Introduction

One of the cornerstones of humanity's success has been our unrivalled ability to cooperate. Its fruits are all around us: from massive physical manifestations like the pyramids, to the less tangible, but even more immense pool of collective knowledge which makes up our culture. The ability to cooperate has enabled us to achieve goals which would have been impossible to achieve on our own. But despite these great collective successes, the question why people actually choose to cooperate is far from straightforward: paradoxically, people in fact are often better off if they choose not to cooperate, at least from their own perspective. For example, it may be more attractive to let our partner do all the dishes, or to let others pay for public goods like health care. But if that is so, then how is it possible that cooperation nevertheless is so widespread? Could it be that some people are more inclined toward cooperation than others? Could it be that people are more (or less) likely to cooperate under particular circumstances, for example, when they interact in particular contexts or roles? And how should we take such differences in “mindset” into account when we seek to persuade others to cooperate? These are some of the major questions that we seek to understand in this dissertation.

Social Dilemmas: An Overview

Deciding whether to cooperate with others or not is particularly difficult in social dilemmas – situations in which our individual interests are not in line with the interests of those we interact with, or with the interests of the collective. As noted in the above, the difficulty of such situations is that we can be better off individually if we decide not to cooperate. Cooperation may require costly time, effort and resources; furthermore, there is a chance that others may nevertheless manage to achieve the collective goal without our help, which would allow us to
profit for free (i.e., free riding). From an individual perspective, it therefore makes perfect sense to choose not to cooperate. However, this individual rationality makes no sense from the point of view of the collective: if everyone chooses not to cooperate, then collective goals will not be realized, and everyone will be worse off than if they had all cooperated (Dawes, 1980; Messick & Brewer, 1983; Kopelman, Weber, & Messick, 2002). In terms of the examples, there would not be a clean plate in the house, and there would be no money for healthcare.

In light of these conflicting pressures, it should come as no surprise that social psychologists have long been fascinated by the question why (and when) people choose to cooperate in social dilemmas, when it is not in their immediate best interest to do so. Over the past four decades, research has identified numerous factors which influence people’s decision to do so or not, originating both from within the individual and from the (social) environment. Firstly, people’s decisions to cooperate or not may be related to their personality. People tend to have a rather stable preference for particular types of outcomes in their interactions with others – for example for equal or collective outcomes, for outcomes for themselves, or for higher outcomes than others. Because they often strive to achieve those types of outcomes when they interact with others, these “social value orientations” (Van Lange, 1999) are highly predictive of their decisions to cooperate or not. For example, people with a prosocial orientation (who prefer high joint outcomes, and outcomes that are equal) tend to construe their interactions in terms of collective welfare (i.e., either all cooperate, or all suffer the consequences), and tend to be more inclined to cooperate. In contrast, people with an individualistic or competitive orientation (who prefer outcomes that are high for themselves, or higher than those of others) tend to see their interactions in terms of individual welfare, and tend to be less inclined to cooperate (i.e., exploit others, or be exploited; see Camac, 1992; De Kwaadsteniet, Van Dijk, Wit, & De Cremer, 2006; Joireman, Van Lange, Kuhlman, Shelley, & Van Vugt, 1997; McClintock & Liebrand, 1988; Van Dijk, De Cremer, & Handgraaf, 2004; Van Lange, De Cremer, Van Dijk, & Van Vugt, 2007).
Secondly, people’s decisions to cooperate or not may be related to with whom they are interacting. Their decisions are influenced by how many others take part in the interaction: the more people are involved, the less people feel inclined to cooperate (Kerr, 1989). Furthermore, their decisions are influenced by what they have heard about others, or by their experiences: people are more likely to cooperate with others who have a good reputation (i.e., reputation, see Klapwijk, Van Lange, & Reinders Folmer, 2007; Nowak & Sigmund, 1998), and with others who have cooperated with them before (i.e., strategy; see Kurzban & DeScioli, 2008).

