

# **MEDIATING IN HIERARCHICAL WORKPLACE CONFLICTS**

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Dissertation offered to obtain the degree of Doctor of Psychology

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KU Leuven

Faculty of Psychology and

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# Mediating in Hierarchical Workplace Conflicts

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Dissertation offered to obtain the  
degree of Doctor of Psychology (PhD)

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## Samenvatting

Mediators vinden hiërarchische arbeidsgeschillen doorgaans ingewikkeld vanwege de structurele machtsongelijkheid tussen de partijen. Het doel van dit proefschrift is om de kennis over de invloed van hiërarchische conflicten op de perceptie van mediators en partijen te vergroten, zowel in dyades als door de tijd heen. Drie vragen staan daarbij centraal: (a) Hoe effectief is mediation bij hiërarchische arbeidsconflicten op de lange termijn? (b) Wat is de invloed van ervaren situationele macht in bovengeschikte-ondergeschikte dyades op de kortetermijneffectiviteit? (c) Hoe beleven bovengeschikten en ondergeschikten emoties tijdens mediation en is een mediator in staat deze emoties correct in te schatten?

Om deze vragen te beantwoorden, is gebruik gemaakt van literatuur over macht, emoties, mediation en conflicthantering. De introductie van het onderzoek vindt plaats aan de hand van een heuristisch model (hoofdstuk een). Daarna volgt het empirisch onderzoek in drie hoofdstukken. Het betreft een kwantitatief onderzoek waarbij boven- en ondergeschikten in een arbeidsmediation direct na afloop en een jaar later vragenlijsten hebben ingevuld. Ook werden de betrokken mediators bevraagd door middel van enquêtes.

Een jaar na afloop blijken zowel boven- als ondergeschikten mediation als effectief te ervaren. Dit impliceert dat arbeidsmediation een duurzaam middel is om conflicten op te lossen. Daarnaast blijkt de kortetermijneffectiviteit een geschikte indicator van langetermijn effectiviteit. Wel vinden bovengeschikten dat ondergeschikten de tussen hen gemaakte afspraken beter nakomen dan andersom (hoofdstuk twee). Ook tonen resultaten aan dat de ervaren macht tijdens een mediation van belang is. De partijen zien de mediation als effectiever naarmate ze meer situationele macht ervaren. Een

onevenwichtige machtsbalans vermindert daarentegen de effectiviteit van mediation. Daarbij ervaren ondergeschikten minder situationele macht dan bovengeschikten en fungeert situationele macht als een mediator tussen hiërarchische positie en ervaren mediation effectiviteit. Met name voor ondergeschikten is het belangrijk om situationele macht te ervaren om de mediation als effectief te zien (hoofdstuk drie). Bovendien ervaren ondergeschikten in hogere mate negatieve emoties dan bovengeschikten tijdens de mediation, maar ervaren zij in dezelfde mate positieve emoties. Een belangrijke uitkomst is dat arbeidsmediators alleen emoties van bovengeschikten correct inschatten. Ook schatten ze negatieve emoties beter in dan positieve (hoofdstuk vier). Het proefschrift eindigt met een samenvatting van de belangrijkste bevindingen. Hier komen ook de theoretische en praktische implicaties van het onderzoek aan bod. Daarbij worden suggesties voor vervolgonderzoek gedaan (hoofdstuk vijf).

## Summary

Mediators generally find mediation of hierarchical workplace conflicts difficult, as it often involves structural power imbalances. This dissertation seeks to increase knowledge of how hierarchical conflict affects how parties and mediators perceive mediation across dyads and across time. Three questions are central to this: (a) How effective in the long-term is the mediation of hierarchical workplace conflicts? (b) How does perceived situational power in supervisor-subordinate dyads relate to mediation effectiveness? (c) Do supervisors and subordinates differ in their emotional experiences during mediation, and are mediators able to perceive these emotions accurately? To answer these questions, we rely on the literature on power, emotions, mediation, and conflict management. We introduce our research via a heuristic model (chapter one). We then present our quantitative empirical research in three chapters based on survey data we collected from supervisors, subordinates, and mediators immediately after the mediation and then one year later.

Our results show that supervisors and subordinates consider mediation effective in the long run, implying the sustainability of workplace mediation as a conflict resolution tool. In addition, short-term perceptions of mediation effectiveness are seemingly an accurate indicator of long-term perceptions of mediation effectiveness. Supervisors and subordinates perceive the long-term outcomes somewhat differently: supervisors sense greater compliance with the agreement from subordinates than vice versa (chapter two). The results also indicate that perceived power during mediation is important: the more situational power that both parties perceive, the more satisfied they are with the mediation; while asymmetry in perceived situational power reduces mediation effectiveness.

In addition, subordinates perceive less situational power than supervisors and perceived situational power is a mediator between hierarchical position and perceived mediation effectiveness. Especially for subordinates, perceived situational power is important to see the mediation as effective (chapter three). Furthermore, subordinates experience more intense negative emotion during mediation than supervisors do, but an equal amount of positive emotion. Importantly, mediators perceive supervisors' positive and negative emotions far more accurately than they do the emotions of subordinates. Mediators are also more accurate in identifying negative emotions than positive emotions (chapter four).

The dissertation concludes with a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of our research and suggestions for future research (chapter five).

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# Chapter 1

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## *General Introduction*

## **Introduction**

Conflict arises regularly in organizations at all levels: friction occurs between colleagues, problems emerge between managers and employees. Tensions can have certain positive effects (Bryant & Allen, 2013; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Dijkstra, Beersma, & Cornelissen, 2012; Giebels, De Reuver, Rispens, & Ufkes, 2016; Todovora, Bear, & Weingart, 2014). However, counter-productive conflicts threaten productivity and employee wellbeing (Sonnentag, Unger, & Nägel, 2013), job satisfaction (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003), and employee retention (Meier, Gross, Spector, & Semmer, 2013). Moreover, poorly managed conflicts are expensive for organizations. In the Netherlands, for example, Euwema and colleagues (2007) estimated the organizational cost of an average escalated workplace conflict to be 27,094 euros.

Organizations increasingly use mediation to resolve and limit the negative effects of conflict (Bennett, 2016; Bollen & Euwema, 2013a; Saundry, McArdle, & Thomas, 2013). In workplace mediation, “parties try to settle their dispute arising out of a continuing or terminated work relationship by the help of a neutral third-party” (Bollen & Euwema, 2013a, p. 331). The mediator has no authority to prescribe outcomes; rather, they help disputants to reach a mutual agreement by promoting conditions that facilitate dialogue and negotiation (Kressel, 2014; Moore, 2014; Seaman, 2016; Wall & Dunne, 2012; Wall & Lynn, 1993; Wall, Stark & Standifer, 2001). A mediated dispute could, for example, concern disagreements about employees’ terms and conditions (Kersley et al., 2005), wrongful termination (Rasmussen & Greenwood, 2014), bullying (Ayoko, Callan, & Härtel, 2003; Baillien, Bollen, Euwema, & De Witte, 2014), (sexual) harassment (Bond, 1996), or discrimination (Bingham & Pitts, 2002).

Many workplace conflicts are hierarchical: that is, between a subordinate and their supervisor, manager, or employer (Coleman, Kugler, Mitchinson, & Foster, 2013; Gayle & Preiss, 1998; Rahim, Antonioni, & Psenicka, 2001). Solutions to hierarchical conflict comprise a substantial proportion of workplace mediator practices (Uitslag, Kalter, & De Gruil, 2011a). Hierarchical conflicts can present challenges to mediation, due to the structural power differences in the relationship. The following case illustrates some of the complexities:

*A mediator receives a phone call from a university personnel officer. She tells him about a conflict between an experienced higher education lecturer (Marley) and her manager (Will). Marley has been on sick leave for some time now. Her occupational physician proposed calling in a mediator. Both the personnel officer and Will would like to see this matter resolved quickly. In addition, the personnel officer tells the mediator that the situation is very stressful for Marley. She is very emotional and is suffering sleep disturbance as a result. Will, on the other hand, seems relaxed. When the mediator gets off the phone, he thinks about the extent to which power relations play a role in conflict and how he should handle them during mediation.*

*During a separate intake, Marley tells the mediator about her problem with Will. The mediator listens to Marley's story and asks some questions: "How do you perceive your position in relation to your manager?" "What is your biggest concern?" "What do you need to have a conversation with him?" The mediator asks Will the same questions during his intake. It seems that Marley feels more dependent on Will than the other way around. The mediator intends to empower Marley during the mediation. A satisfying agreement can only be reached if Marley and*

*Will both feel in control during the mediation. Is that possible in the case of this manager and employee?*

*At one point during the mediation, Will suspects that Marley is intentionally delaying the process. The mediator notices Will's annoyance. "I hear you sighing every time Marley is speaking and you seem a bit annoyed. Is that true?" Will agrees and expresses his irritation. At the same time, the mediator is observing Marley, who is listening quietly. Although Marley looks calm on the outside, she feels very upset. "I knew it, he is still very angry at me," she thinks. The mediator does not notice her discomfort.*

*After some time, Will and Marley come to an agreement. The solution is perfect in Will's eyes: Marley will come back to work, working part-time instead of full-time hours. Marley is relieved that she has not lost her job, but she feels that the agreement has been somewhat forced on her by Will. Although the mediator is initially satisfied that Marley and Will found a resolution for their conflict, the mediator wonders afterwards if it will prove sustainable.*

This case demonstrates some of the difficulties a mediator might face when mediating hierarchical workplace conflicts. Various questions arise as: is a mediation agreement possible in the case of substantial power differences between the parties during the mediation? Is a mediator able to accurately perceive the emotions of both supervisors and subordinates? How effective is mediation of hierarchical workplace conflicts in the long-term? These questions are at the heart of the present dissertation.

Workplace mediators are often very aware of power differences during intakes and mediations: "I am alarmed," "I have to do something with this," and "I am extra alert." Some mediators think

that they should protect the less powerful party, feeling that a fair agreement is otherwise not possible. Other mediators notice power differences but believe that they cannot or should not intervene as this could negatively influence the parties' perceptions of the mediator's neutrality and impartiality (Uitslag et al., 2011a). This reflects the ongoing debate in the mediation literature on the appropriateness of such mediation. Some scholars question whether mediation is fair and effective when the power of the respective parties is asymmetrical (Bollen, Euwema, & Munduate, 2016; Gewurz, 2001; Tallodi, 2019). Others argue that it is possible if the mediator takes power differences into account to limit their impact (Moore, 2014; Poitras & Raines, 2013). It is clear that hierarchical conflicts require extra attention and mediator effectiveness may benefit from knowledge of the implications of hierarchy for their practice (Wiseman & Poitras, 2002).

Mediation in hierarchical workplace conflicts has received limited academic attention (Bollen & Euwema, 2013a). The few empirical studies on this topic suggest that emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses to mediation often depend on the relative hierarchical positions of the parties (Bollen & Euwema, 2014; Bollen, Euwema, & Müller, 2010; Bollen, Ittner, & Euwema, 2012). Supervisors and subordinates are known to perceive mediation outcomes differently (Bingham, 2003; Bollen et al., 2010, 2012; Bollen & Euwema, 2013b): supervisors evaluate mediation more positively than subordinates do (Bollen et al., 2010, 2012). Moreover, these studies demonstrate that supervisors and subordinates differ in their needs and therefore require different approaches by the mediator. For instance, anger acknowledgement by the mediator contributes to subordinates' perceptions of mediation effectiveness, as does perceived justice and reduced uncertainty, but this is not the case for supervisors (Bollen et

al., 2010, 2012; Bollen & Euwema, 2014).

### **Objectives and general model**

Of the studies known to us and dealing with hierarchical workplace mediation – and mediation in general, most focus on short-term mediation effectiveness (assessed immediately after the mediation), such as reaching an agreement (Mareschal, 2005), satisfaction with mediation outcomes and processes (Bollen et al., 2010; Bollen & Euwema, 2014), and perceived resolution of the task and relational conflict (Bollen et al., 2012). Few studies assess long-term impact. This scholarly void leaves open questions about the sustainability of mediation outcomes. The first objective of this dissertation is thus to develop a body of knowledge on the long-term effectiveness of mediation in hierarchical workplace conflicts.

In addition, the aforementioned studies ignore the role of the subjective sense of power as an underlying psychological mechanism in perceptions of mediation effectiveness, especially situational power (as perceived during the mediation) (Anderson, John, & Keltner, 2012). It is unclear how parties with different hierarchical positions experience situational power and how this affects effectiveness. In this respect, no studies of hierarchical workplace mediation have taken interacting dyads into account, and there is no relevant research on supervisors' and subordinates' perceptions of the same mediation. It is unclear whether different power perceptions (power imbalances) in supervisor-subordinate dyads lead to reduced effectiveness, as predicted by negotiation studies (e.g., Mannix & Neale, 1993; Wolfe & McGinn, 2005). Therefore, a second objective is to examine the relation between hierarchical position and power perceptions in hierarchical workplace mediation, considering how these perceptions

affect mediation effectiveness on the individual and the dyadic level.

Finally, all existing studies of (hierarchical) workplace conflicts are limited to either mediator perceptions (Mareschal, 2005; McDermott, Obar, Jose, & Bowers, 2002) or parties' perceptions of the mediation (e.g. Bollen et al., 2010, 2012, 2014). Research has yet to combine mediators' and parties' perceptions: doing so would provide information on the congruence of these perceptions and could shed light on the impact of hierarchical position on mediators' perceptions. For example, although relevant studies highlight the importance of mediators acknowledging parties' anger, especially that of subordinates (Bollen & Euwema, 2014), it is unclear what emotions parties experience during mediation and whether mediators can accurately perceive these. The final objective is therefore to analyze the emotions of supervisors and subordinates and assess mediators' abilities to recognize them.

In summary, the goal of this dissertation is to enhance scholarly understanding of the influence of hierarchical conflict on mediators' and parties' perceptions of mediation, across time and across dyads.

This dissertation outlines the above gaps in literature in one heuristic model (see Figure 1.1), based on insights from different theoretical perspectives: mediation and negotiation literature, theories of hierarchy and power, and theories of emotion. More specifically, it addresses the relation between hierarchical position and short-term and long-term mediation effectiveness and explains this link by focusing on the role of perceived situational power and emotions.

The inspiration for this heuristic process model was the comprehensive mediation model of Herrman, Hollett, and Gale (2006), which follows a time sequence of factors related to pre-mediation (including the conflict), *in situ* mediation, and mediation outcomes. In

our model, *conflict* includes the hierarchical relation between parties as a context characteristic, *mediation* as an indicator of the dynamics during the mediation process (such as parties' power perceptions, parties' emotional experiences, and perceptions of parties' emotions by the mediator), and *mediation outcomes*, which includes short-term and long-term mediation effectiveness.

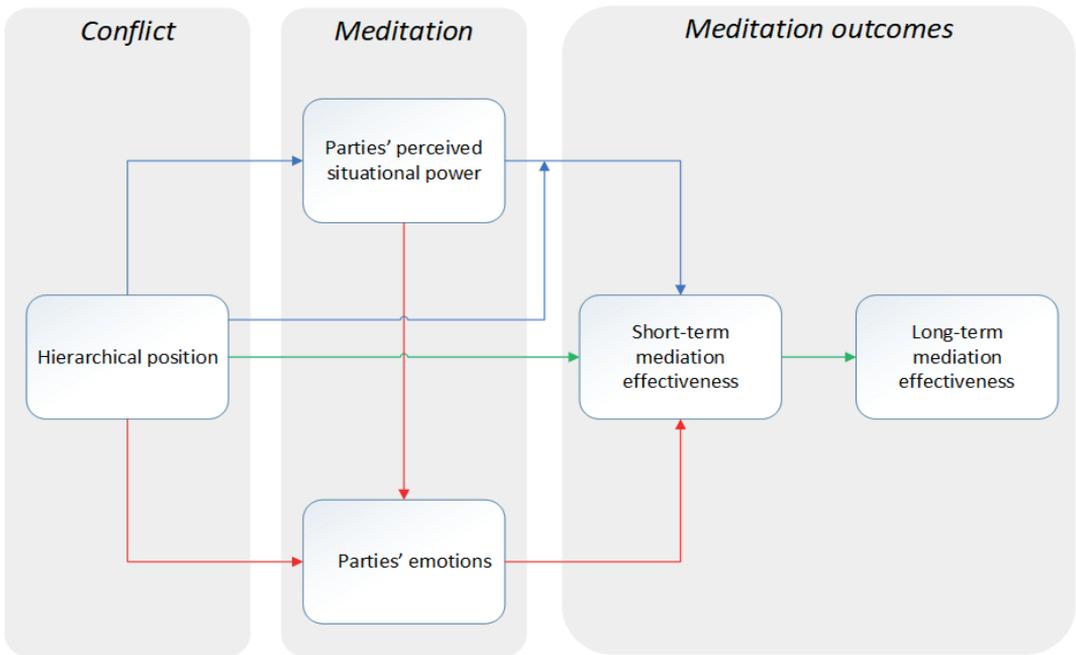


Figure 1.1. Heuristic model of the effectiveness of workplace mediation.

Note: green lines = chapter two; blue lines = chapter three; red lines = chapter four

Like the comprehensive mediation model (Herrman et al., 2006) and more recent contingency models (Bollen et al., 2016; Coleman et al., 2014), our heuristic model underlines that context is important for determining effectiveness. The heuristic model represents the overall hypothesis of this dissertation: the hierarchical relationship between

conflicting parties (a context characteristic) determines how parties (and mediators) perceive power and emotions during mediation (mediation dynamics), which affects their perceptions of short-term and long-term mediation effectiveness (mediation outcomes). We test specific subhypotheses as elements of this general model. We consider it heuristic since we do not simultaneously test all the relationships within the model, but rather focus on specific ones in the different chapters (Gigerenzer & Brighton, 2009).

This heuristic model is by no means all-inclusive regarding the effectiveness of (hierarchical) workplace mediation and its antecedents. Evidently, there are many different factors that influence mediation outcomes (e.g., mediator style, motivation to solve the conflict, organizational culture) (Bollen et al., 2016; Herrman et al., 2006). As this is one of the few studies specifically aiming to understand the influence of hierarchical position on workplace mediation, it relies on the research of Bollen and colleagues (2010, 2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2014) and the negotiation and conflict management literature (e.g., Gelfand & Brett, 2004; Herrman et al., 2006; Wall et al., 2001; Wall & Dunne, 2012) to identify variables for investigation. The selection of the variables was also inspired by preliminary research using mediator focus groups (Uitslag, Kalter, & De Gruil, 2011b). Below, we explain the chosen research variables and explore in greater depth the aforementioned knowledge gaps.

