General discussion

Why do we choose to cooperate with others when it is not in our immediate interest to do so? Our decisions to do so or not depend on our motives or interaction goals – on what we value and wish to achieve in our interactions with others. In the present dissertation, our major focus was on how those goals may influence our decisions to cooperate, our openness to communication, and our vulnerability to – potentially unintended – errors. Our findings reveal that our interaction goals play a crucial part in all these processes; however, they suggest that the question what our goals are may be less straightforward than one might think. Specifically, our findings reveal that the social roles in which we interact may have considerable influence on what goals and expectations become salient for us: if we interact in a different role than that of an individual, for instance that of group representative, our goals and expectations may be very different than otherwise. Our roles thus may have far-reaching consequences for how our interactions with others unfold: in a different “mindset”, we may construe our interactions with others differently, may have different interpretations of what others say and do, and may come to different decisions – sometimes with detrimental consequences for cooperation. However, our findings also reveal that we therefore may benefit greatly if we take the “mindset” of others into account: by “striking the right tone” in our communications, it may be possible to overcome even “mindsets” that are detrimental for cooperation.

In this final chapter of this dissertation, I will briefly review the major findings of the three empirical chapters, and will discuss implications of the present research – for theorizing on social interactions, but also for practice. To conclude, I will outline some questions into which future contributions might provide more insight.
Summary of the Major Findings

Chapter 2

In the second chapter of this dissertation, we examined how we should take the goals of others into account when we seek to persuade them to cooperate with us. That is, we were interested in how people’s goals might influence their openness to persuasive communications, and promises and threats in particular. Research into the effectiveness of promises and threats has by and large yielded mixed results. We hypothesized, however, that some of these inconsistencies might be explained by people’s social value orientations – rather stable preferences for particular interaction goals. People with different social value construe their interactions with others differently (for example, as an individual or a collective problem), and value different outcomes (such as individually high or collectively high outcomes; Camac, 1992; Komorita & Parks, 1995; Pruitt & Kimmel, 1977; Van Lange, 1999). This suggests that communications which refer to potential outcomes, and convey a particular construal of the situation – like promises and threats – may be particularly effective among the people who share that “perspective”. 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.

Following this reasoning, we hypothesized that promises and threats might be particularly persuasive when communicated together. Promises promise to reward cooperation; compliance with this request therefore will provide either party with desirable outcomes (cooperation for one, the promised reward for the other). Threats, in contrast, threaten to punish noncooperation; therefore, failure to comply with the request will result in detrimental outcomes for either party (noncooperation for one, the punishment for the other). Either message therefore refers to a collective outcome, but together, they convey a collective perspective on the situation: the situation as a choice between the most and least favorable choice, from the collective’s point of view. This is the perspective which people with a prosocial value orientation are inclined to take (see Camac, 1992; Van
Lange, 1999). Therefore, we expected the combination of a promise and a threat to be more effective than either message in isolation – but only among people with prosocial interaction goals.

The results of the two studies supported this hypothesis. In line with our reasoning, a message consisting of both a promise and a threat was more effective than either message on its own – but only among participants with a prosocial orientation, who are particularly concerned with the collective interest. Among participants with a proself orientation, who are particularly concerned with their own interest, a combination of a promise and a threat was no more effective than either message on its own. Therefore, the findings of Chapter 2 supported the notion that people’s social value orientations may influence their openness to particular types of communication. In a broader sense, however, the findings underline that people with different interaction goals may perceive and interpret what others say and do differently – and of course, this may have considerable consequences for how their interactions unfold. We investigated these possibilities in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

Chapter 3

The results of Chapter 2 revealed that people’s interaction goals may have considerable influence on how they experience their interactions with others. Our aim for Chapter 3, in contrast, was to examine how the circumstances in which we interact may influence our interaction goals. It is clear that some people may be inclined to take a particular perspective in their interactions with others (i.e., social value orientations). But is it also possible that the context of their interactions puts people in a particular “frame of mind”?

