality plays an important role regarding the effectiveness of an explanation (Keil, 2006; Slusher & Anderson, 1996). Lombrozo and Carey (2006) demonstrated that the effectiveness of an explanation depends on its context-related predictive utility. Situational fixed reasons are expected to be of less informative value regarding the displayed behavior than psychological need-verbalizations or situational reasons. Therefore, situational fixed reasons are expected to be less suitable for predictions regarding future behavior. Thus, the second hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 2: Psychological need-verbalizations and situational reasons have a stronger positive effect on the recipient's ECD than situational fixed reasons.

A situational reason explains the displayed behavior in relation to the specific conflict situation. However, a psychological need-verbalization explains the situational behavior with a fundamental, non-situational cause. It elucidates the causal mechanism between the displayed behavior and a general psychological need. Moreover, it connects a specific behavior with the very beginning of its chain of causality (see Deci & Ryan, 2000; Keil, 2006). Therefore, a psychological need-verbalization is expected to be of greater informative value regarding the behavior compared to situational reasons. Thus, it is expected that a psychological need-verbalization has a greater predictive utility than a situational reason. The main hypothesis of this study is as follows:

Hypothesis 3: A psychological need verbalization has a stronger positive effect on the recipient's ECD, than a situational reason.

According to O'Keefe (2003) the consideration of mediating states is crucial in message-effects research. Four different situational mediators are hypothesized explaining the message's effect on ECD. It is argued that despite the unfavorable character of the displayed behavior, people will perceive explanations as appropriate and face supportive relative to its informative-value. Moreover, recipients will perceive (relative to the explanation's informative value) the partner as more similar to themselves, and will therefore find it is easier to understand the other. Mediational analysis is conducted in two steps. Thus, regarding the first step of the analysis it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 4a: The perceived appropriateness of the message, the message-induced perceived similarity to the partner, and the message-induced perceived positive face support mediate the messages' effects on ECD.

Concerning the second step of the analysis, theoretical considerations on appropriateness as well as on perceived similarity (see for example Silvia, 2005; Williams et al., 2007) led to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4b: The perceived appropriateness of the message, and the message-induced perceived similarity to the partner mediate the messages' effects on ECD via the message induced empathic understanding.

By drawing on findings from SDT-(see for example Deci & Ryan, 2000), as well as from research on value-similarity (see for example Jehn et al., 1997) and need-similarity (Seyfried, 1973), it is argued that the perceived similarity plays a special role regarding psychological need-verbalizations. This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4c: A psychological need-verbalization has a stronger positive impact on perceived similarity than the other messages (Situational reason, Situational fixed reason, Statement).

Method

Sample

Data were collected via an online survey. Participants had open access to the link for 3 weeks (May, 2012). The survey took approximately 40 minutes on average. Participants' anonymity was preserved. In total, 119 participants (60 male, 59 female) completed the survey yielding a 28.24 % response rate. Participants were between 18 and 85 years of age ($M = 42.38$; $SD = 17.52$). All participants were German-speaking (91 Germans, 21 Austrians, 7 other nationalities). The sample's educational level was above average: 51.3 % of all participants had a university degree; 11.8% an university of applied science degree; and 22.7% a high school diploma. Only 14.2% of the participants had less than a high school degree. Participants were also asked about their relationship status: 46 % were married, 2% engaged, about 22% were in a relationship, and 30% in no relationship when completing the survey.

Material

Regarding the experiment, three different scenarios of interpersonal conflict situations were developed (see Appendix A). In each scenario an unfavorable behavior displayed by the participant's hypothetical partner is described. Regarding each scenario four different messages were developed. The message-variation consists of four alternative messages, sent by the hypothetical partner (see Appendix, B). Three of the messages are explanations for the behavior and one message is a statement regarding the behavior: (a) A psychological need-verbalization, (b) a situational reason, (c) a situational fixed reason, (d) a statement. The psychological need-verbalizations were generated in regard with the three universal psychological needs relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Each psychological need is central for one scenario.

One scenario turns on a hypothetical argument between the participants and his/her partner regarding joint activities:

Lately both you and your partner have been extremely busy. For weeks you have been able to find very little time to spend with each other. You are currently experiencing a very demanding period at work, which requires a great deal of your energy. For the past few days your partner has been grumbling about how much you have to do, and has been complaining about how boring things are between you at the moment. Every evening your partner makes a new suggestion to do something together. At the moment you are simply too exhausted and you need rest in order to recover from your strenuous days. You would prefer to simply spend your evening in front of the TV. It annoys you tremendously that you have to justify yourself night after night as to why you don't want to go out. Now annoyed, you say for the umpteenth time that you need peace and quiet, and want to stay at home. Your partner- now also irritated- says that he/she is frustrated with the relationship right now, and that your lethargy gets on his/her nerves. It cannot continue that he/she continuously suggests an activity and you 'just don't feel like it'. You just boil over and you angrily ask your partner what is bringing about his/her behavior.

The psychological need which is central to this scenario was "relatedness". Scenario-related messages are as follows: (a) "I am frustrated because I desire more closeness with you."; (b) "I am frustrated because I don't like that we don't spend time with each other."; (c) "I am frustrated because nothing will change."; (d) "Let me nag.".

In another scenario the participant reads a description of a situation in which he/she feels neglected by his/her partner due to the partner's extensive of working hours:

Your partner had a slow streak in his/her job for a long time. However, a few months ago he/she became very busy with a project that he/she is completely engaged in and is very enthusiastic about. Of course you are very happy for your partner. Even so, it has bothered you for the past few weeks that you and your partner spend such a little amount of time with each other. For the past few days you and your partner have started to bicker. Your partner constantly has to work. If he/she is at home, everything revolves around work. He/she is constantly out. You do know that your partner is busy doing things that are important to him/her, but that doesn't mean that he/she should have so little time for you for such an extended period of time. You would like to spend some more time with your partner. You would like to get some more attention from your partner. Your partner is always talking about how important the project is that he/she is working on right now, and that this is the way things have to be right now. The arguments have escalated in the past few days. Your partner's behavior seems purely stubborn to you. You tell your partner that he/she is being thickheaded, and that he/she isn't taking the relationship serious enough. Your partner angrily speaks to the contrary, saying that you shouldn't exaggerate so much and you should really show some understanding. Show some understanding? In your opinion you have been very understanding for months already! You just boil over and you angrily ask your partner what is bringing about his/her behavior.

