



Impact of Risk Attitudes in the Interpretation of Ambiguous Workplace Conflicts

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Master Thesis – Work, Organizational and Personnel Psychology

S3668843

June 2023

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Abstract

The primary objective of this study was to examine how individuals' risk attitudes influence their interpretation of ambiguous conflict scenarios in non-physical interpersonal conflicts.

Ambiguity arises when there is a lack of clear information or specific details in conflict situations. This lack of clarity makes determining the most appropriate course of action challenging. I expected the participants with a risk-avoidance attitude (e.g., people who tend to exhibit a preference for minimizing or avoiding risky situations) to interpret ambiguous conflict scenarios as more of a conflict.

To address this research question, the 76 participants were presented with (a) two scenarios depicting ambiguous conflicts in the workplace, followed by a series of questions, and (b) the Domain-Specific Risk-Taking (DOSPERT) scale. The relationship between participants' interpretation of ambiguous scenarios and risk scores on the DOSPERT scale was examined. Although I used two scenarios to extend the generalizability of findings, the results were mixed; a positive relationship between the interpretation of ambiguous scenarios and risk scores emerged in the academic context scenario but not in the organizational context. These findings highlight the relevance of decision-making under ambiguity in conflict situations and invite more collaborative approaches between disciplines (e.g., psychology, organizational behaviour, and conflict resolution).

Keywords: Ambiguous Workplace Conflicts, Risk Attitudes, Domain-Specific Risk-Taking scale

Impact of Risk Attitudes in the Interpretation of Ambiguous Workplace Conflicts

Workplace conflicts significantly impact individuals and organizations, often leading to adverse outcomes such as decreased job satisfaction, reduced productivity, and damaged relationships (Rahim, 2002). Therefore, understanding how individuals perceive and interpret conflicts is crucial for effective conflict management and resolution in the workplace (Brykman & O'Neil, 2023; Thomas, 1992; Rahim, 2023). Ambiguity arises when conflict situations lack clear information or details, making it challenging to determine the appropriate course of action (Furnham & Marks, 2013). These ambiguous conflicts often involve non-physical harm allegations, in which one party accuses another of causing harm or discomfort through their actions or behaviour (Furnham & Marks, 2013). In addition to ambiguity, individuals' risk attitudes also play a crucial role in decision-making processes, influencing their willingness to take risks or opt for safer alternatives (Figner & Weber, 2011). The degree of ambiguity involved in interpreting the conflicts and determining appropriate responses is intertwined with individuals' risk attitudes.

Previous research on workplace conflicts has primarily focused on specific incidents or extreme forms of conflict, such as open disputes or overt aggression, and the influence of risk attitudes on conflict interpretation and decision-making in various contexts, such as financial decision-making and entrepreneurial activities (Blais & Weber, 2006; Lauriola et al., 2007; Rolinson et al., 2014). However, the more frequently occurring ambiguous conflicts and the specific role of risk attitudes in interpreting those conflicts within the workplace have often been overlooked (LaRocca & Kromrey, 1999).

Therefore, this study aims to fill this research gap by investigating how individuals with risk-avoidance attitudes interpret ambiguous conflict scenarios. It focuses on their inclination to label such situations as conflicts or avoid doing so to prevent potential errors.

Furthermore, the research seeks to study a possible correlation between participants' conflict perceptions of ambiguous scenarios and their risk scores.

By examining the interplay between ambiguity, risk attitudes, and conflict perception, this research contributes to our understanding of the underlying processes driving individuals' decision-making and behaviour in real-world conflict scenarios. Therefore, it is essential to investigate how individuals perceive and navigate these ambiguous workplace conflicts and how their risk attitudes influence their interpretation and responses (Hilson & Murray-Webster, 2007).

Theoretical Background

Nature and Consequences of Workplace Conflicts

Workplace conflicts can be classified as internal, external, or systemic, depending on what is causing the situation and how are the parties involved (Fowler, 2013). Internal stressors refer to people and problems inside the business, external to people, and issues outside work, and systemic stressors are caused by an organizational structure or policy (Castellini et al., 2023). Internal conflicts are the most common ones and can be divided into three types: task, process, and relational conflicts (Fowler, 2013). Among the different relational conflicts, bullying and interpersonal conflicts are the most common and occur when there is trouble between two people. According to Fowler (2013), interpersonal conflict occurs when there is a strained relationship without abuse of power imbalance (Ayoko et al., 2003; Castellini et al., 2023). However, most of the time, workplace conflicts do not manifest themselves straightforwardly, openly, and transparently. Instead, they tend to be characterized by ambiguity, lack of clarity, and uncertainty, making them inherently messy and challenging to navigate (La Rocca & Kromrey, 1999). These conflicts often involve subtle disagreements, hidden tensions, and differing perceptions, contributing to their complexity and difficulty in effectively resolving them.

Defining Ambiguity

According to Furnham and Marks (2013), *ambiguity* refers to situations where there is a lack of essential information to determine all potential outcomes and gain a comprehensive understanding of a given situation fully. This absence of clarity makes it challenging to assess the potential risks and rewards associated with different courses of action. The way individuals perceive ambiguity can differ based on their awareness of the likelihood of potential gains and losses within a particular situation (Lauriola et al., 2007).