In this sense, we were particularly interested in the effects of social roles. In their social lives, people carry out a host of roles (for example, that of employee, team member, supervisor, parent, and so forth) in their interactions with others. But what influence may these roles have on their “mindset”? Do people pursue different goals when they interact in a different role, even though the issues they decide about remain the same? We were particularly interested in
the role of group representative. Often, when people interact with others, their decisions also have consequences for others who do not take part in the interaction themselves – for example, when we represent our department on the university board. What influence may such contexts have on our “mindset”? How may our goals and expectations be different from when we interact just on behalf of ourselves – for example, from when we negotiate about the terms of our own contract? Reasoning from interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Kelley, Holmes, Kerr, Reis, Rusbult, & Van Lange, 2003) and insights from intergroup interactions (Insko & Schopler, 1998; Pemberton, Insko, & Schopler, 1996; Winquist & Larson, 2004; Wildschut, Pinter, Vevea, Insko, & Schopler, 2003), we hypothesized that interactions between representatives would be likely to activate more self-interested interaction goals, as well as greater belief in the selfishness of others.

The results of Studies 3.1 and 3.2 provided support for both hypotheses. When their interaction was framed as an interaction between representatives, participants attached more importance to achieving relative gain over their partner, and less importance to collective outcomes and the outcomes of their partner. Furthermore, participants also expected their partner to have such a perspective: in context of an interaction between representatives, they expected their partner to attach more importance to achieving relative gain over them, and less importance to their (i.e., the participant’s) outcomes. Taken together, these findings therefore suggest that in context of an interaction between representatives, people are more likely to adopt a competitive (and less cooperative) “mindset”, consisting of more competitive interaction goals, and more competitive expectations of interdependent others – even though objectively the situation itself was no different than in the context of an interaction between individuals. In a broader sense, these findings suggest that social roles may have substantial influence on what interaction goals and expectations become salient for us.

In Study 3.3, we examined what consequences such “mindsets” might have for how people’s interactions with others unfold. Chapter 2 revealed that
rather stable interaction goals (i.e., social value orientations) can have considerable influence on how people perceive the communications of others. In Study 3.3, we therefore investigated whether goals that are activated by people’s social roles might also affect their perceptions and actions. As people exhibited a more competitive “mindset” in interactions between representatives, we expected that they would be less inclined to cooperate with others in this context, particularly at the onset of their interactions. Furthermore, we expected that in this context, people would be particularly vulnerable to unintended errors, or instances of noise (Axelrod & Dion, 1988; Bendor, Kramer, & Stout, 1991; Kollock, 1993; Nowak & Sigmund, 1998; Van Lange, Ouwerkerk, & Tazelaar, 2002): in their competitive “mindset”, representatives should be less willing to give each other the benefit of the doubt, making unintended errors more likely to get out of hand.

The results of Study 3.3 yielded support for both hypotheses. When their interaction was framed as an interaction between representatives, participants cooperated significantly less during the initial round of the interaction. Furthermore, in this context, instances of noise proved highly detrimental for cooperation, whereas participants interacting as individuals were nevertheless able to maintain substantial levels of cooperation. Taken together, the results of Chapter 3 therefore revealed that if people interact in a different role or context, this may transform the way they perceive and experience their interactions with others. As a consequence, their interactions may unfold very differently from when they interact on behalf of themselves – particularly when unintended errors or noise occur.

Chapter 4

Our aim for the fourth and final empirical chapter was to integrate the insights from Chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 2 revealed that people’s interaction goals play an important part in how they perceive and respond to the communications of others. Chapter 3 revealed that different goals and expectations may become salient when people interact in different roles or contexts, and that this may have consequences for how they interact with others. In Chapter 4, we integrated these
insights by examining if the role in which people interact may influence how they perceive and respond to the communications of others.