The psychological need which is central to this scenario is "competence". The scenario-related messages are as follows: (a) "I am so busy because it is important to me to experience

myself as effective and competent.”; (b) “I am so busy because I find work so interesting.”; (c) “I am so busy because I have to be.”; (d) “It is good that I work this much.”.

In the third scenario a conflict situation regarding a vacation planning is described:

For a long time now you and your partner have tossed the idea around of going on a vacation with another couple you are friends with. One evening you are invited to dinner at the couple’s place, but your partner didn’t have the time to come along. When you’re back at home you tell your partner about the evening you had with the friends. You mention, among other things, that you all decided on going to a beach in Italy for vacation. The three of you looked at some flights, and some were quite cheap. Your partner’s face suddenly grows dark. He/she says that he/she would prefer to go to Scandinavia. You find your partner’s tone snotty, and say that Scandinavia will be too cold and you had thought that he/she would have preferred the beach. Your partner is getting annoyed and says that he/she has no desire to be on the beach and that it is an absolutely stupid idea. Your spat grows and it provokes an argument between the two of you. You just boil over and you angrily ask your partner what is bringing about his/her behavior.

The psychological need which is central to this scenario is “autonomy”. The scenario-related messages are as follows: (a) “I am upset because it is important to me that I am involved in decisions that concern me.”; (b) “I am upset because you decided behind my back.”; (c) “I am upset because I don’t want to lie around on the beach.”; (d) “I think I have every reason to be upset.”.

In each scenario, all three components of an interpersonal conflict situation (see Hardwick et al., 2004) were implemented (i.e, disagreement, differences with the attainment of the conflicting parties’ goals, negative emotions). This was confirmed by a pre-test conducted with randomly selected people (5 male, 5 female) at the campus of the University of Vienna (see Appendix C). The assignment of the 12 messages (4 messages per scenario) to their categories “need-verbalization”, “situational reason”, “situational fixed reason”, and “statement”, was also confirmed by a pre-test conducted with another 10 people (5 male, 5 female) who were randomly approached on the campus of the University of Vienna (see also Appendix D).

Procedure

Prior to starting the survey, the participants were informed that the following online survey would relate to communication in interpersonal conflict. Thereafter they had to complete three questionnaires (i.e., dispositional empathy, dispositional agreeableness, and dispositional mindfulness). Participants were then asked about their socio-demographics. Subsequently, they completed the experiment. The introduction given prior to the experiment was as follows:

Hereafter you will be presented with three various conflict scenarios. Each of these scenarios describes a situation in which you and your partner find yourselves in a conflict. Please read the scenarios carefully and thoroughly. Try to imagine you and your partner to be in the specific conflict situation. You will be presented each of these three situations four times. The difference of each scenario lies particularly in each individual closing argument.

When responding to the message, I ask that you answer the questions spontaneously and without contemplating by marking the corresponding box. Please be sure to always answer according to your “gut feeling”, and try to refrain from over-thinking your answers. Be assured that there is no “right” or “wrong answer, nor “good” or “bad” response.”

Each scenario ended with the same sentence addressing the participant: “You just boil over and you angrily ask your partner what is bringing about his/her behavior.” However, the scenarios differed with regard to the messages, which followed the prompt “Your partner’s argument is...”. Thus, every participant responded to 12 messages (i.e., 3 scenarios and 4 message-variations per scenario), which were randomly presented.

After reading the scenario as well as one of the four scenario-related messages, participants’ responses were measured on several analogue-scales (0 -100). Scales surveyed (a) perceived appropriateness of the message; (b) perceived message-induced similarity to the partner; (c) perceived message-induced positive face support; (d) message-induced empathic understanding; and finally (e) message-induced ECD. This structure remained the same throughout the experiment.

The reason for using three different conflict scenarios was to see whether the results would replicate message’s effects on ECD across all three scenarios.

Measures

Measures are listed below in the order in which they appeared in the survey. All measures were scored by averaging across items.

Dispositional variables.

Dispositional empathy. Participants' dispositional empathy was assessed using the E-scale (Leibetseder, Laireiter, Riepler, & Köller, 2001), consisting of 25 items. Example items included "I tend to put myself into my friends' shoes, when they have problems." and "Sometimes I try to understand my friends better, by picturing things from their point of view". Items were assessed using a 5-point Likert response format (*applies to doesn't apply*). The reliability (Cronbach's α) estimates in this study was .86.

Dispositional agreeableness. To assess dispositional agreeableness, participants completed the German agreeableness scale of the revised NEO-Personality-Inventory, the NEO-PI-R (Ostendorf & Angleitner, 2004). Participants used a scale from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* to rate the extent to which they agree with items such as "I would rather collaborate with than compete with others" or "I believe that most people have good intentions". The reliability estimate (Cronbach's α) of the scale was .87.

Dispositional mindfulness. To assess participants' experience of mindfulness during the past 2 to 3 weeks before filling out the questionnaire, participants completed the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (FMI) (Walach, Buchheld, Büttenmüller, Kleinknecht, & Schmidt, 2006). The short version of the FMI, consisting of 14 items, was used in this paper. Regarding items such as "I pay attention to what's behind my actions" or "In difficult situations, I can pause without immediately reacting", participants stated the frequency (*rarely, occasionally, fairly often, or almost always*) of the particular experience. The reliability estimate (Cronbach's α) of the FMI was .83.

Socio-demographics. Following the three questionnaires, participants completed the demographic questionnaire concerning gender, age, education, nationality, and relationship status.