**Conflict.** This dissertation defines a conflict as a subjective experience that unfolds when one person feels their actions are incompatible with those of another person (Elgoibar, Euwema, & Munduate, 2017; Euwema, Medina, Garcia, & Pender, 2018; Tjosvold, Wan, & Tang, 2016). In the workplace, conflicts may be due to scarcity of resources, different

values and opinions, personality differences, misinterpretations, role ambiguity, or a combination of factors (Bono, Boles, Judge, & Lauver, 2002; De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008; Di Pietro & Virgilio, 2013; Rahim, 2011; Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). As stated above, many workplace conflicts are hierarchical, arising between a supervisor and a subordinate (Coleman et al., 2013; Gayle & Preiss, 1998). Conflicting parties usually have differing perceptions of the dispute (Jehn, Rupert, & Nauta, 2006; Jehn, Rupert, Nauta, & Van den Bossche, 2010; Tillman, Hood, & Richard, 2017). For instance, a supervisor may give a subordinate a bad performance review because she believes he has acted unprofessionally, while the subordinate may believe he has done a good job and is not being fully appreciated by his supervisor—or even that the supervisor has a vendetta against him. Compared to their supervisors, subordinates often perceive hierarchical conflict as more personal (Rispen, 2012) and less quickly and easily resolved (Fitness, 2000). They are also more likely than supervisors to suffer harmful effects of hierarchical conflict (De Raeve, Jansen, Van den Brandt, Vasse, & Kant, 2009; Eatough & Chang, 2018) and may feel unsupported and discouraged by their supervisors (Xin & Pelled, 2003). Because of its influence on the perception of the conflict and subsequently the mediation, hierarchical position has been chosen as our primary independent variable.

In a situation of highly escalated conflict, the question is often raised as to whether the supervisor and the subordinate will continue their employment relationship. If necessary, mediation can be part of a process of ending the contract of one of the conflicting parties, usually the subordinate (Latreille & Saundry, 2014; Munduate, Bollen, & Euwema, 2016). Such exit mediations form a substantial proportion of mediations between a supervisor and a subordinate

(Uitslag et al., 2011a). However, there is no existing research on these. For instance, it is unknown whether parties in an exit mediation experience mediation differently than parties intending to maintain their contracts. Considering whether parties are in an exit mediation is important because it can influence our research variables. We therefore use it as an independent variable in one of our chapters and as a control variable in the other chapters.

**Mediation.** With regard to the dynamics of the mediation, we focus on parties' *perceived situational power and emotions*. Hierarchical positions in organizations are typically tied to certain forms of power (Bollen & Euwema, 2013b; Euwema, 1992; McKenzie, 2015). Compared to subordinates, supervisors enjoy greater legitimate power (Raven, 2008) and often have easier access to other power resources, such as money, information, and influential people (Anderson & Brion, 2014; Aquino, 2000; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). Many studies conclude that different psychological processes come into play for people with different levels of power (for a review, see Guinote, 2017), which affects their feelings, cognition, and behaviors (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld, 2006; Van de Vliert, Euwema, & Huisman, 1995; Van Kleef et al., 2008). According to the approach/inhibition theory of power, individuals with power display an inclination to experience more freedom and control, while those with less power tend to feel more threatened and constrained (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Keltner et al., 2003). According to Anderson and colleagues (2012), the *perception* of power is primarily responsible for the above effects: parties are powerful if they perceive themselves to be powerful. Moreover, power exists on different levels of abstraction, such as a general sense of power (across situations and relationships),

power as experienced in a long-term dyadic relationship, power in a single interaction with one other person, or power in a group. Such perceptions are thus experienced differently across relationships and in different contexts (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Anderson et al., 2012). Indeed, research shows that a formal hierarchical position does not necessarily correspond to perceived power in that relationship, although it often does (Berdahl & Martorana, 2006; Bombari, Schmid Mast, & Bachmann, 2017; Tost, 2015). Mediators seek to increase parties' power perceptions by empowering them to feel they have sufficient influence over the mediation process and its outcome to reach an agreement satisfying for both parties (Bush & Folger, 1994). In short, mediators attempt to enhance parties' perceptions of power during mediation. The aforementioned research on the effectiveness on hierarchical workplace mediation, however, does not differentiate between the formal hierarchical positions of the parties and their perceptions of power, including in context-specific situations such as mediation. Therefore, perceived situational power is another of our research variables. We use the context-specific definition of power proposed by Anderson and colleagues (2012): perceived situational power is the amount of influence one party *feels* they have over another in a specific setting, here the mediation.

Numerous scholars stress the importance of mediators balancing the parties' (perceived) power (e.g., Kressel & Pruitt, 1985; Moore, 2014; Poitras & Raines, 2013). However, no empirical research to date has tested the assumption that power symmetry has a positive effect on workplace mediation effectiveness. Research in the field of negotiation suggests this is the case. Researchers have shown that symmetrical power differences lead to greater collaboration and integrative agreements (e.g., Mannix & Neale, 1993; Wolfe & McGinn,

2005), though this remains to be seen in mediation, where conflict is often more escalated than during negotiation (and conflict and negotiation research relies heavily on experiments, rarely on real life situations) (Poitras, 2012). Furthermore, the influence on mediation effectiveness of the overall perception of power by both parties in a dyad is unclear. For example, it is unknown whether there is a higher chance of reaching an agreement when both have high perceptions of situational power.

The other research variable employed for mediation dynamics is the parties' emotions. Emotions are "episodic, relatively short-term, biologically-based patterns of perception, experience, physiology, action, and communication that occur in response to specific physical and social challenges and opportunities" (Keltner & Gross, 1999, p. 468). Emotions are specific action tendencies following an individual's appraisal of their environment (Frijda, 1986, 1993). They prime people for action when they feel jeopardized, in the case of negative emotions, or when they see an opportunity, in the case of positive emotions (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2018; Niedenthal & Ric, 2017). Most disputants come to mediation with some level of emotionality surrounding their conflict. This may be especially true for subordinates, who suffer more from a conflict than supervisors do (Eatough & Chang, 2018). Research on conflict in general has shown that differences in hierarchical position have implications for emotions (Ragins & Winkel, 2011; Vince, 2014). Supervisors and subordinates have and express different emotions when in conflict (Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, & Liljenquist, 2008) and they are affected in different ways by the other party's expression of emotion (Berhdal & Martorana, 2006). However, there is a lack of empirical research on this topic, including the question of variation between the emotions of subordinates and

supervisors. Additionally, perception of power may be an important factor here (Bombari et al., 2017). Furthermore, it is unknown how the experience of emotions is related to mediation effectiveness. Parties who experience positive emotions may perceive the mediation as more effective, and those who experience negative emotions may find the reverse, if the experience of emotion reflects the appraisal of a situation as positive or negative (Frijda, Manstead, & Bem, 2000; Goetz, Frenzel, Stoeger, & Hall, 2009).

Scholars underline the necessity of acknowledging emotions and acting upon them in a manner conducive to positive mediation outcomes (Bollen & Euwema, 2014; Jones, 2006; Jones & Bodtker, 2001; Ladd & Blanchfield, 2016). To ensure appropriate interventions, mediators must accurately perceive disputants' emotions. This can prove challenging – particularly in the context of hierarchical workplace conflicts – as subordinates tend to hide strong (negative) emotions, while supervisors do not (Keltner et al., 2003). Despite the importance of addressing emotions (Jameson, Bodtker & Linker, 2010; Picard & Siltanen, 2013), the issue of perceptual accuracy has received no attention from mediation scholars. Moreover, studies have generally examined negative emotions, especially anger (Bollen & Euwema, 2014), and neglected positive emotions, despite their importance for conflict resolution (Druckman & Olekalns, 2008; Fisher & Shapiro, 2005). Positive emotions are important because they create an atmosphere in which parties are willing to collaborate (e.g., Kopelman, Rosette & Thompson, 2006). The present dissertation, therefore, considers not only the negative emotions of anger, fear, and sadness, but also the positive emotions of happiness and enthusiasm. In addition, our focus will be on parties' emotional experience – rather than expressed emotions – because it is these experiences that

mediators should acknowledge, not least as experiences of negative emotion may hinder the rational thinking required to reach a mutually satisfying agreement (Huntsinger, Isbell, & Clore, 2014; Kaufman, 1999).

**Mediation outcomes.** Here, we focus on *short-term mediation effectiveness* and *long-term mediation effectiveness*. Some empirical studies have explored the effectiveness of workplace mediation (Bollen & Euwema, 2013a; Coggburn, Daley, Jameson & Berry-James, 2018), using a variety of definitions and measures. Early studies treated the reaching of an agreement as a marker of effectiveness (Donohue, Lyles & Rogan, 1989; Herrman et al., 2006). Generally, these studies found workplace mediation to have good settlement rates, fluctuating between 60% and 80% (Kim, Wall, Sohn & Kim, 1993; Mareschal, 2005; Wood & Leon, 2005). In the 21st century, researchers began to conclude that measuring effectiveness in such a dichotomous way is too simplistic and ignores how the parties themselves evaluate the mediation. They argue that parties may be dissatisfied with mediation outcomes even after reaching an agreement, or with the mediation process as a whole, and some may have persistent doubts about the agreement reached (Hollett, Herrman, Eaker, & Gale, 2002; Poitras & Le Tareau, 2009). Scholars have since attempted to measure mediation effectiveness in a multidimensional way, including subjective indicators such as satisfaction with the mediation process, outcome, and/or mediator; reconciliation and confidence in the agreement (Bingham, 2003; Bollen et al., 2010; Bollen & Euwema, 2014; Poitras & Le Tareau, 2009); and perceptions of conflict resolution and fulfillment of expectations before mediation (Bollen et al., 2012). Both parties generally perceive mediation to be effective, although subordinates tend to rate it lower

than supervisors do (Bingham, 2003; Bollen et al., 2010; 2012).

Notably, all the above quantitative studies on workplace mediation concern measurements taken immediately after mediation, thus only measuring short-term effectiveness. We know of just one qualitative study that observed increased empowerment and transformative effects for parties 18 months after mediation (Anderson & Bingham, 1997). As an outlier, this reflects the deficit of longitudinal research on workplace mediation. Some studies of long-term mediation effectiveness in the context of community, family, and court-connected mediation conclude that parties perceive mediation to be effective in the long-term (Kaiser & Gabler, 2014; Pruitt, Peirce, McGillicuddy, Welton, & Castrianno, 1993; Van Slyck, Stern, & Newland, 1992), while others were more ambiguous (Emery, Matthews, & Kitzmann, 1994). The question of the long-term effectiveness of workplace mediation deserves more attention (Bollen & Euwema, 2013a). It is not yet known whether short-term success predicts future results and, therefore, how sustainable mediation outcomes are. Participants may change their minds over time as they meet agreement-implementation difficulties, recurring problems, or negative feedback on the agreement by external parties. This could be especially true for subordinates. We therefore include long-term mediation effectiveness as one of our outcome variables. We choose to measure long-term effectiveness one year after the mediation ended (Kaiser & Gabler, 2014). The reason for doing so is that parties, by then, would have had enough time to feel the consequences of the mediation while limiting the risks of parties forgetting about the mediation or us, as researchers, losing contact with them (Pruitt et al., 1993).

As mediation effectiveness is best measured multi-dimensionally (e.g., Bollen et al., 2010, 2012; Poitras & Le Tareau,

2009), this dissertation relies on a mixture of objective and subjective measures of short-term and long-term mediation effectiveness, such as the reaching of an agreement (or not); satisfaction with the mediation process, outcome, and mediator; level of reconciliation; confidence in the agreement; perception of compliance with the agreement by the other party; and perceived level of conflict resolution. We also assess mediation effectiveness on the level of the dyad (the sum of perceived mediation effectiveness of both parties). It is important to include both parties' perceptions of effectiveness, as a mediation can only be deemed effective when both parties in the mediation consider it so.

### **Overview of the dissertation**

The heuristic model outlines numerous pathways between the variables. In chapter two, we address the relationship between the hierarchical position and short-term and long-term effectiveness by answering the following research question: How effective in the long-term is the mediation of hierarchical workplace conflicts? We applied a repeated measure design: namely, supervisors and subordinates in real mediation cases indicated their perception of mediation effectiveness immediately after the mediation and one year later. Additionally, we address the relationship between (non)-exit mediations and long-term mediation effectiveness.

In chapter three, we answer the following research question: How does perceived situational power in supervisor-subordinate dyads relate to mediation effectiveness? For this, we applied a dyadic research design. Supervisors and subordinates in the same mediation assessed their perceived situational power and short-term mediation effectiveness.

Chapter four addresses the following research question: Do

supervisors and subordinates differ in their emotional experience during mediation, and are mediators able to accurately perceive these emotions? To answer this question, immediately after the last mediation session, the supervisor and subordinate were asked to assess their emotional experiences and the mediator was asked to assess their perception of the same.

We conclude the dissertation in chapter five, presenting the most important findings in relation to the research questions and an exploration of their theoretical and practical implications, as well as noting the limitations of this study and making suggestions for future research.

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# Chapter 2

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## *The Long-Term Effectiveness of Mediating Workplace Conflicts*

This chapter is based on: Kalter, M., Bollen, K., & Euwema, M. C. (2018). The long-term effectiveness of mediating workplace conflicts. *Negotiation Journal*, 34, 243–265.

An earlier version of the chapter has been presented at the annual conference of the International Association for Conflict Management, 28 June–1 July, 2015, Clearwater beach, Florida, USA.

*In this study, we explored the long-term effectiveness of the mediation of hierarchical workplace conflicts by comparing and analyzing participants' perceptions of short-term and long-term mediation effectiveness. Specifically, we surveyed supervisors and subordinates to determine to extent to which they perceive mediation to be effective one year after the conclusion of the process. In this study, we distinguished between mediations that result in a continuing employment relationship versus exit mediations, which occur when employees end their employment. We collected data from real workplace mediation cases in the Netherlands. Our results showed a general positive relationship between short-term and long-term mediation outcomes. Supervisors and subordinates, however, perceived the long-term outcomes somewhat differently, with supervisors perceiving greater compliance with the agreement than did subordinates after one year. We found no significant difference in perceptions of long-term effectiveness between exit and non-exit mediations. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.*

## **Introduction**

Empirical research on workplace mediation effectiveness has shown that, in general, mediation has good settlement rates, varying from 60% to 80% (Kim, Wall, Sohn, & Kim, 1993; Mareschal, 2005; Poitras & Le Tareau, 2009; Swaab & Brett, 2007; Wood & Leon, 2005), with some variation depending on, for example, conflict intensity, type of conflict before the mediation (i.e., relationship conflict versus goal conflict) (Swaab & Brett, 2007), as well as parties' collaborative orientation, relationship hostility, and the mediator's skill base (Mareschal, 2005). Study findings also indicate that most participants feel satisfied with the mediation process, its outcomes, and the mediator and have a high level of confidence in the agreement (Bollen, Euwema, & Müller, 2010; Bollen, Ittner, & Euwema, 2012).

These studies have typically measured effectiveness shortly after the mediation ended (mostly within four weeks) and have therefore presented only short-term effects (Bingham, 2003, 2004, 2012; Bollen & Euwema, 2013; Conlon, 2006; McDermott, Jose, Obar, Polkinghorn, & Bowers, 2002). The question remains whether short-term effects are sustained over the longer term. In other words, what are the effects of workplace mediation over a longer term, one year after the mediation?

This question is relevant because scholars in other fields of mediation such as community mediation and family mediation have argued that short-term mediation success may not necessarily predict long-term mediation success (Emery, Sbarra, & Grover, 2005; Pruit, Peirce, McGillicuddy, Welton, & Castrianno, 1993) because only after a considerable amount of time can parties fully appreciate the consequences of what they agreed to during the mediation. Surprisingly, we do not know of any study reporting how parties perceive the long-term effectiveness of workplace conflict mediation. The current study seeks to explore this.

We first examine whether and how parties' perceptions of short-term mediation effectiveness relate to their perceptions of long-term mediation effectiveness. We then test how hierarchical position and the (dis)continuation of an employment relationship affect parties' perceptions of long-term effectiveness in order to illuminate the impact of context on mediation effectiveness. Previous studies have shown that such mediation context characteristics as hierarchical relations, legal frameworks, organizational culture, and the decision to end the employment contract (or not) can affect or influence the mediation and its effects (Coleman, et al., 2014; Coleman, Kugler, & Mazzaro, 2016). Three dimensions in particular – regulations, roles, and relations – seem most relevant (what we have called previously the “3-R model”; Bollen, Euwema, & Munduate,

2016). The relationship dimension can refer to the characteristics of the relationship between the disputants, as well as their relationship with the mediator.

In this study, we focus on the disputants' relationship only, by taking into account participants' hierarchical position and the (dis)continuing nature of the work relationship. Workplace mediations frequently involve hierarchical conflicts, that is, subordinates in conflict with their supervisor, manager, or employer (Uitslag, Kalter, & De Gruil, 2011). Previous studies of this type of mediation have shown that the relative hierarchical positions that parties occupy affect their perceptions of mediation effectiveness in the short term (Bollen et al., 2010, 2012). Therefore, our second question is to what extent supervisors and subordinates perceive mediation effectiveness differently over the long term.

As mentioned before, we also focus on the long-term effectiveness of mediations in which parties arrange the termination of their employment relationship, also known as "exit mediations" (Munduate, Bollen, & Euwema, 2016; Rasmussen & Greenwood, 2014). To our knowledge, no empirical research has been conducted on exit mediations.

Thus, the three questions we ask in this study are: (a) What is the relation between short-term and long-term mediation effectiveness? (b) To what extent are perceptions of long-term mediation effectiveness affected by disputants' hierarchical position? And (c) To what extent do perceptions of long-term mediation effectiveness differ between participants in exit mediations versus non-exit mediations?

### **The importance of studying long-term mediation effectiveness**

Hardly no empirical studies have measured the long-term effectiveness

of workplace mediation (Anderson & Bingham, 1997), and consequently we know little about whether reported positive outcomes are sustained. For disputants, this could raise the question of whether they should participate in a process whose long-term effectiveness is uncertain. For employers, it similarly raises the question of how many resources they should expend promoting and implementing that same process. It is important for organizations, mediation practitioners, and disputants to know whether workplace mediation is an effective and durable means of dispute resolution.

In addition, some research has suggested that indeed long-term mediation outcomes can be different from short-term outcomes (Bollen & Euwema, 2013; Emery et al., 2005). Perceptions of mediation effectiveness can change as time passes and parties' perspectives on the practical consequences of the mediation outcomes shifts (Donnelly & Ebron, 2000; Kaiser & Gabler, 2014). Parties who feel satisfied and relieved that a conflict seems over may feel differently if the agreement turns out to be less advantageous than they had imagined, if implementation difficulties arise, or if external parties (family members, friends, colleagues) express negative opinions of the agreement.

Several studies in the context of court-connected, community, and family mediation have found an ambiguous relationship between short- and long-term mediation effects (Donnelly & Ebron, 2000; Emery et al., 1994; Kaiser & Gabler, 2014; Pruitt et al., 1993; Van Slyck, Stern, & Newland, 1992). A study by Kaiser and Gabler (2014) on court-connected mediation showed a positive relationship between short-term and long-term satisfaction with the mediation experience. A study on community mediation by Pruitt and his colleagues (1993) showed a positive relationship between short-term satisfaction with the mediation and the

absence of new problems in the long term. In addition, follow-up studies in family mediation research showed both negative (Center for Families, Children, & Courts, 1993; Kelly, 2004) and positive relationships (Center for Families, Children, & Courts, 2000; Donnelly & Ebron, 2000; Kelly, 2004; Van Slyck et al., 1992) between short-term and long-term mediation effectiveness as perceived by clients.

In previous studies, data were collected from three months (Van Slyck et al., 1992) to three years after the mediation (Donnelly & Ebron, 2000). In our current study, we chose an intermediate time lag of one year (De Cuyper, Makikangas, Kinnunen, Mauno, & De Witte, 2012; Kaiser & Gabler, 2014), allowing enough time for the results of the agreement to be felt, while reducing the likelihood that conflict parties would forget about the mediation or that parties would become unreachable (i.e., move away) (Pruitt et al., 1993).

