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Ilana Ritov
Amos Drory
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel

The effect of ambiguity is investigated with regard to the success of a venture on the initial choice of interpersonal conflict management strategy of the venture's initiator. In the experiments reported here, subjects were asked to imagine a hypothetical situation in which the decision-maker, in a capacity as an organization member, seeks the use of an organizational resource in order to initiate the venture. The conflict arises as another member of the organization also lays claim to the same resource. Subjects, taking on the role of the decision-maker, show more collaboration in managing the conflict when experts disagree about the probability of successful outcome of the venture. Similar inclinations are revealed when the possible long-term adverse consequences of the conflict are made explicit. These findings support the interpretation of ambiguity effect in terms of increased loss aversion due to personal responsibility.

One of the major issues addressed by researchers of conflict behavior pertains to the scope of behavioral strategies potentially employed by individuals and groups in a conflict situation. Several models have been developed to account for the structure of conflict management strategy. Early models of this type (Deutsch, 1973) presented interpersonal conflict strategies along a single dimension of cooperation vs. competition. Blake and Mouton (1964) proposed a two-dimensional model based on concern for people and concern for the production of others.

Further adaptations of the two dimensional model highlighted the dimensions of Assertiveness and Cooperativeness (Thomas, 1976). Rahim and Bonoma (1979) preferred the dimensions of Concern for Self vs. Concern for Others. These models all yield five distinct behavioral conflict management strategies: (a) collaborating, working for an integrative solution considering the other's needs without compromising one's own; (b) competing, attempting to dominate and attain one's needs without concern for the other's needs; (c) accommodating, catering for the needs of the other party while sacrificing one's own; (d) avoiding, refraining from any confrontation, thus disregarding the needs of both the self and the other; and, (e) compromising, searching for an intermediate position meeting the opponent halfway. According to Thomas (1976, 1988, 1992), competing and collaborating represent

an assertive approach, while avoiding and accommodating are unassertive strategies. Avoiding and competing represent uncooperative strategies, while compromising represents the middle ground among the other four strategies.

The process by which conflict management strategy is adopted has been interpreted differently by different researchers (Putnam, 1988). Whereas earlier research viewed conflict management behavior predominantly in terms of personality attributes, the focus has gradually shifted and is now centered primarily on the conflict situation and the person-situation interaction (Knapp, Putnam, & Davis, 1988). Lewicki, Weiss, and Lewin (1992) suggested that normative conflict models portray conflict handling behavior as adaptive and as managed with respect to its consequences. Thomas (1988) maintained that conflict management behavior is affected by considerations made by the parties during a conflict episode. Among the major considerations are those pertaining to conflict outcomes and their likelihood. The present study focuses on the relationship between ambiguity with respect to the likelihood of expected positive outcome and the choice of conflict management strategy.

Many decisions in organizational life involve uncertainty (March & Olsen, 1979). Successful outcome of a particular course of action is seldom guaranteed. However, in some cases, a good estimate of the probability of success is available to the decision-maker prior to making a choice. In many other cases, the probability of success is not known, or its given estimate is not judged to be highly accurate. This particular type of uncertainty was first termed "ambiguity" by Ellsberg (1961), who demonstrated the tendency of people to try to avoid it.

In Ellsberg's experiment, subjects were asked to choose between betting on a green ball being drawn at random from an urn containing 50 green balls and 50 red balls, or on a green ball being drawn from an urn containing unknown proportions of green and red balls. Subjects generally preferred to bet on the urn with the known composition. Ambiguity avoidance has since been demonstrated in many domains, including moral judgment (Spranca, Minsk, & Baron, 1991), insurance decisions (Hogarth & Kunreuther, 1989), clinical treatment choice (Curley, Eraker, & Yates, 1984), and vaccination decisions (Ritov & Baron, 1990).