Situational variables. Participants completed an experiment that contained 3 scenarios depicting 3 interpersonal conflict situations. Scenarios varied regarding four messages per scenario. The messages were related to the scenarios and were “sent” by the participant’s hypothetical partner, explaining an unfavorable behavior. For each message, participants indicated their responses on sliders. To allow a transition-free sliding, all scales ranged from 0 to 100. Scales were invisible for the participants.

Perceived appropriateness. Using a 3-item semantic differential scale, participants stated how they perceived the message’s appropriateness. The three items *appropriate* – *inappropriate*, *proper* (to explain herself/himself) – *improper* (to explain herself/himself), and *suitable* – *unsuitable* were obtained by a study from Westmyer et al. (1998). The scale’s reliability estimates (Cronbach’s α) ranged from .90 to .96.

Perceived similarity. In addition to the perceived appropriateness of the message, participants completed items concerning the message-induced perceived similarity to the partner. Participants read the prompt, “My partner’s message contains aspects, which. . .” followed by two scales ranging from: (1) *show to me that my partner and I have no similarities* to *show to me that my partner and I have great similarities*, and (2) *don’t highlight common ground between my partner and I* to *highlight great common ground between my partner and I*. The scales reliability estimates (Cronbach’s α) ranged from .93 to .99.

Perceived positive face support. The assessment of perceived message-induced positive face support was inspired by a study by Cupach and Carson (2002). In the present study those items were acquired that conceptually fit the best to potential message-induced positive face support in an interpersonal conflict situation. The present study differed from

the study by Cupach and Carson (2002), in that the items were transferred to a semantic differential scale. Participants read the prompt, “I perceive my partner’s message as...” followed by 4 items: *impolite – polite*; *insensitive – sensitive*; *disrespectful – respectful*; *peaceable – hostile*. The scales reliability estimates (Cronbach’s α) ranged from .91 to .95.

Empathic understanding. In the present study empathic understanding serves as an indicator for understanding why the partner displayed a behavior, which is perceived as unfavorable by oneself. Analogous to Exline et al. (2008), empathic understanding was assessed using 4-items. Participants read the prompt, “You have ‘heard’ your partner’s message. Please indicate to which degree you now. . .” followed by the items: “understand why your partner acted as s/he did”; “see the situation from your partner’s perspective”; “see his/her behavior as making sense”; and “think of valid reasons why s/he acted as s/he did”. Responses were rated from *not at all* (0) to *totally* (100) on a slider. In the present paper, reliability estimates (Cronbach’s α) ranged from .96 to .98.

Outcome.

Expectation of conflict development (ECD). The interesting outcome in the present study is the participant’s message-induced ECD. The dependent variable ECD serves as a predictor for future conflict resolution. In want of variable-related items in interpersonal conflict research, items were specially designed for the present survey. Participants were prompted with “By my partner’s message, I think...”, followed by the items: „that the conflict is going to exacerbate“; „that my partner and I will come to an amicable solution“; and “that the harmony between me and my partner will easily be established”. Responses were rated from *certainly not* to *certainly* on a sliding pot. Reliability estimates (Cronbach’s α) of ECD-scale ranged from .80 to .92.

Results

Means and Confidence Intervals

Table 1 reports means and confidence intervals of the dependent variable, the situation-related response variables, and the dispositional variables' scales. Means and confidence intervals were computed across all messages and all scenarios.

Table 1
Means and Confidence Intervals.

Descriptive statistic	Outcome		Situational variables		Dispositional variables	
	M	CI	M	CI	M	CI
Expectation of conflict development	60.95	[56.22, 65.02]				
Perceived appropriateness			56.12	[50.39, 61.82]		
Perceived similarity			51.86	[46.59, 57.13]		
Perceived positive face support			51.64	[47.00, 56.27]		
Empathic understanding			59.31	[53.81, 64.81]		
Empathy					3.53	[3.43, 3.63]
Agreeableness					3.49	[3.43, 3.55]
Mindfulness					2.59	[2.50, 2.67]

Note. Table indicates means and confidence intervals computed across all messages and all scenarios.

Testing the Hypotheses

Testing messages' effectiveness. For each message-variation, an average message-effect score was calculated across all scenarios. The mean of "need-verbalization"-score was 72.04, for "situational reason" 69.18, for "situational fixed reason" 54.24, and for "statement" 48.35 (depicted in Figure 2). To provide an explicit test of the hypotheses, balanced panel analyses were conducted, using R.

Results of balanced panel analyses are outlined in Table 2. Since the message-type "statement" served as a control condition, reverse Helmert contrasts were used in order to test the hypotheses. Model 1 in Table 2 confirms the hypothesized effectiveness of messages. All differences between message-categories are significant, $p < .05$.