Finally, people’s decisions to cooperate or not may be related to the features of the interaction situation itself. Their decisions may be influenced by what they are deciding about: for example, prosocials cooperate more if they decide about losses, and proselfs if they decide about gains (De Dreu & McCusker, 1997). Their decisions may depend on their influence in the matter, or on the options they have: people may be more selfish if they have much influence, or may avoid making a decision altogether if they have the opportunity (for examples, see Handgraaf, Van Dijk, & Wilke, 2004; Insko & Schopler, 1998; Orbell & Dawes, 1993; Van Lange & Visser, 1999; Yamagishi, 1988). And their decisions may depend on their ability to discuss the situation: people may decide differently if they have the chance to communicate with their partner (Kerr & Kaufman-Gilliland, 1994; Chen & Komorita, 1994; Bohnet & Frey, 1999). In sum, research on social dilemmas has revealed that certain individuals may be more inclined to cooperate than others, and that certain characteristics of the people they interact with and the situation in which they do so may promote or hamper their willingness to cooperate.
Introduction

Gaps in Social Dilemma Research: the Influence of Context

As outlined in the above, a substantial body of research exists on the factors that underlie people’s decisions to cooperate in social dilemmas or not, and this has highlighted the role of features of the individual, the partner, and the interaction situation. What such findings would seem to suggest is that people should be quite consistent in their decisions: as long as the issues they decide about and the persons they interact with are similar, people would always make the same decision. But is that really the case? As we know from our own lives, we may often be rather more erratic when we make decisions: for example, we may make very different decisions when we are tired or in a hurry (i.e., not feeling like a telephone survey right now), or when we carry out a different role than that of individual (i.e., going for the safe option when choosing a pizza for others as well as for ourselves). The reason for this of course is that our decisions are not made in a vacuum, but may be influenced by the context in which we make them. Particularly interesting, in this respect, is how people’s orientations toward others may depend on the social roles in which they interact.

The notion of interpersonal orientations would seem to suggest that people’s interaction goals are always the same, and exist independently of the context of their interactions. Indeed, there is ample evidence for this, because social value orientations predict people’s decisions across a wide range of topics: social value orientations have not only been linked with decisions in experimental games, but also with people’s willingness to sacrifice in relationships (Van Lange, Agnew, Harinck, & Steemers, 1997), their donations to noble causes (Van Lange, Bekkers, Schuyt, & Van Vugt, 2007), and even their political preferences and voting behavior (Van Lange, Bekkers, Chirumbolo, & Leone, 2007). Even our impressions of others may be highly related to social value orientations: both to

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It should be noted that some of the terms used throughout this dissertation may have different connotations in different disciplines. The present dissertation is written from a social psychological perspective, hence the terms should be understood within this framework.
our own (e.g., our social value orientations influence what behavior we find intelligent and moral, and therefore also influence our impressions of others who do or do not act in such ways; De Bruin & Van Lange, 1999, 2000; Utz, Ouwerkerk, & Van Lange, 2004; Van Lange & Kuhlman, 1994), and to those of others (e.g., people tend to have different impressions of people with prosocial or proself orientations, with prosocials being seen as more moralistic, fastidious, and more concerned with philosophical problems; Bem & Lord, 1979).

But in spite of this impressive body of research, we know from our own experience that our orientations toward others are not always that stable. In some of our interactions we may be good Samaritans, and we may put the interests of some others above our own. But at other times, we may be self-centered, hard-nosed egoists. Therefore, in the present dissertation, we examine the influence of the context in which people interact. More specifically, we focus on how people’s orientations toward others may depend on the social role they carry out, and what consequences that may have for their decisions to cooperate or not. Reasoning from interdependence theory, we argue that the role in which we interact may influence our goals and expectations, and may lead us to perceive our interactions differently, and to make different decisions.

