Conflict issues matter: how conflict issues influence negotiation
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Chapter 2

Persuasive Arguments and Beating Around the Bush in Negotiation:

The Role of Conflict Issues

Many social interactions involve negotiation because participants seek agreement as well as good outcomes for themselves (Pruitt, 1998). Individuals in negotiation develop and convey persuasive arguments intended to alter their opponent’s understanding of reality or to make him or her more conciliatory, rather than just saying what they want (e.g., Giebels, de Dreu, & Van de Vliert, 2000). In fact, the use of persuasive arguments is recommended because, as Fisher and Ury (1981) observed, justifying and legitimizing one’s position reduces the chances that the other party feels personally attacked and it enhances the probability that one’s claim is seriously considered. Often, however, negotiators “beat around the bush,” in that they provide persuasive arguments that do not reflect the true reasons for their position. For example, Druckman, Rozelle and Zechmeister (1977, p. 107) described a leader who used ideological arguments to “disguise, rationalize, and legitimize the contest for power” and to “justify [his]’actual exercise of power by resting it on some universal moral principle.” Likewise, we sometimes see politicians claiming they seek fairness and want to fight for family values while in fact, their primary concern is getting elected next month. Another example is given by Thompson and Loewenstein (1992), who found that negotiators argue for equality or equity-based distributions, depending on what serves their self-interest best.

This beating around the bush is potentially problematic because mutually beneficial agreements can often be discovered only when people accurately
reveal why they want to achieve a certain conflict outcome (Fisher & Ury, 1981; Pruitt & Lewis, 1975). Although a large number of studies has investigated the effects of persuasive arguments on the likelihood and quality of negotiated agreements (for reviews, see De Dreu, Weingart & Kwon, 2000b; Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993), research has neglected the content of the persuasive arguments negotiators advance. Consequently, we do not know when beating around the bush is most likely, or why it occurs. In the current research we seek answers to these questions. In three studies, we investigate the circumstances under which beating around the bush occurs (Experiment 1a and 1b), and how negotiators respond to an opponent who beats around the bush (Experiment 2).

**Conflict Issues and Beating Around the Bush**

Strategic considerations may be important determinants of beating around the bush. From a strategic point of view, it may be unwise to give an opposing negotiator information about the priorities underlying one’s demands (Pruitt & Smith, 1981). Negotiators often find themselves in a “dilemma of honesty and openness” such that being open about personal interests may lead to mutually beneficial agreements, but also makes one vulnerable to exploitation (Fisher & Ury, 1981; Kelley & Thibaut, 1969; O’Connor & Carnevale, 1997; Rubin, Pruitt & Kim, 1994). To avoid exploitation negotiators may, instead of speaking their true mind, invoke principles of fairness to justify their claims (Fisher & Ury, 1981; Hegtvedt & Cook, 1987; Leventhal, 1980; Walster, Berscheid & Walster, 1973). In addition, referring to self-interest in negotiation is usually not seen as a valid argument, because there is no a priori reason to value one party’s position more than the other party’s position (Pruitt, 1981). Beating around the bush thus not only helps to defend oneself against exploitation, it may also smooth interaction and prevent escalation of the conflict.

The examples given at the outset suggest beating around the bush occurs in conflict of interest. **Conflict of interest** arises when negotiators seek agreement on conflicting personal interests such as the attainment of money, time, personal
benefits or other scarce resources. The example given by Druckman et al. (1977) involved the quest for personal power. Similarly, Hegtvedt and Cook (1987, p.112) noted that a "...fairness motive [...] should be closely scrutinized as it may simply be a thin veil [...] for self-interest".