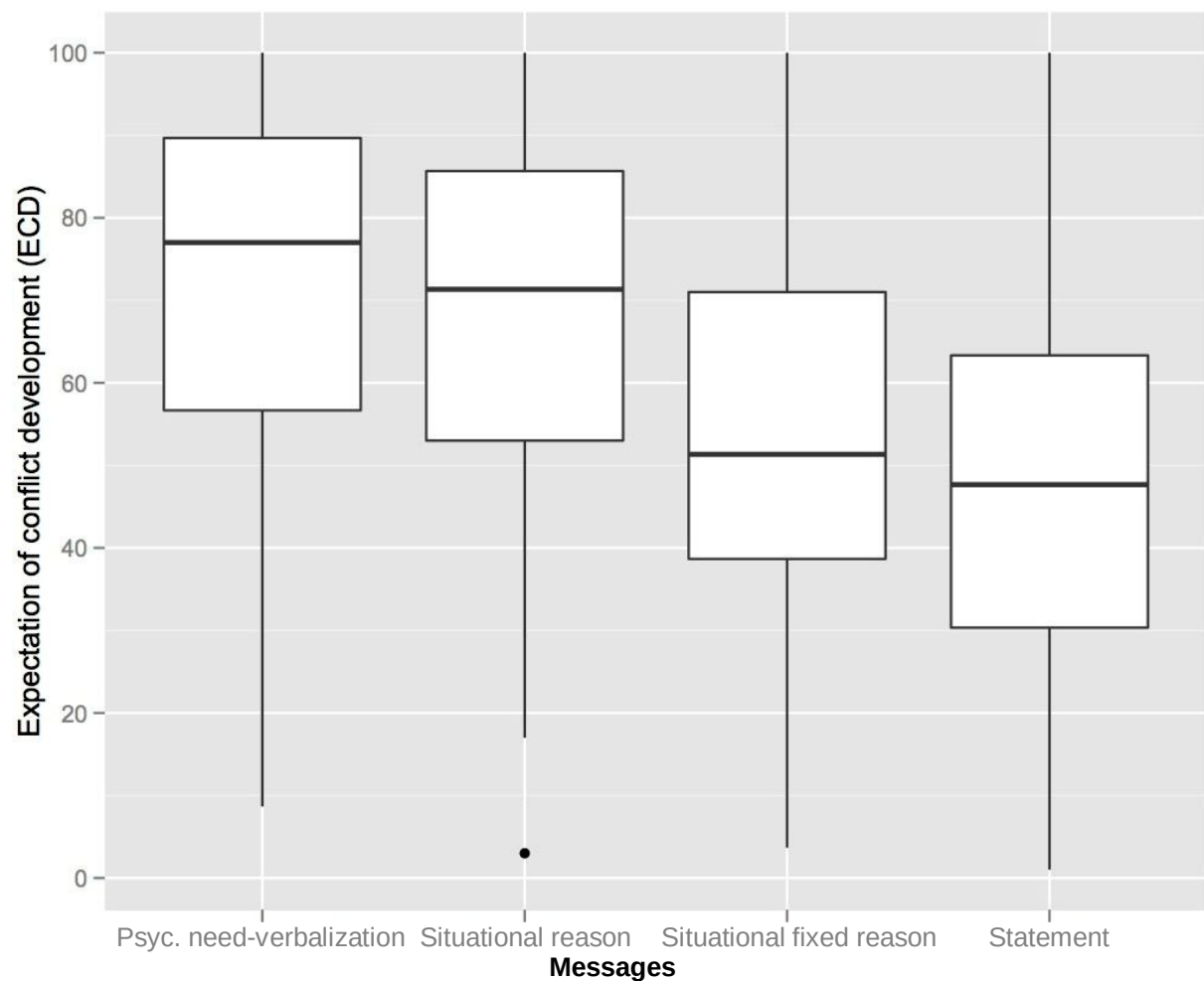


Figure 2. Message-effects on ECD across all scenarios. **Boxplots.** The higher the *ECD*-score is, the more optimistic the participant's expectation of conflict development is.

Testing the mediation paths. According to O'Keefe (2003) data analysis of message-effects must involve following steps: (1) examination of the message variation's impact on the mediating states, (2) examination of the relationship between the mediating states and the outcome variable, and (3) consideration as to whether the hypothesized mediating states mediate the message variation's impact on the outcome. The following paragraphs are structured accordingly.

Message-effects on mediating states. Regarding the research model, mediation paths were assessed in two stages. Messages have an impact on perceived appropriateness (repeated measurement MANOVA; F -statistic = 8.402, $p < .001$), perceived similarity (repeated measurement MANOVA; F -statistic = 7.125, $p < .001$), and perceived positive face support

Table 2
Regression Analysis of Mediation.

Depended variable: Expectation of conflict development; n = 119; t = 12; N = 1428

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
(Intercept)	60.95*** (1.13)	25.71*** (1.51)	22.11*** (1.47)
Need-verbalization vs. Situational reason	-1.43* (0.73)	0.24 (0.53)	0.20 (0.51)
(Need-verb., Situational reason) vs. Situational fixed reason	-5.46*** (0.42)	-0.19 (0.34)	-0.07 (0.33)
(Need-verb., Situational reason, Situational fixed reason) vs. Statement	-4.20*** (0.30)	-0.18 (0.25)	0.41 (0.25)
Perceived appropriateness		0.15*** (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)
Perceived similarity		0.07** (0.03)	0.03 (0.02)
Perceived positive face support		0.45*** (0.03)	0.39*** (0.03)
Empathic understanding			0.28*** (0.03)
Adj. R ²	.21	.57	.60
F-statistic	F(5, 1424) = 123,69; sign.	F(6,1421) = 316,58; sign.	F(7,1420) = 308,59; sign.

Note. Dummy variables have reverse Helmert contrasts. Estimates and standard errors (in parentheses) are depicted.

(repeated measurement MANOVA; F-statistic = 8.553, $p < .001$) in the first stage. In the second stage, the impact of the mediating states on empathic understanding from the first stage (perceived appropriateness and perceived similarity) is examined (repeated measurement MANOVA; F-statistic = 41.07, $p < .001$).

Regression of mediating states on outcome. Perceived appropriateness, perceived similarity, and perceived positive face support have a significant impact on ECD; moreover, the residual deviation is significantly decreased, when additionally considering empathic understanding (Wald-test. F-statistic = 100.21, $p < .001$).

Mediation of message-effects. As indicated in Table 2, Model 2, the messages' effects on ECD disappear when taking the perceived appropriateness, the perceived similarity, and the perceived positive face support into account. This provides support for Hypothesis 4a. The mediational analysis' second stage is outlined in Model 3. Results indicate that empathic understanding as well as perceived positive face support, mediate the messages' effects on ECD. These results provide support for Hypothesis 4b.

The proposed pattern of mediation in the research model was controlled for dispositional empathy, dispositional agreeableness, dispositional mindfulness, gender, age and education. Results revealed that both dispositional empathy ($p < .05$) and dispositional agreeableness ($p < .01$) affects participants' responses on the ECD-scale.

