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Mapping conflict styles - a facet approach

*Paper presented at the Twelfth Conference of the
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San Sebastián-Donostia, Spain*

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Sozialpsychologie ♦ Persönlichkeitspsychologie ♦ Organisationspsychologie

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Abstract

Many conflicts can be conceived of as resulting from a divergence of *values*. On the assumption that there exists a values-conflict link, findings from values research should stimulate the scientific investigation of conflict in general and of *conflict styles* in particular. Since recent studies into the structure of values (Schwartz, 1992) closely relate to so-called facet theory, it seems reasonable to reconsider conflict styles from a facet perspective before trying to formulate hypotheses about the supposed relationship. This is accomplished by falling back on Rahim's (1992) theoretical approach. We start with rephrasing his model by defining conflict styles in the terminology of facet research. Next, we derive hypotheses about their mutual relation. These hypotheses are tested in a third step by means of multidimensional scaling applied to data from three different samples. The results of our analyses are presented in a way that facilitates comparisons with findings from values research. All in all, they clearly support the two-dimensional structure hypothesized by Rahim. Having accomplished the task of reconsidering conflict styles in terms of facet theory, we finally sketch out some tentative hypotheses about the relation between Schwartz' basic value dimensions and Rahim's dimensions of conflict styles.

MAPPING CONFLICT STYLES - A FACET APPROACH

In many instances, a *conflict* may be conceived of as a *divergence of values* that goes along with a belief that the parties' current value-driven aspirations cannot be (easily) achieved simultaneously (e.g. Rubin, Pruitt & Kim, 1994). According to Schwartz (1992), *values* can be defined by two basic dimensions called 'self-transcendence versus self-enhancement' and 'openness to change versus conservation'. His cross-cultural theory on the dynamic structure of values has been convincingly validated on the basis of samples from many culturally different countries during the past decade (e.g., Schwartz & Sagiv, 1995). Provided that there exists a *values-conflict link*, findings from values research should stimulate the scientific investigation of conflict in general and of *conflict styles* in particular, therefore. In this paper, conflict styles are the focal point of interest.

However, in order to get a better understanding of the supposed relation between values and conflict style the conceptual and methodological basis of value research as conducted by Schwartz (1992) should be taken into consideration. This research is closely related to the so-called *facet approach* or *facet theory* devised by Louis Guttman (Guttman & Greenbaum, 1998). This approach offers a set of principles to guide research design, has a companion set of multivariate statistical procedures for data analysis, and provides a metatheoretical framework within which to construct theories (Shye & Elizur, 1994). It seems reasonable, therefore, to *reconsider conflict styles from a facet perspective* before trying to formulate more specific hypotheses about the supposed relationship of values and conflict styles.

Redefining Conflict Styles in Terms of Facet Theory

In a first step, we (re-) defined conflict styles in terms of facet theory. This was accomplished by building on Rahim's (1992) theoretical approach which belongs to a group of so-called dual concern models. These models postulate two types of concern - concern for self and concern for other (Rubin, Pruitt & Kim, 1994). Rahim (1992) contends that these concerns portray the motivational orientations of a given individual during conflict. Depending on the respective degree of concern for self and for other, different styles of handling interpersonal conflict can be distinguished and parsimoniously described by two dimensions: an 'integrative' dimension ranging from 'integrating' to 'avoiding', and a 'distributive' dimension with 'dominating' and 'obliging' as opposite poles. Rahim's theoretical approach can be easily rephrased in facet terminology by means of a so-called *mapping sentence* comprising three central *content facets* (Figure 1): (a) concern for self, (b) concern for other and (c) party involved (i.e., other). Such a mapping sentence can be read from top to bottom like a sentence in ordinary language by combining the appropriate elements (1 ... n) of the different facets (A ... Z) in order to specify a special case of the phenomenon under study, i.e., a conflict style.