Conflict, however, is not necessarily rooted in interests, and instead may be rooted in intellective or evaluative issues (Brehmer, 1976; Cosier & Rose, 1977; De Dreu, Harinck & Van Vianen, 1999; Druckman, 1994; Druckman, et al., 1977; Levine & Thompson, 1996). An *intellective conflict* arises when negotiators seek agreement on conflicting interpretations of reality. For example, a lawyer opposes a jail sentence while the district attorney opposes a monetary fine because the lawyer and district attorney have different ideas as to how effective a particular penalty is in preventing recidivism. The effectiveness of jail penalties and monetary fines can be objectively verified, for example by studying the recidivism statistics. Intellective conflicts are sometimes referred to as ‘cognitive conflicts’ (e.g., Brehmer, 1976; Cosier & Rose, 1977). An *evaluative conflict* arises when negotiators seek agreement on conflicting evaluations of issues that have no single correct answer, such as norms and values. For example, a lawyer opposes a jail sentence while the district attorney opposes a monetary fine because the lawyer and district attorney have different evaluations of the justness of a particular penalty. Justness is an evaluative issue because there is no universal measure of justness (Gergen & Gergen, 1986; Levine & Thompson, 1996; Maier, 1963; Raiffa, 1982). Evaluative conflicts are sometimes referred to as “value conflicts” (Druckman, et al., 1977).

The dilemma of openness and honesty is less relevant in intellective and evaluative conflict because opposing parties have the shared goal of reaching agreement, instead of the competitive goal of maximizing one’s self-interest. There is no material gain or loss in intellective and evaluative conflict, and exploitation is not an issue. The goal in intellective and evaluative conflict is not to serve one’s self-interest but rather to reach a common understanding and evaluation of reality (Druckman et al, 1977; Festinger, 1950, p. 184). As a consequence, the reasons to beat around the bush discussed earlier may be less relevant in intellective and evaluative conflict than in conflict of interest. In
addition, there are no fairness norms in intellective and evaluative conflict that may be invoked to justify one's own position. It makes no sense to claim the objective correctness of a particular position because one "deserves to be correct" according to some fairness principle.

Taken together, we have argued that beating around the bush occurs because of strategic considerations and we have argued that these considerations are more likely in a conflict of interest, than in an intellective or evaluative conflict. In Experiment 1a and 1b we tested the prediction that negotiators in a conflict of interest generate arguments referring to the objective correctness or evaluative superiority of their position while at the same time avoid arguments directly referring to their self-interest. Negotiators in an intellective or evaluative conflict will not engage in beating around the bush and, accordingly, generate arguments that reflect the true reasons for their position in the negotiation. To test this prediction we used data collected as part of a larger research project. Earlier work using this data set considered problem solving behavior and likelihood of integrative agreements as a function of conflict issue (see Harinck, De Dreu & Van Vianen, 2000). The manipulation checks we report in this article are the same as those reported in our earlier work, and we do so for the reader's convenience. All other data reported in this article are unique and the issue of beating around the bush has not been dealt with previously.

**Experiment 1a and 1b**

**Method**

**Design and Participants**
In both Experiment 1a and 1b conflict issue (interests vs. intellective vs. evaluative) was manipulated as a between-dyad factor. Participants in Experiment 1a were 78 undergraduate students at the University of Amsterdam. Part of the sample participated for course credit, the other part participated for money (€12.50; equivalent to $6.25). The experiment was run
in dyads \((N = 39)\). There were 10 male-male couples, 16 male-female couples and 13 female-female couples, evenly distributed over the three conflict conditions. The sex composition was not related to the content of the arguments and will not be discussed any further. Dyads were randomly allocated to experimental conditions \((N = 13 \text{ per condition})\).

Participants in Experiment 1b were 88 undergraduate students at the University of Amsterdam. Part of the sample participated for course credit, the other part participated for money (fl 12.50; equivalent to $ 6.25). The experiment was run in dyads \((N = 44)\). There were 9 male-male couples, 15 male-female couples and 20 female-female couples, evenly distributed over the three conditions. The sex composition was not related to the content of the arguments and will not be discussed any further. Dyads were randomly allocated to experimental conditions: 15 in the conflict of interest condition, 13 in the intellectual conflict condition and 16 in the evaluative conflict condition.

**Negotiation Task and Manipulation of Conflict Issue**

In both Experiment 1a and 1b a negotiation task was used that was based on tasks used in past research (De Dreu, Giebels, & Van de Vliert, 1998; Pruitt & Lewis, 1975). Participants worked in dyads, one of them was (randomly) assigned the role of a lawyer, and the other one was assigned the role of a district attorney. Their task was to reach agreement on penalties for several different criminal cases. Each participant received the same information about the penalties and the criminal cases (for detailed descriptions, see Harinck et al., 2000, Chapter 3).