In order to test Hypothesis 4c, a panel regression analysis was carried out. The results display that the conditional mean of perceived similarity is highest if the psychological need was verbalized. The difference between statement and any reasons, as well as between situational fixed reasons and psychological need-verbalizations and situational reasons is significant ($p < .001$). However, the difference between psychological need-verbalization and situational reasons is not significant ($p = .33$), indicating that Hypothesis 4c is not tenable.

Discussion

In the present study research on interpersonal conflict and psychological needs was merged, which is unique for psychological research thus far. The primary purpose of this study was to analyze the effect of a psychological need-verbalization on the perception and evaluation of an interpersonal conflict situation.

The starting point for the interpretation of the study's results is the idea that an highly competent management of an interpersonal conflict leads to a conflict resolution, which is mutually beneficial for both parties. This corresponds to Spitzberg et al.'s (1994) argumentation that competent communication (appropriate and effective communication) implies a win/win-situation. Therefore, by sending their messages, the conflicting parties ideally pursue conflict resolution. In the present study a highly optimistic expectation of conflict development (ECD) of the participant shall both indicate conflict-mitigation and predict conflict-resolution.

Psychological need-verbalizations regarding a displayed behavior in an interpersonal conflict situation affected more positively the participants' ECD compared to messages stating situational reasons, situational fixed reasons or statements. That implies that the participants were fairly convinced that the conflict will not exacerbate and that he/she and his/her partner can commonly solve the conflict, after having received a psychological need-verbalization. These results indicate the superiority of a psychological need-verbalization in an interpersonal conflict situation compared to other messages. It was shown that all message-effects remained stable across three different scenarios, indicating that the participants' responses to the messages were independent of the specific conflict situation. This allows generalization of psychological need-verbalization's effectiveness in interpersonal conflict situations. Furthermore, the results revealed that the perceived appropriateness of the message, a message-induced perceived similarity to the partner, a message-related perceived positive face support and message-induced empathic understanding mediated the messages' effects on ECD. Thus, findings indicate that a psychological need-verbalization can be seen as a manner of highly competent conflict communication by being effective, being perceived as appropriate, being perceived as positive face supportive, and facilitating empathic understanding.

Theoretical Implications and Contributions

In the present study the messages' effects are indicated by the participants ECD. On the basis of the literature regarding explanation effects (see for example Lombrozo & Carey, 2006; Slusher & Anderson, 1996) it was argued that in an interpersonal conflict situation an explanation's effect depends on its informative value regarding the displayed behavior. The informative value may be due to its property highlighting a causal mechanism (Slusher & Anderson, 1996) as well as its predictive utility (Lombrozo & Carey, 2006). The present study's findings support the assumptions regarding the role of causality, by showing that reasons for a specific behavior in a conflict situation (i.e, psychological need-verbalization, situational reason, and situational fixed reasons) had a stronger positive effect on the participant's ECD than statements. Furthermore, findings support the assumption regarding the role of predictive utility: Participants seemed to be gradually more optimistic regarding the future conflict development when receiving a situational fixed reason, a situational reason, or a psychological need-verbalization. This indicates that a psychological need-verbalization may be exactly the "kind of information likely to subserve future intervention and prediction" (Lombrozo & Carey, 2006, p. 195). Thus, a psychological need-verbalization in an interpersonal conflict situation seems to be not only a strong argument (Slusher & Anderson, 1996) but also to meet the function of explanation (Lombrozo & Carey, 2006).

Slusher and Anderson (1996) analyzed a property of effective explanations, whereas Lombrozo and Carey (2006) hypothesized about the function of effective explanations. However, the present study examines how messages in interpersonal conflict situations derive their effectiveness. In line with O'Keefe's (2003) research claims psychological states mediating the messages' effects were conducted: The results revealed that perceived appropriateness, perceived positive face support and empathic understanding were stronger in mediating the messages' effects on ECD in an interpersonal conflict situation than perceived similarity was. Thus, the present study's findings did not confirm the theoretical

considerations (see for example Seyfried, 1973) that psychological need-verbalization's effect can be explained by perceived similarity regarding psychological needs. Nevertheless, psychological need-verbalization had the strongest impact on ECD. The question then arises as to how psychological need-verbalization derives its effectiveness. Both high empathic understanding and the experience of positive face support were strongly associated with the participants' expectation that the conflict is about to be solved (indicated in an optimistic ECD). Thus, when a person receives a psychological need- verbalization, it is very likely that the person understands the motives for the partner's behavior; furthermore, the person doesn't feel socially or personally threatened by a psychological need-verbalization. This replicates findings by Shen (2010b), indicating that state empathy is positively associated with perceived message-effectiveness. Furthermore, the mediation path over positive face support reflects the importance of face support in interpersonal conflict communication (Cupach et al., 2010).

Spitzberg et al. (1994) argue that a win/win situation is central to both competent communication and a collaborative conflict style. This indicates that verbalizing a psychological need in an interpersonal conflict situation may shift the conflict's dynamic to conditions that enable both conflicting parties to manage the conflict collaboratively. Verbalizing a psychological need appears to bring conflicting parties closer together and facilitates a joint path to conflict resolution.

Regarding the individual factors, the findings of the present study indicate that dispositional empathy as well as dispositional agreeableness is positively associated with the participants' ECD. These findings correspond to previous research on empathy (see for example Davis, 1994; de Wied et al., 2007; Fehr et al., 2010) and agreeableness (see for example Jensen-Campbell & Graziano, 2001) demonstrating their conflict-mitigating role. However, dispositional mindfulness and socio-demographics may play a more important role in affecting a conflict's dynamic than they play in regard to the analysis of message-effects.

Implications for Practitioners

Psychological needs are central in assisting conflict resolution in practice (Hale & Thieme, 2010; Rosenberg, 2003). According to Ryan and Deci (2000) and Rosenberg (2003), both situational behavior as well as a person's emotional experience is strongly associated with psychological needs. Linking theory to practice, this paper assesses the effect of a psychological need-verbalization on the perception and evaluation of an interpersonal conflict situation. The present study's findings encourage mediators as well as other practitioners working in the context of interpersonal conflicts to focus on psychological needs. However, this issue may be important to everyone: Not only psychologists and mediators, but anyone who needs to handle interpersonal conflict in their private or work-life.