In particular, we were interested in the effectiveness of pre-emptive communication as a means of overcoming noise. As some recent studies have suggested, people may be able to prevent instances of noise from getting out of hand if they apologize after an unintended error, and clarify their actual intentions (see Tazelaar, Van Lange, & Ouwerkerk, 2004). However, in many cases people are not aware that they have made an error, but are aware that errors might occur. For that reason, we investigated whether apologizing or clarifying one’s actions pre-emptively might also help people to avoid the detrimental effects of noise. Furthermore, as the findings of Chapter 2 suggest that the effectiveness of communications may depend strongly on the receiver’s interaction goals, we examined whether one should communicate differently to people who carry out different social roles.

Because apologies communicate concern for the interests of the other, we expected that such messages might bolster interpersonal trust in interactions between individuals, and therefore might limit the subsequent impact of an instance of noise. However, such concern is highly inconsistent with the competitive expectations that representatives have of each other. In this context, apologies therefore might be more likely to arouse suspicion and disbelief, and hence might be less effective, or even counterproductive. In contrast, a more neutral, matter-of-fact clarification of one’s intentions might be less likely to activate disbelief, and therefore might be more effective as a means of overcoming noise in this context.

The results of the study supported these hypotheses. In line with the findings of Tazelaar et al. (2004), apologies and clarifications increased cooperation following an instance of noise; however, their effectiveness was strongly dependent on the context in which they were voiced. In context of an interaction between individuals, apologies and clarifications greatly increased cooperation. But in context of an interaction between representatives, apologies
backfired, and were much less effective than clarifications – in fact, in this context, they were no more effective than not communicating at all.

The results of Chapter 4 therefore revealed that people’s perceptions of what others say and do may depend strongly on the role in which they interact, and the “mindset” that accompanies it. As such, it is possible that accounts which foster positive relations in some contexts, raise suspicion in others, and thereby inadvertently perpetuate or exacerbate harmful misunderstandings. However, our findings nevertheless reveal that there are great benefits to communicating – as long as we manage to “strike the right tone” for the circumstances.

Theoretical implications

It is well known that people’s motives or interaction goals play a major role in their decisions to cooperate with others, particularly when it is not in their immediate interest to do so (Joireman, Van Lange, Kuhlman, Shelley, & Van Vugt, 1997; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Kelley, Holmes, Kerr, Reis, Rusbult, & Van Lange, 2003; Van Lange, De Cremer, Van Dijk, & Van Vugt, 2006). The major findings of this dissertation underline this notion, but reveal that the question of what their interaction goals are may be rather less straightforward than was thought previously. Our results reveal that if we carry out a different social role than that of an individual in our interactions with others, then our goals may change, as may our expectations of those we interact with. In the resulting “mindset”, we may perceive what others say and do differently, may be more or less willing to give them the benefit of the doubt if they make mistakes, and may be more or less inclined to cooperate with them. In the following, I will discuss some of the major theoretical implications of the present findings, focusing on their importance for the literatures on social motives, intergroup interaction, and communication.

Firstly, as noted in the above, the findings from the present research add to our understanding of people’s motives, by revealing that the context in which people interact may have considerable influence on their goals and expectations. At first glance, this finding may not seem that surprising, as as far back as in
1936, Kurt Lewin himself argued that behavior stems both from the person and the social environment (Lewin, 1936). However, since then, much of the literature has focused on the effects of stable interpersonal orientations (i.e., social value orientations) and powerful features of the situation (e.g., effects of experience with or reputation of the partner, effects of the decision structure, see Klapwijk, Van Lange, & Reinders Folmer, 2007; Komorita & Parks, 1995; Weber, Kopelman, & Messick, 2004) – and has by and large overlooked the influence of the context in which these factors operate. That is, although the issues we decide on may be similar, we may nevertheless make very different decisions if we deal with those issues in a different context, for example when we do so in a different social role than that of an individual. The demands of our roles may require us to take the interests of others into account (e.g., when making decisions which also affect significant others), or to forego our own preferences (e.g., when at work, we must satisfy the preferences of our employer rather than our own), and therefore may change our orientations toward others, as well as how we perceive the issues we decide on. For example, as representatives, we may have more competitive goals, and may be inclined to perceive our interactions more in terms of competition – even when facing the same task and incentives as individuals, and even when representing only fairly arbitrary groups, to whom we are not explicitly accountable.\(^{21}\) Therefore, the present dissertation underlines that our interactions with others do not take place in a “vacuum”, and reveals that the roles in which we interact may have an important impact on how we approach and experience them. Considering how much of our lives we spend in various roles (e.g., employee, parent, partner, and so forth), such processes in fact may feature in many of our interactions – and therefore may be crucial for understanding many of our decisions.