Lawyers were instructed to aim for monetary fines for their clients, while district attorneys were instructed to aim for jail penalties. In the *conflict of interests* condition, lawyers were instructed to aim for monetary fines because it would help their career and chances to get promoted. District attorneys were instructed to aim for jail penalties because obtaining jail penalties would help their career and chances to get promoted. Thus, the participants’ preferences for a particular sentence were related to obtaining personal interests.
To create an *intellective conflict*, we manipulated how the participants thought about the *effectiveness* of jail penalties or monetary fines. The effectiveness of a sentence, defined as the reduction of subsequent recidivism, has a correct solution because it is possible to measure objectively how effective sentences are in diminishing recidivism. On the other hand, participants usually are uninformed about the true effectiveness of the different penalties on recidivism rates, enabling us to manipulate the assumed (in)effectiveness of jail penalties and monetary fines. Thus, lawyers were instructed to pursue a monetary fine because this sentence was most effective in reducing recidivism among offenders. Similarly, district attorneys were instructed to aim for jail penalties because this was most effective in reducing recidivism.

To create an *evaluative conflict*, we manipulated how participants thought about the *justness* of the different penalties. Justness is an evaluative issue because there is no objective universal measure of justness (Gergen & Gergen, 1986; Levine & Thompson, 1996; Maier, 1963; Raiffa, 1982). Lawyers in the evaluative conflict condition were instructed to pursue a monetary fine because they believed this was most just. Similarly, district attorneys were instructed to pursue a jail penalty because they believed this kind of sentence was most just.

**Procedure and Dependent Variables**

One to three dyads were run simultaneously in Experiment 1a and 1b. When participants entered the laboratory, they were welcomed by the experimenter and divided in dyads. Each dyad was assigned a table; in case multiple dyads were run, tables were placed at some distance from each other (in Experiment 1b dyads were seated in separate “offices”). Participants were given a folder containing instructions about their role and the task, the conflict issue manipulation and their own preference chart.

In Experiment 1a, participants were given ten minutes to write down arguments for their own position. The lawyer had to write down arguments favoring monetary fines and the district attorney had to write down arguments favoring jail penalties. After ten minutes, the experimenter collected the sheets
with arguments and administered a short questionnaire containing manipulation checks.

In Experiment 1b, participants did not write down arguments but upon reading their role instructions moved on immediately to discuss the cases face-to-face. The experimenter told each dyad they had thirty minutes to discuss their positions and to reach agreements, and that this discussion would be tape-recorded. When participants reached agreement or when time ran out the experimenter stopped the recorder and handed out a questionnaire to measure the effectiveness of the manipulations. Participants were paid and debriefed upon completion.

The questionnaire in both Experiment 1a and 1b contained manipulation checks of the conflict issue by asking participants why they wanted monetary (in the case of a lawyer) or jail (in the case of a district attorney) penalties. Answers had to be given on three items: (a) because monetary/jail penalties are good for my career, (b) because monetary/jail penalties are most effective, and (c) because monetary/jail penalties are most just (always 1 = not at all, to 5 = very much).

In Experiment 1a we analyzed the content of the arguments participants wrote down. Every argument that described the effect of a penalty on someone's career, was coded 'career'. An example is "I do not agree with a jail penalty because that is bad for my career". Every argument related to the effectiveness of the penalty was coded 'effectiveness'. An example is: "I do not want to give this man a monetary fine, because then he needs to steal again, and that is exactly what we do not want". Every argument that was related to the justness of the penalties was coded 'justness'. An example is "I do not think it is fair to give him a jail penalty". Every argument that could not be coded as 'career', 'effectiveness' or 'justness' was coded 'other'. An example is: "This man should not get a jail penalty because this man is ill". As we do not have expectations about the last category, we do not discuss this 'other' category in the rest of the paper, but focus on the arguments which content could be labeled as 'career', 'effectiveness' or 'justness'. One judge coded all arguments. Another independent judge coded thirty-three percent of the arguments.
Cohen's Kappa (1960) was .84. Analyses were based on the codes of all arguments. The arguments were divided by the total number of arguments generated by the participant to control for the total number of arguments generated by a dyad (Weingart, 1997).