A **conflict style** is an individual's (x) tendency to show

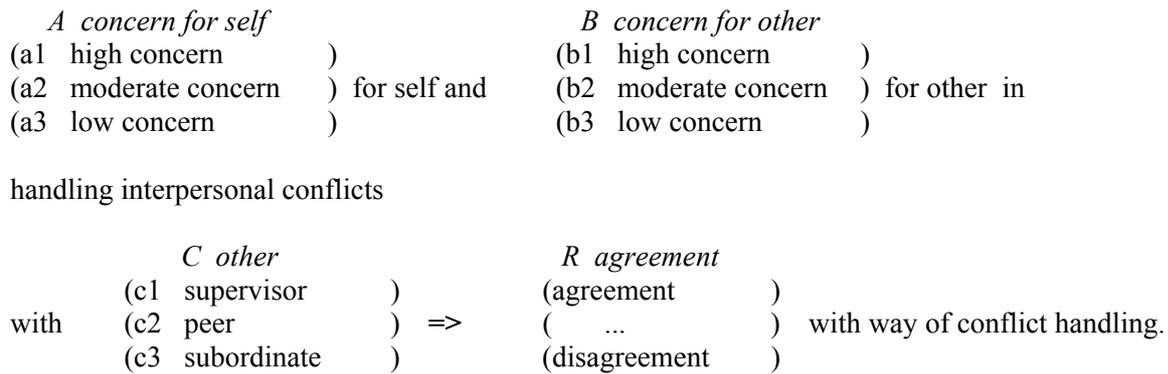


Figure 1. Mapping sentence, redefining Rahim's (1992) conflict styles in terms of Facet Theory

In a second step, this mapping sentence served as a frame of reference for classifying items that represent different conflict styles: Using the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory (ROCI-II), each of the 28 items of this instrument was identified by a so-called *structuple* (see Table 1). In this research context, a structuple specifies an item by assigning it to one element of each of the three content facets at a time. Beyond characterizing items, however, structuples also serve for stating *regional hypotheses* about *item similarities* that can be tested empirically.

Method

In our study, hypotheses were tested by nonmetric multidimensional scaling analyses, *MDS* (Borg & Groenen, 1997). Technically speaking, testing of regional hypotheses in two- or higher-dimensional space is accomplished by introducing boundary curves according to the structuples that define distinct conflict styles. It should be noted, however, that regions of items characterized by the same structuple are in general not 'clusters' that are discernible by 'empty space' around them. Instead, regional hypotheses refer to space that in principle has points everywhere. This means that some items in one region may correlate less with other variables of the same region than they do with items from other regions (cf. Levy, 1985).

Holding 'party' constant by analyzing the different forms of ROCI-II (referring to supervisor, peer, or subordinate) separately in our study, the remaining two content facets (*concern for self* and *concern for other*, containing three elements each: high, moderate, and low concern) should form a *duplex* (cf. Levy, 1985) in two-dimensional space, i.e., a 3x3 grid separating items. However, as only five out of nine theoretically possible conflict styles are distinguished by Rahim's theory (i.e. avoiding, compromising, dominating, integrating and obliging), separation of items can be accomplished by a more parsimonious spatial partition-