Second, and related to the above, the notion that our orientations toward others may be influenced by the context in which we interact provides support for

\(^{21}\) It should be noted that this categorization on its own could not explain our results; see Studies 2.1 and 2.2.
Chapter 5

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the slot-machine model of interpersonal orientations (Van Lange, De Cremer, Van Dijk, & Van Vugt, 2006; Van Lange & Joireman, 2008) – a theory which regards people’s interaction goals as plastic rather than rigid. This model builds on interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Kelley, Holmes, Kerr, Reis, Rusbult, & Van Lange, 2003), and argues that people’s interaction goals reflect which decision rules (from the spectrum of all possible rules) are the most salient for them under the present circumstances. The slot-machine model therefore acknowledges that some decision rules may generally be more salient for people than others (i.e., their social value orientations), but also suggest that particular rules may become more or less salient under particular circumstances.

The findings of the present dissertation provide considerable support for this view. Using the Ring Measure of Social Values, we were able to compare people’s use of the five most common decision rules (selfishness, cooperation, equality, competition, and altruism) in two distinct interaction contexts. Our findings revealed that an interaction between representatives, participants were relatively more inclined to use the competitive interaction rule, and relatively less inclined to use the cooperative and altruistic rules, compared with in an interaction between individuals. These results therefore reveal that indeed particular decision rules become more and less salient in different circumstances, and therefore provide empirical support for the slot-machine model. Furthermore, these findings reveal that goals which thus become salient can have very tangible consequences for people’s perceptions and actions. In sum, the present findings therefore support a more plastic view of people’s orientations toward others, which may have important implications for how we understand people’s actions toward others.

Third, the present insights into the “mindset” of representatives may also have important implications for our understanding of interactions between groups. An extensive literature exists on intergroup interactions, which has provided important insight into the factors that lead to cooperative relations and to conflict between groups (see Insko & Schopler, 1998; Van Beest, Andeweg, Van Lange, & Koning, 2008). However, much of this literature focuses on interactions where
groups interact as a whole. Yet in social life, there are also many interactions where groups interact not as a whole, but rather via individuals who carry out a social role: via representatives, or their more powerful kin, leaders.\textsuperscript{22} Such individuals face rather different pressures than members of decision-making groups, in that they interact interpersonally, but do so on behalf of their groups (i.e., they operate at the intersection of interpersonal and intergroup interactions). Representatives, for example, are not “anonymous” members of the group who cannot be identified, they are individually responsible for the outcomes of others, and may be held under (explicit or implicit) scrutiny by their constituency. The present findings suggest that their “mindset” consequently may be rather different than that of group members (see Studies 3.1 and 3.2). Therefore, it is possible that group representatives may sometimes make rather different decisions than groups as a whole, and that they need different kinds “leverage” in order to improve their relations (for example, interventions directed at face-saving or logrolling). Therefore, the present research suggests that in order to understand interactions between groups, it may also be important to consider the “psychology” of the individuals who represent them. We therefore regard it as encouraging that recent work in this area has focused on the role of leaders in such interactions (for example, see Pinter, Insko, Wildschut, Kirchner, Montoya, & Wolf, 2007).