Why do people prefer to avoid ambiguity? Frisch and Baron (1988) suggested that perception of missing information is at the source of this phenomenon; when missing information is made salient, subjects are inclined to avoid action (or prefer less ambiguous options). Heath and Tversky (1991) proposed a related idea, that the effect of ambiguity depends upon the decision-maker's feeling of competence in the particular context relevant to the choice. These authors demonstrated that subjects prefer unambiguous to ambiguous choices only when they consider themselves lacking information or competence in the relevant domain. In domains of competence, preference is actually reversed. Heath and Tversky suggested that the competence hypothesis is likely to stem from motivational factors: the decision-maker takes credit for success if the choice involves judgment in an area of competence, and takes the blame for failure if the choice involves judgment in an area

of relative ignorance. The added value of the outcome results either from self-evaluation or from evaluation by others.

This motivational account is in accord with the findings of Curly, Yates, and Abrams (1986) that subjects particularly avoid ambiguous chance events when they anticipate their decisions to be evaluated by others. Thus, ambiguity avoidance seems closely linked to assumption of personal responsibility by the decision-maker. Tversky and Kahneman (personal communication) suggest that assuming personal responsibility for the decision considerably amplifies loss aversion. Since decisions are powerfully influenced by loss aversion (Tversky & Kahneman, 1991), as the potential loss looms larger, one is more likely to prefer options that would reduce it.

Personal responsibility and accountability for one's actions are core factors in the social contingency model of decision-making proposed by Tetlock (1992). Social contingencies are particularly salient in the context of behavior in organizations. Thus, to the extent that ambiguity is indeed related to personal responsibility, it is expected to affect individual decisions in organizational context.

The present study focuses on the role of ambiguity in strategic choice concerning interpersonal conflict in organizations. In our scenario, the decision-maker is interested in pursuing a certain course of action for which organizational resources are needed. More specifically, a manager is interested in manufacturing a new product. Embarking on the desired course of action inevitably involves our decision-maker in a conflict of interests with another individual in his organization, who also lays claim to the same limited resources. Thus, the decision to pursue one's goal necessitates a choice concerning the mode of handling the interpersonal conflict. Subjects, who are asked to imagine themselves in the decision-maker's place, indicate how likely they are to apply each of five given conflict management strategies in the specific situations. The new product, for which the additional resources are needed, may turn out successful, or may fail. We manipulate ambiguity by varying the estimates for probability of successful outcome (that is, the success of the new product). In the unambiguous conditions, independent experts agree upon a single-point estimate of probability of success, whereas, in the ambiguous conditions, each of the experts gives a different assessment.

The experimental studies reviewed above suggest that, in situations involving interpersonal conflict, ambiguity is likely to amplify perception of potential adverse outcomes of goal pursuit. Although in our scenario, direct loss, associated with the product's failure, is not specified, damage to future relations is likely to be considered a potential loss. If people's preference of behavioral strategy in such situations is determined primarily by their perception of the expected outcome in terms of personal gain or loss (Greenhalge, 1987), then the increased weight of potential loss, associated with ambiguity, is expected to affect their choice. In order to examine the specific nature of the predicted change in strategy due to ambiguity, we return to Thomas's (1976, 1988) two-dimensional model.

Thomas's model implies that the role of the five behavioral strategies in terms of facilitating gain or loss may pertain to two major aspects of the conflict situa-

tion: (a) goal attainment; and, (b) future relations with other party. The assertive strategies (competition, collaboration) are designed to increase goal attainment. Although the potential gain expected from collaboration is bounded by interests of the other party, and thus may be lower than the gain expected from competition, it does not entail accepting a sure reduction in expected gain. The unassertive strategies (avoiding, accommodating) make no attempt to pursue the conflicting goal and may not be expected to yield any gain in this regard. The cooperative strategies (accommodation, collaboration) are designed to protect the future relationship with the other party while the uncooperative strategies are either indifferent to such future relations (avoiding) or run the risk of severing them (competition). The compromising strategy offers a middle ground between competing and accommodating. As such, it sacrifices some of the potential gain expected as a result of a successful competition and hopefully provides some protection of future relations with the other party.

