Misleading in social decision-making: a motivational approach

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What do people communicate to interdependent others in order to influence their decision making? How do they provide information? What motivates people to mislead others, and what motivates them not to do so? These are the issues I have been investigating in the last four years. I hope that this book can get us closer to an answer...

Having an understanding of these questions is important for understanding everyday human interaction. In today's information age, trying to influence people's decisions and actions by abuse or simply by undue demonstration of power is fortunately going out of fashion in many parts of the world, as we become increasingly self-willed and independent, taking self-imposed commitments more seriously than externally imposed ones. Obviously thus, influencing people's decisions by fine-tuning information provision is becoming an ever more powerful tool.

Moving to Amsterdam was one of the more important decisions I made in my life. My decision to start working on a PhD project was largely influenced by the information I received from Carsten De Dreu. He told me that doing research at the Department of Work and Organizational Psychology at the University of Amsterdam and attending lectures at the Kurt Lewin Institute was an inspiring, pleasurable, and gratifying occupation. Luckily, I was not misled, as it turned out that this information was highly accurate. (I'm writing this sentence with certain pride, as the findings reported in Chapter 3 show that it is cooperative people who receive highly accurate information.)
Moving to Amsterdam was a good decision to make. In the first place, Carsten's catching enthusiasm for science makes him a great teacher and a very inspiring person to collaborate with. I am really happy that I had the chance to work with him and to receive top-class support and guidance throughout my research project. In addition, I became acquainted with a bunch of very sociable, enthusiastic and competent young researchers. I had countless delicious cups of coffee, inspiring discussions, and a great time going to conferences (or to the pub) together with Andreas, Bram, Cathy, Dimitri, Dominique, Eric, Femke, Fieke, Irene, Katherine, Lotte, Marjolein and Sonja. I am particularly thankful to Astrid Homan, Bernard Nijstad, Bianca Beersma, Daan van Knippenberg, and Maria Dijkstra who were a wealth of constructive comments, sound advice and creative expertise whenever wracking my brains wouldn't take me much further. Special thanks go to Jelte, Suzanne, Ina, and especially Joke for their unfailing practical support. I would also like to thank the participants in the experiments, and all the students whose interest in psychology is stimulating and encouraging. Finally, I am particularly indebted to Gerben van Kleef. Not only was it most pleasant and much fun to share an office for almost four years, he also helped me to integrate successfully into Dutch society – the practical implications of his research were essential for me each time I needed to make short work of the bureaucratic red tape.

Moving to Amsterdam was the right decision. Nevertheless, I would not have taken it, if my then girlfriend and meanwhile wife, Margarita, had not left her sunny homeland to come with me. I would like to thank her for being such a devoted, yet critical reader of various drafts of this thesis and a wonderful person to love and share a life with. My love and a very special debt gratitude come her way.

Wolfgang Steinel
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