Within the setting of decision-making, pick up and misfortune probabilities allude to the probability of encountering positive or negative results in a given circumstance. Pick up probabilities speak to the chances of getting alluring results, whereas misfortune probabilities speak to the chances of bringing about undesirable results (Lauriola et al., 2007).

In the context of decision-making, probabilities of gain and loss encompass the likelihood of experiencing positive or negative outcomes in a given situation. Gain probabilities represent the chances of obtaining desirable outcomes, while loss probabilities represent the chances of incurring undesirable outcomes (Lauriola et al., 2007). When individuals encounter ambiguity, the lack of clear information about the probabilities of gains and losses can lead to heightened emotional responses and a perceived increased risk of making incorrect decisions or taking inappropriate action. Interestingly, individuals tend to exhibit aversion to ambiguity when it involves a high probability of gains but may be more accepting of ambiguity when it pertains to low-probability promotions. Conversely, individuals may be more averse to ambiguity in low-probability loss scenarios (Etner et al., 2012). This implies that individuals' risk attitudes can impact their interpretation of ambiguous workplace conflicts by influencing their emotional responses, risk perceptions and willingness to take action.

Attitudes Towards Risk and Their Role in Ambiguous Conflict Perceptions

Risk-taking involves making the choice with more variable outcomes that can lead to positive or negative consequences for one or more objectives (Figner & Weber, 2011).

Research have provided evidence that individual differences, such as age, gender, and previous experiences play important roles in shaping risk-taking behavior. For instance, studies have shown that women tend to exhibit a higher inclination to avoid ambiguity than men in highly ambiguous situations (Etner et al., 2012), while older adults tend to prefer positive information over negative information compared to younger adults (Figner & Weber, 2011). In any case, risk-taking is also influenced by contextual factors, such as decision-making ability and emotions. Moreover, people's risk attitudes can vary in different situations, as attitudes drive behaviour and can lead to different reactions to the same situation (Hillson & Murray-Webster, 2007). In the context of risk-taking behaviour, individuals are influenced by their perception of the associated benefits and drawbacks of the decisions they face, which can be shaped by their past experiences in specific contexts (Shou et al., 2022). For example, individuals who have encountered favourable results in similar situations are more inclined to take risks. Conversely, those who have experienced adverse consequences may exhibit hesitancy or avoidance towards risk-taking (Shou et al., 2022).

Risk attitude refers to an individual's propensity to engage in risky actions in pursuit of a potentially greater payoff, despite the possibility of encountering greater losses (Cocioc, 2017). This concept is pivotal in understanding human decision-making tendencies and responses, particularly in the face of ambiguous situations. Therefore, understanding an individual's risk attitude is crucial to comprehending their decision-making tendencies and responses to ambiguous situations.

Relation Between Risk and Ambiguity

The decision-making processes distinguish between two types of decisions: risky decisions and decisions under ambiguity. This distinction is made based on the level of

knowledge regarding outcomes and probabilities associated with a situation. In this context, outcomes refer to the possible results or consequences that can occur as a result of taking a particular action or decision. They represent the specific results that individuals anticipate or hope to achieve. On the other hand, probabilities represent the likelihood or chances of different outcomes occurring. They reflect the degree of uncertainty associated with each possible outcome. In decision-making, probabilities help individuals assess the relative likelihood of different outcomes and guide them in estimating the potential risks or benefits of a particular course of action (Cocioc, 2017; Furnham & Marks, 2013; Hillson & Murray-Webster, 2007). When interpreting ambiguous workplace conflicts, outcomes and probabilities are closely related. In risky decision-making situations, probabilities are always known, but outcomes are not (Rolison et al., 2014). Whereas, when individuals are faced with ambiguity in decision-making, there is a lack of clear information about the outcomes and probabilities of a situation, making it challenging to assess potential risks and rewards associated with different courses of action. The absence of this knowledge can lead to a perceived increased risk of making incorrect decisions or taking inappropriate action in the face of conflicts. Overall, risk and ambiguity play a role in decision-making processes, influencing how individuals interpret and respond to various situations, including interpersonal conflicts.

The Prospect Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding how individuals evaluate and make decisions under conditions of risk aversion, ambiguity and individuals' perceptions and responses to ambiguous workplace conflicts. It highlights that individuals evaluate situations based on the potential gains or losses they perceive, with a particular focus on loss aversion. This theory suggests that individuals are more sensitive to potential losses than gains. In the context of this study, the Prospect Theory offers a comprehensive framework for examining how risk aversion and the evaluation of potential

losses contribute to individuals' perceptions and responses in the context of ambiguous workplace conflicts. It allows for a deeper understanding of how individuals with risk-averse attitudes may be less inclined to label situations as conflicts and instead seek safer alternatives to minimize potential losses or negative influences (Altinat et al., 2012; Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Lauriola et al., 2007; Rolison et al., 2014; Yechiam & Ert, 2011).

Based on the literature above, I predict that individuals with a higher risk tolerance will be related to greater perceptions of ambiguous conflicts as conflicts compared to those with lower risk tolerance. In addition to addressing this main question, I will examine a few related but exploratory sub-questions to get a better understanding of ambiguity and conflict perceptions.