Whether the mediation produced an agreement or not is a typical measure of short-term effectiveness (Hollett, Herrman, Eaker, & Gale, 2002; Kelly, 2004). In contrast, long-term measures can include both “hard” and “soft” indicators. Hard indicators (which are still subject to interpretation) can include whether there has been compliance with the agreement, and “soft” indicators include disputants’ perceptions, such as their satisfaction with the mediation process, outcome, and/or mediator, and whether they reconciled with each other. The extent of reconciliation between parties, in particular – whether they restored their former relationship, and can interact positively and with trust and respect toward each other – may only be perceptible over time (Lederach, 1999; Moore, 2014). In our study, we measured perceptions of reconciliation; satisfaction with the mediation process, outcome, and mediator; and the extent to which parties perceive that the other conflict party complied with the mediation agreement

(Pruitt et al., 1993). The presence of such perceptions would suggest that the mediation was successful because it achieved the goal of producing long-lasting agreements honored by both parties (see McCorkle & Reese, 2015).

Most of the studies of other types of mediation have shown that parties perceive mediation effective in the long term (Donnelly & Ebron, 2000; Kaiser & Gabler, 2014; Pruitt et al., 1993; Van Slyck et al., 1992), although some others were more ambiguous (Emery et al., 1994). In sum, studies show that disputants perceive mediation effective in the short term (Bollen et al., 2010, 2012; Poitras & Le Tareau, 2009) and often also in the long term (Donnelly & Ebron, 2000; Kaiser & Gabler, 2014; Pruitt et al., 1993; Van Slyck et al., 1992).

We assume that perceptions of long-term mediation effectiveness can be explained by its results in the short term. Consequently, our first hypothesis is as follows:

*Hypothesis 1:* Perceptions of short-term mediation effectiveness (reconciliation, satisfaction with the mediator, mediation process and outcome, and confidence in mediation agreement) are positively related to perceptions of their long-term mediation effectiveness equivalents.

### **Long-term effectiveness of mediation of hierarchical conflicts**

Conflicts between supervisor and subordinate are described as hierarchical conflicts. In hierarchical conflicts, supervisors are typically more powerful than their subordinates (Euwema, 1992; McKenzie, 2015). Many studies show that hierarchy and power have a profound impact

on disputants' feelings, cognitions, and behaviors (Galinsky, Rucker, & Magee, 2016; Guinote, 2017; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003; Van de Vliert, Euwema, & Huismans, 1995). Hierarchy continues to play a role in workplace mediation (Wiseman & Poitras, 2002) and affects how parties perceive short-term mediation effectiveness (Bollen et al., 2010, 2012). In general, it takes more to satisfy subordinates than supervisors immediately after the mediation. Supervisors typically feel more satisfied with the mediation and perceive the process as more effective than do subordinates.

In addition, the results of these studies have shown that the conditions for an effective mediation are different for supervisors and subordinates. For example, for subordinates, having the mediator acknowledge their anger can enhance their perceptions of mediation effectiveness (Bollen & Euwema, 2014), but this is not the case for supervisors. Similarly, subordinates' perceptions of procedural justice enhance their perceptions of mediation effectiveness, whereas experiencing uncertainty about the mediation is likely to diminish their sense that the process is effective, but these perceptions do not have the same effect on supervisors (Bollen et al., 2010, 2012).

Studies of hierarchy and power have shown pervasive effects that endure even beyond the particular social context in which they were initially experienced (Galinsky, Rus, & Lammers, 2011). These findings suggest that the effects of hierarchical positioning on perceptions of the conflict and of the mediation process could still be felt after a longer period of time. Thus, our second hypothesis is:

*Hypothesis 2:* In the longer term, supervisors will perceive (2a) greater reconciliation than subordinates. (2b) They will also be more

satisfied with the mediator; (2c) the mediation process; and (2d) the mediation outcome than will subordinates.

Another possible indicator of mediation success is parties' long-term compliance with the agreement (Herrman, Hollett, & Gale, 2006; Long, 2003; McCorkle & Reese, 2015; Pruitt et al., 1993). Parties' relative hierarchical position in the conflict may also have some effect on how they perceive their counterpart's level of compliance with the agreement. We assume that compared to supervisors, subordinates will perceive that the supervisor is less compliant with the mediation than vice versa because supervisors generally have more freedom to behave as they want when compared to their subordinates (Keltner et al., 2003; Galinsky et al., 2011; Galinsky et al., 2016) and may thus feel freer to comply or not to comply with the agreement. At the same time, it seems more likely that supervisors would correct subordinates if they believe the subordinate is not living up to the agreement. Subordinates in contrast feel more constrained in their behavior (Keltner et al., 2003) and as such may feel less capable of speaking out to make sure that the supervisor behaves according to the mediation agreement. In addition, the psychological experience of power increases general optimism (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Galinsky et al., 2011), which might also encourage supervisors, who are relatively more powerful, to perceive greater compliance with the agreement. Therefore, the last part of our second hypothesis is:

*Hypothesis 2 (continued):* One year after ending the mediation of a hierarchical labor conflict, supervisors will perceive more compliance with the mediation agreement by the subordinate than vice versa (2e).

### **Long-term effectiveness of exit and non-exit mediations**

Broadly speaking, a hierarchical conflict in the workplace can be practically resolved by mediation in three ways: (a) both parties remain employed by the organization, and agreements are made to avoid future conflicts; (b) parties remain employed by the organization, however, one or both parties transfer to another department or different job within the organization; (c) one of the parties leaves the organization (Uitslag et al., 2011). If the last option occurs, then the mediation becomes an “exit mediation” (Latreille & Saundry, 2014; Munduate et al., 2016). It is more common for a subordinate to leave the organization because of a conflict, rather than the supervisor (Uitslag et al., 2011).

Although exit mediations occur commonly in many countries (McAndrew, Morton, & Geare, 2004; Rasmussen & Greenwood, 2014; Walker & Hamilton, 2009), these are arrangements that differ significantly from place to place. The “regulations” dimension of the 3-R model is relevant in this regard (Bollen et al., 2016). In the United States, for example, exit mediations will usually only take place if a discharged employee files a formal complaint and both parties agree to mediate or if the parties activate some kind of an internal grievance system in place at the workplace (Menkel-Meadow, 2014). Thus, often by the time parties seek mediation (most often the employee), their employment relationship is already over and they use the process to come to a suitable settlement (Rasmussen & Greenwood, 2014). In South Africa, for example, there are two systems: a statutory system that requires all disputes dealing with alleged unfair dismissal to be referred for “conciliation” (a quick and robust form of mediation), and a voluntary system of mediation. Although most disputes going to mediation or conciliation in South Africa involve employees who have already been dismissed, sometimes an employee

in either system will refer a matter to conciliation or mediation when an ongoing employment relationship remains (Jordaan & De Wulf, 2016).

In the Netherlands, where we conducted this research, exit workplace mediations are rather common. Human resources professionals and occupational physicians play a large role in the choice to mediate. Workplace mediation got a boost after the introduction of the Improved Gatekeeper Act (2002) and the 2004 extension of the 1996 Wage Payment during Sickness Act. The Improved Gatekeeper Act facilitates an effective return to work for employees following medical leaves that take longer than six weeks and in which workplace conflict plays a role as assessed by the occupational physician. In these cases, workplace mediation is often advised as a means to solve the problem. Generally, Dutch companies are obliged to collaborate with an occupational physician to ensure a healthy workplace. The Wage Payment during Sickness Act states that when a worker becomes sick, the employer is obliged to continue paying 70–100 % of the salary for up to two years, during which the worker is protected by law against layoff (De Jong, Everhardt, & Schrijvershof, 2011; Hoefsmit, de Rijk, & Houkes, 2013; Vossen & Van Gestel, 2015.) These laws create urgency for employers and employees to resolve their conflict in a constructive way and raise the question of whether a continuation of the employment relationship is appropriate or not (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development 2015).

In the Netherlands, the decision to terminate the employment can be made before mediation begins (by one or both parties) or during the mediation process itself. In the latter case, employer and employee may intend to maintain their relationship, but conclude during the mediation process that terminating the employment contract is the best way to resolve the conflict; or, alternatively, one of the parties may intend to

continue the employment relationship but discovers during the mediation process that his or her counterpart is unwilling to do so (Van de Griendt & Schutte, 2006).

Regardless of whether or not both parties initially intend to continue the working relationship, the main distinguishing characteristic of an exit mediation is that, at the end of the process, the parties terminate the relationship and arrange a settlement. Thus, for parties in exit mediations, the terms of the agreement are likely to be more important than restoration of the relationship because the working relationship will cease (Poitras & Le Tareau, 2009). This is less likely the case for parties in non-exit mediations: they may reconcile during the course of the mediation because they intend to work together in the future (Bush & Folger, 1994; Kressel & Pruitt, 1989; McCorkle & Reese, 2015; Poitras, 2010) and are thus socially interdependent (for discussion of social dependence theory, see DeOrtentiis, Summers, Ammeter, Douglas, & Ferris, 2013; Deutsch, 1949; Johnson & Johnson, 1989, 2005).

Because parties need each other to achieve their own goals, this interdependence can produce cooperative behavior that promotes trust and reconciliation (Balliet & Van Lange, 2013; Johnson & Johnson, 2005; Pruitt, Rubin, & Kim, 2003). The mediator role in exit mediations is thus likely to differ from the role in non-exit mediations (Poitras & Le Tareau, 2009). We would expect mediators to use more solution-oriented techniques in exit mediations and place less emphasis on mending the relationship (Coleman et al., 2014; Coleman et al., 2016). In non-exit mediations, in contrast, we would expect mediators to focus more on reconciliation to support a healthy working relationship (Poitras, 2010). In non-exit mediations, the focus on more collaborative behavior may also positively influence how these parties evaluate the mediation. Studies focusing on collaboration in

conflict situations found that cooperation and reconciliation lead to general feelings of satisfaction and self-efficacy among conflict parties (Enright & North, 1998; Maltby, Day, & Barber, 2005; Pruitt et al., 2003). This could mean that parties in non-exit mediations engage in more collaborative and reconciliatory behavior, leading to greater satisfaction with the mediation compared to those parties involved in exit mediations. Subordinates in exit mediations, in contrast, might experience a high level of uncertainty about their future, which could affect mediation perceptions in a negative way (Bollen et al., 2012), especially if they did not expect a termination of the work contract.

Consequently, our third hypothesis is that, compared to parties in a non-exit mediation, parties in an exit mediation perceive that the mediation was less effective in the long term.

*Hypothesis 3:* Compared to parties in a non-exit mediation, parties involved in an exit mediation will, over the long term, perceive (3a) less reconciliation; (3b) less satisfaction with the mediator; (3c) less satisfaction with the mediation process; (3d) less satisfaction with the mediation outcome; and (3e) less compliance with the agreement.

## **Methodology**

### **Data collection and respondents**

In this study, we derived empirical data from real mediation cases involving hierarchical labor conflicts in the Netherlands. We collected data using questionnaires. Participants were supervisors and subordinates involved in a hierarchical workplace conflict, mediated by a professional mediator

registered with the Dutch Mediation Federation (MfN) mediator.<sup>1</sup> We sent questionnaires at two different times: first, up to four weeks following the last mediation session, to collect general information about the conflict and the perceived short-term mediation effectiveness, and a second time one year later to collect data on perceived long-term mediation effectiveness. We collected data between January 2011 and July 2014.

We approached workplace mediators with the help of the Dutch Mediation Federation. The mediators who agreed to participate in the study recruited disputants from their own mediations. To avoid selection bias, mediators offered all parties in a hierarchical mediation at the time the chance to participate in the study. The mediators provided us with participants' contact information and we sent a digital questionnaire by e-mail to the disputants. We sent another survey one year later with questions about the same mediation. To provide incentive for parties to fill out the long-term questionnaire, we awarded parties with a 10 euro gift certificate if they completed and returned the survey. We only allowed a maximum of five mediations per mediator in our data set to prevent a sample bias. Participation was voluntary and confidential; only we had access to the data and personal information of the participants.

### **Sample**

A total of 96 respondents in 67 mediations completed the first wave questionnaire. The second wave questionnaire was completed by 41

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<sup>1</sup> The Dutch Mediation Federation (MfN; formerly known as Netherlands Mediation Institute) is the Dutch national standard-setting and quality assurance platform for the practice of mediation in the Netherlands. Mediators who are MfN-registered have considerable experience with mediation, a minimum of nine mediations a year is required.

respondents (43% response rate) including 25 subordinates and 16 supervisors. The subordinates' characteristics were as follows: 15 men and 10 women; average age of 51.52 years ( $SD = 9.01$ ); 11 in exit mediations, and 14 in non-exit mediations. The supervisors' characteristics were as follows: 12 men and 4 women, average age: 48.44 years ( $SD = 8.07$ ), 9 in exit mediations and 7 in non-exit mediations. Only 6 participants had been disputants in the same mediation with another disputant (3 dyads).

Subordinates were relatively highly educated, with 13 of them (52%) having received a higher education without university degree, and 5 (20%) holding a university degree. A total of 6 supervisors (37.5%) had received a higher education without university degree, and 8 supervisors (50%) held a university degree.

A total of 40 respondents (97%) had a work contract of indefinite duration at the time of the mediation, with only one person, a supervisor, holding a fixed-term contract. Before the mediation started, 15 subordinates (60%) were on sick leave and 12 of them (49%) had reported ill for longer than two months. None of the supervisors were absent from work.

In this sample, 20 mediations (49%) fit the definition of exit mediation. In these exit mediations, 6 supervisors (30%) and 6 subordinates (30%) intended at the start of the mediation to end the employment contract, while 3 supervisors (15%) and 5 subordinates (25%) initially intended to continue working together. In the non-exit mediations, 6 supervisors (28%) and 13 subordinates (62%) had the intention to continue the employment relationship, while only 1 supervisor (5%) and 1 subordinate (5%) initially intended to cease the working relationship. Data showed that the conflicts were perceived as highly escalated with an average escalation level of 3.95 ( $SD = 1.16$ ) on a 5-point scale. Regarding the mediation outcome, 32 out of 41 mediations ended in an agreement

(78%). These settlement rates are in line with other research indicating that agreement rates for (workplace) mediation vary from 60% to 80% (McDermott et al., 2002; Poitras & Le Tareau, 2009).

### **Measures**

*Hierarchical position.* In this study, hierarchical position has been operationalized according to who held a position of authority in relation to the other party involved (“What is your position in the conflict?”). Possible answers were “employer,” “employee,” and “other”. “Employee” refers to subordinates and “employer” to supervisors (subordinate = 0, supervisor = 1).

*Exit or non-exit mediation.* We ascertained whether it was an exit or non-exit mediation by asking the mediators and disputants if the particular mediation ended in the termination of the employment relationship (non-exit = 0, exit = 1).

*Perceptions of short-term and long-term mediation effectiveness.* We relied on the five-dimensional mediation effectiveness model developed by Poitras and Le Tareau (2009). This fifteen-item scale comprises five subscales of three statements each: (1) reconciliation between the parties (e.g., “I feel like my relationship with the other party has been restored”), (2) satisfaction with mediator (e.g., “The mediator’s intervention was determinant in advancing discussion”), (3) satisfaction with mediation process (e.g., “Mediation was run in a neutral and objective manner”), (4) satisfaction with the mediation outcome (e.g., “I am happy with the solution we came to”), and (5) confidence in the agreement (e.g., “I believe our agreement will be applied”).

Responses for the different items were coded on a 5-point

Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree), with a high score indicating a high level of agreement with the statements. The Cronbach's alpha (measure for internal consistency) for each of the five subscales was as follows: reconciliation = .90, satisfaction with the mediator = .86, satisfaction with the process = .91, satisfaction with the outcome = .97, and confidence in the agreement = .78. A Cronbach's alpha above .70 is expected to reflect internal consistency, meaning that the three items we used to measure the subscales of mediation effectiveness were, indeed, reliable in the sense that they measured the specified construct.

With the exception of "confidence in the agreement," we used the same scales in the second wave questionnaire, but we slightly adapted the statements to reflect the time that had passed: (e.g., "Looking back, the mediator's intervention was determinant in advancing discussion"). For the second set of surveys, the Cronbach's alphas were as follows: reconciliation = .88, satisfaction with the mediator = .93, satisfaction with the process = .72, satisfaction with the outcome = .95.

Instead of measuring "confidence in the agreement" as we had in the short-term measure, in the long-term measure (when it would no longer have been relevant), we used "compliance with the agreement by the other party." In our study, following the work of Pruitt and his colleagues (1993), we assessed compliance with the agreement by the other party with the statement, "The other party complied with the mediation agreement." These responses were also coded on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) because it was the perception of compliance that we measured.

*Control variables.* In this study, we define an exit mediation as one that ended in the termination of the employment relationship. What parties intended to be the outcome at the start of the mediation with

regard to continuing the employment relationship, however, may have differed from what the outcome actually was, and this might have had an impact on how they perceived mediation effectiveness. For example, based on expectancy theory (Kanfer & Chen, 2016; Miner, 2005; Vroom, 1964), parties who want an exit at the start of the mediation might evaluate an exit mediation outcome more positively than parties whose intention it was to continue working together. For this reason, we controlled for this by asking participants what their intention was regarding their employment relationship at the start of the mediation (we stop working together = 0 versus we continue working together = 1). In addition, we also used gender (male = 0, female = 1), the objective mediation outcome (no agreement = 0, agreement = 1), escalation level of the initial conflict (on a 5-point scale), and age (in years) (Bollen et al., 2010; Bollen & Euwema, 2014) as control variables in the analyses.

### **Data analyses**

We managed and analyzed the data using the Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 24.0. To test our hypotheses, we conducted a series of hierarchical regression analyses. We ran these analyses separately to gauge the impact of each subscale of short-term mediation effectiveness (reconciliation, satisfaction with mediator, process, and outcome, as well as confidence in the agreement) on its long-term equivalents. In the first step, we entered the control variables (age, gender, intention employment, conflict escalation, and agreement). In the second step, we entered hierarchical position and (non)-exit mediation to examine their effect on long-term mediation effectiveness. In the third step, we entered the relevant subscale of short-term mediation effectiveness.

To control for the risk of multicollinearity (Cohen, Cohen, West, &

Aiken, 2003), we tested the variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance of all predictors. The VIF of the predictors varied between 1.01 and 2.41; the tolerance of the predictors varied between .41 and .98. Both were within the acceptable range for multicollinearity risk (Coakes, 2005).

## Results

The mean scores, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among control and research variables are listed in Table 2.1. We conducted five three-stage hierarchical regression analyses for the five different subscales measuring short- and long-term mediation effectiveness. Results of the first hierarchical regression analysis, on *reconciliation*, show no effect from any of the control variables, the hierarchical position, nor the exit or non-exit nature of the mediation. The only important significant predictor of long-term reconciliation was short-term reconciliation. The beta value ( $\beta$ ) was .63 and significant ( $\beta = .63, p \leq .001$ ). Together the independent variables accounted for 48.6% of the variance in long-term reconciliation with an adjusted R squared (adjusted  $R^2$ ) of .486.