In Experiment 1b, the discussions between the lawyers and district attorneys were recorded and transcribed. The arguments in these transcripts were coded for content using the same coding scheme as in Experiment 1a. One judge coded all arguments. Another independent judge coded thirty-three percent of the arguments. Cohen's kappa (1960) was .84. Analyses were based on the codes of all arguments. The arguments were divided by the total number of speaking turns to control for the verbosity of the dyads (Weingart, 1997).

Taken together, participants had the role of a lawyer or a district attorney and prepared for (Experiment 1a) or negotiated in (Experiment 1b) a conflict of interest, an intellectual conflict or an evaluative conflict. The arguments they wrote down prior to interaction (Experiment 1a) or the arguments they communicated during negotiation (Experiment 1b) were coded and analyzed.

**Results and Discussion**

**Treatment of the Data**
Participants negotiated in dyads. Within each dyad, individual data are interdependent, and therefore the individual data of the participants in each dyad were averaged and analyzed at the dyadic level (cf. Kenny & LaVoie, 1985).

**Manipulation Checks**
In Experiment 1a and 1b, the checks for the manipulation of conflict issue were analyzed by a 3 (manipulation check: career vs. effectiveness vs. justness) by 3 (conflict issue: interest vs. intellectual vs. evaluative) MANOVA with the last factor between-dyads. In Experiment 1a, there was a main effect for manipulation check, $F(2, 66) = 8.57$, $p < .001$, qualified by a Conflict Issue x Manipulation Check interaction, $F(4, 66) = 19.58$, $p < .001$. Within the conflict of
interest condition the main effect of conflict issue was significant, $F(2, 66) = 9.25, p < .001$, showing that dyads wanted to give the penalties because it favored their career ($M = 3.38$) rather than because the penalties were most effective ($M = 2.62, p < .05$) or most just ($M = 2.79, p < .05$). Within the intellective conflict condition, the main effect of conflict issue was significant, $F(2, 66) = 31.01, p < .001$, showing that dyads wanted to give the penalties because of the effectiveness of the penalties ($M = 4.07$) rather than because the penalties favored their career ($M = 1.85, p < .05$) or because the penalties were most just ($M = 3.46, p < .05$). Within the evaluative conflict condition, the main effect of conflict issue was significant, $F(2, 66) = 8.21, p < .001$, showing that dyads wanted to give the penalties because of the justness of the penalties ($M = 3.36$) rather than because the penalties favored their career ($M = 2.13, p < .05$). Although means were in the expected direction, there was no significant difference between the scores on the effectiveness ($M = 3.09$) and the justness of the penalties for dyads in the evaluative conflict condition.

In Experiment 1b similar results were obtained. There was a main effect of conflict issue, $F(2, 41) = 3.45, p < .041$, qualified by a Conflict Issue x Manipulation Check interaction, $F(4, 82) = 19.96, p < .001$. Within the conflict of interest condition the main effect of conflict issue was significant, $F(2, 40) = 14.87, p < .001$, showing that dyads wanted the penalties because it favored their career ($M = 4.37$) rather than because they thought the penalties to be most effective ($M = 3.03, p < .05$) or most just ($M = 3.00, p < .05$). Within the intellective conflict condition, the main effect of conflict issue was significant, $F(2, 40) = 9.82, p < .001$, showing that dyads wanted the penalties because of the effectiveness of the penalties ($M = 3.85$) rather than because the penalties favored their career ($M = 2.50, p < .05$) or because the penalties were most just ($M = 3.00, p < .05$). Within the evaluative conflict condition, the main effect of conflict issue was significant, $F(2, 40) = 17.90, p < .001$, showing that dyads wanted to give the penalties because of the justness of the penalties ($M = 3.75$) rather than because the penalties favored their career ($M = 2.16, p < .05$) or because the penalties were most effective ($M = 3.34, p < .06$).
Persuasive Arguments

In Experiment 1a, no single individual in either condition generated an argument that related a certain penalty to one's career. In Experiment 1b, there were no career arguments in the evaluative condition. The absence of career arguments in certain cells implied that we could not use standard ANOVA to analyze the arguments because the variance of the career arguments in the empty cells was zero. Instead, we used a non-parametric test for related samples, the Friedman test, to test whether the differences between the relative amount of career, effectiveness and justness arguments were significant. The Friedman test ranks the career, effectiveness and justness arguments for each participant, calculates the mean rank for each type of argument over all the participants and then calculates a test statistic with approximately a Chi-square distribution. We report means and standard deviations for the reader's convenience.