Additional Research Questions: Impact of Age, Gender, and Previous Experiences on Ambiguous Conflict Perceptions

In addition to examining the core hypothesis of a positive correlation between risk attitudes and the interpretation of ambiguous conflicts, I will explore additional questions that might affect the relationship between ambiguity and risk attitudes. First, I will examine gender. Previous studies by Etner et al. (2012) and Borghans et al. (2009) suggest that women tend to exhibit higher risk aversion, particularly in the social domain, but also demonstrate a more favourable response towards ambiguity than men. Moreover, LaRocca and Kromrey (1999) indicated that women generally perceive the same situations as more harassing than men. Considering these findings, I will explore the possibility that gender moderate the relationship between ambiguity and risk attitudes, leading to a stronger relationship.

Moreover, I will explore the possible moderating effect of age on the relationship between ambiguity and risk attitudes. Research suggests that ambiguity tolerance tends to

increase with age (Furnham & Marks, 2013). However, Figner and Weber (2011) found that older adults have a preference for positive information over negative information compared to younger adults, which can result in different risk attitudes across age groups. Furthermore, Rolison et al. (2014) observed that risk attitudes in the social domain increase slightly from young to middle age, followed by a decrease in older age. Given these insights, the relationship between ambiguity and risk attitudes might change in strength and direction as a function of the different age groups.

Moreover, a recent study by Shou and colleagues (2022) provided interesting findings on the impact of previous similar experiences on individuals' perceptions and interpretations of ambiguous workplace conflicts. The study highlighted that when individuals encounter situations they consider themselves personally relevant and possess prior knowledge or experience, they tend to exhibit stronger emotional sensitivity towards negative outcomes and ambiguity. This emotional sensitivity enables them to envision the potential consequences of their engagement with the situation (Shou et al., 2022). Consequently, their previous similar experiences play a crucial role in shaping their perception of the advantages and disadvantages associated with their decision-making process, ultimately influencing their interpretation of ambiguous workplace conflicts and risk attitudes. Considering the significant influence of previous similar experiences, it is important to explore the potential moderating effect on individuals' interpretations and responses to ambiguous workplace conflicts and risk attitudes (Shou et al., 2022).

Present Study

Overall, I anticipate that individuals with a higher propensity for risk-taking will be more inclined to perceive ambiguous workplace conflicts as conflicts. Additionally, I will examine how factors such as gender, age, and previous similar experiences may moderate this relationship for a more nuanced understanding of it. To accomplish these objectives, I

will collect data from a diverse sample of participants. The findings will be analyzed and presented in the subsequent sections, followed by a discussion of their implications for both theory and practice. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by illuminating the impact of risk attitudes on individuals' interpretation and responses to ambiguous workplace conflicts.

Methods

Participants

All participants were recruited voluntarily through a snowball sample on social media platforms (LinkedIn, Instagram, WhatsApp) and encouraged to share the link with other acquaintances, making this a convenience sample. Before the survey was distributed to potential participants, it was approved by the University of Groningen Ethics Committee. A total of 117 participants took part in this study. Forty-one participants were not included in the final analysis because they failed to complete all the tasks in the questionnaire by either missing some items or stopping halfway through them. The ages of the participants were grouped as follows: 18-24 (n=49), 25-34 (n=14), 35-44 (n=3), 45-54 (n=3), and 55-64 (n=7). The final sample consisted of 76 participants (43 females, 31 males and 2 non-binary), of which 43.4% had worked full-time, 42.1% had worked part-time or in a student job, 9.2% had worked in an internship, and 5.3% had never worked.

Research Design and Procedure

Before starting the survey, participants were presented with information about the study and asked to provide informed consent. First, the participants were asked to read and evaluate two scenarios. Subsequently, they were presented with the DOSPERT scale (Blais & Weber, 2006). After finishing both tasks, participants were asked to answer demographic questions (age, gender, and previous work experience), with an option to skip any of them if

they wished. Lastly, participants underwent a debriefing process, and I offered my contact information to those who wished to learn more about it.

The Scenarios

Two scenarios were used for generalizability purposes, depicting common workplace interactions involving ambiguous conflicts. The scenarios exclusively contained non-physical allegations and were designed to be gender-and age-neutral to control for potential prejudices or stereotypes. I did not make any hypotheses aimed at comparing the two scenarios; instead, I expected the effect between risk tolerance and conflict perceptions would emerge in both. The complete scenarios can be found in Appendix A.

Academic Context. The first scenario was based on the ones used by Tao et al. (2017) in their microaggression ambiguity and emotional reactions study. I chose this scenario because the level of ambiguity in each scenario was graded and agreed upon by four experts. This particular scenario was determined to be highly ambiguous (Tao et al., 2017), making it a suitable tool for the present study. It involves a student asking their professor for feedback on an assignment. In summary, the professor declines the request and expresses frustration, according to Fowler (2013), representing a mixture of systemic workplace conflict (absence of agreement over expectations and values, policies, and deadlines) and external conflict (external stressors of working while studying and the workload of the professor).

Organizational Context. The second scenario was based on the common conceptualization of non-physical harms, which could be ambiguous in nature (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). Four external individuals were asked to evaluate and appraise two versions of the scenario to assess the ambiguity level. A consensus was reached, indicating that this version was the most ambiguous. This scenario portrays a conflict between two team members, A and B, regarding different approaches to a project. The situation describes how

two co-workers disagree on how to proceed with the project, which brings many strong feelings. Based on the research conducted by Fowler (2013), this scenario represents an internal conflict where two employees argue about their job performance.