The second hierarchical regression analysis, on *satisfaction with the mediator*, shows that only short-term satisfaction with the mediator was a significant predictor of long-term satisfaction with the mediator ( $\beta = .38, p \leq .05$ ). There was no effect from the control variables, hierarchical position, or (non)-exit mediation. All the independent variables together accounted for 39.8% of the variance in long-term satisfaction with the mediator (adjusted  $R^2 = .398$ ).

The third hierarchical regression analysis, on *satisfaction with the mediation process*, shows that none of the control variables, nor the independent variables (hierarchical position, exit or not, short-term satisfaction with the mediation process) affected satisfaction with the

Table 2.1

*Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix for research and control variables (N=41)*

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
1. Intention employment	.66	.48																	
2. Gender	.34	.48	-.02																
3. Age	50.32	8.69	.34*	.04															
4. Agreement	.78	.42	-.13	.13	-.15														
5. Conflict escalation	3.95	1.16	-.03	.08	.03	.23													
6. Hierarchical position	.39	.49	-.16	-.15	-.18	.18	-.27												
7. (Non)exit mediation	.49	.51	-.53*	.12	-.33*	.40**	.17	.12											
8. Reconciliation ST	2.83	1.17	.15	.04	-.11	.42**	-.04	.09	-.14										
9. Sat. mediator ST	3.75	.84	-.28	.05	-.26	.37*	.19	-.02	.23	.33*									
10. Sat. process ST	4.26	.49	-.01	.11	-.19	.33*	.25	-.05	.04	.43**	.40*								
11. Sat. outcome ST	3.93	1.12	.11	.03	-.11	.71**	.22	.13	.04	.59**	.50**	.59**							
12. Confidence agreement	3.97	.63	.03	-.03	.00	-	-.13	-.02	-.18	.55**	.39*	.40*	.48**						
13. Reconciliation LT	2.67	1.19	.12	-.25	.03	.21	.02	.18	-.034*	.67**	.32*	.25	.48**	.18					
14. Sat. mediator LT	3.98	.81	-.36*	.08	-.28	.46**	.35*	-.05	0.27	.15	.60**	.27	.34*	.26	.21				
15. Sat. process LT	4.08	.63	-.04	.10	-.25	.29*	-.12	.14	-.010	.22	.29	.34*	.51**	-.18	.37*	.15			
16. Sat. outcome LT	3.85	1.10	-.10	.06	-.11	.41**	.06	.16	-.004	.44**	.42**	.35*	.70**	.11	.58**	.39*	.67**		
17. Compliance LT	3.88	1.10	.03	.03	.15	-	-.23	.45**	-.021	.44*	-.17	.12	.15	.50**	.31	.08	-.05	.25	

\*p ≤ .05, \*\*p ≤ .01, \*\*\*p ≤ .001 (two-tailed)

Note: LT = long term, ST = short term.

mediation process in the longer term. Altogether, in stage three of the hierarchical regression analysis the independent variables only accounted for 11.5% of the variance in long-term satisfaction with the mediation process (adjusted  $R^2 = .115$ ).

The fourth hierarchical regression analysis, on *satisfaction with mediation outcome*, shows that neither any of the control variables, hierarchical position, nor exit or status affected satisfaction with the mediation outcome in the longer term. We did find an effect, however, for short-term satisfaction with the mediation outcome on long-term satisfaction with the mediation outcome ( $\beta = .80, p \leq .001$ ). All the independent variables together explain 43.6% of the variance in long-term satisfaction with mediation outcome (adjusted  $R^2 = .436$ ).

The final hierarchical regression analysis, on *perceptions of compliance with the agreement by the other party*, shows that neither the control variables nor being in an exit mediation or not were significant predictors of perceptions of compliance with the agreement by the other party. Hierarchical position ( $\beta = .65, p \leq .001$ ), however, as well as short-term confidence in the mediation agreement ( $\beta = .51, p \leq .001$ ) were significant predictors of parties' perceptions that the other party was in compliance with the agreement. Together, the independent variables accounted for 46.6% of the variance in long-term compliance with the agreement by the other party (adjusted  $R^2 = .466$ ).

Hypothesis 1 stated that perceptions of short-term mediation effectiveness are positively related to perceptions of long-term mediation effectiveness. The results of the different hierarchical regression analyses show, as expected, significant and positive main effects of short-term reconciliation ( $\beta = .63, p \leq .001$ ), short-term satisfaction with the mediator ( $\beta = .38, p \leq .05$ ), short-term satisfaction with the mediation outcome ( $\beta$

= .80,  $p \leq .001$ ), and short-term confidence in the mediation agreement ( $\beta = .51, p \leq .001$ ) on their long-term equivalents. There was no significant main effect of short-term satisfaction with the mediation process on long-term satisfaction with the mediation process. This means that our findings generally support Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 stated that supervisors are likely to view mediation as more effective in the long term than are subordinates. Results show that hierarchical position is a significant unique predictor of *perceptions of compliance with the agreement by the other party one year after the mediation* ( $\beta = .65, p \leq .001$ ), but not of the other long-term mediation effectiveness subscales: reconciliation, satisfaction with the mediator, satisfaction with the mediation process, and satisfaction with the mediation outcome. Hypothesis 2 is, therefore, only partly supported.

Hypothesis 3 stated that compared with parties in a non-exit mediation, parties in an exit mediation would perceive less long-term mediation effectiveness. Our findings show no difference in perceptions of long-term mediation effectiveness according to whether the mediation was for an exit or not. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

## **Discussion**

The goal of this study was to offer more insight into the long-term effects of mediation in hierarchical workplace conflicts, with special attention to the role of hierarchical position and being involved in an exit mediation or not.

Previous research on workplace mediation focused mainly on short-term outcomes and therefore ignored how participants in workplace mediation perceive mediation effectiveness in the long term. Also, it is

surprising that, although some workplace mediations are exit mediations, this type of mediation was never the topic of earlier studies. With this study, we hoped to fill in this research gap and offer new insights on mediation theory and practice.

We have tested our hypotheses using real-life mediation cases that involved hierarchical labor conflicts. We ran hierarchical regression analyses to see if perceptions of mediation effectiveness immediately after the mediation predicted perceptions of long-term mediation effectiveness, while differentiating between perceived reconciliation; satisfaction with the mediator, process, and outcome; and compliance with the agreement by the other party.

First and foremost, our results show that mediation is considered effective in the long run by both supervisors and subordinates in mediation. Generally, short-term measures of mediation effectiveness such as reconciliation and satisfaction with the mediator and outcome, as well as confidence in the agreement, predicted how mediation clients would perceive long-term mediation effectiveness. We found one exception, however: perceived satisfaction with the mediation process immediately after the mediation did not predict how satisfied mediation clients would feel with the process in the long term. Possible explanations for this are that, in the long run, tangible results such as the mediation outcome were more salient and memorable than the specific mediation process, and/or participants may simply have forgotten the details of the process while the outcomes and their feelings about the mediator remained more vivid.

With regard to hierarchical position, both supervisors and subordinates reported satisfaction with the mediation process, the mediator, and the outcome in the long term. For both supervisors and subordinates, reconciliation was the lowest rated subscale of long-term mediation effectiveness. This supports earlier research on (workplace) mediation that found reconciliation between

parties was not a common result (Kressel & Pruitt, 1989; Poitras, 2010; Poitras & Le Tareau, 2009).

In addition, hierarchical position affected how parties perceived compliance with the agreement over the longer term: supervisors experienced substantially more compliance with the agreement by the other party than did subordinates. This may reflect the fact that subordinates feel more constrained in their behavior when compared to supervisors (Galinsky et al., 2011; Galinsky et al., 2016; Keltner et al., 2003) and might be less willing or capable of speaking out to make sure that the supervisor behaves according to the mediation agreement than the other way around. It is also possible that supervisors evaluate compliance more positively because the psychological experience of power increases a general sense of optimism (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Galinsky et al., 2011). We did not find that hierarchical position had a significant impact on the other subscales of mediation effectiveness.

We also found that whether or not the mediation involved terminating or continuing the employment was not a predictor of perception of long-term mediation effectiveness. Parties in both exit mediations and non-exit mediations reported long-term satisfaction with the mediator, process, and outcome, and that they believed the other party had complied with the agreement. Compared to these outcomes, parties felt to a lesser extent reconciled with the other. This is not what we expected because social interdependence theory (DeOrtentiis et al., 2013; Deutsch, 1949; Johnson & Johnson, 1989, 2005) predicts that parties in a non-exit mediation, who are more interdependent because of a future relationship, will engage in more collaborative behavior that stimulates trust and reconciliation (Pruitt et al., 2003). A possible explanation for our result might be that, although in exit mediations the focus is on terminating

the relationship and not on reconciliation, parties might still perceive the mediation as effective because it enabled them to leave on good terms or perhaps perceived the mediation as effective simply because they were so relieved that the conflict had come to an end (Moore, 2014).

This study supports the effectiveness of workplace mediation even in hierarchical conflicts. Not only do parties consider mediation effective in the short term, but also in the longer term, thereby supporting the durability of mediation. Furthermore, this study underscores the important effect of hierarchical position on compliance with the agreement.

Our findings suggest that mediators should consider, when mediating hierarchical conflicts, that supervisors and subordinates may have different perceptions of agreement compliance. These findings suggest that mediators should help parties work on implementation and monitoring of the agreement as part of the mediation process (Moore, 2014). Because it is more difficult for subordinates to address supervisors when they feel the agreement is not respected than the other way around (Keltner et al., 2003), mediators should pay special attention to these differences and even make disputants aware of these power dynamics when discussing the agreement.

Another implication of our study is that exit mediations have value. We found, counterintuitively, no significant difference in levels of reconciliation between exit and non-exit mediations. Consequently, reconciliation was just as possible for disputants in both exit and non-exit mediations. Our results show that parties in exit mediation consider this type of mediation just as effective as parties in non-exit mediations.

### **Limitations and future research**

This study has several limitations. First, the sample size of 41 participants is small. This is a common limitation for real-life mediation research: in this case, as in others, it was difficult to find mediators willing to ask parties to participate because of their concerns about confidentiality. And, as is often the case, long-term participation was difficult to achieve: more than half of the participants “dropped out” between the first and second questionnaire, which could have caused a selection bias (Deng, Hillygus, Reiter, Si, & Zheng, 2013; Hogan, Roy, & Korkontzelou, 2004).

In addition, participation in the study was voluntary and may thus have attracted greater interest from those who had positive experiences. This could partially account for the high agreement rate in our data set (78%). Although a 78% agreement rate is within the range reported by other studies of workplace mediation (Mareschal, 2005; Poitras & Le Tareau, 2009; Wood & Leon, 2005), it is on the high side of that range.

Further, in our hypothesis development we made the assumption that mediators in different types of mediations use different mediation techniques. For example, we surmised that mediators probably use more solution-oriented techniques in exit mediations and put less emphasis on mending the relationship (Coleman et al., 2014; Coleman et al., 2016). We did not test for this, however. Future research could examine whether different mediation techniques are used in these two different types of mediation, and, if they are different, whether it makes any difference.

Finally, we did not examine the long-term impacts of the mediation on feelings of well-being or improved functioning. Especially in the case of hierarchical workplace conflicts, it would be interesting to see if mediation leads to improved well-being in the long term, especially for subordinates as they are more affected by hierarchical conflicts in a negative way

compared to supervisors (Dijkstra, 2006; Giebels & Janssen, 2005). Because unemployment has negative impacts on health and well-being (Griep et al., 2016; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005), it would also be interesting to find out whether workers who participated in exit mediation found a new job and whether what they learned via mediation helped them in their next job.

## **Conclusion**

In this study of long-term workplace mediation effectiveness, we found that disputants' perceptions of reconciliation and satisfaction with the mediator and the mediation outcome, as well as the level of confidence in the mediation agreement as reported immediately after the mediation, were good predictors for similar results in the longer term. Unexpectedly, we found few differences between supervisors and subordinates, with the exception that subordinates perceived less compliance with the agreement on the part of the supervisor. We were also surprised to find no differences between exit and non-exit mediations. In general, parties found mediation effective in the long term regardless of their hierarchical position or whether the employment relationship was destined to continue or to cease.

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## Appendix

### Measures

#### Short-term mediation effectiveness

##### *Reconciliation between the parties*

1. I am reconciled with the other party
2. I feel like my relationship with the other party has been restored.
3. I believe I have rebuilt my relationship with the other.

##### *Satisfaction with the mediator*

1. The mediator's intervention was determinant in advancing discussion.
2. The mediator had an important impact on the progress of the discussion.
3. The mediator's contribution was critical to advancing discussion.

##### *Satisfaction with the mediation process*

1. The mediation meeting was run without bias.
2. Mediation was run in a neutral and objective manner.
3. Mediation took place in an impartial climate.

##### *Satisfaction with the mediation outcome*

1. I am happy with the solution we came to.
2. The settlement of the conflict was satisfactory to me.
3. I am satisfied with the outcome we reached.

*Confidence in the agreement*

1. I believe our agreement will be applied.
2. I am convinced the agreement reached will be respected.
3. I believe we will abide by the provisions of the agreement.

**Long-term mediation effectiveness**

*Reconciliation between the parties*

1. I am reconciled with the other party
2. I feel like my relationship with the other party has been restored.
3. I believe I have rebuilt my relationship with the other.

*Satisfaction with the mediator*

1. Looking back, the mediator's intervention was determinant in advancing discussion.
2. At the time, the mediator had an important impact on the progress of the discussion.
3. Thinking back, the mediator's contribution was critical to advancing discussion.

*Satisfaction with the mediation process*

1. At the time, the mediation meeting was run without bias.
2. Thinking back, mediation was run in a neutral and objective manner.
3. Looking back, Mediation took place in an impartial climate.

*Satisfaction with the mediation outcome*

1. I am now, after some time, happy with the solution we came to.
2. The settlement of the conflict is satisfactory to me, now after some time.
3. Looking back, I am content with the outcome we reached.

*Compliance with the agreement by the other party*

1. The other party complied with the mediation agreement.





# Chapter 3

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*Power Play: The Relationship  
between Power Perceptions  
and Mediation Effectiveness in  
Supervisor-Subordinate Dyads*

*A key to success in conflict mediation is the management of perceived power and power differences by the mediator. This study explored the relationship between the hierarchical position of conflicting parties, their power perceptions during mediation, and mediation effectiveness (the reaching of an agreement and perceived mediation effectiveness). To test our hypotheses, we used data from 52 dyads involved in mediation of hierarchical workplace conflict in the Netherlands. As expected, supervisors perceived more power during mediation than subordinates. Perceived situational power related positively to perceived mediation effectiveness and mediated the relationship between hierarchical position and perceived mediation effectiveness. For subordinates perceived situational power was more strongly related to mediation effectiveness than for supervisors. On a dyadic level, symmetrical power perceptions and a comparably high level of perceived situational power related positively to mediation effectiveness as perceived by the dyad, with symmetrical power perceptions increasing the likelihood of reaching an agreement. Implications for mediation theory and practice are discussed.*

## **Introduction**

Unresolved conflicts often have damaging effects on organizations and the people working for them (De Dreu, 2008; Rainey, 2014). When conflicts are not resolved in a timely manner, there can be substantial financial costs for the organization (Kals, Thiel, & Freund, 2016; Slaikeu & Hasson, 2012).

Labor mediation has proven an effective tool for limiting financial costs by resolving conflicts in a constructive manner (Bollen & Euwema, 2013a; Gilin Oore, Leiter, & LeBlanc, 2015; Munduate, Bollen, & Euwema, 2016). In mediation, an impartial third party assists disputants in reaching an acceptable settlement for both, by promoting the full and equal participation of all parties (Kressel, 2014; Moore, 2014). This is

particularly challenging when mediating hierarchical workplace conflicts, given the asymmetrical power relations (Bollen & Euwema, 2014).

Previous studies have shown that parties' respective formal hierarchical positions affect workplace mediation in different ways, including parties' needs in mediation (Bollen & Euwema, 2013a, 2014; Bollen, Euwema, & Müller, 2010; Bollen, Ittner, & Euwema, 2012) and parties' mediation evaluation (Bingham, 1997; Coggburn, Daley, Jameson, & Berry-James, 2018; Kalter, Bollen, & Euwema, 2018). Hierarchical position is only one source of power, and the present study investigates how supervisors' and subordinates' *perceptions* of power may affect mediation. This question is important since it is the perception of power – and not the formal hierarchical position in itself – that affects cognitions, emotions, and behaviors (Bombari, Schmid Mast, & Bachmann, 2017; Guinote, 2017; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). Consequently, perceived power and especially power as perceived in relation to the other conflict party may play an important role in mediation and its perceived effectiveness. This calls for research taking into account the conflict dyad. To date, research on mediation in hierarchical workplace conflicts has focused mostly on individual perceptions, not taking into account the perceived effectiveness on the level of the dyad: how do both parties involved in the same mediation evaluate the mediation?

In addition, it is unclear how power dynamics as perceived by both parties during the mediation itself (whether an asymmetry or the sum of perceived power) affects mediation effectiveness. First, a key task of the mediator is to recognize and manage power imbalances (Moore, 2014; Poitras & Raines, 2013; Wiseman & Poitras, 2002). Since perceived power differences inhibit effective negotiations (e.g., Mannix & Neale, 1993; Olekalns & Smith, 2013; Wolfe & McGinn, 2005), asymmetrical power

perceptions may also negatively affect the mediation. Second, the overall level of power as perceived by both disputants during the mediation may also affect perceived mediation effectiveness. In integrative negotiations, parties' capabilities and resources are joined in order to create value (Raiffa, Richardson, & Metcalfe, 2007). The bargaining strategies used in integrative negotiation are open information exchange, creative problem-solving, shared concessions and concern for the opponent (Lewicki, Barry, & Saunders, 2016; Weingart & Olekalns, 2004). As such, the mediator supports conflict parties to negotiate in an integrative way. To do so, the mediator empowers both parties so that they feel competent to express their needs, interests, and wishes in order to come to a win-win solution. It is therefore likely that when both parties perceive themselves as powerful during the mediation, this adds to the (perceived) mediation effectiveness (Bush & Folger, 2004; Cobb, 1993; Gaynier, 2005).

The current study explores these questions and examines how power – as perceived by supervisors and subordinates in the same mediation – relates to the probability of reaching an agreement for the settlement of the dispute, as well as parties' perceptions of mediation effectiveness. Although such an agreement might be verbal, it is often a written contract between parties and usually contains a summary of the issues on which the parties have agreed (Adrian & Mykland, 2014; Beck, Walsh, & Weston, 2009), being either a termination of the employment contract (an exit mediation) or an arrangement about continuing the work relationship (Rasmussen & Greenwood, 2014).

Our approach is multilevel. We explore the individual effects of perceived power on mediation effectiveness (both the reaching of an agreement and perceived mediation effectiveness), and the dyadic effects, with sets of supervisors and subordinates involved in the same mediation.

In short, what we mean by the dyadic level is that we combine the data of both parties in a particular dyad for our analyses, for example the sum of perceived mediation effectiveness of both supervisor and subordinate in a mediation. As a result, this study is one of the first on workplace mediation that measures dyadic effects. We use data from real mediation cases concerning hierarchical workplace conflicts in the Netherlands to test our hypotheses.