It may be proposed that, with all other circumstances remaining equal, as the goal becomes more attractive, there will be a higher inclination to choose an assertive, outcome-maximizing strategy and disregard the impact on relations with the other party (competition). On the other hand, when the attractiveness of the goal is reduced, there will be a greater concern for protecting the relationship aspect, without sacrificing the opportunity of goal attainment. Thus, an assertive by cooperative strategy will be preferred (collaboration). Unassertive tactics (avoiding, accommodating) will not be affected by such changes, as long as the goal remains positively attractive, since the unassertive tactics do not allow for any realistic probability of goal attainment.

As pointed out earlier, we maintain that ambiguity affects goal attractiveness by increasing sensitivity to potential loss, particularly regarding relationships with other individuals. Thus, it follows from the general mapping of the strategies described above, that the introduction of ambiguity increases the rate of collaboration and reduces the rate of competition. We do not expect significant changes with respect to the non-goal-oriented strategies, namely, avoidance and accommodation. As compromise entails a sure cutback of the decision-maker's share in the needed resource, we do not expect ambiguity to affect this strategy either.

Experiment 1

In this experiment, as well as in the following ones, subjects were asked to read short vignettes describing a member of an organization who faces a situation of interpersonal conflict. This person is engaged in an enterprise that inevitably leads to conflict of interests between himself and another member of his organization; consequently, he faces a choice between different strategies for managing the conflict. The enterprise's success is not certain, even if the organization decides to grant the necessary resources. Different versions of the vignettes give different predictions of the probability of successful outcome. We asked our subjects to

imagine themselves in the role of the person described in the vignette, and to indicate how likely, under those specific conditions, they would be to use each of the given strategies.

Method

Subjects. The first experiment had 195 subjects with a mean age of 22. The subjects were undergraduate students enrolled in the Departments of Industrial Engineering and Management, Economics, and Behavioral Sciences. The experiment was conducted in the classrooms by permission of the instructors and included the students who attended the selected classes.

Instrument. The experiment consisted of a paper and pencil instrument containing the following critical incident:

> Dan is the managing director of a manufacturing plant in a large organization. He plans to manufacture a new product next year. Dan knows that, if successful, the company's profits will go up and he will get a lot of credit.
>
> *Version 1*: Dan consulted with three experts who estimated the new product success probability. The three experts agreed that the product's success probability is 70%.
>
> *Version 2*: Dan consulted with three experts who estimated the new product success probability. The three experts disagreed on the probability of the new product success. The first expert estimated the probability of success by 50%, the second expert estimated it by 70%, and the third expert estimated the probability by 90%.
>
> Dan needs an additional budget of two million dollars to set up the production line for the new product. The company allocates the sum of two million dollars every year for the promotion of a special project. In case there is more than one applicant, it is expected that they will try to sort out the conflict on their own before it is brought up to management for a final decision.
>
> Dan knows that Jack, who is heading the R&D department, is also interested in this money for the development of new products.
>
> There are several possible strategies which one could adopt to deal with this situation. If you were Dan, to what extent would you be inclined to use each one of the following strategies?

The delineation of the incident was followed by a short description of the five strategies suggested by Thomas: avoiding, accommodating, competing, collaborating, and compromising. The full description of the five strategies, as they appeared in the questionnaire, is given in the Appendix. The subjects were asked to rate their inclination to adopt each one of the five strategies independently. The rating was made on a five-point scale attached to each strategy, ranging from "Very little" to "Very much."

Design. The study consisted of a 2 x 5 factorial design with one between-subject and one within-subject factor. The between-subject factor "success probability" consisted of two levels: (a) Agreement among experts (*Version 1.* 70%) (n = 96); (b) Disagreement among experts (*Version 2.* 50%–70%–90%) (n = 99). The within-subject factor consisted of five scales pertaining to the five strategies for handling interpersonal conflict.

The questionnaire containing the critical incident and the five scales was administered to the subjects in their classrooms. The purpose of the experiment was presented in general terms as concerned with the ways people handle interpersonal conflict under different circumstances. Subjects were told that participation in the experiment was voluntary. They were asked not to identify themselves by name on the forms. Only very few subjects declined to complete the questionnaire.