Measures

Scenario Evaluation

Participants were asked to respond to a series of questions created for the purposes of the study using Likert scales. These questions aimed to assess participants' perceptions of conflict, behaviour, and risk in an academic setting, specifically related to interactions between two parties. Both scenarios included the same questions but adapted to the context and information provided in each of them. Questions measuring conflict in several ways were included to extend the generalizability of my findings. The questions included:

Conflict Perception. In this one-item scale, participants assessed on a 5-point scale (1=*definitely not a conflict*, 5=*definitely a conflict*) the extent to which the scenario presented a conflict ("*Please indicate whether this scenario is presenting a conflict or not*").

Civility. Participants rated the professor's /B's behaviour in terms of acceptability, kindness, civility, considerateness, and insult level ("*Consider Prof. De Vries's /B's behaviour. Indicate the extent to which the behaviour is uncivil, unkind...*" rating each behaviour from -3 *Uncivil* to +3 *civil*, for example). Overall, the reliability of the items is suitable for both scenarios ($\alpha=.74$ and $\alpha=.91$ for Scenario X and Y, respectively), meaning the items measure civility consistently. I developed the items for the purposes of this study and based them on the existing conceptualization of civility and incivility (Cortina et al., 2001).

Definition of Conflict Behavior. Participants indicated on a 5-point agreement scale (1=*strongly disagree* to 5=*strongly agree*) the extent to which they agreed with the behaviour

represented in three items; harassment, conflict, and incivility (“*Consider ... , indicate the extent to which you agree that the behaviour represents*”).

Likelihood of Future Abuse. Participants rated this one-item scale using a 5-point scale (1=*extremely unlikely*, 5= *extremely likely*) the likelihood of future verbal abuse by the professor towards a student (“*How likely it that ... will verbally abuse ... in the future?*”).

Risk Assessment. In this one-item scale, participants provided their feelings toward the level of risk the student was exposed to in the situation (“*If you were ... in this situation, how would you rate ... behaviour?*”) on a 5-point scale (1=*definitely not risky*, 5=*definitely risky*).

The scales definition of conflict behaviour, the likelihood of future abuse and risk assessment were collected to enhance the generalizability of the findings; however, the reliability was very poor. Therefore, the scores were excluded from the main analysis. However, a correlation analysis between each score and the variable perceived risk was explored. See Appendix C.

Similar Previous Experience. Participants answered this one-item scale on a 5-point scale (1=*definitely not*, 5=*definitely yes*), whether they had previously experienced a similar situation (“*Please indicate whether you had a previous experience similar to the one presented*”).

The Domain-Specific Risk-Taking Scale for the Adult Population

Participants’ perceived risk in interpersonal situations was assessed with the DOSPERT. The DOSPERT scale was used to assess participants’ preferences for engaging in uncertain activities, considering potential gains and losses. The scale provided continuous scores that reflected different levels of risk tolerance. The social domain component of the DOSPERT scale consisted of six statements that described various behaviours or thoughts related to social situations (for instance, “*Disagreeing with an authority figure on a major*

issue” or “*Speaking your mind about an unpopular issue in a meeting at work*”).

Respondents are asked to respond on a scale (e.g., 1=*not at all risky*, to 7 *extremely risky*).

Participants were asked three main questions regarding the six statements (see Appendix B for the full scale). Even though participants answered all three questions, I only used the scores from the perceived risk sub-component ($\alpha=.79$) because the other ones had very low reliabilities, which could jeopardize the results, and only using the risk sub-component was the main goal to test our hypothesis (“*Indicate how risky you perceive each situation*”) (Rolison et al.,2014).

Results

Assumption Checks

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was employed to evaluate normality (Table 1). This assessment holds significant value since numerous parametric statistical tests depend on the premise that variables follow a normal distribution. The null hypothesis of this measurement scrutinizes whether or not the dataset conforms to a normal distribution and adopts an alpha level of 0.05 as the significance criterion. The scores from the conflict perception scale for each context were used in the upcoming analyses. For academic context, the normality test gave the value of .37 ($df = 76, p <.001$), and for organizational context interpretation, a value of .31 ($df = 76, p <.001$), therefore the null hypothesis is rejected, and the data is not normally distributed. However, the perceived risk gave a value of .07 ($df = 76, p = .200$), meaning the data is normally distributed.

In addition, linearity and homoscedasticity assumptions were also tested to ensure the accuracy of statistical analysis. The assessment for linearity was conducted using a normal P-P plot, while a scatterplot of the residuals was conducted for homoscedasticity. There were no drastic deviations from the line in the normal P-P plot for the academic context scores but

not for the organizational context scores, meaning there is a linearity between the perceived risk and the academic context scores but not for the organizational context.

Regarding homoscedasticity, the scatterplot of the residuals for the perceived risk and the academic context scores shows that the points are not distributed equally above and below zero in both axes, meaning the data is not homoscedastic. Similarly, for the perceived risk and the organizational context scores, there is a very tight distribution to the left of the plot, meaning that the data is not homoscedastic.