### **Perceived power in mediation**

Power can be defined as “the asymmetric control over valued resources in social relations” (Magee & Galinsky, 2008, p. 16). Other power definitions pay more attention to the subjective nature of power: an individual’s perceived ability to influence the behavior of others (Anderson, John, & Keltner, 2012; De Dreu & Van Kleef, 2004; Fast & Chen, 2009; Schmid Mast, Jonas, & Hall, 2009). Since power may differ from one relationship to another and between situations, Anderson and colleagues (2012) differentiate between different types of power: a general sense of power (as experienced across situations and relationships), relational power (as perceived in general in a long-term dyadic relationship), power perceived in a group, and context-specific power (as perceived during a specific situation). In the present study, we focus on context-specific power (situational power): the amount of influence one party perceives to have over the other conflict party in a specific setting; here, the mediation. Mediation literature stresses the importance of empowering parties, suggesting that power perceived during the mediation is an important factor for perceived mediation effectiveness (e.g., Domenici & Littlejohn, 2001). Next to this, mediators seek to create situations in which both conflict parties can essentially communicate as “equals.” To this end,

mediators work to “empower” parties, moving them from weakness to greater strength. Specifically, mediators attempt to enhance parties’ perceptions of power in such a way that each party feels to have influence over the mediation process and its outcomes (Bush & Folger, 2004; Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 2011; Moore, 2014). When both parties believe they have an impact on the important issues in the mediation, this enhances their power perceptions and, thus, their respective mediation evaluations. This also implies that when both parties’ power perceptions are increased, there is a higher chance of reaching an agreement. This is framed by the overall mediation goal of both parties having an equal voice to express their most important needs and wishes and reach a solution by which all needs are met (a so-called “integrative” solution) (Alexander, 2008; Carnevale, 2019; Klaming, Van Veenen, & Leenes, 2009; Roloff, Putnam, & Anastasiou, 2003). This is usually particularly relevant for the structurally weaker party, often the subordinate in the conflict (Bollen & Euwema, 2014). Coleman (2014) emphasizes working towards an understanding of power not as a distributive attribute, but rather as empowering both disputants: “Conflict can be framed as a mutual problem to be solved by both parties, which leads to an increased tendency to minimize power differences between the disputants and to mutually enhance each other’s power in order to work together effectively to achieve their shared goals” (Coleman, 2014, p. 153). This implies that, in a constructive relationship, both parties experience a great deal of power or influence over each other in pursuit of shared goals. This assumption is based on positive interdependence: parties are open to and willing to meet the needs of the other because they feel that they need the other party (Deutsch, 1949; Johnson & Johnson, 1992). In conflict situations, this feeling of positive interdependence is of course less prevalent or has become latent. The task of the mediator is to intervene in such a way that positive interdependence between conflict parties is

stimulated, for example by identifying and emphasizing parties' common interests (Fisher et al., 2011; Picard & Melchin, 2007).

When parties engage in a mediation, they typically have already some kind of relationship. This is certainly the case for workplace mediations dealing with hierarchical labor conflicts. This implies that supervisors and subordinates also perceive power in this hierarchical relation next to the specific mediation setting. Perceived relational power represents the general perception of power in this working relationship (Anderson et al., 2012). Subordinates usually perceive themselves as less powerful than their supervisors (Euwema, 1992; McKenzie, 2015). Although a formal hierarchical position does not always correspond to perceived relational power, it often does (Berdahl & Martorana, 2006; Bombari et al., 2017). Supervisors have greater legitimate power than their subordinates: they are more able to reward and punish and generally have easier access to other power resources, such as money or information (Anderson & Brion, 2014; French & Raven, 1959; Raven, 2008). In the mediation setting, the mediator seeks to limit the impact of these relational power imbalances (Kressel, 2014; Poitras & Raines, 2013; Wall & Lynn, 1993). Instead, the mediator seeks to empower both parties to reach an agreement that reflects their respective needs and wishes to a similar extent (Moore, 2014). Thus, although the perceived situational power may be increased by the mediator and the mediation context, especially for the subordinate, it is likely to be influenced by the formal hierarchical position each party occupies and the accompanied level of perceived relational power (Anderson et al., 2012; Tost, 2015). Moreover, mediation is a temporary process, while the dyadic hierarchical relationship has mostly a long-term character: parties continue working together in a hierarchical relationship during and after finishing the mediation (with the exception of an exit mediation). In this respect, parties' relative hierarchical position

may affect their experiences of power during mediation and, consequently, their perceptions of the mediation effectiveness. As a result, we propose the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1:* During the mediation of a hierarchical labor conflict, supervisors perceive more situational power than subordinates.

*Hypothesis 2:* Perceived situational power during mediation is positively related to perceived mediation effectiveness.

*Hypothesis 3:* Perceived situational power mediates the relationship between hierarchical position and perceived mediation effectiveness.

*Hypothesis 4:* The level of situational power as experienced by the conflicting dyad during mediation, is positively related to (4a) reaching an agreement and (4b) perceived dyadic mediation effectiveness.

### **Power asymmetry and mediation effectiveness**

In the context of this study focusing on the level of perceived power during workplace mediation, situational power asymmetry refers to differences in perceived power when mediating hierarchical labor conflicts. One party may experience high levels of power, while the other may have the impression of having little or no power. Several authors consider it important to manage such power imbalances in mediation because they

can interfere with mediation success (e.g., Moore, 2014; Saposnek, 2006; Wiseman & Poitras, 2002). However, no empirical studies have tested this assumption. To date, only some studies have investigated perceptual differences between disputants in a mediation (Jehn, Peterson, & Sanchez-Burks, 2011; Jehn, Rupert, & Nauta, 2006; Jehn, Rupert, Nauta, & Van den Bossche, 2010). For example, Jehn and colleagues (2010) found that when one conflict party experiences a high level of conflict while the other party perceives little or no conflict (an asymmetry of conflict perceptions), the former tends to be less satisfied with the mediation process and outcomes. This is because asymmetrical conflict perceptions may lead to unequal commitment by the mediating disputants, while mediation assumes equal commitment (Jehn et al., 2010). The same line of reasoning may hold for asymmetrical power perceptions in workplace mediation. For instance, in a workplace mediation setting, when there is a large power disparity between supervisor and subordinate, there may be a failure of listening or consideration due to a lack of engagement, which may result in difficulties to reach an agreement that satisfies both parties (Herrman, Hollett, & Gale, 2006; Kressel, 2014). Especially when individuals higher in power perceive a negative interdependence rather than positive interdependence with the party lower in power, this may result in exploitative and controlling behavior on the part of the more powerful person (Coleman, 2014; Coleman, Kugler, Mitchinson, & Foster, 2013).

Research in the field of negotiations shows that joint outcomes are affected by power perceptions as experienced during the negotiation (e.g., Kim, Pinkley, & Fragale, 2005): when parties perceive comparable levels of power, there are more satisfactory outcomes and integrative solutions than when parties perceive asymmetric levels of power (e.g., Mannix & Neale, 1993; Wei & Luo, 2012; Wolfe & McGinn, 2005). Specifically, in a study by Giebels, De Dreu, and Van de Vliert (2000), researchers provided one,

both, or neither of the members of the dyad with an exit option, and had the dyads engage in a negotiation task. Those dyads holding asymmetric power perceptions (dyads with a one-sided exit option) engaged in less collaborative behavior and obtained lower joint outcomes than those with symmetric power (those with either two-sided or no exit options). Furthermore, there were no differences between negotiations with two-sided exit options and those without exit options. This suggests that the more comparable parties' view on their respective power positions is, the more likely they are to negotiate and to seek a mutually acceptable agreement (McCracken, Salterio, & Schmidt, 2011; Rubin, Pruitt, & Kim, 1994; Weitzman & Weitzman, 2014). Applying this to a mediation context, we assume that, when on the level of the dyad there is a discrepancy in perceived situational power, supervisors and subordinates will be less likely to reach an agreement and will evaluate the mediation more negatively, than when parties have a comparable view of their power position. Our fifth hypothesis reads:

*Hypothesis 5: Asymmetrical perceptions of situational power in mediating dyads are negatively associated with (5a) reaching a mediation agreement and (5b) perceived mediation effectiveness on the level of the dyad.*

### **Hierarchical position, perceived power, and mediation effectiveness**

Usually, subordinates are less powerful in the working relationship with their supervisor (Euwema, 1992), and we expect this to influence levels of perceived power during the mediation (Hypothesis 1). However, the hierarchical position one occupies may also have an impact on other

aspects next to the level of perceived power. Here we focus on the different impact the level of perceived situational power may have for subordinates versus supervisors. Specifically, we assume that the level of perceived power may be of more relevance for subordinates compared with supervisors. Research shows conflict can have a serious effect on the subordinate (Eatough & Chang, 2018), causing negative emotions (Fitness, 2000) and feelings of uncertainty and vulnerability (Bollen et al., 2010). Consequently, supervisor and subordinate typically enter a mediation differently, with distinct needs and expectations towards the mediation. Compared to their supervisor, subordinates have a greater need for acknowledgement of their emotions (Bollen & Euwema, 2014), procedural justice (Bollen et al., 2012), and uncertainty reduction by the mediator (Bollen et al., 2010).

Studies indicate that conflict parties in mediation need the opportunity to speak out, the experience of acknowledgement of their needs, and looking together for solutions that meet their needs (Beer & Packard, 2012; Moore, 2014). Several authors argue this is related to having a voice (Folger, 1977; McFarlin & Sweeney, 1996; Shapiro & Brett, 1993) and the ability to influence the process as well as the other party. Bollen and colleagues (2012) argue that all these elements (e.g., the experience of voice and justice) are stronger related to perceptions of mediation effectiveness for subordinates, compared to supervisors. Therefore, we expect hierarchical position to moderate the relationship between conflict parties' perceived situational power and their evaluation of mediation outcomes. While subordinates may need to perceive themselves as powerful (the experience of control) to see the mediation as effective, supervisors' perceptions of mediation effectiveness may be less negatively influenced by a lack of power during the mediation as their higher hierarchical position may already provide them sufficient

levels of influence, control and a sense of power in their relationship with the subordinate (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Anderson & John, 2015). Furthermore, the conflict usually does not have as high emotional and personal impact on supervisors, as it does for subordinates, such as job insecurity or job loss (Fitness, 2000). Consequently, we hypothesize the following:

*Hypothesis 6:* Hierarchical position moderates the relationship between perceived situational power and mediation effectiveness, with a stronger relationship for subordinates than for supervisors.

## **Methodology**

### **Data Collection and Respondents**

Through cooperation with the Dutch Mediation Federation (MfN)<sup>2</sup> and mediation providers in the Netherlands, we approached mediation clients involved in hierarchical labor conflict. Data were collected between October 2010 and July 2014. MfN mediators who agreed to work with us asked the conflict parties to participate. To avoid selection bias on the part of the mediators, all parties in five successive mediations were asked to participate. To avoid sample bias, each mediator could only report data for a maximum of five dyads. Parties received a digital questionnaire within four weeks of the final mediation session. Supervisors and subordinates received the same survey. Participation was confidential and voluntary.

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<sup>2</sup> The MfN is the Dutch national quality assurance platform for mediation in the Netherlands

## Sample

Almost 60% of the respondents in 150 mediations ( $N = 300$ ) returned the questionnaire. We selected only mediation cases in which both supervisor and subordinate had completed the questionnaire<sup>3,4</sup>. In total, 104 respondents – stemming from 52 dyads – were involved in this research: 54 men (33 supervisors and 21 subordinates) and 50 women (20 supervisors and 30 subordinates). All participants were Dutch. Conflict parties had an average age of 49.86 years old ( $SD = 15.22$ ): supervisors, 50.79 years old ( $SD = 13.80$ ) and subordinates 48.88 years ( $SD = 16.64$ ). Approximately 80% of the supervisors held a higher educational degree, with 39% having a university degree. Of the subordinates, only 12% held a university degree. The data indicate that conflicts tended to be highly escalated, with an average escalation level of 4 ( $SD = 1.07$ ) on a 5-point Likert scale. In 78.8% of cases, the parties reached an agreement. This aligns with earlier studies demonstrating that agreement rates for workplace mediation fluctuate between 60% and 80% (McDermott, Jose, Obar, Polkinghorn, & Bowers, 2002; Poitras & Le Tareau, 2009). In 59,8% of the mediated cases, supervisor and subordinate ended their employment relationship as part of the mediation agreement.

## Measures

We conducted the questionnaire in Dutch. To this end, we translated the

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<sup>3</sup> The datasets of two mediation researchers were combined in order to examine sufficient matching dyads

<sup>4</sup> A total of 29 mediators (in 46 dyads) participated in our study, while in six mediations (6 dyads) we could not link the data to a specific mediator. The vast majority of the mediators in our data-set mediated 1 dyad (76%), 5 mediators mediated 2 or 3 dyads (17%) and 2 mediators mediated 5 or 6 dyads (7%).

original study scales (perceived power, Anderson et al., 2012; perceived mediation effectiveness, Poitras & Le Tareau, 2009) into Dutch. Two bilingual people translated the questionnaire from English to Dutch and then backward from Dutch to English to ensure that the translation of the scales was both semantically correct and conceptually equivalent (Behling & Law, 2000).

We operationalized *Hierarchical position* as the position of authority or certain formal occupation in relation to the other party involved in the mediation (Bollen et al., 2010, 2012; Finkelstein, 1992) (“What is your position in the conflict?”). The possible answers were “employer,” “employee,” “Other...” with the term “employee” referring to subordinates and “employer” to supervisors. We coded subordinates as 0 and supervisors as 1.

To measure *Situational power*, we used the context-specific power scale developed by Anderson and colleagues (2012), adapted to the context of the mediation (three statements): for example, “I had more influence over the mediation process than the other party.” The results suggest a satisfactory internal consistency of Cronbach’s alpha: .88. For all items, respondents needed to specify their level of agreement on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, with a higher score indicating a high level of power perceived in relation to the other party in the mediation.

*Asymmetric perceptions of situational power in the dyad.* Following previous asymmetry studies (Jehn et al., 2006, 2010), we calculated difference scores for perceived situational power as perceived during the mediation between the supervisor and the subordinate. Scores ranged from 0 to maximum 4, with a high score meaning that supervisors and subordinates differed substantially in the power experienced during the mediation, while a score of zero meaning that conflict parties held

comparable views of their power positions.

We measured *Perceived dyadic power* as the total sum of perceived situational power by both parties in a particular dyad. We combined the scores for the perceived situational power of both supervisor and subordinate in a particular dyad (with values ranging from 2 to 10).

Based on research by Bollen and colleagues (2010, 2012, 2014), Colquitt (2001) and Poitras and LeTareau (2009), we relied on an eight-item scale to measure *Perceived mediation effectiveness*. We asked disputants to evaluate the mediation process (Cronbach's alpha = .87) (four items; e.g., "The mediation was run in a neutral and objective manner"), the mediation outcome (Cronbach's alpha = .97) (three items; e.g., "I am happy with the solution we came to"), and the extent to which they felt the personal conflict had been resolved. Scales all ranging from 1 (*Totally disagree*) to 5 (*Totally agree*), except extent personal conflict resolved (ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very strong), with a higher score indicating a higher level of perceived mediation effectiveness. The Cronbach's alpha of the overall scale was .90. The results of an exploratory factor analysis distinguish our research variables: clients' perceived power and two different factors in mediation effectiveness (Table 3.1): satisfaction with the mediation process and the mediation outcome. In this study, we report the results for the overall scale as well as the two subscales.

We measured *Perceived dyadic mediation effectiveness* as the total sum of perceived effectiveness by both parties in a particular dyad. We combined the scores for the perceived mediation effectiveness of both individual parties (with values ranging from 2 to 10).

The respondents indicated whether they had reached a *Mediation agreement*, with "no" coded as 0 and "yes" as 1.

As the experience of power and perceived mediation effectiveness may depend on the objective mediation outcome (agreement or not) and/or the level of conflict escalation at the start of the mediation, we entered these as *Control variables* (Bollen & Euwema, 2014). As participants' gender and being involved in an exit mediation or not, did not correlate with our research variables, we excluded them from further analyses.

### **Data analyses**

We executed data management, exploratory factor analysis, and other analyses using SPSS 24.0. To test our hypotheses, we used ANOVA analysis, hierarchical regression analyses, and logistic regression analyses.

## **Results**

### **Preliminary analyses**

Before testing our hypotheses, we checked whether our data met the assumptions for the aforementioned analyses. We found that multicollinearity was not a concern and the data contained no outliers. To identify whether our data fit the hypothesized constructs (factors), we subjected a total of 11 items assessing parties' perceived situational power (three items) and perceived mediation effectiveness (eight items) to exploratory factor analysis. The results show three factors (see Table 3.1).

Furthermore, since participants were nested within supervisor-subordinate dyads we tested for nonindependence. According to Kenny, Kashy, & Cook (2006), data analyses need to take into account the level of the dyad if there is statistical proof of nonindependence. We tested for

nonindependence by calculating Pearson's correlations between each dyad's scores on perceived situational power and perceived mediation effectiveness and its subscales, which is recommended for dyads with distinguishable dyad members (Kenny et al., 2006). For the variables

Table 3.1

*Exploratory factor analysis of items measuring parties' perceived situational power and mediation effectiveness*

Items	Factor 1 Sit.power	Factor 2 Sat.proc.	Factor 3 Sat. out.
I had more influence over the mediation process than the other party.	.92		
I had more influence over the mediation outcome than the other party.	.88		
I felt as the more powerful during mediation.	.85		
The mediation meeting was run without bias.		.89	
Mediation was run in a neutral and objective manner.		.88	
The motives and the intentions of the mediator were good.		.82	
The mediator treated me in a consistent and predictable way.		.82	
I am happy with the solution we came to.			.85
The settlement of the conflict was satisfactory to me.			.80
I am satisfied with the outcome we reached.			.77
To what extent did the mediation solve the personal conflict?			.77

Extraction method: principal axis factoring. Rotation method: Oblimin with Kaiser normalization. Factor loadings below .30 are excluded from the table.

Table 3.2  
*Means (M), standard deviations (SD), and correlations between research variables and control variables (N=104)*

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Conflict escalation	4.00	1.07											
2. Agreement	.79	.41	-.04										
3. Hierarchical position	.50	.50	-.14	.09									
4. Perceived sit. power	2.77	.94	-.12	.07	.28**								
5. D. sit. power asymmetry	1.30	.85	.14	.20*	.00	-.08							
6. D. sit. power	5.55	1.08	-.28**	.04	.00	.57***	-.14						
7. Perc. mediation effect	3.63	.90	-.09	.20*	.07	.48***	-.21*	.34***					
8. Sat. mediation process	3.93	.81	-.08	.02	.06	.34***	-.10	.26**	.84***				
9. Sat. mediation outcome	3.32	1.19	-.08	.32***	.06	.48***	-.25**	.34***	.93***	.59***			
10. D. mediation effect	7.26	1.35	-.18	.23*	.00	.26**	-.28**	.46***	.75***	.61***	.72***		
11. D. sat. mediation process	7.86	1.20	-.12	.05	.00	.20*	-.14	.35**	.62**	.74**	.42**	.82**	
12. D. sat. mediation outcome	6.65	1.84	-.19	.37***	.00	.25*	-.33**	.44**	.70**	.41**	.77**	.93**	.55**

\* $p \leq .05$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\* $p \leq .001$  (two-tailed).

under study, we found the following correlations: perceived situational power ( $r = -.30, p < .05$ ), perceived mediation effectiveness ( $r = .13, p > .05$ ), satisfaction with mediation process ( $r = .11, p > .05$ ) and satisfaction with mediation outcome ( $r = .19, p > .05$ ). Since the level of consequential nonindependence is .45 (Kenny et al., 2006; Kenny, Kashy, & Bolger, 1998; Tambling, Johnson, & Johnson, 2011), each party or disputant can be considered as the unit of analysis and consequently multi-level modeling is not required.