Results and Discussion

Prior to analysis of the present experiment, we report the data analysis from another questionnaire, designed to validate the above measure of conflict strategies. The short descriptions detailed in the Appendix were administered, together with the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory–II (ROCI–II) (Rahim, 1983), to another sample of 140 part-time graduate students of management. All subjects in the sample were full time employees in various organizations and had at least two years of work experience. The correlations between each of the five ROCI–II subscales and the corresponding short descriptions of the conflict management strategy ranged between r = .60 to r = .72 and were all highly significant. The intercorrelations among the five strategies based on the study sample are given in Table 1.

Table 1
The Intercorrelations among the Five Strategies

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Avoid	—				
2. Accommodate	.33	—			
3. Compete	–.18	–.64	—		
4. Collaborate	–.07	.06	.01	—	
5. Compromise	.04	–.12	–.14	.48	—

It may be observed that most coefficients were relatively low, and that only three were of considerable magnitude: Avoiding with accommodating (.33); Competing with Accommodation (–.64); and, Collaboration with compromising (.48). The magnitude of the correlations suggest that, while the above strategies are partially associated, they may still be regarded as distinct from each other. This finding is compatible with recently published evidence of the discriminant validities of the ROCI–II subscales (Rahim & Magner, 1995).

Turning next to Experiment 1, we computed for each strategy and each version of the incident the mean rating across subjects (Table 2).

Table 2
Experiment 1: Mean Ratings of Strategies

Strategies	Experts' Assessments				Effect Size
	Disagree 50%, 70%, 90%		Agree 70%		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	
Avoid	2.52	1.14	2.68	1.20	.14
Accommodate	1.54	1.18	1.69	1.11	.13
Compete	4.18	1.18	4.13	.92	.05
Collaborate	3.93	1.05	3.52	1.13	.37
Compromise	3.00	1.15	2.94	1.06	.06

Analysis of variance revealed a highly significant effect of the within-subject factor [F (4, 77) = 183.05, $p < .001$]. Indeed, mean responses on the different scales varied greatly. Subjects were most likely to compete and least likely to accommodate their opponent. The between-subject factor of experts' agreement did not yield a significant main effect [F (1, 19) = .41, *ns*], but the interaction between the experts' agreement and strategy type was significant [F (4, 77) = 2.48, $p < .05$]. The right column of Table 2 displays the effect sizes for each of the strategies. These effects indicated that the interaction between the two factors was mostly due to the impact of ambiguity on the tendency to collaborate; subjects in the no-agreement condition were more inclined to collaborate than subjects in the agreement condition [F (1, 19) = 7.75, $p < .01$]. Ambiguity did not significantly affect any of the other strategies.

To summarize, subjects' ratings supported the prediction with respect to increased collaboration under ambiguity. The prediction of increased competition in the non-ambiguous, relative to the ambiguous, condition was not supported by the data. The lack of significant difference in competition could be due to a ceiling effect; the rating of competition in the ambiguous condition was already very high (4.18 on a scale of 5).

Unlike collaborating and competing, each of the other three strategies—avoidance, accommodation, and compromise—involves giving up some or all of the resource. An increase in the use of any of those strategies would mean accepting a sure decrease in expected gain. As we have seen, ambiguity did not affect the use of those strategies.

Experiment 2

A possible alternative account of the interaction found in Experiment 1 between expert agreement and conflict management strategy could pertain to subjects' interpretation of the probability information presented to them. It is possible that when the three experts provide different assessments, subjects are inclined to overweight the lower estimate relative to the other two estimates. Indeed, Heath and Tversky (1991) provide a demonstration suggesting that the Hogarth and Kunreuther (1989) ambiguity manipulation affected perceived probability of outcomes. In their demonstration, subjects who were told that "they could experience considerable uncertainty about the estimate," judged "the true probability" to be more regressive than the given estimate. To test the hypothesis that a shift in perceived probability generated the ambiguity effects found in Experiment 1, we compared, in the following experiment, the rating of strategies in two "experts agreement" conditions: agreement on high probability of success (90%); and agreement on low probability of success (50%).

Method

Subjects. Experiment 2 had 193 participants. The subjects were selected from the same population and with the same procedures as in Experiment 1.