In Experiment 1a there was a main effect of argument type, $\chi^2(2, N = 38) = 15.57, p < .001$. Participants generated less career arguments ($M = 0.00$) than effectiveness arguments ($M = .16$), $\chi^2(1, N = 38) = 13.92, p < .001$, or justness arguments ($M = .04$), $\chi^2(1, N = 38) = 5.16, p < .023$. The difference between effectiveness and justness arguments was not significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 38) = 1.68, ns$. None of the participants generated arguments that referred to the career, which supported our hypothesis that individuals do not talk about their interests. We repeated the Friedman test for each conflict issue condition separately, to investigate whether the conflict issue influenced the type of arguments that were generated (for means and standard deviations, see Table 3).

In the interest condition in Experiment 1a, there was no effect of argument content, $\chi^2(2, N = .13) = 3.37, ns$. Although participants did not generate any arguments that referred to the career, only the difference between the career arguments and the effectiveness arguments tended to reach statistical significance, $\chi^2(1, N = 13) = 2.77, p < .10$. In the intellective condition in Experiment 1a, there was an effect of argument content, $\chi^2(2, N = 13) = 6.96, p < .013$. Further tests showed that participants generated more effectiveness
arguments than career arguments, $\chi^2(1, N = 13) = 6.23, p < .013$, or justness arguments, $\chi^2(1, N = 13) = 2.77, p < .10$. Thus, the arguments of participants in the intellective condition mainly referred to the real conflict issue, namely the effectiveness of the penalties. Conform our expectation, participants in the intellective condition did not beat around the bush.

In the evaluative condition in Experiment 1a, there was an effect of argument content, $\chi^2(1, N = 12) = 5.54, p < .063$. Further tests showed that participants in the evaluative condition generated more effectiveness arguments than career arguments, $\chi^2(1, N = 12) = 5.33, p < .021$. Contrary to our expectation, there are no indications that participants in the evaluative condition mainly generated justness arguments, but they did not beat around the bush either. Instead, they generated a mixture of arguments referring to justness and effectiveness.

In Experiment 1b there was a main effect of argument type, $\chi^2(2, N = 43) = 60.85, p < .001$. Further tests showed that participants, conform our expectation, generated less career arguments ($M = 0.00$) than effectiveness arguments ($M = .08$), $\chi^2(1, N = 43) = 39.09, p < .001$, or justness arguments ($M = .05$), $\chi^2(1, N = 43) = 33.58, p < .001$. Participants also generated more effectiveness arguments than justness arguments, $\chi^2(1, N = 43) = 11.26, p < .001$. There was only a very small amount of career arguments, which supported our hypothesis that individuals generally do not talk about their interests. We repeated the Friedman test for each conflict issue condition separately, to investigate whether the conflict issue influenced the type of arguments that were generated (for means and standard deviations, see Table 3).
In the interest condition in Experiment 1b, there was an effect of argument content, $\chi^2(2, N = 15) = 17.50, p < .001$. Conform our expectation, further tests showed that participants generated less career arguments than effectiveness arguments, $\chi^2(1, N = 15) = 11.27, p < .008$, or justness arguments, $\chi^2(1, N = 15) = 9.60, p < .020$. Participants also tended to generate more effectiveness arguments than justness arguments, $\chi^2(1, N = 15) = 3.27, p < .07$. The fact that career arguments were mentioned in the interest condition seems to run counter to the hypothesis that negotiators in a conflict of interest do not