Table 3.2 shows the mean scores, standard deviations, and correlations between the control and research variables. In line with expectations we observe that reaching an agreement is related to perceived mediation effectiveness ( $r = .20, p < .05$ ), satisfaction with the mediation outcome ( $r = .32, p < .001$ ), dyadic mediation effectiveness ( $r = .23, p < .05$ ), and dyadic satisfaction with mediation outcome ( $r = .37, p < .001$ ), but negatively with dyadic power asymmetry ( $r = -.20, p < .05$ ).

For the variables under study, data suggest that the occupation of a hierarchical position is positively related to perception of power during mediation ( $r = .24, p < .05$ ) but no other variables. Furthermore, perceived power relates positively to dyadic power ( $r = .57, p < .001$ ), mediation effectiveness ( $r = .48, p < .001$ ), satisfaction with the mediation process ( $r = .34, p < .001$ ), satisfaction with the mediation outcomes ( $r = .48, p < .001$ ), dyadic mediation effectiveness ( $r = .26, p < .01$ ), dyadic satisfaction with the mediation process ( $r = .20, p < .05$ ), and outcomes ( $r = .25, p < .05$ ). Dyadic power asymmetry relates negatively to perceived mediation effectiveness ( $r = -.21, p < .05$ ), satisfaction with the mediation outcomes ( $r = -.25, p < .01$ ), dyadic mediation effectiveness ( $r = -.28, p < .01$ ), and dyadic satisfaction with the mediation outcomes ( $r = -.33, p < .01$ ), however it has no correlation with satisfaction with the mediation process ( $r = -.10$ ,

$p > .05$ ) or dyadic satisfaction with the mediation process ( $r = -.14, p > .05$ ). Dyadic power relates positively to perceived mediation effectiveness ( $r = .34, p < .001$ ), satisfaction with the mediation process ( $r = .26, p < .01$ ), satisfaction with the mediation outcome ( $r = .34, p < .001$ ), dyadic mediation effectiveness ( $r = .46, p < .001$ ), dyadic satisfaction with the mediation process ( $r = .35, p < .01$ ) and outcome ( $r = .44, p < .01$ ).

To test whether the hierarchical positions of the parties relate to their respective levels of perceived power in mediation (Hypothesis 1), we conducted an ANOVA analysis, with the level of conflict escalation and mediation agreement as control variables. The data confirm our hypothesis and show that hierarchical position and level of perceived power are related  $F[4, 99] = 4.86, p < .05$ : supervisors experience a higher level of situational power (in mediation) than subordinates do ( $M = 3.00$  versus  $M = 2.54$ ).

To test the relationship between perceived power during mediation and mediation effectiveness (Hypothesis 2), we regressed mediation effectiveness on perceived situational power. Our results show that perceived situational power is related to mediation effectiveness ( $\beta = .46, p < .001$ ), also after controlling for reaching an agreement ( $\beta = .17, p > .05$ ) and conflict escalation ( $\beta = -.03, p > .05$ ). Further testing reveals that perceived situational power is positively associated with satisfaction with the mediation process ( $\beta = .34, p < .001$ ) and satisfaction with the outcomes ( $\beta = .46, p < .001$ ), after controlling for reaching an agreement (respectively  $\beta = -.04, p > .05$ ;  $\beta = .28, p < .001$ ), and for conflict escalation ( $\beta = -.04, p > .05$ ;  $\beta = -.02, p > .05$ ).

To test whether perceived situational power mediates the relationship between hierarchical position and perceived mediation effectiveness (Hypothesis 3), we ran bootstrapping analysis by using the

SPSS process macro (Hayes, 2017). This type of analysis is considered by simulation researchers as among the most powerful methods to detect mediation (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). For example, in comparison with the Baron and Kenny mediation analysis (1986), bootstrapping analysis has more statistical power (Mallinckrodt, Abraham, Wei, & Russell, 2006). The results indeed indicate that perceived levels of situational power mediate the influence of hierarchical position on perceived mediation effectiveness. The bootstrapping analysis, controlling for the level of conflict escalation and reaching an agreement, found that the direct effect of hierarchical position was not significant ( $b = -.16, p > .05$ ). However, hierarchical position exerts an indirect effect on perceived mediation effectiveness through perceived situational power. Hierarchical position predicts perceived situational power ( $b = .49, p < .05$ ), which then predicts perceived mediation effectiveness ( $b = .46, p < .001$ ). Perceived situational power is a significant mediator, 95% confidence interval (CI) = .063 to .46. This result was also confirmed by the Sobel test (Sobel, 1982):  $z = 2.36, p < .05$ .

To test Hypothesis 4a and to know whether the level of perceived situational power as experienced by the conflicting dyad relates to the likelihood of reaching an agreement, we ran a logistical regression, with hierarchical position and level of conflict escalation as control variables. We found no significant effect ( $\beta = -.07, z = .09, p = ns$ ). The model explained only 2% (Nagelkerke R square) of the variance in reaching mediation agreement and correctly classified 79% of cases. To test Hypothesis 4b, assuming that the dyadic level of perceived power relates to dyadic level of perceived mediation effectiveness, we ran a hierarchical regression analysis. Table 3.3 shows that dyadic perceptions of power (sum of the parties' individual power perceptions) relate positively to dyadic perceived mediation effectiveness ( $\beta = .43, p < .001$ ), even when controlling for the mediation agreement ( $\beta = .22, p < .05$ ) and the level of conflict escalation

Table 3.3

*Summary of hierarchical regression analysis: Dyadic power perception predicting dyadic perceptions of mediation effectiveness (N =104)*

	Model 1	Model 2
Conflict escalation	-.17	-.05
Agreement	.23*	.22
Dyadic power perceptions		.43***
R <sup>2</sup>	.08	.26
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.06	.23
Δ Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.08*	.17***

\*p ≤ .05, \*\*p ≤ .01, \*\*\*p ≤ .001 (two-tailed)

Table 3.4

*Summary of hierarchical regression analysis: Dyadic power perception predicting dyadic perceptions of mediation effectiveness (N =104)*

	Model 1	Model 2
Conflict escalation	-.12	-.03
Agreement	.06	.06
Dyadic power perceptions		.34***
R <sup>2</sup>	.02	.12
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.00	.10
Δ Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.02	.11***

\*p ≤ .05, \*\*p ≤ .01, \*\*\*p ≤ .001 (two-tailed)

Table 3.5

*Summary of hierarchical regression analysis: Dyadic power perception predicting dyadic perceptions of satisfaction with the mediation outcome (N =104)*

	Model 1	Model 2
Conflict escalation	-.17	-.06
Agreement	.37***	.36***
Dyadic power perceptions		.41***
R <sup>2</sup>	.17	.33
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.15	.31
Δ Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.17***	.16***

\*p ≤ .05, \*\*p ≤ .01, \*\*\*p ≤ .001 (two-tailed)

( $\beta = -.05, p > .05$ ). For the subscales of mediation effectiveness, our results indicate that dyadic perceptions of situational power associates positively with satisfaction with the process ( $\beta = .34, p < .001$ ) and with the outcome ( $\beta = .41, p < .001$ ) (see Table 3.4 and 3.5).

To test how asymmetrical power perceptions on the level of the dyad relate to the likelihood of reaching an agreement (Hypothesis 5a), we used logistic regression modelling, with hierarchical position and level of conflict escalation as control variables. The data show a significant effect of asymmetrical power perceptions on likelihood of reaching an agreement ( $\beta = .58, z = 3.94, p < .05$ ). The model explained only 8% (Nagelkerke R square) of the variance and correctly classified 79% of cases.

To test whether asymmetrical dyadic power perceptions predicted dyadic mediation effectiveness (Hypothesis 5b), we conducted a hierarchical regression analysis. The results show that asymmetrical

Table 3.6

*Summary of hierarchical regression analysis: Asymmetrical power perceptions predicting dyadic perceptions of mediation effectiveness (N = 104)*

	Model 1	Model 2
Conflict escalation	-.17	-.14
Agreement	.23*	.18
Asymmetrical dyadic power perceptions		.23*
R <sup>2</sup>	.08	.13
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.06	.11
$\Delta$ Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.08*	.05*

\* $p \leq .05$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\* $p \leq .001$  (two-tailed)

Table 3.7

*Summary of hierarchical regression analysis: Asymmetrical power perceptions predicting dyadic perceptions of satisfaction with the mediation process (N =104)*

	Model 1	Model 2
Conflict escalation	-.17	-.14
Agreement	.23*	.18
Asymmetrical dyadic power perceptions		.23*
R <sup>2</sup>	.08	.13
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.06	.11
Δ Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.08*	.05*

\* $p \leq .05$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\* $p \leq .001$  (two-tailed)

Table 3.8

*Summary of hierarchical regression analysis: Asymmetrical power perceptions predicting dyadic perceptions of satisfaction with the mediation outcome (N =104)*

	Model 1	Model 2
Conflict escalation	-.17	-.14
Agreement	.23*	.18
Asymmetrical dyadic power perceptions		.23*
R <sup>2</sup>	.08	.13
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.06	.11
Δ Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.08*	.05*

\* $p \leq .05$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\* $p \leq .001$  (two-tailed)

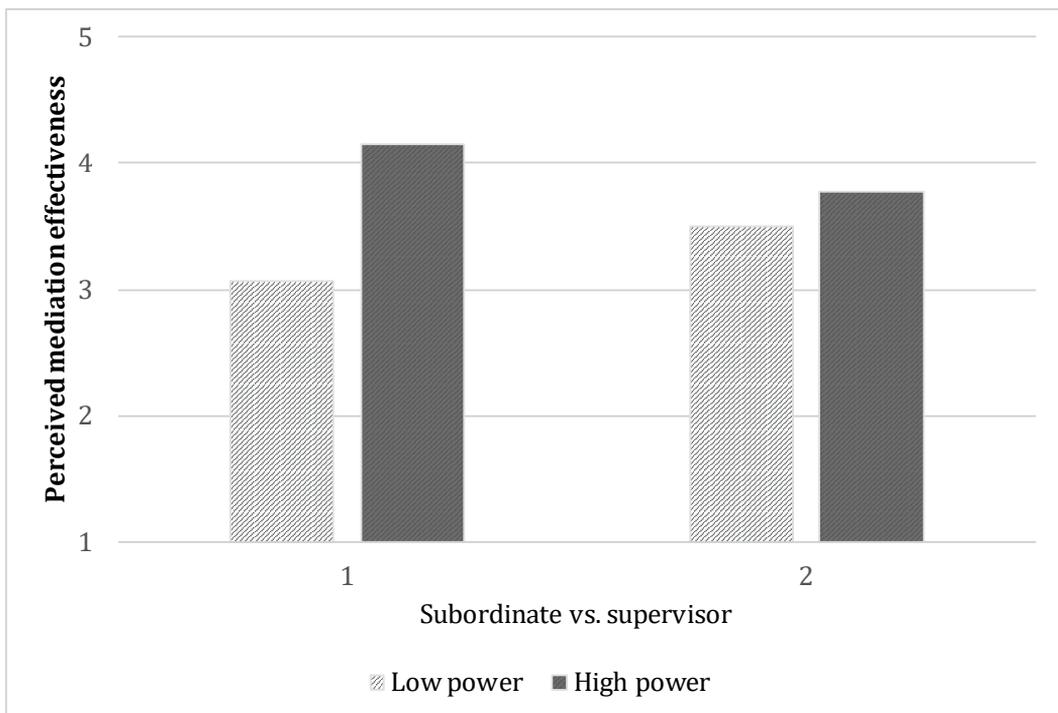
power perceptions in the dyad relate negatively to perceived mediation effectiveness ( $\beta = -.23$ ,  $p < .05$ ): the greater the asymmetrical power perceptions, the less likely parties are to perceive the mediation as effective (see Table 3.6). Focusing on the two subscales satisfaction with the mediation process and outcome, our results show that this is primarily explained by the effect of asymmetrical dyad power perceptions on satisfaction with mediation outcome ( $\beta = -.25$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and not on satisfaction with the mediation process ( $\beta = -.14$ ,  $p > .05$ ) (See Tables 3.7 and 3.8).

Table 3.9

*Summary of hierarchical regression analysis: Moderation of hierarchical position and perceived power predicting perceptions of mediation effectiveness: mediation (N =104)*

	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Conflict escalation	-.09	-.04	.05
Agreement	-.20	.17	.16
Zscore hierarchical position		-.09	-.09
Zscore perceived sit. power		.48***	.48***
ZscoreHP x perceived sit. power			-.18*
R <sup>2</sup>	.05	.27	.31
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.03	.24	.26
Δ Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.05	.22***	.03*

\* $p \leq .05$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\* $p \leq .001$  (two-tailed)



*Figure 3.1. The interactive effects of perceived situational power and hierarchical position on perceived mediation effectiveness.*

*Note:* 1 = subordinate, 2 = supervisor

between perceived power during mediation and perceived mediation effectiveness (Hypothesis 6), we performed a regression analysis, with level of conflict escalation and agreement as control variables. In addition to the expected main effect of perceived situational power on perceived effectiveness ( $\beta = -.48, p < .001$ ), Table 3.9 shows a significant interaction term: hierarchical position affects the strength of the relationship between perceived situational power and perceptions of mediation effectiveness ( $\beta = -.18, p < .05$ ). Figure 3.1 depicts this interaction effect and shows that perceived situational power is especially important for subordinates to evaluate the mediation as effective. This is less true for supervisors.

## Discussion

This article explores the influence of situational power perceptions on mediation effectiveness in hierarchical workplace conflicts, both at the individual and dyadic level. In contrast to studies investigating the effects of the formal hierarchical position on perceived mediation effectiveness (e.g., Bollen & Euwema, 2013b, 2014; Kalter et al., 2018), we wanted to explore the role of perceived situational power on perceived mediation effectiveness (Anderson et al., 2012), including whether parties were able to reach an agreement. This aligns with one of the mediation goals: empowering parties to manage their conflict (Bennett, 2013; Domenici & Littlejohn, 2001; Garcia, 2000). It is unclear until now whether high levels of perceived situational power indeed have a positive effect on mediation effectiveness. No empirical research to date has investigated situational power in the mediation context. Furthermore, on the dyadic level, studies have shown the negative effects of asymmetrical perceptions on satisfaction (e.g., Jehn et al., 2010). Empirical evidence of this in mediation within a hierarchical structure is, however, non-existent. It is

therefore interesting to investigate how power differences present in a dyad influence mediation effectiveness. Similarly, we wanted to explore the level of perceived power in the dyad and examine if high levels of perceived power as perceived by both parties in a mediation contribute to their perceived effectiveness. As such, we examined how situational power, as perceived by both parties during the mediation (whether asymmetrical or the sum of perceived power), affects mediation effectiveness. We tested our hypotheses using real-life mediation cases involving highly escalated supervisor-subordinate conflicts, which contributed to the external validity of this study (Mitchell, 2012; Poitras, 2012).

The results show that hierarchical position continues to play a role in workplace mediation. Our data confirm that subordinates generally perceive themselves as less powerful than supervisors do during mediation (Hypothesis 1). This is in line with research stressing that a position that affords structural power (a hierarchical position) often corresponds with a subjective experience of power in different contexts (Anicich & Hirsh, 2017; Berdahl & Martorana, 2006; Bombari et al., 2017; Smith & Galinsky, 2010). Even in a mediation context where mediators seek to enhance parties' situational power perceptions and balance power, the effects of formal hierarchy are persistent. Although we found that power perceptions during mediation relate overall positively to perceived mediation effectiveness (Hypothesis 2) and that perceived situational power mediates the relationship between hierarchical position and perceived mediation effectiveness (Hypothesis 3), the experience of power during mediation contributed more to perceptions of mediation effectiveness for subordinates than they did for supervisors (Hypothesis 6). A possible explanation for this interaction effect is the different ways that supervisors and subordinates enter mediation. When in conflict with their superior, subordinates often perceive themselves as having less

control over the situation; they feel more unsafe and insecure (Bollen et al., 2010), feel more dependent on their supervisor for valued resources (Tepper, Moss, De Lockhart, & Carr, 2007), and experience more intense negative emotions (Fitness, 2000). Subordinates often experience more uncertainty over the mediation: it is a relatively new situation for them, whereas supervisors may have experienced mediation more often with other subordinates and may consider it 'part of their job' (Bollen et al., 2010). As a result, supervisors may feel more prepared and in control. Notably, subordinates are the party at risk of losing their job due to the conflict, while their supervisor's position is less likely to be at stake (Uitslag, Kalter, & De Gruil, 2011). This is also visible in our data, with half of the cases ending in the termination of the working relation between supervisor and subordinate, and it is the subordinate who has to leave his or her job. In other words, the consequences are usually more impactful for the subordinates whose influence during the mediation, is a key driver for their evaluation, more so than for supervisors. For supervisors who generally already feel powerful in the work relationship, other factors may be more influential (e.g., the swift pace of the mediation, a quick resolution of the conflict, efficiency or cost reduction). Future research can test whether these factors moderate the relationship between hierarchical position and perceived mediation effectiveness.

We found that power asymmetry is negatively associated with the likelihood of reaching an agreement (Hypothesis 5a) and perceived dyadic mediation effectiveness (Hypothesis 5b). More specifically, power asymmetry was only negatively related to the dyadic satisfaction with the mediation outcome, but not to dyadic satisfaction with the mediation process. This finding indicated the importance of the mediation outcome. It could be that parties, regardless of power asymmetry, are satisfied with the mediation process and the mediator who supports them. This finding is

in line with the results of the study by Kalter and colleagues (2018) where it is the outcome of the mediation that counts in the long-term (see chapter two of this dissertation). The result that power asymmetry is negatively related to perceived mediation effectiveness is consistent with negotiation literature, showing that when conflicting parties have a comparable view of their power position, they are more willing to negotiate and work on an agreement that satisfies both of them (Carnevale & Pruitt, 1992; Rubin et al., 1994; Weitzman & Weitzman, 2014). The present study is, to our knowledge, the first study investigating such power imbalance in the context of mediation, thus contributing to mediation theory. Given the detrimental impact of this imbalance and its prevalence, it is key for mediators to focus on perceptions of power during the mediation and to empower the less powerful party (Domenici & Littlejohn, 2001; Kelly, 1995).

Our data also show that the sum of the parties' power perceptions relates positively to perceptions of mediation effectiveness on the dyad level (Hypothesis 4b). In other words, when parties perceive more power during mediation, their overall perception of mediation effectiveness increases. These results underline that mediators should empower parties such that both feel they can influence the mediation and the other party, with little divergence between the parties in terms of their perceived power. We did not find that the amount of situational power perceived by the parties increased the likelihood of their reaching an agreement. It appears that it is not necessary for the parties to perceive themselves as powerful to reach an agreement as long as their respective power perceptions do not differ substantially.