Instrument and Design. The same basic incident described above was used with the following modification: only the "experts agreement" version was used, with experts, following the scenario of version 1, estimating either 90% or 50% probability of success.

Results and Discussion

We computed, as in Experiment 1, the mean rating of each strategy across subjects for each version of the incident. Those means are displayed in Table 3. Again we find that the within-subject factor of strategy is highly significant [F (4, 76) = 188.25, $p < .001$]. However, neither the main effect of predicted probability of success, nor the interaction between the two factors, approach significant level [F (1, 191) = .21, *ns* and F (4, 76) = .62, *ns* for main effect and interaction, respectively]. Effect sizes are displayed in the right column of Table 3.

The size of the effects may indicate that ratings of strategies are relatively unaffected by the change in estimated probability of success. However, the lack of significant effects cannot be taken as positive disconfirmation of the alternative hypothesis pertaining to the role of judged probability. Indeed, the tests may not be powerful enough to detect significant changes. We compute, for example, the power of the test to detect a significant difference in the tendency to collaborate. If the "true" difference was the magnitude found in Experiment 1 (that is .401), the probability of concluding that such a difference is significant in Experiment 2 would be .64. The power to detect smaller differences would obviously be lower still. Hence, although the results of the present study do not lend support to the hypothesis that the ambiguity effect found in Experiment 1 is wholly due to a shift

in perceived probability of success in the experts disagreement condition, a more direct test of this possibility is needed. This was provided in Experiment 3.

Table 3
Experiment 2: Mean Ratings of Strategies

Strategies	Experts' Assessments				Effect Size
	Disagree 50%		Agree 90%		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	
Avoid	2.47	1.30	2.43	1.13	.03
Accommodate	1.73	1.54	1.64	1.55	.06
Compete	4.00	1.36	4.20	1.40	.15
Collaborate	3.72	1.23	3.71	1.11	.01
Compromise	3.00	1.14	3.07	.88	.06

Experiment 3

As detailed earlier, the motivational account of ambiguity attributes its impact to intensification of potential outcomes due to assumption of credit or blame. In Experiment 3, we tested this assumption directly by presenting subjects with identical conditions to those used in Experiment 1 and asking the subjects to assess how different outcomes might affect their standing in the organization. Specifically, we were interested in comparing the effect of successful versus unsuccessful outcomes under different *a priori* probability conditions. The present experiment also provided an opportunity for re-testing, in a different way, the hypothesis that ambiguity affects subjective probability.

Method

Subjects. There were 134 subjects taking part in Experiment 3, which was conducted in a classroom setting. Each subject responded to a single version of the questionnaire. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of the four different versions.

Instrument and Design. The same incident was used as in Experiment 1. Four versions were employed, each differing with respect to the estimated probability of success. In two expert agreement conditions, all three experts predicted either a 50% (in version 1), or a 70% (in version 2) chance of success. In the remaining two versions, the experts did not agree in their predictions. In version 3 the three experts predicted a 30%, 50%, and 70% chance of success, and in version 4, the predictions were 50%, 70% and 90%. Thus, as in Experiment 1, ambiguity was operationalized as disagreement between experts. Versions 1 and 2 described unambiguous situations, whereas versions 3 and 4 described ambiguous situations.

The mean estimate for probability of success was crossed with ambiguity: in versions 1 and 3 the mean probability was 50%; whereas in versions 2 and 4, it was 70%.

The subjects' task in this experiment was quite different from the one in Experiment 1. The delineation of the incident was followed by three questions. First, subjects were asked for their own assessment of the probability that the new product would be successful if manufactured. This question was designed to examine, in a different way, the possibility that ambiguity changes the subjective point estimate of the probability. In the second question, subjects were asked: "Imagine that you received the additional budget, and you managed to manufacture the new product. The product turned out to be successful. How do you think this will affect your standing in the organization?" Similarly, in the third question, subjects were asked to imagine that the product was put on the market, but did not prove a success. They were asked to assess how this outcome might affect their standing in the organization. The response to each of the last two questions was given on a five-point rating scale, ranging from "Very little positive impact" (1) to "Very high positive impact" (5).