Hypothesis Testing: Correlation Between Perceived Risk and Both Scenarios

The correlation between the perceived risk scores and the academic and organizational context scores must be examined to test our hypothesis. Since the data is not normally distributed and the homoscedasticity assumption is only met for the academic context, we could not use Pearson's correlation. Instead, we used Spearman's rank (rho) non-parametric correlation between the perceived risk scores and the academic context scores, obtaining a rho = .19 ($N = 76$). In addition, we used the same non-parametric correlation between the perceived risk scores and the organizational context scores, obtaining a score of rho = .07 ($N = 76$). See Table 2.

Table 1

Kolmogorov-Smirnov Normality Tests

Variable	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Perceived Risk	.07	76	.20
Academic Context	.37	76	<.001
Organizational Context	.31	76	<.001

Note. n=76

Table 2*Demographics and Spearman's Rank (rho) Correlation Results*

Variable	<i>M (SD)</i>	1	2
1. Academic Context	5.4 (1.9)		
2. Organizational Context	6.4 (0.9)	.30**	
3. Perceived Risk	3.5 (1.0)	.19	.07

Note. ** $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed); * $p < 0.05$; $N = 76$

The results mean that there is a non-significant correlation between the academic context and perceived risk scores. Plus, a non-significant correlation between the organizational context and perceived risk scores. These results mean that the higher scores in perceived risk are not significantly related to the interpretation of conflicts in any of the contexts. Therefore, my hypothesis cannot be supported.

Furthermore, as expected, a positive and statistically significant correlation was observed between the two contexts. This indicates a significant relationship between the two, suggesting that participants who interpreted one context as a conflict are likely to interpret the other context in a similar manner.

Additional Research Questions

This study aimed to measure three additional research questions: (a) a possible significant difference between age groups and ambiguity and risk attitudes; (b) a possible significant difference between genders and ambiguity; and (c) a possible influence of previous experience on the correlation between ambiguity and risk attitudes. Unfortunately, the sample of participants was unbalanced regarding age distribution; 64% of participants were aged between 18 and 24. Therefore, conducting an analysis with this data would be inconclusive.

However, the percentage of male participants (41%) and female participants (57%) was balanced and, therefore, could be analyzed. Tables 3 and 4 show the results of a moderating analysis examining the relationship between both academic and organizational context scores and perceived risk scores by gender. Interestingly, the results showed a positive statistically significant interaction term for the relationship between the academic context and perceived risk scores but not for the relationship between the organizational context and perceived risk scores. This means that age influences the relationship between the academic context and risk perceptions, increasing the correlation. Thus, it means that when participants were female, the relationship between the academic context interpretation and the perceived risk scores became stronger. Unfortunately, there was no significant interaction between the organizational context and the perceptions of risk, thus, highlighting the complexity of the moderation.

Table 3

Moderation Analysis of the Relationship Between the Academic Context Interpretation and Perceived Risk Scores by Gender

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	3.5	.11	31	.00
Academic Context	.04	.06	.61	.54
Gender	.09	.21	.43	.66
Academic Context * Gender	.23	.11	2.2	.03

Note. $n=76$; $p<.05$

Table 4

Moderation Analysis of the Relationship Between the Organizational Context Interpretation and Perceived Risk Scores by Gender

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	3.5	.11	30	.00
Organizational Context	.12	.14	.87	.38
Gender	.04	.22	.20	.84
Organizational Context * Gender	.24	.30	.79	.43

Note. n=76; p<.05

Finally, to study the possible influence of previous experience on the correlation between ambiguity and risk attitudes, I conducted a moderation analysis of the relationship between both conflict interpretations and perceived risk scores by previous experience. Tables 5 and 6 show the results of the moderation effect of previous experience in the relationship between the different contexts and the perceived risk scores. Unfortunately, the results showed no statistically significant interaction term for the relationship between both context interpretations and perceived risk scores. Therefore, the presence of prior familiarity with a similar situation may not have a significant impact on the relationship between risk attitudes and ambiguous conflict perceptions.

Table 5

Moderation Analysis of The Relationship Between the Academic Context Interpretation and Perceived Risk Scores by Previous Experience

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	3.5	.12	29	.00
Academic Context	.04	.07	.65	.51
Previous Experience	.02	.05	.51	.61
Academic context * Previous Experience	-.01	.03	-.43	.67

Note. $N = 76$; $p < .05$

Table 6

Moderation Analysis of The Relationship Between Organizational Context Interpretation and Perceived Risk Scores by Previous Experience

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	3.4	.12	29	.00
Organizational Context	.19	.17	1.1	.27
Previous Experience	-.01	.05	-.20	.84
Organizational context * Previous Experience	-.33	.08	-.29	.70

Note. $N = 76$; $p < .05$

Discussion

I aimed to explore the relationship between risk attitudes and perceptions of ambiguous situations in the context of organizational interactions and interpersonal conflicts. The hypothesis posited that individuals with a higher risk avoidance attitude would perceive

ambiguous situations as more of a conflict due to their tendency to favour safe choices and be averse to making mistakes; being attuned to threats might lead to greater preparation and sensitivity (Altinay et al., 2012). Consequently, I anticipated a robust positive correlation between participants' interpretation of ambiguous scenarios and their risk scores.

The correlation between the perceived risk score and each context scenario yielded no significant correlations. This suggests that the relationship between participants' interpretation of ambiguous scenarios and their risk scores may exist or happen by chance. The lack of significant correlation limits the support for the initial hypothesis; this hypothesis might not hold in this particular sample or the particular contexts of the conflicts.