The present study contributes to the further development of mediation theory. Hierarchical and power differences are often present

during mediation. Our results confirm what mediation scholars already suspected: it is essential for mediators to empower disputants and work with power differences to reach satisfying outcomes (Moore, 2014; Saposnek, 2006; Wiseman & Poitras, 2002). As such, this study provides a better understanding of how the psychological mechanism of perceived power affects mediation effectiveness.

### **Limitations and recommendations for future research**

Our study has some limitations. First, we were unable to establish a causal link between variables because we used a cross-sectional design (Lindell & Whitney, 2001). Immediately following the mediation (within four weeks after the mediation ended), we conducted a survey assessing power perceptions and mediation effectiveness perceptions. These retrospective measurements may have contributed to a recall bias. The parties' emotional states immediately following the mediation may have influenced their perception of themselves as powerful or powerless (Eisenhower, Mathiowetz, & Morganstein, 2011; Keuler & Safer, 1998). They may already have felt some of the consequences of the mediation and may have made new appraisals of the mediation (Levine, Prohaska, Burgess, Rice, & Laulhere, 2001). For example, participants who are satisfied with the mediation agreement may recall themselves as having been more powerful than they actually were. Future research may therefore use a repeated measure or a longitudinal design, for instance, perceived power before and during the mediation process and perceptions of mediation effectiveness after the last mediation session.

Second, when testing Hypotheses 4 and 5, we combined data from both parties to create a dyad score (the sum of perceived power and/or the sum of mediation effectiveness as experienced by the two parties), but did

not distinguish between the relative differences between the parties. In particular, a high score for perceived situational power as experienced by the dyad may reflect either both parties perceiving themselves as equally powerful or one party perceiving himself or herself as very powerful while the other party considers him or her as having limited levels of power. We therefore suggest that future research consider individual differences within a dyad, for example, by focusing on directional asymmetry, exploring how high and low power perceivers in one dyad experience mediation effectiveness (Jehn et al., 2010; Jehn & Rispens, 2008).

Third, the generalizability of our findings is another area of limitation. Whether the findings would have been different in other cultural contexts remains untested. The Netherlands, where we conducted this study, is a relatively low power-distance culture (Hofstede, 2011; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkow, 2010), which may have influenced the parties' perceptions of power and mediation effectiveness. People in this country usually prefer an equal power distribution, and although they may occupy different hierarchical positions, people feel relatively equal in relation to each other (Kolman, Noorderhaven, Hofstede, & Dienes, 2003; Rienties & Tempelaar, 2013). This may have resulted in less extreme power differences compared to higher power-distance cultures, such as Belgium, which in turn may affect perceived mediation effectiveness.

Fourth, we did not take into account in our analyses that supervisor-subordinate dyads are nested within mediators. The reason for doing this was that the data is skewed: 22 mediators in our data-set (76%) mediated only 1 dyad, 5 mediators mediated 2 or 3 dyads (17%) and 2 mediators (7%) mediated 5 or 6 dyads. Arguably, if we would have controlled for the mediator, this skewed distribution would have made our analyses hard to interpret because of a distorted view. In addition, for 6 dyads we could not

link this to mediator data. This large proportion of missing values (12% of all the dyads) in the analyses would have resulted in a loss of valuable information. However, we recommend that future researchers who study mediation dyads take mediations done by the same mediator into account.

Another interesting aspect future research can explore concerns mediators and their interventions. Our study addressed only the disputants' experiences of power during mediation. Future studies can additionally investigate the mediators' perception of the parties' perceived power and determine whether mediators are able to accurately estimate power asymmetries. In chapter four of this dissertation, we demonstrate that mediators are better attuned to supervisors than subordinates: they estimate the emotions of supervisors better than that of subordinates. This may apply to mediators' perceptions of parties' perceived power as well since parties with reduced power show more inhibited social behavior than parties with elevated power and may hide more of what they truly think (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Keltner et al., 2003). This may, in turn, result in expressions and behaviors of subordinates that may be more difficult for mediators to "read". For example, Morrison, See, and Pan's (2015) study found that employees often withhold important suggestions or concerns from their supervisor and often choose to remain silent when they feel they are lacking power. As such, it is worth investigating the contributors to parties' perceptions of power during mediation and the interventions that mediators use to empower parties and handle power asymmetry by observing real mediations, noting which interventions are most effective (Ippolito & Pruitt, 1990; Uitslag et al., 2011).

In addition, it would be interesting to investigate how parties perceive and interpret the conflict with the other party and what their attitudes are in relation to the other party in the conflict. When studying

mediation effectiveness, it is not only important to consider perceived power but also what people do with this power: Are people willing to deploy their power to help the other party? People's tendency may depend on their social value orientation (SVO) (Balliet, Parks, & Joireman, 2009; Van Lange, 1999). This is an individual's preference about how to divide resources between the self and another individual (Messick & McClintock, 1968; Murphy, Ackermann, & Handgraaf, 2011). Negotiation studies have shown that compared to people with an individualistic or competitive orientation, people with a prosocial orientation establish a collaborative climate more easily (e.g., Bogaert, Boone, & Declerck, 2008; De Dreu & Boles, 1998; Weingart, Bennett, & Brett, 1993). They are, for example, more likely to exhibit lower levels of demand and greater levels of concessions and to attribute higher levels of fairness to the other negotiator (De Dreu & Van Lange, 1995). In a mediation context, if a supervisor has a prosocial orientation this may result in a willingness to deploy power to help the subordinate.

### **Practical implications**

Workplace conflicts are often hierarchical (Gayle & Preiss, 1998); consequently, mediators often work with supervisors and their subordinates. As such, our findings provide interesting insights for practice. Mediators should work with power differences by balancing power and/or empowering parties because, when left unchecked, these can impede mediation effectiveness (see also Wiseman & Poitras, 2002). It is evident from our findings that mediators should enhance all parties' perceptions of situational power such that both feel they can influence the mediation and the other party. Notably, our findings suggest that subordinates need special attention. Mediators should thus enhance the power perceptions

of less powerful parties while showing more powerful parties that they are equally important. Mediation studies have shown that maintaining an appearance of neutrality and impartiality is essential for mediators to succeed (Heisterkamp, 2006; Jehn et al., 2010; Welton & Pruitt, 1987). This may prove challenging when intervening and dealing with power relationships between supervisors and subordinates (Astor, 2007; Crowe & Field, 2019). If a mediator creates more opportunities for less powerful parties to voice their concerns, this can impair their image of neutrality and impartiality (Van Gramberg & Teicher, 2006). Although this cannot be directly concluded from our research, transparency can help mediators in such situations, explaining why they empower one of the parties at one point during the mediation or why they do certain interventions (Menkel-Meadow, Porter Love, Schneider, & Moffit, 2019). For example, when it is necessary to speak for a longer time for one of the parties, mediators must explain why this party needs extra attention but must reiterate that doing so does not mean that the other party is excluded and that they also want to hear what the other party has to say later on. Accordingly, transparency may contribute to mediators' multi-partiality (i.e., being there for both parties in the mediation).

Mediators may need to pay special attention to power differences during the entire process, from the intake to the signing of an agreement, and possibly act upon them. This suggests that mediators should also identify the parties' power perceptions during the process. They may do so during the mediation (e.g., using a metaphor of a kite flying in the wind to describe the power relations) or during a (pre-mediation) caucus. Caucuses are private meetings between mediators and disputants during mediation and may be especially helpful for less powerful parties who need a safe environment in which they can express themselves and, consequently, feel free to discuss power (Davis & Salem, 1984; Kelly, 1995;

Swaab & Brett, 2006).

Lastly, this study may not only hold implications for mediations between supervisors and subordinates but also may apply to other mediation contexts in which power asymmetry exists, such as workplace mediation between colleagues or divorce mediation.

### **Conclusion**

This study demonstrated an assumed but empirically ignored aspect of mediation in hierarchical workplace conflicts: supervisors and subordinates perceive different levels of power during mediation, which affects their perceptions of the mediation's effectiveness. This study is innovative because we analyzed data from supervisors and subordinates in the same mediation, which was never done in previous studies on hierarchical workplace conflicts. The key message of this study is that perceived situational power is an important psychological mechanism that influences the effectiveness of a mediation. On a dyadic level, symmetrical and power perceptions relate positively to perceptions of mediation effectiveness, with symmetrical power perceptions increasing the likelihood of reaching an agreement. This contributes to the ultimate aim of mediation, which is to empower parties such that both feel they have influence over the mediation and its process.

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## Appendix

### Measures

#### Perceived situational power

1. I had more influence over the mediation process than the other party.
2. I had more influence over the mediation outcome than the other party.
3. I felt as the more powerful during the mediation.

#### Short-term mediation effectiveness

##### *Satisfaction with the mediation process*

1. The mediation meeting was run without bias.
2. Mediation was run in a neutral and objective manner.
3. The motives and intentions of the mediator were good.
4. The mediator treated me in a consistent and predictable way.

##### *Satisfaction with the mediation outcome*

1. I am happy with the solution we came to.
2. The settlement of the conflict was satisfactory to me.
3. I am satisfied with the outcome we reached.
4. To what extent did the mediation solve the personal conflict?



# Chapter 4

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## *A Matter of Feelings: Mediators' Perceptions of Emotion in Hierarchical Workplace Conflicts*

This chapter has been presented at the annual conference of the International Association for Conflict Management, 7–10 July, 2019, Dublin, Ireland.

*Emotions play a central role in the process of conflict and resolution. For a mediator, it is important to recognize emotions correctly and act upon them. Whether interventions are appropriate depends to a large extent on the ability of mediators to accurately perceive the emotions of conflict parties. Particularly in hierarchical labor conflicts, this can be challenging, since subordinates tend to hide emotions while supervisors tend to express them. In this study, we investigated if subordinates and supervisors differ in their emotional experience during mediation and whether mediators perceive these emotions accurately. To this end, we compared the extent to which disputants experienced certain emotions with the extent to which mediators perceived these emotions. Data were collected through surveys of mediation clients and mediators in hierarchical labor conflicts in the Netherlands. As expected, subordinates experienced a higher level of negative emotions during the mediation than supervisors did. Positive emotions, however, were experienced to a similar extent by both supervisors and subordinates in mediation. Mediators perceived supervisors' emotions more accurately than they did subordinates' emotions. While supervisors' emotions were positively related with mediators' perceptions, this was not the case for subordinates' emotions. Furthermore, mediators were more accurately perceiving supervisors' negative emotions than their positive emotions. Implications for mediation theory and practice are discussed.*

## **Introduction**

Conflicting parties often experience emotions during mediation. One of the factors contributing to a successful mediation is that mediators acknowledge these emotions and set up a process to manage them (Bollen & Euwema, 2014; Jones & Bodtker, 2001; Ladd & Blanchfield, 2016). This could pave the way for conflict transformation and parties' positive

evaluation of the mediation (Jameson, Bodtker, Porch, & Jordan, 2009; Katz Jameson, Sohan, & Hodge, 2014). In order to effectively handle emotions, mediators need to be accurate in perceiving them. That is, mediators perceive emotions as closely as possible as experienced by the parties themselves. The less accurate, the more they might intervene ineffectively, not matching parties' emotional needs. However, are mediators able to achieve this? Several studies show that people have difficulties to accurately noting and 'reading' emotions, though some are more 'emotionally intelligent' than others (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002; Kelly & Kaminskienė, 2016; Remland, 2016; Scherer & Ceschi, 2000). Mediators may be no exception to this (Capelos & Smilovitz, 2008; Charkoudian, De Ritis, Buck, & Wilson, 2009; Jameson, Bodtker, & Linker, 2010; Jones & Bodtker, 2001; Zariski, 2010). Particularly in the context of hierarchical labor conflicts, emotion recognition can be challenging for mediators since subordinates tend to hide even strong emotions, while supervisors tend to express emotions, however small or limited they may be (Bombari, Schmid Mast, & Bachmann, 2017; Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, & Liljenquist, 2008). This can lead to misinterpretation of parties' emotions by the mediator. For example, if mediators are better at recognizing supervisors' emotions because these are more easily expressed, mediators may develop interventions that are more aligned with the supervisors' needs and wishes. This can be particularly problematic since research shows that emotion acknowledgement by mediators is more important for subordinates to perceive the mediation as effective than it is for supervisors (Bollen & Euwema, 2014). To date, most studies of emotions in mediation have focused on the importance of addressing negative emotions (Jameson et al., 2010; Jones & Bodtker, 2001; Jones, 2006; Picard & Siltanen, 2013), with few investigating disputants' broader experience of emotions in mediation or whether mediators are able to accurately

perceive these emotions. In addition, most studies are limited to negative emotions, such as anger (Bollen & Euwema, 2014; Fitness, 2000; Williams & Hinshaw, 2018). This study seeks to fill this gap by investigating both positive and negative emotions.

Previous researchers differentiate between expressing and experiencing emotions since people sometimes do not show the emotions they are feeling or may fake an emotional reaction (Davis, 1995; Gibson & Callister, 2010; Vuori, Vuori, & Huy, 2018). For example, a subordinate might hide her anger because she is afraid of repercussions. For mediators, it is important to address expressed emotions, genuine or not, because of their impact on the conflict and the mediation process (Poitras & Raines, 2013). The focus of this study, however, is parties' emotional experience. According to Jones (2006) it is the *experience* of parties' emotions that mediators should identify, otherwise they might miss essential information about the conflict. One important task of a mediator is to help parties focus on the underlying interests signaled by the experience of emotions (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 2011). Furthermore, it is the *experience* of negative emotions that should be addressed primarily because of their possible hampering of rational thinking (Clore & Huntsinger, 2007; Huntsinger, Isbell, & Clore, 2014), standing in the way of a satisfying mediation agreement (Jones & Bodtger, 2001). Four questions guide the current study: (a) Do supervisors and subordinates experience emotions differently during mediation? (b) How accurately do mediators perceive emotions experienced by the conflict parties? (c) Is there a difference in the quality of mediators' perception of subordinate and supervisor emotions? (d) Does the perceptual accuracy differ for positive and negative emotions?

### **The importance of emotion recognition in mediation**

Emotions are “episodic, relatively short-term, biologically-based patterns of perception, experience, physiology, action, and communication that occur in response to specific physical and social challenges and opportunities” (Keltner & Gross, 1999, p. 468). They prepare people for action when they are threatened, in the case of negative emotions, or when they see opportunities, in the case of positive emotions (Frijda, 1986; Niedenthal & Ric, 2017; Oatley, Keltner, & Jenkins, 2006; Williams & Hinshaw, 2018). Mediators often observe many different kinds of negative emotions (Lieberman, 2006). This may be fear of seeing the other conflict party (“I have to see my manager at the mediation table? Last time I saw her, she was shouting at me!”), anger (“He called in sick when he knew that our company was in trouble!”), or sadness (“Why did he fire me? I thought I meant more to him.”).

Mediation scholars have been asking whether addressing negative emotions is necessary during mediation (Jones & Bodtker, 2001). On the one hand, it can be argued that negative emotions should be put aside because they can complicate the mediation process and result in mediators losing control of the behavior of disputants (Kelly & Kaminskienė, 2016). On the other hand, emotions signal what really matters to parties (Fisher et al., 2011; Goldberg & Shaw, 2007; Kals, Thiel, & Freund, 2016). Recent research on mediation effectiveness supports the latter perspective, indicating that in hierarchical labor conflicts, mediators should acknowledge negative emotions in order to reach positive outcomes (Bollen & Euwema, 2014). The opportunity to express negative emotions in a safe setting is an element of giving voice, which contributes to perceptions of fairness (Judge, Scott, & Ilies, 2006; Lind & Tyler, 1988; Shapiro, Buttner, & Barry, 1994) and makes people feel listened to and understood (Bruneau & Saxe, 2012; Gramling

et al., 2016; Oishi, Akimoto, Richards, & Suh, 2013; Tjosvold, 1984). This might be especially important for subordinates who feel less heard and less acknowledged at work, compared to supervisors (Fitness, 2000).

In addition, it is important for mediators to pay attention to negative emotions because, if not addressed properly, they can hinder the mediation process. Parties experiencing strong negative emotions can feel overwhelmed, sometimes leading to emotional “flooding” (Bodtker & Katz Jameson, 2001; Nair, 2008) hampering their rational, cognitive functioning (Clare & Huntsinger, 2007; Huntsinger et al., 2014; Jones & Bodtker, 2001). This interferes with the ability to listen to the other party and to engage in problem-solving behaviors (Druckman & Olekalns, 2008).

However, it is not only negative emotions that are displayed during mediation. Parties might also show positive emotions, such as happiness (“I am happy that we are finally talking to each other”) or enthusiasm (“I feel excited because I see a lot of new opportunities”). Mediators should acknowledge and encourage these emotions as these can foster cooperation and facilitate deal-making (Carnevale, 2008; Fisher & Shapiro, 2005; Grandey, 2000). The “broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions” (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson & Joiner, 2018; Johnson & Fredrickson, 2005) states that positive emotions help people to form new skills over time, by broadening their awareness and encouraging novel, varied, and exploratory thoughts and actions. Negotiation research shows that positive emotions are important as they create a positive climate in which parties are more willing to listen to one another and to come to an agreement (Fisher & Shapiro, 2005). More specifically, they push parties to be more future-focused, to invest more in the relationship, and to perceive their counterpart as more favorable, which may even generate positive emotions in the other party (Barsade, 2002; Kopelman, Rosette,

& Thompson, 2006; Olekalns & Druckman, 2014). As mediation can be seen as a guided negotiation by a third party, a mediator should create an environment which offers room for positive emotions in order to work with them.

### **Hierarchical position and emotion experience during mediation**

Supervisors and subordinates often begin the mediation on different footings because of their different formal position (Bollen, Euwema, & Müller, 2010; Bollen, Ittner, & Euwema, 2012). Supervisors usually are more powerful than their subordinates (Euwema, 1992) and more able to inflict costs or withhold benefits (Galinsky, Rus, & Lammers, 2011; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). Subordinates are thus usually more severely affected by the conflict because they have more to lose (Eatough & Chang, 2018) leading to feelings of uncertainty and vulnerability when entering the mediation (Bollen et al., 2010).

As numerous researchers point out, power exerts a strong influence on people's feelings, thoughts, and actions in general (for a review, see Guinote, 2017), particularly in times of conflict (Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2006; Fitness, 2000). When in conflict with low-power parties, the high-power parties, usually the supervisor in a hierarchical conflict, tend to behave in a domineering manner, whereas low-power parties' actions are restricted (Coleman & Ferguson, 2014; Van de Vliert, Euwema, & Huismans, 1995). This can be explained by the approach/inhibition theory of power (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Keltner, et al., 2003), which posits that powerful individuals are approach-motivated, focusing more on reward, using more automatic cognition, and being more likely to behave in an unconstrained manner. In contrast, people who are lower in power and more inhibition motivated, tend to perceive situations as

more threatening, use more controlled cognition, and act with more social constraint. This theory predicts how power influences one's emotional life. More specifically, it states that people with power are more likely to experience positive emotions, such as happiness and pride, while people without power are more likely to experience negative emotions, such as fear or sadness (Berdahl & Martorana, 2006; Keltner et al., 2003; Langner & Keltner, 2008). Previous research confirms this (Berdahl & Martorana, 2006; Bombari et al., 2017). Thus, our first hypothesis is:

*Hypothesis 1:* a) Subordinates experience a higher level of negative emotions during the mediation than supervisors do and b) Supervisors experience a higher level of positive emotions during mediation than subordinates do.