Results and Discussion

Mean probability estimates, given in response to question 1, are displayed in Table 4. On the whole, the probability estimates given by subjects are quite close to the average experts' assessment given in the questionnaire. Thus, there is a highly significant effect from mean experts' assessment [F (1, 124) = 63.46, $p < .001$]. The probability estimates given by subjects in the ambiguous conditions (experts disagree) are slightly higher than those in the unambiguous conditions (expert agreement), but this effect is not quite significant [F (1, 124) = 3.31, *ns*]. Hence, we can conclude that subjects generally accept the premises that the average of the probability assessments given by the three experts is their best estimate of the potential success of the new product. Again, we find no indication that the lower estimates receive greater weight than the higher ones. If anything, the opposite is true.

Table 4
Average Estimated Probability of Success by Condition

Mean *a priori* chances	Experts' Assessments			
	Agree		Disagree	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
50%	52.65	12.50	56.42	12.80
70%	69.10	10.57	72.83	9.80

The main purpose of this questionnaire was to examine the extent to which ambiguity affects subjects' view of the potential implications of success (question 2) or failure (question 3). The average rating for the implication of success and failure are given in Table 5. We first examined the case in which the product was put on the market and proved successful. In that case, subjects anticipated gaining substantial credit for their performance. Indeed, the positive impact of the incident was expected to be somewhat greater in the ambiguous, than in the non-ambiguous, conditions [F (1, 127) = 4.09, $p < .05$]. Thus, it appears that the manager's decision to press for manufacturing the new product in a situation where the experts were not in agreement about the probability of the product's success in the marketplace earns him "extra credit." The effect of mean estimated chance of success (50% vs. 70%) did not prove significant [F (1, 127) = 1.75, *ns*], nor did the interaction between "agreement" and "mean assessment" [F (1, 127) = .02, *ns*].

Table 5
Mean Rating of the Impact of Success and Failure of Product

Mean *a priori* chances	Experts Agreement							
	Success				Failure			
	Agree		Disagree		Agree		Disagree	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
50%	4.24	.60	4.49	.67	2.59	.70	1.94	.90
70%	4.39	.66	4.59	.51	2.63	.60	2.61	.87

The anticipated impact of the incident is much less positive in the case where the product did not become successful. In analyzing the ratings given in response to question 3, we find significant effects of both the mean *a priori* chance [F (1, 125) = 5.49, $p < .05$] and the "agreement" factor [F (1, 125) = 4.76, $p < .05$], as well as a significant interaction [F (1, 125) = 4.42, $p < .05$]. Thus, subjects expected to be somewhat better off if their decision to manufacture the unsuccessful product was based on a mean projected success probability of 70% rather than 50%, and they also expected to be somewhat better off if the experts were in agreement. However, these two main effects appear mostly due to the very low ratings of the case, in which the mean projected success probability was 50% with no expert agreement. Thus, it appears that, while the manager's decision to press for the manufacturing of the new product in a situation where the experts were not in agreement may earn him "extra credit" if the product succeeds, it may also count against him in case of failure. The latter impact may be particularly strong if the manager is perceived as having taken a greater risk.

Experiment 4

If ambiguity affects the choice of strategy primarily because of anticipation of increased negative impact in case of failure, then emphasizing potential loss associated with conflict may produce a similar shift in conflict management strategies, even under unambiguous conditions. Thus, in a situation where one is most likely to bear the consequences of having been involved in interpersonal conflict, differences in agreed probability of success may have an effect on the choice of strategy similar to the one exerted by ambiguity. This hypothesis was tested in the present experiment, by providing subjects with additional information suggesting that the implications of their present decision, in terms of relationship with the other party, might affect their career in the future.

Given this additional information, we compared subjects' responses in three conditions: experts' agreement on high probability of success (90%); experts' agreement on low probability of success (50%); and, experts' disagreement (with mean estimate of 70%).

Method

Subjects. The experiment had 314 subjects selected from the same population by the same procedures as in the previous experiments.