**Interdependence theory and the slot-machine model of interpersonal orientations**

Interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Kelley, Holmes, Kerr, Reis, Rusbult, & Van Lange, 2003) explains how people’s orientations toward others may adapt to the situations in which they interact. It argues that at the basic or “gut level”, people are selfish, and view their decisions from this perspective. However, when they interact with others, they are often confronted with broader concerns – like the consequences of their decisions for others, strategic considerations, or long-term goals (also see Joireman, Kuhlman, Van Lange, Doi, & Shelley, 2003; Van Lange, 1999). People may adapt to such demands by taking a different perspective: they may reconceptualize their selfish, “given” view of the situation into a broader “effective” view, which incorporates the interest of the other in relation to their own. This process is called *transformation*
of motivation. Following such a transformation, people follow different decision rules than selfishness – cooperation, equality, competition, or altruism – and will base their decisions on the extent to which they satisfy these goals, rather than their self-interest.

The slot-machine model of interpersonal orientations (see Van Lange et al., 2007) builds on this view by proposing that people differ in the probability that they will make particular transformations. Therefore, people may be more likely to use some decision rules than others (i.e., those that correspond with their social value orientation); however, the model proposes that the characteristics of people’s interactions – like with whom they are interacting, what the topic is, and in so forth – may make particular rules more or less salient. Therefore, this model takes a probabilistic, rather than a deterministic, view on interpersonal orientations, and suggests that people’s orientations toward others may change, depending on the situation in which they interact. In such a different “mindset”, people may construe their interactions with differently, and therefore may have different perceptions and make different decisions.

Interaction context: the role of representative

The present dissertation is rooted in such theorizing. Specifically, we propose that the demands of the role in which people interact may also influence which decision rules become salient for them. People carry out a vast range of roles in social life: that of individual, partner, parent, employee, group member, and so forth. However, only little is known of the effects that social roles may have on their “psychology”. In the words of Weber, Kopelman and Messick (2004):

“We want to make special mention of how role prototypes (e.g., Buddhist, parent, Democrat, teacher) – normative constellations of qualities, status, behaviors, and values – may act as pivotal identity factors in social dilemmas. (...) To our knowledge, there is no experimental work in the social dilemmas literature that takes such complex roles seriously as determinants of choice behavior.”
As the above suggests, social roles may serve as powerful contexts in people's interactions with others, and it is likely that people will construe and experience their interactions very differently when such a role is salient. Reasoning from interdependence theory and the slot-machine model, we propose that the demands associated with such roles may affect the likelihood that particular decision rules will become salient. That is, we propose that when people interact with others in a powerful role like this, then specific goals and expectations may become more or less salient – and consequently that in such roles, people may have very different goals and expectations than when they interact simply as individuals. Furthermore, we propose that in such a “mindset”, people may also have very different perceptions of what others say and do, and may make very different decisions themselves.

For the present dissertation, we were interested in the effects of one role in particular: that of group representative. In this role, people act as decision-makers for others as well as for themselves – others who do not take part in the interaction themselves. This role is ubiquitous in our social lives, and in many interactions we represent others, or are represented ourselves. On some occasions, this role is very explicit – for example, when we are asked to represent our department on the university board. On other occasions, we represent others in a more implicit, less official way – for example, when we negotiate about our own teaching load, and realize that our decisions may affect the whole of the department. In any case, the decisions of representatives can have an important impact on people’s lives. Indeed, some of the most far-reaching decisions affecting us are taken by representatives such as politicians (although the role of such representatives is similar to that of leaders, in that their role may give them status and feelings of entitlement; see Hollander, 1985, also see De Cremer & Alberts, 2004; Platow & Van Knippenberg, 2001) or union delegates.