### Table 3. Means (standard deviations) of arguments designed prior to (Experiment 1a) or during negotiation (Experiment 1b) as a function of the conflict issue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict Issue</th>
<th>Argument Content</th>
<th>Experiment 1a</th>
<th>Argument Content</th>
<th>Experiment 1b</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interests</td>
<td>Career</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>Effectiveness</td>
<td>.005a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.00)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intellective</td>
<td>.00a</td>
<td>.29b</td>
<td>.01a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.00)</td>
<td>(.28)</td>
<td>(.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evaluative</td>
<td>.00a</td>
<td>.13b</td>
<td>.07ab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.00)</td>
<td>(.13)</td>
<td>(.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interests</td>
<td>Career</td>
<td>.05b</td>
<td>.04b</td>
<td>.05b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.03)</td>
<td>(.03)</td>
<td>(.04b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intellective</td>
<td>.11b</td>
<td>.04c</td>
<td>.11b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.04)</td>
<td>(.02)</td>
<td>(.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evaluative</td>
<td>.07b</td>
<td>.06b</td>
<td>.07b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.05)</td>
<td>(.03)</td>
<td>(.03)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Different superscripts within a row indicate significant differences at $p < .05$.
generate arguments in terms of their self-interest. However, qualitative analysis of the career arguments showed that two dyads in the conflict of interest condition explicitly said that they did not care if their career suffered. They considered giving an *appropriate* penalty more important. One participant for example stated that it would be very mean to send someone else to prison because of his own career, which he considered 'not done'. The two other dyads mentioned their career only at the very end (but before closure) of the discussion. Thus, although a small number of dyads mentioned the career during the discussion, it seems that participants mentioned the career only when they explicitly considered it inappropriate or when revealing the true conflict issue could not hurt them anymore. All in all, negotiators in conflict of interest do not refer to self-interest to persuade their opponent, and if they mention their self-interest they appear to do so in an apologetic way.

In the intellective condition in Experiment 1b, there was an effect of argument content, $\chi^2(2, N = 12) = 23.04, p < .001$. Further tests showed that participants generated more effectiveness arguments than career arguments, $\chi^2(1, N = 12) = 12.00, p < .001$, or justness arguments, $\chi^2(1, N = 12) = 10.08, p < .002$. Participants also generated more justness arguments than career arguments, $\chi^2(1, N = 12) = 12.00, p < .001$. Thus, the arguments of participants in the intellective condition mainly referred to the real conflict issue, namely the effectiveness of the penalties. Conform our expectation, participants in the intellective condition did not beat around the bush.

In the evaluative condition in Experiment 1b, there was an effect of argument content, $\chi^2(1, N = 16) = 21.88, p < .001$. Further tests showed that participants generated more effectiveness arguments than career arguments, $\chi^2(1, N = 16) = 16.00, p < .001$, or justness arguments, $\chi^2(1, N = 16) = 12.25, p < .001$. Contrary to our expectation, participants in the evaluative condition did not mainly refer to justness arguments, but they did not beat around the bush either. Instead, they generated a mixture of arguments referring to justness, the real conflict issue, and effectiveness.
Chapter 2

Experiment 2

The results of Experiment 1a and 1b provided support for our hypothesis that beating around the bush is more likely in negotiations about interest than in intellective or evaluative negotiations. The results in the evaluative negotiation were less clear than in the other conditions, and we will return to this finding in the Discussion.

In the Introduction we argued that individuals beat around the bush for strategic reasons. Experiment 2 was designed to examine this issue in more detail. We compared negotiators' reactions to opponents who openly talked about their personal interest with reactions to opponents who beat around the bush. We predicted that the former type of opponent would be considered more honest but less strategic than the latter type of opponent.

Method

Participants
Thirty-six undergraduate students at the University of Amsterdam participated in the Experiment for course credit and were randomly assigned to experimental conditions (N = 12 participants per condition).

Procedure
When participants entered the laboratory, they were welcomed by the experimenter and placed in separate cubicles. We decided to give all participants the role of a district attorney because our earlier studies revealed no effects for role. Participants received instructions containing the information about the lawyer's interest, a memo containing the persuasive argument, and a questionnaire. Participants read that they were going to discuss several court cases with a lawyer. They read that the lawyer wanted monetary fines because this would foster the lawyer's career. Subsequently, participants received a memo allegedly written by the lawyer that stated that the lawyer wanted
monetary fines because of the lawyer's career (self-interest argument condition), because of its effectiveness (intellectual argument condition), or because of its justness (evaluative argument condition). Upon reading these materials, participants were given a questionnaire. Upon completion, they were told that the experiment was over, they were debriefed and thanked for participation.