Instrument. The same basic incident described above was used, with the following modification: all versions included an additional paragraph intended to enhance the decision-maker's expectations concerning future consequences of his choice of strategy. To that end, the other individual, with whom the conflict of interests arose, was characterized as an influential member of the organization. His description read:

> Jack is senior to Dan in the organization. Jack usually takes part in decisions that will have a considerable effect on Dan's advancement and success in the company.

Design. The design of Experiment 4 was basically similar to the design of the previous experiments, except for the fact that the between-subject factor "success probability" consisted of three levels:

a. Agreement among judges — Low probability (50%) (n = 130)
b. Agreement among judges — High probability (90%) (n = 94).
c. Disagreement among judges (50%–70%–90%) (n = 90)

The experiment was conducted following the same procedure described in the first experiment.

Results and Discussion

As in Experiments 1 and 2, we computed the mean rating of each strategy across subjects for each version of the incident (see Table 6). Examining the mean responses, we find, once again, that the within-subject factor is highly significant [F (4, 1244) = 341.84, $p < .001$]. The between-subject factor of experts' agreement

does not yield a significant main effect [F (2, 311) = .15, *ns*], but the interaction between the experts' agreement and strategy type is significant [F (8, 1244) = 2.83, $p < .005$].

Table 6
Experiment 4: Mean Ratings of Strategies

Strategies	Experts' Assessments					
	Disagree 50%, 70%, 90%		Agree 50%		Agree 90%	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Avoid	2.51	1.13	2.46	1.27	2.72	1.16
Accommodate	1.74	1.30	1.68	1.53	1.72	1.42
Compete	3.98	1.28	3.93	1.37	4.24	1.40
Collaborate	4.14	1.12	4.25	1.21	3.82	1.10
Compromise	3.13	1.14	3.18	1.15	3.16	1.07

Effect sizes for the difference between each pair of conditions are reported in Table 7. Comparing the ratings of each strategy in the three "experts' agreement" conditions we find that the ratings in the "no agreement" condition are similar to those expressed in the "low probability" condition. The differences between those two conditions do not approach significant level for any of the five strategies, and the effect sizes are all below .10. The two "agreement" conditions differed significantly in the ratings of two strategies: competing and collaborating. Subjects in the "low probability" condition were less inclined to compete and more inclined to collaborate than subjects in the "high probability" condition [F (1, 311) = 5.85, $p < .05$ and F (1, 311) = 13.38, $p < .001$, respectively]. Ratings of the other three strategies were not significantly different.

Table 7
Experiment 4: Effect Sizes for Pairwise Comparison of Conditions

Strategies	Comparisons		
	Disagree–Agree 50%, 70%, 90%	Disagree–Agree 50%	Disagree–Agree 90%
Avoid	.04	.16	.19
Accommodate	.05	.02	.03
Compete	.04	.20	.23
Collaborate	.09	.28	.37
Compromise	.05	.02	.02

Comparing the rating of strategies in the "no agreement" condition to those in the "high probability" condition, we find a significant difference in the rating of collaborating [F (1, 311) = 6.31, $p < .01$ and a marginally significant difference in the rating of competing [F (1,311) = 3.57, $p < .05$]. Thus, subjects in the "no agreement" condition appear to be more inclined to collaborate and perhaps less inclined to compete than subjects in the "high probability" condition. Ratings of the other three strategies did not show a significant effect.

In sum, the results support our predictions concerning both the effect of ambiguity and the "explicit adverse consequences" effect. When the potential future implications of relationship with the other party are made more salient, subjects become more sensitive to the likelihood of successful goal attainment. As the likelihood decreases, the tendency to collaborate increases and the tendency to compete decreases. The same changes are observed when the probability of success is ambiguous.

General Discussion

In the experiments presented in this paper, we have placed our subjects in the position of an organization member who, in order to achieve his goal, must face a conflict with another member of the same organization. We have demonstrated that ambiguity with regard to the probability of successful attainment of the goal affects subjects' preference for particular conflict management strategies. Admittedly, our findings are limited to the initial choice of strategy. At this preliminary stage of the conflict, however, subjects seem quite capable of differentiating between the five strategies available to them (based on Thomas's model) and of rating the likelihood of their using each of the strategies in the circumstances described.