Finally, the present findings provide important new insight into our understanding of communication. When it comes to achieving cooperation, communication can be an essential tool. It enables people to coordinate their actions and to explain their decisions, and thus makes it easier to achieve and maintain cooperation. However, in spite of this, findings regarding its effectiveness in fact have been mixed (for example, see Chen & Komorita, 1994;\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{22} Representatives do in fact often feature in studies on intergroup interactions. However, their interaction is typically not investigated: they are merely there to convey the decisions of their group (for example, see Insko, Kirchner, Pinter, Efaw, & Wildschut, 2005; Insko, Schopler, Gaertner, Wildschut, Kozar, Pinter, et al., 2001; Schopler, Insko, Wieselquist, Pemberton, Witcher, Kozar, et al., 2001).
Lindskold & Bennett, 1973; Orbell, Van de Kragt, & Dawes, 1988), with communication sometimes having positive effects on cooperation, and other times having no, or even detrimental effects. The present research suggests that people’s interaction goals may play a crucial part in this relationship. As Chapters 2 and 4 reveal, people may particularly be receptive to communications that fit their “mindset” – communications which suggest that others share their outlook on the situation, or which suit their expectations. Communications which fail to do so, in contrast, may be far less effective, or even counterproductive. Therefore, the present findings suggest that in order to understand the effects of communication, it may also be necessary to consider the “mindset” of its target. And in a more practical vein, our findings suggest that there may be important benefits to tailoring one’s messages to suit the audience and the circumstances: our communications may be particularly effective if we manage to “strike the right tone”.

Practical implications

While the present findings are interesting from a theoretical point of view, they also have several more practical implications. Perhaps first and foremostly, the present findings have important implications for all those situations in social life where others act as our representatives, where we are representatives ourselves, or where we interact with the representatives of others. Our findings suggest that representatives may adopt a rather more competitive “mindset” than they would in their interactions as individuals: the pressures of their role may make them strongly motivated to do better (and certainly no worse) than those they interact with, and may lead them to have (unrealistically?) pessimistic expectations of others. In this “mindset”, they may be inclined to use rather competitive tactics – which they believe will please their constituency (Holmes & Lamm, 1979), but which in fact may end up hurting them. Therefore, an important implication of the present research is that it may be unwise to consider representatives the “default choice” for conducting our group’s interactions, and
that we should be careful when acting as, or interacting with, representatives ourselves. We wish to emphasize, however, that constituencies can play an important role in improving the effectiveness of their representatives. Representatives may be much less inclined toward competition if their constituencies emphasize their faith in them, avoid making them too explicitly accountable, and give them clear indications of their wishes (also see Cohen & Insko, 2008?). Constituencies may therefore also be responsible themselves for the extent to which they benefit from the efforts of their representatives.

Related to the above, the notion that our “mindset” may be very different when we act as representatives suggests that our orientations toward others may be quite variable – as may those of the people we interact with. Although we may like to believe ourselves to be unbiased and consistent, the present findings suggest that our aims and perceptions in fact may be influenced quite substantially by the context of our interactions. This can have important consequences for how our interactions unfold, as our “mindset” may sometimes cloud our judgment, and distract us from the true issues at hand. On the one hand, this suggests that it may be important to think twice before acting on such “gut feelings”, as from time to time, our “mindset” may lead us astray. But on the other hand, an intriguing implication of our findings is that our “gut feelings” may sometimes give an indication of those of others: if they must deal with the same demands that we must, then their “gut feelings” may also be similar to ours. Therefore, by considering our own “gut feelings”, we may be able to appeal more effectively to others – thereby reducing the likelihood of abrasive relations and harmful misunderstandings.

Finally, the present findings have important implications for dealing with unintended errors or noise. Unintended errors are frequent in our social lives, and may lead to harmful misunderstandings. For example, if we miss an important meeting because the train breaks down, our colleagues may think that we have forgotten, or have overslept – which may negatively affect their esteem of us, and may hamper our future interactions. The present findings reveal that errors like these may be particularly harmful in some contexts, and far less so in others. In
particular when acting as representatives, people were less willing to give each other the benefit of the doubt, and less inclined to rebuild cooperation – whereas among people acting as individuals, instances of noise had far less of an impact.