Dependent Variables

Manipulation checks. Participants answered three items about the lawyer's conflict issue: "The lawyer wants to give monetary fines because (a) it is good for the lawyer's career, (b) the lawyer believes this to be most effective, and (c) the lawyer believes this to be most just" (always 1 = not at all, to 5 = very much).

Judgments. One scale with six items measured the extent to which the participants considered the memo strategic. The items were: smart, strategic, handy, cunning, tactical and sly (always 1 = not at all, to 5 = very much). Cronbach's alpha was .88. We measured the extent to which participants considered the lawyer to be honest. The items were: honest, open, credible and straightforward (always 1 = not at all, to 5 = very much). Cronbach's alpha was .82.

Results

Manipulation Checks
A 3 x 3 Analysis of Variance with the three manipulation checks as a within-participants factor and persuasive argument as a between-participants factor showed a main effect of manipulation check, $F(2, 64) = 54.47, p < .001$. Participants more strongly thought that the lawyer's conflict issue was the career ($M = 4.51$), than effectiveness ($M = 2.83, t(34) = 6.29, p < .001$), or justness ($M = 2.09, t(34) = 13.85, p < .001$). Univariate Analyses of Variance showed that answers on the manipulation checks for career, $F(2, 32) = .38, ns.$, effectiveness, $F(2, 32) = 2.30, ns.$, and justness, $F(2, 32) = 1.13, ns.$, did not differ as a function of the type of persuasive argument (i.e., self-interest, intellectual, evaluative).
Thus, participants in all conditions believed more strongly (and accurately) that the lawyer wanted monetary fines because of his career than because of effectiveness or justness.

**Judgments**

Data were analyzed with one-way ANOVA with type of persuasive argument as the between-participant factor. We predicted that self-interest arguments would be considered less strategic than intellectual or evaluative arguments. Analysis revealed an effect of type of persuasive argument, $F(2, 33) = 8.42, p < .002$, showing indeed that the memo was considered less strategic in the self-interest arguments condition ($M = 1.76$), than in the intellectual arguments ($M = 2.71, p < .05$) or evaluative arguments condition ($M = 3.14, p < .05$). Figure 3 gives a schematic presentation.

We also predicted that negotiators presenting self-interest arguments (thus reflecting their true issue) would be judged more honest than negotiators presenting intellectual or evaluative arguments (i.e., those negotiators beating around the bush). A main effect of type of persuasive argument on the lawyer's honesty, $F(2, 33) = 10.34, p < .001$, showed that the lawyer was judged more honest in the case of self-interest arguments ($M = 3.98$) than in the case of intellectual ($M = 2.46, p < .05$) or evaluative arguments ($M = 2.65, p < .05$). Thus, beating around the bush is considered dishonest but strategic (see Figure 3).

**Conclusions and Discussion**

This study considered an aspect of negotiation woefully neglected in past research. We examined “beating around the bush” as a potentially widespread phenomenon in negotiation and predicted that beating around the bush is more likely in conflict of interest than in intellective and evaluative conflict. Results supported our analysis. Experiment 1a and 1b showed that beating around the bush is more likely in conflict of interest than in intellective or evaluative conflict.
Figure 3. Perceived strategic value of opponent’s memo and perceived opponent’s honesty as a function of the conflict issue (N = 39 dyads).

The results in the evaluative conflicts in Experiment 1a and 1b were less clear than the results in the interests and intellective conflict conditions. Surprisingly, participants in the evaluative condition did not mainly use justness arguments, but used a mixture of effectiveness and justness arguments. We think this (lack of) effect might be due to the manipulation of the evaluative conflict issue, which consisted of telling participants that a certain penalty was ‘most just’. Participants could already hold opinions about the justness of monetary and jail sentences prior to the experiment, and our manipulation of the justness of the sentences might have not overruled these already existing beliefs. Participants may have turned to other kinds of arguments than justness arguments, because their personal feelings about justness were different from our manipulation of justness.