Limitations

Although the study casts light on new discoveries in the research field of interpersonal conflicts, there are two limitations to the above findings: First, in order to assess the participants' responses, three scales were developed: *perceived similarity*, *perceived positive face support*, and *ECD*. All three scales achieved sufficient reliability. Nevertheless, the scales' validity as well as reliability still needs to be confirmed by further research. Second, the scale of *perceived similarity*, in particular, gives rise for concern. It was hypothesized that the psychological need-verbalization's effect would be strongly mediated by perceived similarity. However, results did not support this hypothesis. The reason could be manifold: (a) The validity of the items could be doubted. On the one hand results show that participants' perception of similarity varies with the message they have received. On the other hand it may be that the scale did not assess psychological need-similarity, but some other form of perceived similarity. (b) It could be that people are not aware of their own psychological needs. Psychological research has neglected psychological needs, and so may have society. Thus, participants may have not been able to find similarities regarding psychological needs, because they may not be used thinking within the categories of psychological needs.

Implications for Future Research

The present study establishes new fields of research in social psychology (e.g., psychological needs in communication or psychological needs in interpersonal conflict). Thus, it implies many prospects for future research: First of all, the results should be replicated in field studies that assess reactions to psychological need-verbalizations during real life interpersonal interactions with actual persons. Regarding future experimental research, it is recommended that researchers use messages from real life interpersonal conflict situations. Furthermore, it is suggested to assess the congruence of the *ECD*-score and actual conflict resolution.

Lakey and Canary (2002) highlighted the importance of sensitivity to the partner goals in the assessment of communication competence. The results of the present study support, in particular, the inclusion of sensitivity to one's own and the partner's psychological needs in models of interpersonal communication competence.

The findings indicate that a psychological need-verbalization strongly affects the receiver's empathic understanding, his/ her perception of positive face support, and his/her *ECD*. This suggests the assumption that a psychological need-verbalization's effect can be associated with Fisher and Shapiro's (2005) concept of appreciation. Appreciation is defined as understanding the other party's point of view and finding merit in the other's individuality. A psychological need-verbalization may activate the receiver's appreciation of the other person in an interpersonal conflict situation. Future research could attend to the research question as to whether verbalizing psychological needs goes beyond competent communication by facilitating interpersonal connection.

Conclusion

Evidently, competent communication as well as a competent conflict management is crucial especially in the presence of individual and societal challenges such as increasing depression-, burn-out-, and divorce rates.

In addition to substantiating mediation practice, the findings of the present study demonstrate the potential of communication in an interpersonal conflict situation: The results show that “empathic understanding” as well as “perceived positive face support” plays a great role in mediating the effect of a psychological need-verbalization on a person’s ECD. As a whole, the results of this study break new ground by indicating that a psychological need-verbalization is a manner of highly competent conflict communication, paving the way for conflict resolution. The determining mechanism may be that despite differences in behavior, perception or judgment, all individuals can connect on the level of psychological needs.

Appendices

Appendix A:

The introduction given prior to the survey was as follows:

Hereafter you will be presented with three various conflict scenarios. Each of these scenarios describes a situation in which you and your partner find yourselves in a conflict. Please read the scenarios carefully and thoroughly. Try to imagine you and your partner to be in the specific conflict situation. You will be presented each of these three situations four times. The difference of each scenario lies particularly in each individual closing argument.

When responding to the message, I ask that you answer the questions spontaneously and without contemplating by marking the corresponding box. Please be sure to always answer according to your “gut feeling”, and try to refrain from over-thinking your answers. Be assured that there is no “right” or “wrong answer, nor “good” or “bad” response.

Participants responded four times to each scenario. Scenarios differed with regard to the messages, which followed the prompt “Your partner’s argument is...” (see Appendix B). The psychological need central to the specific scenario is only stated for a better understanding and was not visible for participants.

Psychological need: Relatedness

In the evening

Lately both you and your partner have been extremely busy. For weeks you have been able to find very little time to spend with each other. You are currently experiencing a very demanding period at work, which requires a great deal of your energy. For the past few days your partner has been grumbling about how much you have to do, and has been complaining about how boring things are between you at the moment. Every evening your partner makes a new suggestion to do something together. At the moment you are simply too exhausted and you need rest in order to recover from your strenuous days. You would prefer to simply spend your evening in front of the TV. It annoys you tremendously that you have to justify yourself night after night as to why you don’t want to go out. Now annoyed, you say for the umpteenth time that you need peace and quiet, and want to stay at home. Your partner- now also irritated- says that he/she is frustrated with the relationship right now, and that your lethargy gets on his/her nerves. It cannot continue that he/she continuously suggests an activity and you ‘just don’t feel like it’. You have just had enough of this nagging and you are by no means lethargic. You just boil over and you angrily ask your partner what is bringing about his/her behavior.

Your partner’s argument is...

Psychological need: Competence

The job

Your partner had a slow streak in his/her job for a long time. However, a few months ago he/she became very busy with a project that he/she is completely engaged in and is very enthusiastic about. Of course you are very happy for your partner. Even so, it has bothered you for the past few weeks that you and your partner spend such a little amount of time with each other. For the past few days you and your partner have started to bicker. Your partner constantly has to work. If he/she is at home, everything revolves around work. He/she is constantly out. You do know that your partner is busy doing things that are important to him/her, but that doesn't mean that he/she should have so little time for you for such an extended period of time. You would like to spend some more time with your partner. You would like to get some more attention from your partner. Your partner is always talking about how important the project is that he/she is working on right now, and that this is the way things have to be right now. The arguments have escalated in the past few days. Your partner's behavior seems purely stubborn to you. You tell your partner that he/she is being thickheaded, and that he/she isn't taking the relationship serious enough. Your partner angrily speaks to the contrary, saying that you shouldn't exaggerate so much and you should really show some understanding. Show some understanding? In your opinion you have been very understanding for months already! You just boil over and you angrily ask your partner what is bringing about his/her behavior.