In addition to examining the main findings, I also examined some additional questions, such as age, gender, and previous experience. Considering the unbalanced distribution of participants' age in the sample, conducting an analysis solely based on age would yield inconclusive results. However, the gender distribution was relatively balanced, allowing for analysis. The moderating analysis examining the relationship between the academic context and risk perception scores by gender did yield significant results, indicating that gender might affect the relationship. Specifically, female participants exhibited a stronger correlation between the academic context and the risk perception scores. However, on the relationship between the organizational context and risk perception scores by gender, the moderating analysis did not show significant results, meaning that gender might not affect them. These contradictory results could be due to the fact that gender may have a differential impact on an individual's interpretation and response to different scenarios. Gender may play a more significant role in the academic context, while its influence is less pronounced or irrelevant in the organizational context.

Additionally, the moderation analysis examining the relationship between the academic and organizational context and the risk perception scores by previous experience

did not yield significant results, suggesting that having experienced a previous similar situation did not moderate the relationship.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

By highlighting the role of ambiguity, the study brings attention to a previously unstudied aspect of conflict that has the potential to significantly influence how conflicts are perceived, experienced, and resolved. Integrating ambiguity into established theoretical frameworks, such as cognitive conflict theory (Festinger, 1957; Greene et al., 2004; Harmon-Jones, 2019), holds the promise of providing a more comprehensive understanding of the cognitive and emotional processes that individuals engage in when interpreting conflicts. For example, by incorporating ambiguity into the cognitive conflict theory, research can explore how individuals make sense of and attribute meaning to ambiguous conflict situations. Expanding existing theories allows for a more nuanced understanding of the cognitive and emotional processes involved in conflict interpretation and resolution, refining existing theories and advancing our knowledge of conflict dynamics.

In addition, the study's integration of risk attitudes and ambiguity highlights the relevance of decision-making under ambiguity in conflict situations. By examining risk attitudes and ambiguity, researchers gain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the decision-making processes involved in complex and uncertain conflict contexts. For instance, researchers can replicate this study and continue examining whether individuals with a higher inclination for risk-taking are more likely to perceive ambiguous situations as indicative of a conflict, thus adopting a riskier approach in their decision-making.

Lastly, the study's findings invite cross-disciplinary collaborations between fields such as psychology, organizational behaviour, and conflict resolution. By integrating theories and insights from these diverse disciplines, such as cognitive conflict theory or social identity theory, researchers can develop a more holistic framework to explain the complex interplay

between risk attitudes, ambiguity, and conflict. These collaborations can enrich theoretical developments and foster innovative perspectives and solutions to address conflicts in various contexts.

Strengths, Limitations and Future Directions

The study has some notable strengths. First, the study addresses a gap in the existing literature by focusing on the role of risk attitudes in ambiguous conflict perception, offering a novel contribution to the decision-making processes of individuals and their responses toward ambiguous conflict situations. Second, the study relied on two different vignettes for generalizability purposes, providing a more holistic view of how risk attitudes influence ambiguous conflict perception.

Despite these strengths, this study still has some limitations. First, the observed correlation in the study between participants' interpretation of ambiguous conflict scenarios and their risk scores may be influenced by the specific type of scenario. The different nature of the conflict in each scenario, with the academic context involving a mix of systemic and external conflict and the organizational context involving internal conflict, could contribute to the variables in correlation strength. Additionally, the contextual factors and participants' reliability to the scenarios, such as academic context being education-related and organizational context being work-related, may further impact the observed correlation. The type of conflict is an aspect I was not expecting to be that relevant but might be worth keeping in mind in the future.

Second, although younger participants and individuals with previous work experience represent a substantial portion of the data, there may be an uneven distribution between these demographic groups, potentially influencing the results. Therefore, future research should explore this influence in greater detail. This could involve designing experiments that systematically vary the types of characteristics of conflict scenarios to determine how they

affect the correlation between interpretation and risk scores. Additionally, investigating the role of contextual factors in participants' reliability to the scenarios, such as considering variations in age, educational background, and work experience, could provide deeper insights into the factors that influence the observed correlations.

Third, it is crucial to consider the analysis's exploratory nature. The analyses conducted to examine the relationship between the variable of risk perception and the interpretation of conflicts did yield a positive correlation, even though it was not significant. A possible reason for these non-significant results could be the lack of sufficient theory or methodology. Therefore, caution should be exercised when interpreting the results of these analyses. A potential future research direction to address this is to conduct a replication study using pre-registered research design, including it in the pre-specifying hypotheses and using a wider variety of risk scales and scenarios in different contexts to mitigate the risk of chance findings or spurious correlation and ensure transparency and rigour in the research process, enhancing the reliability of the results. Additionally, a larger sample size could be employed in the replication study to increase statistical power and improve the generalizability of the findings. By replicating the study with a more comprehensive pre-registered design, researchers can validate and build upon the initial findings, providing more robust evidence and contributing to the cumulative knowledge in the field.