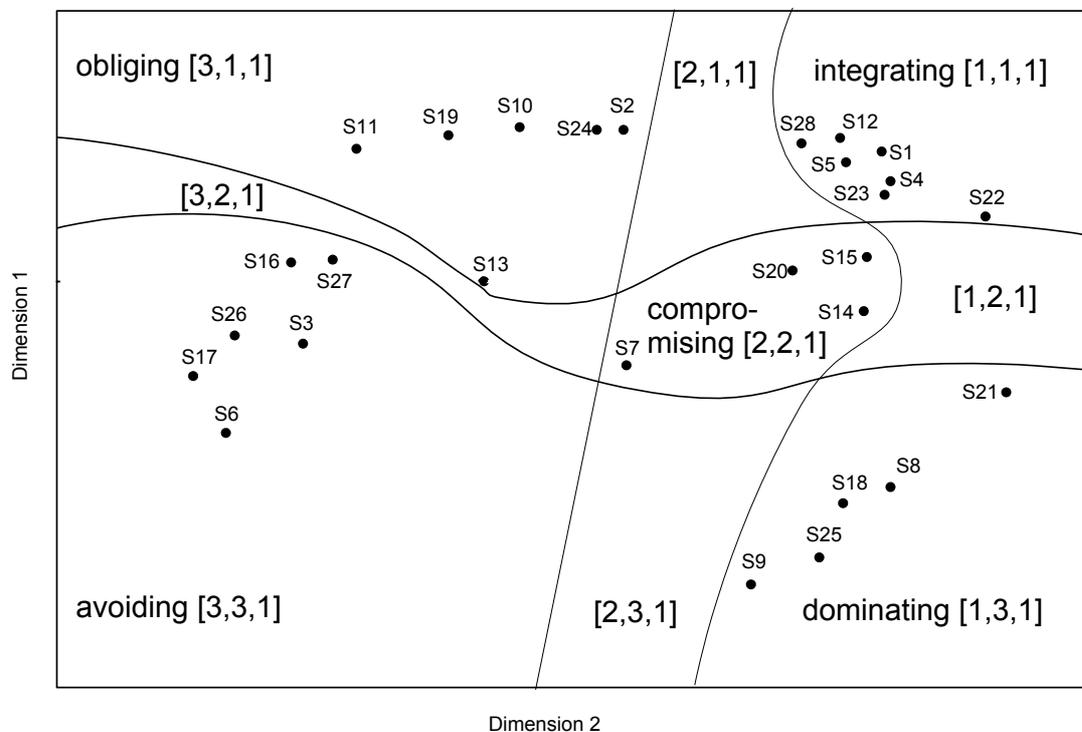
Table 1 ROCI-II items (peers): specification of conflict styles by structuples according to the mapping sentence

ROCI-IIa		Facets		
Item	Conflict Style	A	B	C
1. I try to investigate an issue with my peers to find a solution acceptable to us.	integrating	1	1	2
2. I generally try to satisfy the needs of my peers.	obliging	3	1	2
3. I attempt to avoid being "put on the spot" and try to keep my conflict with my peers to myself.	avoiding	3	3	2
4. I try to integrate my ideas with those of my peers to come up with a decision jointly.	integrating	1	1	2
5. I try to work with my peers to find solution to a problem which satisfy our expectations.	integrating	1	1	2
6. I usually avoid open discussion of my differences with my peers.	avoiding	3	3	2
7. I try to find a middle course to resolve an impasse.	compromising	2	2	2
8. I use my influence to get my ideas accepted.	dominating	1	3	2
9. I use my authority to make a decision in my favor.	dominating	1	3	2
10. I usually accommodate the wishes of my peers.	obliging	3	1	2
11. I give in to the wishes of my peers.	obliging	3	1	2
12. I exchange accurate information with my peers to solve a problem together.	integrating	1	1	2
13. I usually allow concessions to my peers.	obliging	3	1	2
14. I usually propose a middle ground for breaking deadlocks.	compromising	2	2	2
15. I negotiate with my peers so that a compromise can be reached.	compromising	2	2	2
16. I try to stay away from disagreement with my peers.	avoiding	3	3	2
17. I avoid an encounter with my peers.	avoiding	3	3	2
18. I use my expertise to make a decision in my favor.	dominating	1	3	2
19. I often go along with the suggestions of my peers.	obliging	3	1	2
20. I use "give and take" so that a compromise can be made.	compromising	2	2	2
21. I am generally firm in pursuing my side of the issue.	dominating	1	3	2
22. I try to bring all our concerns out in the open so that the issues can be resolved in the best possible way.	integrating	1	1	2
23. I collaborate with my peers to come up with decisions acceptable to us.	integrating	1	1	2
24. I try to satisfy the expectations of my peers.	obliging	3	1	2
25. I sometimes use my power to win a competitive situation.	dominating	1	3	2
26. I try to keep my disagreement with my peers to myself in order to avoid hard feelings.	avoiding	3	3	2
27. I try to avoid unpleasant exchanges with my peers.	avoiding	3	3	2
28. I try to work with my peers for a proper understanding of a problem.	integrating	1	1	2

ing (a so-called *radex*) which closely resembles Rahim's two-dimensional model of conflict styles (1992, p. 24).