Your partner's argument is...

Psychological need: Autonomy

Vacation

For a long time now you and your partner have tossed the idea around of going on a vacation with another couple you are friends with. One evening you are invited to dinner at the couple's place, but your partner didn't have the time to come along. When you're back at home you tell your partner about the evening you had with the friends. You mention, among other things, that you all decided on going to a beach in Italy for vacation. The three of you looked at some flights, and some were quite cheap. Your partner's face suddenly grows dark. He/she says that he/she would prefer to go to Scandinavia. You find your partner's tone snotty, and say that Scandinavia will be too cold and you had thought that he/she would have preferred the beach. Your partner is getting annoyed and says that he/she has no desire to be on the beach and that it is an absolutely stupid idea. Your spat grows and it provokes an argument between the two of you. You just boil over and you angrily ask your partner what is bringing about his/her behavior.

Your partner's argument is...

Appendix B:

The following box depicts the message-variations for each scenario. Each psychological need was central to only one scenario.

Scenario	“In the evening”	“The job”	“Vacation”
Psychological need	Relatedness	Competence	Autonomy
Psychological need	“I am frustrated because I desire more closeness with you.”	“I am so busy because it is important to me to experience myself as effective and competent.”	“I am upset because it is important to me that I am involved in decisions that concern me.”
Situational reason	“I am frustrated because I don’t like that we don’t spend time with each other.”	“I am so busy because I find work so interesting.”	“I am upset because you decided behind my back.”
Situational fixed reason	“I am frustrated because nothing will change.”	“I am so busy because I have to be.”	“I am upset because I don’t want to lie around on the beach.”
Statement	“Let me nag.”	“It is good that I work this much.”	“I think I have every reason to be upset.”

Appendix C:

The following pretest was conducted to evaluate the conflict scenarios:

PRETEST - Szenarien**Studie zur Kommunikation im Konflikt.****(Diplomarbeit im Fach Psychologie)****24.05.2012**

Im Folgenden werden drei kurze Szenarien beschrieben. Bitte lesen Sie sich die Szenarien konzentriert durch.

Ich bitte Sie die Szenarien nach drei Kriterien zu beurteilen:

1. Liegt eine Meinungsverschiedenheit vor?
2. Kollidieren die Ziele der beiden Partner?
3. Werden negative Emotionen auf beiden Seiten beschrieben?

Szenario 1:

„In letzter Zeit waren sowohl Sie als auch ihr Partner* äußerst beschäftigt. Seit Wochen haben Sie nur wenig Zeit gefunden miteinander etwas zu unternehmen. Gerade für Sie ist momentan eine Phase in der sie beruflich sehr gefordert sind und viel Energie aufbringen müssen. Seit einigen Tagen nörgelt ihr Partner an allem was sie machen herum und beklagt sich wie langweilig doch momentan alles sei. Jeden Abend macht ihr Partner aufs Neue den Vorschlag etwas zu unternehmen. Sie sind momentan dafür zu angestrengt und brauchen Ruhe um sich von dem anstrengenden Tag zu erholen. Am liebsten würden Sie den Abend einfach nur vor dem Fernseher verbringen. Es ärgert sie ungemein, dass sie sich Abend für Abend rechtfertigen müssen, warum sie nichts unternehmen wollen. Außerdem geht es ihnen auf die Nerven, dass ihr Partner einfach nicht verstehen will, dass Sie Ruhe brauchen und zu Hause bleiben wollen. Ihr Partner nörgelt weiter und beklagt sich über ihre Lethargie. Sie sind die Nörgelei endgültig leid. Und „lethargisch“ sind sie erst recht nicht. Ihnen platzt der Kragen und sie fragen verärgert ihren Partner, was sein/ihr Verhalten denn eigentlich soll.“

Liegt eine Meinungsverschiedenheit vor?	JA	
	NEIN	
Kollidieren verschiedene Ziele?	JA	
	NEIN	
Sind negative Emotionen auf beiden Seiten beschrieben?	JA	
	NEIN	

Szenario 2:

„Ihr Partner hatte lange Zeit eine Durststrecke in seinem/ihrer Job. Seit ein paar Monaten beschäftigt er/sie sich allerdings nun mit einem Projekt, das ihn/sie voll einnimmt und vor allem begeistert. Sie freuen sich natürlich für ihren Partner. Allerdings ärgert es sie schon seit ein paar Wochen, dass Sie und ihr Partner so wenig Zeit miteinander verbringen. Seit Tagen bekommen Sie und Ihr Partner sich nun immer wieder in die Haare. Ständig muss ihr Partner arbeiten. Und ist er/sie zu Hause, geht es nur um die Arbeit. Ständig ist er/sie unterwegs. Sie wissen ja, dass Ihr Partner gerade mit einer für ihn wichtigen Sache beschäftigt ist, aber das heißt doch nicht gleich, dass Sie so lange zu kurz kommen müssen. Sie wünschen sich ein bisschen mehr Zeit mit Ihrem Partner. Sie wünschen sich mehr Aufmerksamkeit von Ihrem Partner. Doch ihr Partner redet die ganze Zeit nur davon, wie wichtig es ist, was er/sie gerade macht und dass das momentan nicht anders geht. Die Streitereien haben sich in den vergangenen Tagen hochgeschaukelt. Für Sie ist das pure Sturheit. Sie sagen ihrem Partner, was er/sie für ein Dickschädel sei und dass er/sie die Beziehung zu wenig ernst nehmen würde. Ihr Partner hält dagegen, dass Sie sich nicht so aufführen sollen und Sie doch wirklich mal Verständnis zeigen könnten. Verständnis zeigen? Ihrer Meinung nach zeigen Sie bereits seit Monaten Verständnis! Ihnen platzt der Kragen und sie fragen verärgert ihren Partner, was sein/ihr Verhalten denn eigentlich soll.“