Fourth, it is important to note that this study is focused on measuring risk perception rather than risk behaviour. This deliberate focus on perception stems from several considerations, including resource constraints and the lack of robust empirical evidence regarding the relationship between risk and ambiguity. Given the limited availability of resources, it was more feasible to investigate participants' subjective perception of risk in ambiguous conflicts rather than directly observe and analyze their risk-taking behaviours. Although investigating risk behaviour holds substantial potential for highlighting the

relationship between risk and ambiguity, it requires additional methodological and theoretical considerations that still need to be further developed. Consequently, the present study serves as groundwork for future research, which can provide more profound insights into the nuanced relationship between risk and ambiguity.

Conclusion

Collectively, this study's findings suggest a potential positive association between the interpretation of ambiguous conflicts and individuals' risk attitudes, thus providing a compelling reason for further investigation in this area of research.

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Appendix A

Scenario 1: Read this scenario carefully and answer the questions below based on your interpretation of it.

Student: Hello, Professor De Vries. I wanted to ask you something pertaining to our research assignment that is due soon.

Professor: What is it you'd like to know?

Student: Well, I am almost finished completing my rough draft for it, and would like for you to look over it hopefully next week before I revise it for the final copy to turn in.

Professor: I cannot possibly do that. Students always seem to assume that we have endless time to go over their work.

Student: I did not assume that, but I just wanted to ask....

Professor: I explicitly stated that I will not be looking at students' work before you submit it.

You had an option to come to three of our drop-in review sessions, and you were not there.

You also had an option to submit your outline for my review three weeks ago, but you did not do that either.

Student: I really tried to do that, but I work full time.

Professor: So do your peers, and yet they managed to finish their tasks on time.

The student left Prof. De Vries's office, feeling quite uncomfortable about the interaction.

The student was disappointed that Prof. De Vries acted so uncivilly and rudely.

Please indicate whether this scenario presents a **conflict or not**.

1. Definitely not a conflict
2. Maybe not a conflict
3. Neutral
4. Maybe a conflict
5. Definitely a conflict

Consider Prof. De Vries' behaviour. Indicate the extent to which his behaviour is:

1. Unacceptable (-3) – Acceptable (+3)
2. Unkind (-3) – Kind (+3)
3. Uncivil (-3) – Civil (+3)
4. Inconsiderate (-3) - Considerate (+3)
5. Insulting (-3) – Polite (+3)

Consider **Prof. De Vries' behaviour**. Indicate the extent to which you agree that the behaviour represents:

1. Harassment (1 strongly disagree - 5 strongly agree)
2. Conflict (1 strongly disagree - 5 strongly agree)
3. Incivility (1 strongly disagree - 5 strongly agree)

How likely is it that **Prof. De Vries will verbally abuse a student** in the future?

1. Extremely unlikely
2. Somewhat unlikely
3. Neutral
4. Somewhat likely
5. Extremely likely

If you were the student in this situation, how would you rate Prof. De Vries' behaviour?

1. Definitely not risky
2. Somewhat not risky
3. Neutral
4. Somewhat risky
5. Definitely risky

Please indicate whether you had a **previous experience** similar to the one presented.

1. Definitely not
2. Probably not
3. It might or might not
4. Probably yes
5. Definitely yes

Scenario 2: Read this scenario carefully and answer the questions below based on your interpretation of it.

B: Hey, A, can we talk about the project?

A: Sure!

B: I have noticed you have a lot of new ideas and approaches, and these are causing friction among team members. We had a very good dynamic and already established processes before you joined; let us keep it that way.

A: Well, your boss praised me for my innovative thinking and encouraged me to continue acting this way.

B: I understand that, but it is causing a lot of tension and stress in the team. We already had a plan on how to approach this, on how to make it perfect; you cannot arrive at the project and change everything around. This is very important for me.

A: Look, this project is important to me too. I have been waiting for an opportunity like this for months. I think it would be wise to consider different approaches if you want to make it successful.

B: I think my way will make it successful enough; we have thought of all the details, and it is a perfect plan.

A: Then you do you, and I will do the same. We will see what happens...

B left the room very disappointed about A's unreasonable response.

Please indicate whether this scenario presents a **conflict or not**.

1. Definitely not a conflict
2. Maybe not a conflict
3. Neutral
4. Maybe a conflict
5. Definitely a conflict

Consider B's behaviour. Indicate the extent to which the behaviour is:

1. Unacceptable (-3) – Acceptable (+3)
2. Unkind (-3) – Kind (+3)
3. Uncivil (-3) – Civil (+3)
4. Inconsiderate (-3) - Considerate (+3)
5. Insulting (-3) – Polite (+3)

Consider **B's behaviour**. Indicate the extent to which you agree that the behaviour represents:

1. Harassment (1 strongly disagree - 5 strongly agree)
2. Conflict (1 strongly disagree - 5 strongly agree)
3. Incivility (1 strongly disagree - 5 strongly agree)

How likely is it that **A will verbally abuse** B in the future?

1. Extremely unlikely
2. Somewhat unlikely
3. Neutral
4. Somewhat likely
5. Extremely likely

How likely is it that **B will verbally abuse** A in the future?

1. Extremely unlikely
2. Somewhat unlikely

3. Neutral
4. Somewhat likely
5. Extremely likely

If you were B in this situation, how would you rate A's behaviour?

1. Definitely not risky
2. Somewhat not risky
3. Neutral
4. Somewhat risky
5. Definitely risky

If you were A in this situation, how would you rate B's behaviour?