However, the role of representative is not only interesting because it is ubiquitous and influential. It is also interesting because it shares features with two types of interactions which are psychologically very distinct: interactions between individuals on the one hand, and interactions between groups on the other. The
interactions of representatives are like intergroup interactions in that representatives take decisions on behalf of groups – and as research on the interindividual-intergroup discontinuity effect (Insko & Schopler, 1998; Pemberton, Insko, & Schopler, 1996; Winquist & Larson, 2004; Wildschut, Pinter, Vevea, Insko, & Schopler, 2003) has revealed, the interactions of groups tend to be rather more competitive than those of individuals. However, the interactions of representatives are also like interpersonal interactions, in that representatives interact with others personally. Representatives therefore act on the intersection of these two types of interaction, and bear a responsibility for others that is absent from their interactions as individuals – but at the same time do not enjoy the kind of anonymity and shared responsibility they would have in a decision-making group. Therefore, this role poses an unique and psychologically rich context to people’s interactions with others, which may evoke rather a different “mindset” than that of individuals – even if the issues at stake in fact are no different.

But what “mindset” may this be? How may our goals and expectations be different from when we interact just on behalf of ourselves – for example, from when we negotiate with the board about the terms of our own contract? And how may that affect our perceptions of others, and the decisions we make? Reasoning from interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Kelley et al., 2003) and insights from intergroup interactions (Insko & Schopler, 1998; Pemberton et al., 1996; Winquist & Larson, 2004; Wildschut et al., 2003), we propose that the role of representative may activate more self-regarding interaction goals. Furthermore, we propose that this role may activate belief in the selfishness of others, particularly when those others are also representatives. The resulting, rather competitive “mindset” may bias people’s perceptions of what others say and do, and may make them less inclined to cooperate.

Overview of the Dissertation

In order to test our reasoning, we conducted several studies, in which we examined the relationship between people’s “mindset” and their perceptions and
actions in their interactions with others. In these studies, we investigated how people’s goals and expectations might influence their reactions to the communications of others, their decisions to cooperate with others or not, and their willingness to give others the benefit of the doubt, in case of – potentially unintended – errors. And crucially, we examined how these processes might be affected when people interact in a different role than that of individual: when people interact as group representative. In the following, I will briefly outline the three chapters that comprise this dissertation, and discuss how each relates to this framework.\(^2\)

**Chapter 2: Mindset and communication, part I: How social value orientations may determine people’s openness to promises, threats, and their combinations.**

As noted in our discussion of social dilemmas, there indeed is ample evidence that some individuals are more inclined to cooperate in such situations than others. People with different social value orientations pursue different interaction goals, and construe their interactions differently – and this has important consequences for their willingness to cooperate. In the second chapter of this dissertation, we aimed to examine how we should take these different perspectives into account when we interact with others, in particular when we seek to persuade them to cooperate with us. That is, we were interested in how people’s social value orientation might influence their openness to persuasive communications, and in particular to promises and threats – two types of messages which people frequently use in their interactions with others, but which have had mixed results in previous contributions (see Chen & Komorita, 1994; Deutsch & Krauss, 1960; Horai & Tedeschi, 1969; Lindskold, Betz, & Walters, 1986; Lindskold & Collins, 1978; McClintock, Stech, & Beggan, 1987; Michelini, 1975; Stech, McClintock, & Moss, 1984; Orbell, Van de Kragt, & Dawes, 1988;)

\(^2\) As a final remark, it should be noted that the chapters that comprise this dissertation were written as empirical journal articles. This means that all three chapters can be read independently; however, it also means that there can be some overlap between the different chapters.
Rubin & Lewicki, 1973; Schenkler, Bonoma, Tedeschi, & Pivnick, 1970). People with different social value orientations, however, take different perspectives on their interactions with others (i.e., they perceive them as an individual or a collective problem), and pursue different interaction goals (such as individually high or collectively high outcomes). What this suggests is that they may also respond rather differently to communications which convey a particular perspective on the situation – like promises and threats do. If the message matches the “perspective” of the recipient, it may suggest that both parties have a similar view on the situation – and therefore may be particularly persuasive.