Liegt eine Meinungs- verschiedenheit vor?	JA	
	NEIN	
Kollidieren verschiedene Ziele?	JA	
	NEIN	
Sind negative Emotionen auf beiden Seiten beschrieben?	JA	
	NEIN	

Szenario 3:

„Schon lange geistert die Idee durch den Raum, dass Sie und Ihr Partner mit einem befreundeten Paar in den Urlaub fahren. Eines Abends sind Sie bei Ihren Freunden zu einem Abendessen eingeladen, wobei Ihr Partner keine Zeit hat mitzukommen. Zurück zu Hause erzählen Sie ihrem Partner von dem gemeinsamen Abend mit dem befreundeten Paar. Sie erzählen unter anderem, dass Sie gemeinsam ausgemacht haben, den Urlaub am Strand in Italien zu verbringen. Sie hätten außerdem bereits nach Flügen geschaut, wobei auch einige sehr günstige Flüge dabei gewesen wären. Das Gesicht Ihres Partners verdüstert sich. Er/Sie sagt, dass er/sie aber lieber nach Skandinavien reisen würde. Sie empfinden den Ton Ihres Partners als pampig und sagen, dass Skandinavien Ihnen aber zu kalt wäre und Sie gedacht hätten, dass auch er/sie am liebsten am Strand sein würde. Ihr Partner wird ungehalten und sagt, dass er/sie überhaupt keine Lust auf Strand hätte und dass das eine total bescheuerte

Idee sei. Ihre Auseinandersetzung wird heftiger und es entfacht ein Streit zwischen Ihnen beiden. Irgendwann platzt Ihnen der Kragen und sie fragen verärgert Ihren Partner, was sein/ihr Verhalten denn eigentlich soll.“

Liegt eine Meinungs- verschiedenheit vor?	JA	
	NEIN	
Kollidieren verschiedene Ziele?	JA	
	NEIN	
Sind negative Emotionen auf beiden Seiten beschrieben?	JA	
	NEIN	

Vielen Dank für die Unterstützung!

* Um einen leichten Lesefluss zu garantieren und das Textverständnis so einfach wie möglich zu gestalten, habe ich mich entschlossen die weibliche Form, sowie die männliche Form unter dem Begriff „Partner“ gleichberechtigt zu vereinen. Ich danke für Ihr Verständnis.

Appendix D:

The following pretest was conducted regarding the message-categorization:

PRETEST - Aussagen**Studie zur Kommunikation im Konflikt.****(Diplomarbeit im Fach Psychologie)****24.05.2012**

Ich bitte Sie eine Reihe von Aussagen einer von 4 Kategorien zuzuordnen. Tragen sie hinter die Aussage die Ziffer ein, die für eine der 4 Kategorien steht. Vielen Dank!

Die Aussage enthält *eine **Bedürfnisformulierung***. = **1**

Die Aussage enthält *einen **situationsbezogenen Grund***. = **2**

Die Aussage enthält *einen **situationsbezogenen unveränderbaren Grund***. = **3**

Die Aussage enthält ***weder** ein Bedürfnis **noch** einen Grund*. = **4**

Aussagen	Kategorie
Ich nörgle die ganze Zeit, weil ich mir mehr Verbundenheit mit dir wünsche.	
Ich bin sauer geworden, weil Ihr über meinen Kopf hinweg entschieden habt.	
Ich finde ich habe allen Grund sauer zu sein.	
Lass mich halt nörgeln.	
Ich arbeite momentan so viel, weil die Arbeit so interessant ist.	
Ich nörgle die ganze Zeit, weil wir so wenig miteinander machen.	
Ich bin sauer geworden, weil es mir wichtig ist, bei Entscheidungen, die auch mit betreffen, miteinbezogen zu werden.	
Es ist gut, dass ich so viel arbeite.	
Ich arbeite momentan so viel, weil es mir wichtig ist, mich als effektiv und kompetent zu erleben.	
Ich bin sauer geworden, weil Ich keine Lust auf einen Italienurlaub habe.	
Ich nörgle die ganze Zeit, weil mir nichts anderes übrig bleibt.	
Ich arbeite momentan so viel, weil ich muss.	

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Zusammenfassung

Bisher hat die psychologische Forschung die Rolle von psychischen Bedürfnissen in zwischenmenschlichen Konflikten außer Acht gelassen. Die vorliegende Forschungsarbeit wurde entworfen, um den Effekt von Bedürfnisformulierungen auf die Wahrnehmung und Bewertung in einer zwischenmenschlichen Konfliktsituation zu analysieren. 119 Personen nahmen an der Untersuchung teil. Das Experiment bestand aus drei hypothetischen Konfliktszenarien, welche sich jeweils durch eine abschließende Aussage, die sich auf ein gezeigtes Verhalten bezog, unterschieden. Die Aussagen, auf welche die Untersuchungsteilnehmer reagierten, enthielten entweder psychische Bedürfnisse, andere Gründe oder keinen Grund für das Verhalten. Es wurden die Wahrnehmung der Angemessenheit der Aussage, der aussageindizierte Ähnlichkeit zum Partner und der aussagenbezogenen Wahrung des „Gesichts“ sowie das empathische Verständnis und die Erwartung der Konfliktentwicklung (ECD) erhoben. Die Ergebnisse wiesen auf theoriekonforme Unterschiede bezüglich der Wirkung der Aussagen hin. Insgesamt legen die Ergebnisse nahe, dass eine Bedürfnisformulierung eine kompetente Art der Kommunikation in einer zwischenmenschlichen Konfliktsituation darstellt und ein sehr effektives Mittel für Konfliktmanagement ist. Es werden die sich daraus ergebenden Bedeutungen für Theorie und Praxis, Grenzen der Studie, sowie Implikationen für zukünftige Forschung diskutiert.

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SPRACHKENNTNISSE

Deutsch: Muttersprache

Englisch: fließend in Wort und Schrift