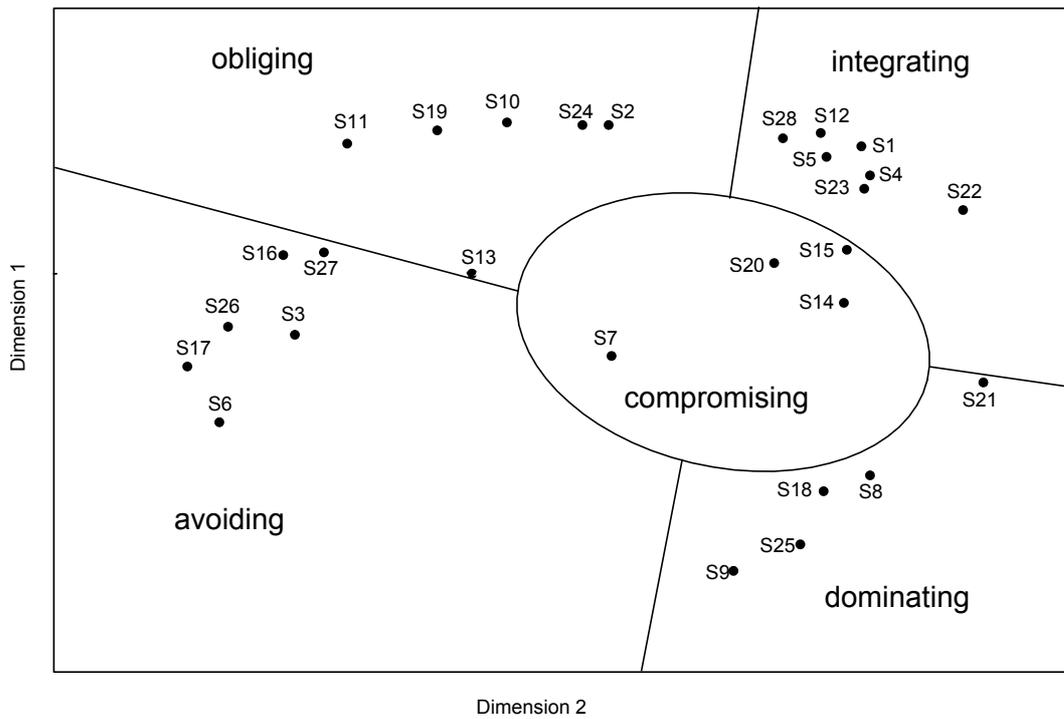
Results

This supposition was tested in a third step by applying nonmetric MDS analyses to data on conflict styles from three different samples of subordinates (N = 1.708), supervisors (N = 1.304), and peers (N = 1.431). In all three analyses, clear *radex* structures emerged which conform to our expectations as specified in the above mapping sentence of conflict styles. The results of these analyses are depicted in Figures 3 - 5. In addition to these MDS-plots, results from the first sample are also presented in the form of a duplex to illustrate a complete (i.e., 3 x 3) split of two-dimensional space according to the mapping sentence applied. The results of our analyses clearly support the two-dimensional structure hypothesized by Rahim (1992).