The results of Chapter 2 suggest that people with different orientations indeed do respond differently to promises and threats. Our findings revealed that people with a prosocial orientation were persuaded particularly if their partner communicated both a promise and a threat. This combination conveys a collective perspective, in that cooperation will be rewarded (i.e., optimal collective outcome) and defection will be punished (i.e., worst collective outcome) – the perspective that prosocials are also inclined to take. In contrast, people with a proself orientation (who take an individual perspective on their interactions) responded to no message in particular – and certainly not to appeals to the collective interest. Therefore, Chapter 2 suggests that people’s orientation or “mindset” may influence to what kind of communications they respond in their interactions with others. Furthermore, it suggests that in order to persuade others to cooperate, it is important to take their “mindset” into account in our communications.

Chapter 3: Mindset and social role: How acting as representative may affect people’s goals, expectations, and decisions.

In the third chapter, we examine how people’s “mindset” may be influenced by the roles they carry out. Furthermore, we investigate what consequences this may have for people’s actions toward others, and for their sensitivity to unintended errors or noise (Axelrod & Dion, 1988; Bendor, Kramer, & Stout, 1991; Kollock, 1993; Nowak & Sigmund, 1998; Van Lange, Ouwerkerk, &
Tazelaar, 2002). As noted earlier, many roles have powerful associations and demands, and therefore serve as powerful contexts in people’s interactions with others. Therefore, it may be that in roles like these, very different goals and expectations become salient than when people act simply as individuals – and consequently, that in roles like these people have rather different perceptions of what others do, and come to different decisions themselves.

The results of Chapter 3 indeed do suggest that certain roles may activate a rather different “mindset” than that of individuals. In the role of group representative, participants had more competitive interaction goals than as individuals, and were more inclined to expect competition from their interaction partner. Consequently, their role had substantial influence on how their interactions unfolded: in the role of representative, participants were less inclined to cooperate at the onset of their interactions, and less inclined to give others the benefit of the doubt in case of – potentially unintended – errors. Therefore, Chapter 3 suggests that the roles people carry out may have an important influence on their “mindset” in interactions with others, and may activate goals and expectations that may be rather different than those they would have as individuals. Furthermore, our findings suggest that this may have considerable influence on their perceptions and decisions, and thus may have considerable influence on how their interactions with others unfold.

Chapter 4: Mindset and communication, part II: How acting as representative may influence people’s openness to pre-emptive clarifications and apologies.

In the fourth chapter, we integrate insights from Chapters 2 and 3, and examine how we should take the role in which others interact into account when we seek to overcome misunderstandings. Chapter 3 revealed that as representatives, people are particularly vulnerable to noise or unintended errors. Therefore, in Chapter 4, we focused particularly on people’s openness to communications directed at overcoming such “noise”, in particular to pre-emptive clarifications and apologies. Chapter 2 revealed that a persuasive message must fit the goals or perspective of its target, in order to be effective. However, Chapter 3 revealed that the “mindset” of the target may depend on the role he or she is
performing. Therefore, this suggests that in order to overcome instances of noise, a persuasive message must fit the role of its target.

The results of Chapter 4 indeed suggest that in order to effectively overcome an instance of noise, pre-emptive communications must fit the “mindset” of their recipient – and therefore must take the role of their target into account. Our findings reveal that one can effectively appeal to individuals both by apologizing or by clarifying one’s actions in advance. Representatives, however, tend to have a more competitive “mindset”, and therefore pre-emptive apologies are more likely to raise suspicion for them. Our findings reveal that one can appeal effectively to representatives by clarifying one’s intentions in advance, in a neutral, matter-of-fact way. Therefore, Chapter 4 reveals that to what kind of messages people respond may depend on the role they are performing, and therefore that in order to be convincing, it is necessary to take that into account. Therefore, to communicate effectively, one must “strike the right tone”.