The notion that the impact of noise may depend on the context has important implications for how people should deal with such misunderstandings. Previous studies have revealed several ways in which one can limit the impact of noise, for instance by being somewhat forgiving or generous, or by communicating (see Klapwijk & Van Lange, 2008; Tazelaar, Van Lange, & Ouwerkerk, 2004; Van Lange, Ouwerkerk, & Tazelaar, 2002). The present findings suggest, however, that people may be more open to such tactics in some contexts than in others. For example, as representatives, people have little faith in the intentions of others, and cannot afford to take chances – and therefore may be less open to tactics like forgiveness and generosity, and less likely to employ them themselves. Our findings suggest that in order to overcome instances of noise, it is necessary to take the “mindset” of the other into account: that is, people may greatly limit the impact of noise if they put themselves in the shoes of their counterpart, and consider his or her situation. By doing so, they may be able to appeal more effectively to their partner’s perspective – which may make their communications more persuasive and believable (i.e., “striking the right tone”), and may prevent it “falling on deaf ears”. Again, however, it is important to note that the constituency can play a pivotal role in limiting the impact of noise: if they reassure their representative that tactics to overcome noise (like forgiveness and generosity) will not be disapproved of, they can give their representative the “tools” to effectively combat it.

Avenues for Future Research

In the present dissertation, I have sought to provide some insight into the question why people choose to cooperate with others, when it is not in their immediate interest to do so. I have particularly focused on the influence that people’s interaction goals may have – not only on the decision to cooperate or not, but also
on how people perceive and experience their interactions. The six studies which comprise this dissertation have revealed many intriguing insights into this relationship: they have revealed that people’s interaction goals may be strongly related to their decisions to cooperate with others or not; however, they have also revealed that those goals in turn may be influenced considerably by the roles in which people interact. In this way, our roles may have considerable influence on how we experience our interactions with others, and on how our interactions unfold: the demands of our roles may limit our openness to communications (like promises, threats, apologies, and to clarifications), and may enhance our vulnerability to the harmful effects of unintended errors or noise. In sum, the present findings therefore have revealed that our social roles may have considerable influence on the “mindset” in which we interact with others, and thus may have far-reaching consequences for how those interactions unfold. There are, however, several further questions that follow from these findings, which could provide further insight into the nature of this relationship. We outline a number of these questions in the following.

First, and most importantly, several important further questions may be raised about the relationship between people’s roles and their “psychology”. In the present research, we have focused particularly on interpersonal interactions in the role of group representative. This role had considerable influence on people’s “mindset”, and far-reaching consequences for how their interactions with others unfolded. But, as noted earlier, people interact in context of a vast range of roles (that of individual, partner, parent, employee, group member, and so forth), each of which may come with its own distinct requirements. Therefore, an important avenue for further contributions would be to examine what “mindset” other social roles might activate, and what consequences that might have for people’s actions toward others. But although roles may serve as particularly powerful contexts, it is of course also important to note that there are a host of other influences in the context of people’s interactions, which might also have considerable influence on their “psychology”. For example, people’s mood, the temperature, distractions or
cognitive load, time pressure, weariness or depletion, and so forth – factors like these might also have considerable influence on how people perceive their interactions with others, and on what decisions they make. Therefore, examining contextual factors like these could also greatly increase our understanding of what processes underlie people’s orientations towards others. Furthermore, because of their relative subtlety, factors like these could provide important insight into people’s awareness of such processes: it could be, for example, that many contextual influences do not reach our awareness, but rather are reflected in “gut feelings”. We regard this as an interesting possibility, on which future contributions could shed further light.

Second, there are also further questions that may be raised about people’s “mindsets”, and in particular about their impact on other aspects of people’s “psychology”. The present findings reveal that the roles in which people interact may have considerable influence on their outlook on their interactions with others. In a different role, different goals and expectations of others may become salient, which suggests that people may take on a different “perspective” on their interactions – for example, as representatives, they may be more inclined to perceive their interactions in terms of competition. But it may be that this “mindset” is also reflected in other aspects of their “psychology”.