Experiment 2 corroborated the idea that when the true conflict issue is self-interest, negotiators generating arguments revealing their self-interest are considered more honest but less strategic than negotiators generating
arguments pertaining to intellectual or evaluative issues. Our results are in line with anecdotes offered by Druckman et al. (1977) who noted that parties use alternative rationales for claims that are actually guided by self-interest, and the theoretical position assumed by Hegtvedt and Cook (1987) that self-interest is often masked by fairness (i.e., evaluative) arguments.

The reader might argue that it seems quite clear that individuals perceive that arguing in one’s own self-interest is less socially desirable than arguing out of effectiveness or justness concerns, and thus that individuals are less likely to publicly report that their behavior is based on self-interest. We disagree with this point of view for two reasons. The first reason is that self-interest may not be socially less desirable than effectiveness or justness concerns. Miller and Ratner (1998) showed that people often justify their behavior in terms of self-interest. People do not seem to like ‘acknowledging that their behavior may have been motivated by genuine compassion or kindness’ (Miller & Ratner, 1996, p.38). Moreover, confessing ‘self-interest avoids doubts about the truth of one’s self-presentation, doubts which might be expected, for instance if, other motivations were reported’ (Montada, 1996, p. 265).

The second reason is that participants in our experiments had ample opportunities to be open about their personal interests. Participants were explicitly allowed to talk about anything they wanted to, so there were no a priori reasons to hide personal interests and to show effectiveness or justness concerns. Moreover, the consequences for being open about personal interests were rather limited in this experimental setting because participants were not accountable to real offenders and payment after participation was not linked to behavior during the experiment. Finally, participants were role-playing, which reduces the likelihood that social disapproval is taken personally. Thus, we think that participants had ample opportunities to discuss the personal interests, and the fact that they did not is not as obvious as it may seem.

At first blush beating around the bush may seem wise in conflict of interest, because it avoids the negative consequences of revealing self-interest. For instance, Tjosvold (1977) showed that negotiators react less favorably to an opponent who was believed to be committed to self-interest than to an
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opponent who was believed to be committed to justness. However, beating around the bush is effective only to the extent that one’s opponent does not discover one’s position in a negotiation is rooted in self-interest rather than the claimed desire to establish fairness or to find the truth. In addition, beating around the bush may hinder the discovery of mutually beneficial, integrative agreements. Ample research has shown that integrative agreements require both negotiators to accurately exchange the (underlying reasons for their) preferences and priorities (for a review see, De Dreu et al., 2000b; for discussions see Fisher & Ury, 1981; Lax & Sebenius, 1986; Pruitt, 1998). Beating around the bush may hinder integrative negotiation because tradeoffs that would be beneficial to both parties may go unnoticed.

Future research may consider the conditions under which beating around the bush in conflict of interest is more or less likely. One important moderator seems to be whether parties have a cooperative relationship and trust the opposing negotiator to cooperate in the future (Pruitt, 1998). When trust is high, the strategic reasons to beat around the bush are reduced because negotiators do not fear exploitation by their opponent. Lindskold and Han (1988), for instance, found that negotiators considered it more important to provide truthful information to the other party under high compared to low levels of trust. In a related vein, there may be cultural variation in the extent to which people are inclined to beat around the bush. Research shows that individualistic negotiators are more concerned about self-interest and use more self-enhancing tactics such as threats, warnings and putdowns than collectivist negotiators (Gelfand & Christakopoulou, 1999). One might speculate that a self-enhancing tactic such as beating around the bush is more frequently used by individualistic than by collectivist negotiators.

An interesting implication of the present results is that conflict of interest may be difficult to detect because negotiators tend to present intellective or evaluative arguments for their position. Beating around the bush may hamper the effectiveness of mediators and arbitrators assisting the negotiators to solve their differences. In fact, beating around the bush may occur more often and more intensely when third parties are present, as their presence increases self-
presentation concerns. Those observing conflict, including researchers conducting observation studies, should not conclude too quickly that disputants have an intellectual or evaluative conflict—it cannot be excluded that those talking about intellectual and evaluative issues beat around the bush with the sole aim to foster their self-interest.