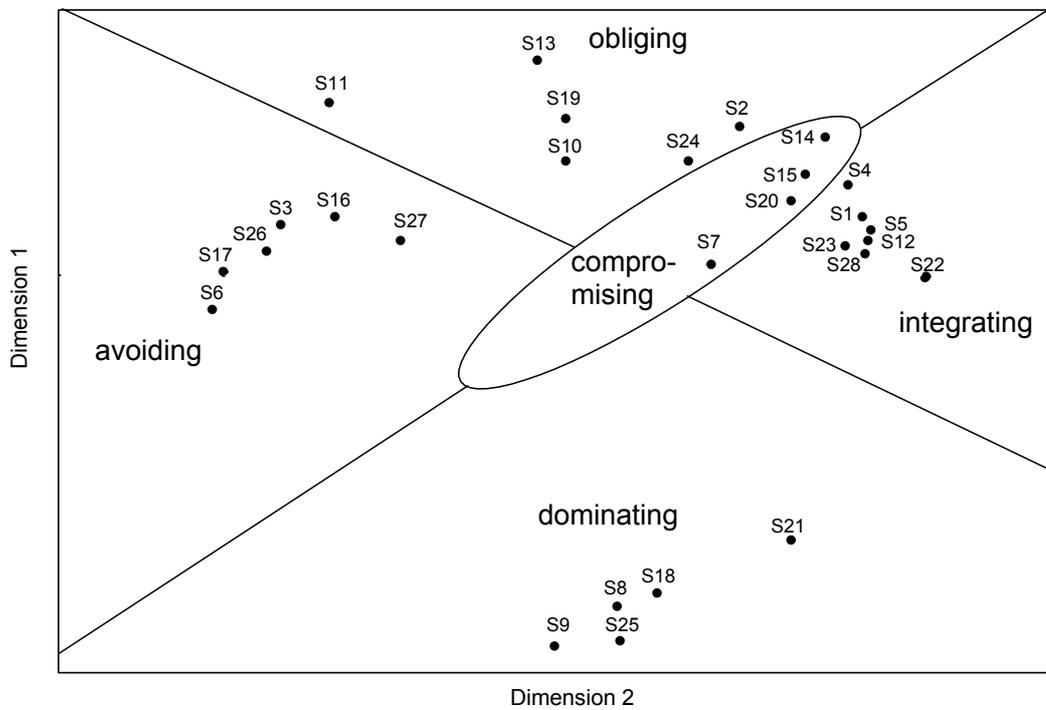
Items S1-S28 of ROCI-II, Form A (data file: PRSN 2345)

Figure 2. Duplex, separating ROCI-II items for subordinates according to the mapping sentence of conflict styles



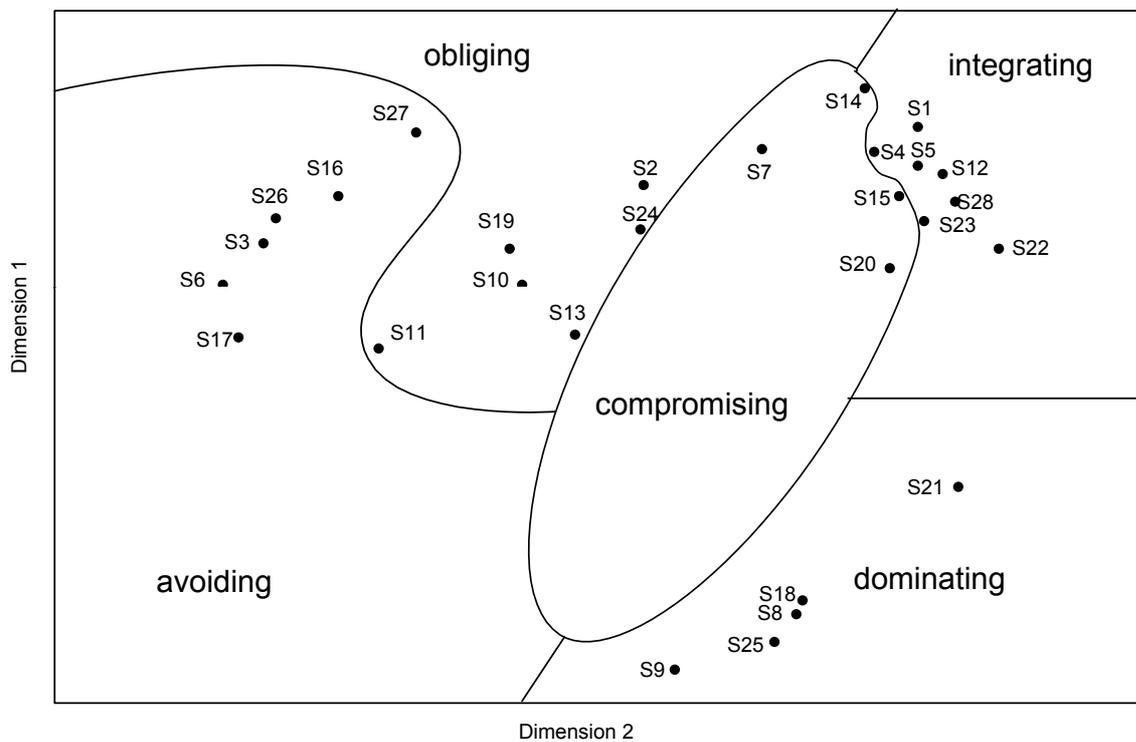
Items S1-S28 of ROCI-II, Form A (data file: PRSN 2345)