Particularly interesting in this respect are the consequences for people’s moral system. The moral system plays an important part in translating goals into actions: at the “gut level”, people’s motives may be selfish, but people often do not act selfishly – because many selfish acts are seen as immoral. But recent work on ethics and morality suggests that what people perceive as moral or not in fact may be open to change (see Trevino & Weaver, 2003; Wildschut & Insko, 2006); people may engage in various distortions to justify immoral behavior (e.g., moral disengagement, Bandura, 1999), and may change their standards of what they deem moral or not (i.e., reducing cognitive dissonance, Blasi, 2004; Festinger, 1957). Particularly interesting for the present work is the possibility that people may use different moral standards in different circumstances. As Wildschut and Insko (2006) suggest, if people take part in intergroup interactions,
they may shift toward a “group morality”, which places the interest of the group above all other moral concerns. This raises the possibility that people’s standards of what is moral or not may also be affected by the context or role in which they interact – and therefore that people’s willingness to engage in immoral acts might depend on their role, the context, or the situation. This relation therefore would make an excellent topic for future contributions.

Finally, there are several further questions which may be raised about communication. In the studies that comprise this dissertation, we have examined the effects of promises, threats, apologies, and clarifications, and have learned that their impact may depend on the “mindset” of the person receiving them. These findings therefore suggest that people’s role and their personality may play an important part in how they perceive and experience the communications of others, and thus may play a crucial part in its effectiveness. However, in order to gain a more comprehensive picture of this relationship, a number of further questions must be asked. For one, it is not yet known how the effects of several other important types of communication (for example, ridicule, insults, praise, supplications, and so forth) may depend on people’s “mindset”. It seems plausible that people’s goals and expectations would also influence their perceptions of such communications, but at present no studies have looked into this relation. Furthermore, as noted earlier, people’s “mindset” may be influenced by the roles in which they interact, and thus it may be that certain types of communication are more effective in one context than in another. For example, reasoning from Chapter 1, it might be that in more cooperative contexts (for example, interactions in the role of team member, partner, or parent) combinations of promise and threat are less effective, because it is highly inappropriate to threaten others in such settings. In more competitive settings, in contrast, threats may be more appropriate and effective – but perhaps not in combination with promises, which might be less credible. Therefore, it may also be important to examine the effectiveness of these and other communications in different contexts. And lastly, the present findings highlight how people respond to promises, threats, apologies, and clarifications, but do not reveal when they would use these and other
communications *themselves*. Little is known of when and where people employ particular types of communication, and of how that may be influenced by their personality or the context. In sum, future contributions could greatly improve our understanding of communication by investigating further types of communication, by further examining how the effectiveness of communications may depend on the context, and by examining when and where people use which types of communication themselves.

Concluding Remarks

The question of why people choose to cooperate with others is a complicated one, as instances abound in which they in fact are better off when they choose not to cooperate. People’s decisions to do so or not tend to be strongly tied to their interpersonal orientations – to the extent to which they are inclined to consider the interests of others, and how they value those interests in relation to their own. The research that comprises this dissertation suggests that these orientations indeed may have a pivotal influence – not only on their decisions to cooperate or not, but on all kinds of aspects of their interactions. For example, people’s orientations may also influence their openness to persuasive communications, such as promises and threats. Crucially, however, the present dissertation also reveals that these orientations may in fact be far less stable and consistent than was thought previously. People’s orientations toward others may be strongly dependent on the context or role in which they interact, and if people interact in a different role than that of an individual (for example that of group representative), very different goals and expectations may become salient. In a “mindset” like this, their interactions may unfold very differently than otherwise: for example, when acting as representative, people have less faith in the communications of others, are less willing to give them the benefit of the doubt in case of unintended errors, and are less inclined to cooperate with them. Therefore, in order to understand people’s decisions, one must also understand the roles in which they interact – and in the case of representatives, their role
seems to trigger a rather competitive “mindset”. This is a finding that needs closer attention – not only for theoretical reasons, but also for the welfare of the world. After all, it is often representatives (and not individuals) who discuss, negotiate, and resolve issues that challenge relationships among groups, cultures, and nations.