Introducing ambiguity produced a shift in the initial choice of strategies. Under ambiguity, inclination to compete decreased, while inclination to collaborate increased. Ambiguity did not change subjects' inclination to avoidance, accommodation, or compromise. Making the adverse future consequences of the conflict more explicit had an effect similar to that of ambiguity. Only when adverse consequences were made explicit did ratings of strategies reflect a differentiation between high and low probability of success. In the latter case, competitiveness was reduced and collaborativeness increased.

The similarity between the ambiguity effect and the "explicit adverse consequences" effect support the hypothesis that these effects have a common root. Both presumably affect choice of strategy by heightening the perception of potential loss. Interestingly, unlike previous findings in the study of ambiguity, neither of the two manipulations in our study led to avoidance. Thus, in the context of organizational conflict management, ambiguity appears to cause a shift in initial choice of strategy, rather than increase omission or procrastination. The shift in strategies accruing as potential loss looms larger reflects the decision-maker's wish to constrain adverse effects of a conflict without making definite concessions in pursuit of his primary goal.

The above conclusions should be interpreted with care in view of the fact that our study was based on responses to a single vignette. Future research should expand the scope of assessing the impact of ambiguity beyond the specific context used in the present study. The pattern of results found in the study, however, is compatible with Pruitt's concept of flexible rigidity (Pruitt & Lewis, 1977; Pruitt, 1981). Flexible rigidity refers to rigidity with respect to ultimate goals, combined with flexibility of means. Several studies demonstrate that bargainers adopting this strategy achieve higher joint outcomes than bargainers who are either rigid with respect to means, or flexible with respect to final goals (Pruitt & Lewis, 1977). Thus, perhaps surprisingly, flexibility with respect to means is particularly beneficial when ultimate goals are not compromised. Several recent studies provide further evidence for the important role of predetermining specified difficult goals in achieving desirable negotiation outcomes (Huber & Neale, 1986, 1987). The particular shift we found in conflict management strategies suggests that, while ultimate goals are not compromised, a tendency to adopt flexible means emerges. Thus, even as the chances of success become ambiguous (or potential adverse consequences more salient), the subjects do not resort to conflict styles, which would critically impede their ultimate goal (Avoidance, Accommodation, Compromise). They do, however, show flexibility in their use of strategies that would harm (Competition) or promote (Collaboration) relations with other organization members. Such flexibility would not necessarily affect the subjects' chances of achieving their primary goal.

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Appendix

Description of the Five Conflict Strategies in the Questionnaire

1. **Avoiding.** I will try to avoid pursuing my own concerns or those of the other person. I will try not to address the conflict with the other person but to postpone it until a better time.

2. **Accommodating.** I will try to disregard my own concerns and interests and to satisfy the concerns and expectations of the other person.

3. **Competing.** I will use whatever power seems appropriate to win my own position at the other persons expense disregarding his concerns. I will use means such as my influence, my expertise, and my position and connections in the organization.

4. **Collaborating.** I will attempt to work with the other person to find some solution which will fully satisfy the concerns and needs of both of us. I will try to combine the goals and creative ideas of both of us and to reach agreement.

5. **Compromising.** I will try to negotiate with the other person in order to reach a mutually acceptable solution which partially satisfies both of us. I will attempt to reach a compromise, assuming that both of us will have to give up some of our interests.

Biographical Note

Amos Drory
School of Management
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev
Beer-Sheva 84195, Israel
Phone/Fax: 972–7–472–205/896
E-mail: drori@bgumail.bgu.ac.il

Professor Drory received his Ph.D. in Psychology from Temple University. His research interests include conflict management and political behavior in organizations. He is now an Associate Professor at the School of Management, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

Ilana Ritov received her Ph.D. in Psychology from the Hebrew University. Her research interests include judgement, decision making, and conflict behavior. She is now a Senior Lecturer at the School of Management, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

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