1. Definitely not risky
2. Somewhat not risky
3. Neutral
4. Somewhat risky
5. Definitely risky

Please indicate whether you had a **previous experience** similar to the one presented.

1. Definitely not
2. Probably not
3. It might or might not
4. Probably yes
5. Definitely yes

Appendix B

Domain-Specific Risk-Taking (Adult) Scale – Risk Taking

For each of the following statements, please indicate the **likelihood** that you would engage in the described activity or behaviour if you were to find yourself in that situation. Provide a rating from *Extremely Unlikely* to *Extremely Likely*, using the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Extremely Unlikely	Moderately Unlikely Likely	Somewhat Unlikely	Not Sure Unlikely	Somewhat Likely	Moderately Likely	Likely

1. Admitting that your tastes are different from those of a friend.
2. Disagreeing with an authority figure on a major issue.
3. Choosing a career that you truly enjoy over a more secure one.
4. Speaking your mind about an unpopular issue in a meeting at work.
5. Moving to a city far away from your extended family.
6. Starting a new career in your mid-thirties.

For each of the following statements, please indicate **how risky you perceive** each situation. Provide a rating from *Not at All Risky* to *Extremely Risky* using the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all Risky	Slightly Risky	Somewhat Risky	Moderately Risky	Risky	Very Risky	Extremely Risky

1. Admitting that your tastes are different from those of a friend.
2. Disagreeing with an authority figure on a major issue.
3. Choosing a career that you truly enjoy over a more secure one.
4. Speaking your mind about an unpopular issue in a meeting at work.
5. Moving to a city far away from your extended family.
6. Starting a new career in your mid-thirties.

For each of the following statements, please indicate **the benefits** you would obtain from each situation. Provide a rating from **1 to 7** using the following scale:

							1
No benefits At all	2	3	Moderate Benefits	4	5	6	7 Great Benefits

1. Admitting that your tastes are different from those of a friend.
2. Disagreeing with an authority figure on a major issue.
3. Choosing a career that you truly enjoy over a more secure one.
4. Speaking your mind about an unpopular issue in a meeting at work.
5. Moving to a city far away from your extended family.
6. Starting a new career in your mid-thirties.

Appendix C

Additional Data

Table 7

Descriptives, Cronbach's Alpha and Correlations of DOSPERT Scale Questions

Variable	<i>M (SD)</i>	α	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>
1. PB	4.4 (0.9)	.66		
2. PR	3.5 (1.0)	.79	-.04	
3. PL	5.1 (0.9)	.68	.33**	.008

Note. ** $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed); * $p < 0.05$; $N = 76$; PB=Perceived Benefits; PR=Perceived Risk;

PL=Perceived Likelihood; α =Cronbach's alpha if item deleted.

Table 8

Academic Context -Descriptives, Cronbach Alpha and Correlations of Definition of Behavior Scale Questions

Variable	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	α
1. DB Q1	1.6 (1.0)			.62
2. DB Q2	3.6 (1.0)	.29**		.43
3. DB Q3	3.2 (1.3)	.29**	.47**	.42

Note. ** $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed); $N=76$; DB = Definition of Behavior; α =Cronbach's alpha if item

deleted

Table 9

Organizational Context - Descriptives, Cronbach Alpha and Correlations of Definition of Behavior Scale Questions

Variable	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	α
1. DB Q1	2.4 (1.2)			.54
2. DB Q2	4.1 (0.8)	.20		.63
3. DB Q3	3.0 (1.2)	.45**	.40**	.34

Note. ** $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed); $N = 76$; DB = Definition of Behavior; α = Cronbach's alpha if item deleted

Table 10

Demographics and Spearman's Rank (ρ) Correlation Results of the Excluded Scales in the Academic Context

Variable	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
1. Perceived Risk	3.5 (1.0)					
2. Definition of Conflict Behavior Item1	1.7 (.99)	-.012				
3. Definition of Conflict Behavior Item2	3.6 (1.0)	.121	.287*			
4. Definition of Conflict Behavior Item3	3.2 (1.3)	.100	.295**	.473**		
5. Likelihood of Future Abuse	4.1 (1.9)	-.006	.281*	.424**	.560**	
6. Risk Assessment	4.9 (1.8)	.055	.244*	.416**	.435**	.531**

Note. ** $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed); * $p < 0.05$; $N = 76$

Table 11

Demographics and Spearman's Rank (rho) Correlation Results of the Excluded Scales in the Organizational Context

Variable	<i>M (SD)</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Perceived Risk	3.5 (1.0)							
2. Definition of Conflict Behavior Item1	2.4 (1.2)	-.102						
3. Definition of Conflict Behavior Item2	4.1 (.87)	.076	.198					
4. Definition of Conflict Behavior Item3	3.0 (1.2)	-.001	.448**	.400**				
5. Likelihood of Future Abuse Item 1	4.1 (2.0)	.080	.363**	.205	.194			
6. Likelihood of Future Abuse Item 2	4.5 (1.9)	-.149	.449**	.308**	.513**	.402**		
7. Risk Assessment Item 1	5.0 (1.8)	.143	-.117	.173	-.147	.323**	-.133	
8. Risk Assessment Item 2	5.5 (1.7)	.127	.092	.331**	.417**	.151	.333*	.214

Note. ** $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed); * $p < 0.05$; $N = 76$