Figure 3. Radex, separating ROCI-II items for subordinates according to the mapping sentence of conflict styles



Items S1-S28 of ROCI-II, Form B (data file: PRSN 2345)

Figure 4. Radex, separating ROCI-II items for supervisors according to the mapping sentence of conflict styles



Items S1-S28 of ROCI-II, Form C (data file: PRSN 2345)

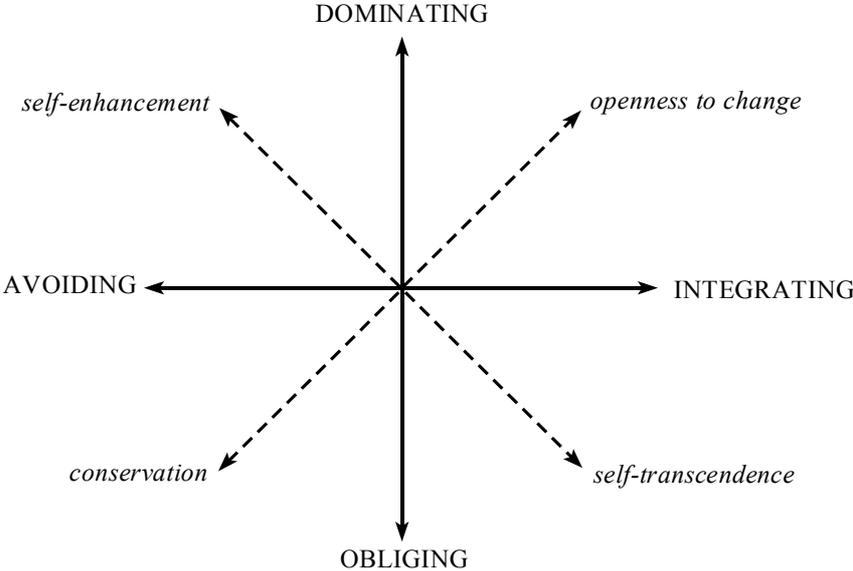
Figure 5. Radex, separating ROCI-II items for peers according to the mapping sentence of conflict styles

Research Perspectives and Conclusion

Having shown that the structure of conflict styles can be mapped in a similar way as values, some tentative hypotheses about the *relative location* of both, Schwartz' (1992) basic value dimensions ('self-transcendence' versus 'self-enhancement' and 'openness to change' versus 'conservation') and Rahim's (1992) dimensions of conflict styles in *one common two-dimensional space* are sketched out. Of course, there is no simple one-to-one relation of the two structural models in such a way that the basic dimensions of both approaches are supposed to coincide. At first glance, 'dominating' in terms of Rahim's approach and 'self-enhancement' as defined by Schwartz seem to be closely linked. However, looking at the opposite poles of the respective dimensions reveals that 'obliging' and 'self-transcendence' share only some common features. This is true because an obliging conflict style is not only characterized by an orientation towards 'self-transcendence' but by an orientation towards 'conformity' and 'security' as well. These values are typical representatives of the 'conservation' value type. Thus, an appropriate rotation is required to adjust the hypothesized position of the value dimensions relative to Rahim's (1992) distributive dimension.

Assuming an orthogonal relation of the basic value dimensions (Schwartz, 1992), rotating them in the way proposed would place an integrating conflict style in between the 'openness to change' and 'self-transcendence' value types. In fact, this location of 'integrating' is not only formally adequate but also conceptually meaningful. Finally, 'avoiding' as conceived by

Rahim (1992) corresponds to a mix of 'self-enhancement' and 'conservation'. This interpretation is in accordance with its hypothetical location in a two-dimensional space of value types and conflict styles as discussed here. The aforementioned preliminary hypotheses are summarized in Figure 6.



✂
Figure 6. Hypothesized relations of basic value types and conflict styles in two-dimensional space

These hypotheses may be taken as a starting-point for further investigations into the relation between conflict styles and value orientations. As there has been much speculation about the values-conflict link in the past, such investigations would certainly contribute to a better understanding of this interesting domain of research.

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