### **Accuracy of emotion recognition in hierarchical workplace mediations**

Jones (2006) suggests that mediators need three skills in order to work with emotions: (a) to recognize the emotional experience of a disputant; (b) to help the disputant to understand their own emotional experiences; and (c) to help the disputant to reappraise the emotion by reframing the problem. In this paper, we focus on the first skill. A first crucial step toward recognizing emotions is the analysis of expressive cues, such as facial expressions or body posture, which happens in a quick and automatic manner (Elfenbein, 2007; Neumann & Strack, 2000). For this, the mediator must take the larger social context into account (Barrett, Lindquist, & Gendron, 2007; Barrett, Mesquita, & Gendron, 2011; Hess, Blaison, & Kafetsios, 2016). Furthermore, interpreting emotions

is influenced by the perceiver's knowledge of the situation, culture, social norms, and display rules (Kayyal, Widen, & Russell, 2015; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Consequently, emotion recognition depends also on the perceiver's interpretive lens (Elfenbein, 2007). All this implies that accurately perceiving conflict parties' experienced emotions is challenging, especially when mixed or low intensity emotions are involved (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002; Scherer & Ceschi, 2000; Thompson, Medvec, Seiden, & Kopelman, 2001) or when they strategically fake, moderate, or mask emotions (Clark, Pataki, & Carver, 1996; Wong, Tschan, Messerli, & Semmer, 2013). In hierarchical labor conflicts, accurately recognizing the experience of emotions may be even more challenging since subordinates and supervisors differ in their emotional expressions (cf. the approach/inhibition theory of power). In other words, subordinates are less likely to show their emotions than supervisors are, thus recognizing subordinates' emotions may be more difficult for mediators. Consequently, our second hypothesis is as follows:

*Hypothesis 2:* Mediators in hierarchical workplace conflicts perceive emotions of supervisors more accurately than they do of subordinates.

Following this line of reasoning, we suggest that mediators more accurately perceive parties' negative emotions than their positive emotions. From an evolutionary perspective, people are more sensitive to negative than positive emotions because such emotions imply a direct threat and thus require an immediate response (Cosmides & Tooby, 2000; Frijda, 1986; Izard, 2013). In addition, numerous studies have provided evidence of a "negativity bias." People in general give more attention and weight to negative stimuli than to positive stimuli (Bebbington, MacLeod,

Ellison, & Fay, 2016; Carretié, Mercado, Tapia, & Hinojosa, 2001; Ito & Cacioppo, 2005; Rozin & Royzman, 2001). Consequently, we propose that mediators are more attuned to the experience of negative emotions than to positive emotions. For this reason, our third hypothesis is:

*Hypothesis 3:* Mediators in hierarchical workplace conflicts more accurately perceive the experience of parties' negative emotions than positive emotions.

## **Methodology**

### **Data collection and respondents**

In cooperation with the MfN (Dutch Mediation Federation<sup>5</sup>), we approached workplace mediators for this research. Those who agreed to work with us, asked supervisors and subordinates in five of their successive mediations to participate. Both mediator and parties received a digital questionnaire by email immediately after the final session (within a maximum of four weeks), between January 2011 and July 2014. The questionnaire included several measures to assess general information about the conflict and the mediation, including the experience of positive and negative emotions. The mediator also completed a questionnaire on the same topics, assessing supervisors' and subordinates' emotions. To avoid selection bias on the part of the mediators, all parties in successive mediations were asked to participate. We also allowed a maximum of five mediations per mediator in our data set to prevent a sample bias. Participation was confidential and voluntary.

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<sup>5</sup> The MfN is the Dutch national standard-setting and quality assurance platform for the mediation practice in the Netherlands.

## Sample

In total, 168 parties and their mediators stemming from 84 mediations received questionnaires. Of these, 41 supervisors (28 male and 13 female), 55 subordinates (24 male and 31 female) and their mediators (17 male and 16 female) returned the surveys, giving a 57% (mediation clients) and 100% (mediators) response rate. In total, we received data from 67 mediations. Most mediators filled out a survey for 1 or 2 mediations (85%) while a smaller percentage of mediators sent us data from 3 or more mediations (15%). In 60% of the returned questionnaires (filled out by subordinates or supervisors), parties were involved in the same mediation. In 40% of the mediations either supervisor or subordinate returned the survey. The final sample size of our study was  $N = 192$ : 41 supervisors and the mediator ( $N = 82$ ) plus 55 subordinates and the mediator ( $N = 110$ ). However, we combined data from supervisors, subordinates and the mediators differently to test our hypotheses. For example, to test Hypothesis 1 we combined data from supervisors and subordinates ( $N = 96$ ), whereas for testing Hypothesis 2 we combined data from either supervisors and their mediators ( $N = 82$ ) or subordinates and their mediators ( $N = 110$ ). On average, supervisors were 47.05 years ( $SD = 7.18$ ) and subordinates 49.55 years ( $SD = 9.22$ ). Approximately 90% of the supervisors had a higher educational degree, of which 40% had a university degree. Some 70% of the subordinates had a higher educational degree, of which 20% had a university degree. The average age of the mediators was 52.93 years ( $SD = 8.00$ ). The mediators all had a higher educational degree, of which 60% had a university degree. They were experienced, with 73% having mediated for more than five years and 52% conducting more than 20 mediations per year and 20% conducting 5-10 per year. All of these respondents (mediators and clients) were Dutch. The data show that the conflicts tended to be highly escalated as perceived by

mediation clients, with an average escalation level of 4.03 ( $SD = 1.08$ ) on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 5, reflecting a very high level of escalation. In 80% of all cases, the parties reached an agreement. This is in line with earlier research, indicating that agreement rates for (workplace) mediation vary from 60 to 80% (McDermott, Jose, Obar, Polkinghorn, & Bowers, 2002; Poitras & Le Tareau, 2009). In 40% of cases, the supervisor and subordinate ended their working relationship as an element of the mediation agreement (an exit mediation).

### **Measures**

*Hierarchical position.* In this study, hierarchical position is operationalized as the position of authority or certain formal position in relation to the other party in the mediation (Finkelstein, 1992) (“What is your position in the conflict?”). The possible categories were as follows: “employer”, “employee”, “Other”. “Employee” refers to subordinates and “employer” to supervisors. Subordinates were coded as 0 and supervisors as 1.

*Mediation clients' emotions.* We created a “Positive Emotions Scale” and a “Negative Emotions Scale” based on the existing Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) developed by Watson, Clark, and Tellegen (1988) to measure the emotions of mediation clients. To measure positive emotions, we asked the parties to indicate the extent to which they felt happy and enthusiastic during the mediation (two items) ( $r = .72$ ) (“To what extent did you feel happy during the mediation”). To measure negative emotions, we asked the parties to indicate the extent to which they experienced anger, fear and sadness (three items) ( $\alpha = .78$ ) (“To what extent did you feel angry during the mediation?”). We coded the responses to the different items on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all*; 5 = *extremely*), whether they were experiencing specific emotions.

*Perception of parties' emotions by mediators.* Mediators received surveys similar to those of the clients, asking them to indicate the extent to which they perceived the positive (two items) and negative (three items) emotions of subordinates and supervisors. The survey asked them to measure the supervisors' levels of happiness and enthusiasm during mediation (two items) ("The supervisor was happy during the mediation") ( $r = .79$ ), and those of the subordinates ( $r = .77$ ). The survey also asked respondents to indicate the levels of anger, fear and sadness experienced by supervisors (three items ( $\alpha = .80$ ) ("The supervisor was angry during the mediation") and subordinates ( $\alpha = .58$ ) on a 5-point Likert scale.

### **Data analyses**

Data management and analyses were executed using SPSS 24.0. We used MANOVA analyses and hierarchical regression analyses to test our hypotheses. As the experience of emotions may depend on the gender of the clients (0 = *male*, 1 = *female*), the escalation level of the initial conflict (on a 5-point Likert scale: 1 = *not at all*, 5 = *to a great extent*), mediation outcome (0 = *no agreement*, 1 = *agreement*) and (non)-exit mediation (0 = *non-exit*, 1 = *exit*), we controlled for these variables (Bollen & Euwema, 2014).

### **Results**

Table 4.1 shows mean scores, standard deviations, and correlations among control and research variables. Figure 4.1 provides the results for hierarchical position, experience of emotion, and mediators' perceptions of emotion.

Hypothesis 1 states that (a) subordinates experience a higher level of negative emotions during the mediation than supervisors do, and (b) supervisors experience a higher level of positive emotions during the mediation than subordinates do. The results show that, as expected, hierarchical position is significantly related to the experience of negative emotions during mediation ( $r = -.54, p < .001$ ). However, this does not apply to the experience of positive emotions ( $r = -.11, p > .05$ ). This is confirmed by a MANOVA analysis of negative emotions  $F[1, 86] = 24.71, p < .001$  and positive emotions  $F[1,86] = 1.44, p > .05$ . Subordinates significantly experience a higher level of negative emotions during mediation than supervisors do ( $M = 2.69, SD = 1.10$  versus  $M = 1.52, SD = .61$ ), including when controlling for the clients' gender  $F[1,79] = 1.68, p > .05$ , conflict escalation  $F[1,79] = 6.47, p < .05$ , mediation outcome (agreement or not)  $F[1,79] = .01, p > .05$  or (non)-exit (exit or not)  $F[1,79] = 2.59, p > .05$ . However, supervisors do not experience a higher level of positive emotions during mediation than subordinates do ( $M = 1.71, SD = .93$  versus  $M = 1.93, SD = 1.13$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 1 is partly confirmed for (a) but not for (b).

In Table 4.2 (supervisors) and Table 4.3 (subordinates), means, standard deviations and intercorrelations among research variables are displayed for independent emotions. Figure 4.2 provides the results for hierarchical position, experience of independent emotions and mediators' perceptions of independent emotions.

Testing of the relationship between hierarchical position and the independent emotions reveals that the negative emotions and the positive emotion of enthusiasm are significantly related to hierarchical position: anger ( $r = -.44, p < .001$ ), fear ( $r = .51, p < .001$ ), sadness ( $r = .51, p < .001$ ) and enthusiasm ( $r = -.21, p < .05$ ). There is no significant relationship

between hierarchical position and the experience of happiness ( $r = .01, p > .05$ ). MANOVA analysis confirms these results for the negative emotions of anger  $F[1,82] = 13.36, p < .001$ , fear  $F[1,82] = 11.43, p < .001$  and sadness  $F[1,82] = 14.20, p < .001$ , but not for the positive emotion of enthusiasm  $F[1,82] = 3.36, p > .05$ . Subordinates significantly experience higher levels of negative emotions than supervisors do: anger ( $M = 2.98, SD = 1.34$  versus  $M = 1.80, SD = 1.04$ ), fear ( $M = 2.19, SD = 1.32$  versus  $M = 1.15, SD = .53$ ), and sadness ( $M = 2.89, SD = 1.41$  versus  $M = 1.59, SD = .94$ ), even when controlling for the clients' gender, conflict escalation, mediation outcome (agreement or not) or (non)-exit (exit or not). Subordinates and supervisors do not experience significant different levels of positive emotions: happiness ( $M = 1.73, SD = 1.12$  versus  $M = 1.74, SD = .97$ ) and enthusiasm ( $M = 2.19, SD = 1.32$  versus  $M = 1.68, SD = 1.05$ ).

Hypothesis 2 states that mediators in hierarchical workplace conflicts perceive the positive and negative emotions of supervisors more accurately than they do those of subordinates. The results show, as expected, that the positive emotions reported by supervisors are positively related to mediator recognition of these emotions ( $r = .40, p < .05$ ) (see Table 4.1). This also applies to negative emotions ( $r = .58, p < .001$ ). Hierarchical regression analyses confirm these findings for positive emotions ( $\beta = .41, p < .05$ ), including when controlling for gender of the clients ( $\beta = .03, p > .05$ ), conflict escalation level ( $\beta = .30, p > .05$ ), mediation outcome (agreement or not) ( $\beta = .18, p > .05$ ) and (non)-exit (exit or not) ( $\beta = -.11, p > .05$ ). We also see that negative emotions self-reported by supervisors are positively related to mediators' recognition of these emotions ( $\beta = .44, p = .001$ ). This is also true when controlling for gender of the clients ( $\beta = -.11, p > .05$ ), escalation level ( $\beta = .37, p < .01$ ), mediation outcome (agreement or not) ( $\beta = -.40, p = .001$ ) and (non)-exit (exit or not) ( $\beta = -.08, p > .05$ ). The results show that there is no significant

relationship between the positive emotions reported by subordinates and mediator recognition of these emotions ( $r = -.01, p > .05$ ) (see Table 4.1). This also applies to negative emotions ( $r = .09, p > .05$ ). Hierarchical regression analyses confirm these findings for both positive emotions ( $\beta = -.05, p > .05$ ) and negative emotions ( $\beta = .11, p > .05$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 2 is supported. When we consider the emotions as experienced independently by supervisors and as perceived by mediators (Table 4.2), we see that four of the five emotions are positively related to mediator recognition of them: happiness ( $r = .39, p < .05$ ), anger ( $r = .40, p < .05$ ), fear ( $r = .47, p < .01$ ), and sadness ( $r = .47, p < .01$ ). There is no significant relationship between supervisor enthusiasm and mediator perception of this ( $r = .25, p > .05$ ). Hierarchical regression analyses show that supervisors' experience of happiness ( $\beta = .45, p < .01$ ), fear ( $\beta = .36, p < .05$ ) and sadness ( $\beta = .37, p < .05$ ) are related to mediator perceptions of these emotions. There is no significant relationship however between supervisor anger and mediator anger perception ( $\beta = .21, p > .05$ ) after controlling for gender, escalation level, agreement and exit. Similarly, there is no relationship between supervisor enthusiasm and mediator perception of this ( $\beta = .26, p > .05$ ). When looking at the emotions as experienced independently by subordinates and in terms of their perception by mediators (Table 4.3), we see that none of the five emotions are related to mediator perceptions of that particular emotion: happiness ( $r = .13, p > .05$ ), enthusiasm ( $r = .26, p > .05$ ), anger ( $r = .21, p > .05$ ), fear ( $r = .05, p > .05$ ) and sadness ( $r = .29, p > .05$ ). Hierarchical regression analyses confirm that there is no relationship between the emotions as experienced by subordinates and the perceptions of this by mediators: happiness ( $\beta = -.15, p > .05$ ), enthusiasm ( $\beta = .23, p > .05$ ), anger ( $\beta = .19, p > .05$ ), fear ( $\beta = .07, p > .05$ ), and sadness ( $\beta = .29, p < .05$ ).

Hypothesis 3 states that mediators in hierarchical workplace

**Table 4.1**  
*Means (M), standard deviations (SD), and correlations between parties' positive emotions, negative emotions, mediator emotion perception and control variables (N = 192)*

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Gender clients	.46	.50													
2. Conflict escalation	4.03	1.08	.11												
3. Agreement	.82	.39	.15	.02											
4. (Non)-exit mediation	.40	.49	.07	.01	.32**										
5. Pos. emotion sub.	1.93	1.13	-.06	.10	-.05	-.02									
6. Neg. emotion sub.	2.69	1.10	.11	.29*	.09	.32*	-.27								
7. M. perc. sub. pos. emotion	1.97	1.08	-.11	.33*	.29	-.26	-.01	-.12							
8. M. perc. sub. neg. emotion	3.07	.96	.08	.10	.11	.03	.10	.09	.06						
9. Pos. emotion sup.	1.71	.93	-.04	-.21	.21	-.30	--	--	--	--					
10. Neg. emotion sup.	1.52	.61	.13	.35*	-.09	.09	--	--	--	--	-.17				
11. M. perc. sup. pos. emotion	2.01	1.25	.02	.26	.15	-.25	--	--	--	--	.40*	.06			
12. M. perc. sup. neg. emotion	1.93	1.05	-.04	.55**	-.51**	-.01	--	--	--	--	-.08	.58**	.33		
13. Perc. situational power	2.69	.85	-.17	-.16	.09	.02	.28	-.17	.23	-.06	-.11	-.08	-.36*	-.19	
14. Perc. mediation effect.	3.77	.74	-.06	-.10	.38**	-.05	.49**	-.27	.44**	.03	.53**	-.28	.37*	-.21	0.45**

\*p ≤ .05, \*\*p ≤ .01, \*\*\*p ≤ .001 (two-tailed)

conflicts more accurately perceive negative emotions than positive emotions. Our findings show that, as expected, mediators more accurately perceive negative emotions of supervisors ( $r = .58, p < .01$ ) compared to positive emotions ( $r = .40, p < .05$ ). We do not find any significant relation between mediators' perception and self-reports of subordinates' negative emotions ( $r = .09, p > .05$ ) neither positive emotions ( $r = -.01, p > .05$ ).

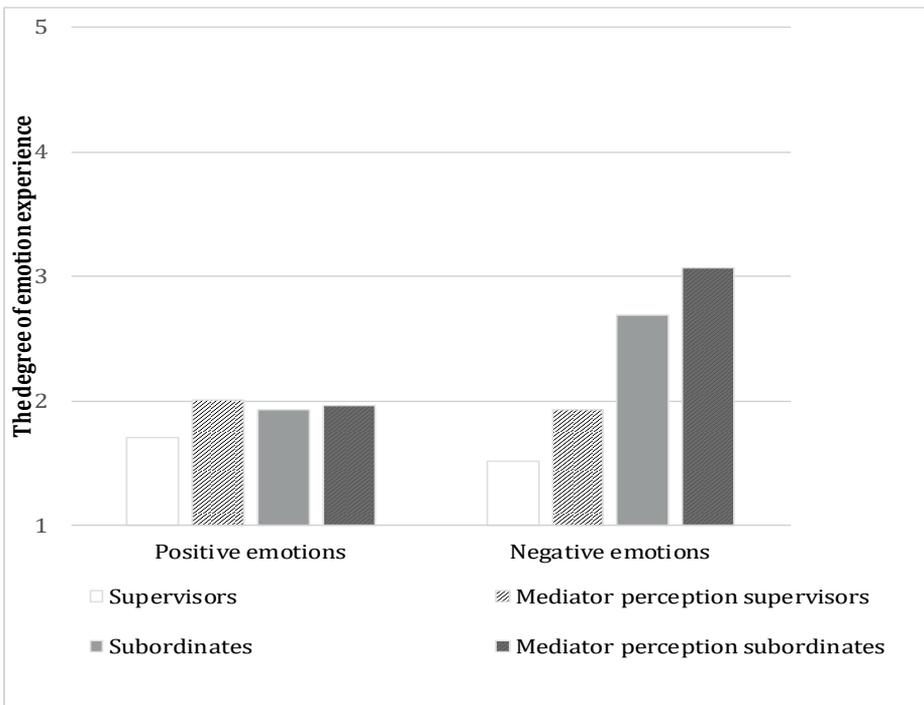


Figure 4.1. Hierarchical position, experience of emotion, and mediators' perceptions of emotion.

Table 4.2

*Means (M), standard deviations (SD), and correlations between supervisors' emotions happiness, enthusiasm, anger, fear, sadness and mediator emotion perception (N = 82)*

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Happiness supervisor	1.74	.97									
2. Enthusiasm supervisor	1.68	1.05	.69**								
3. Anger supervisor	1.80	1.04	-.07	-.16							
4. Fear supervisor	1.15	.53	-.18	-.19	.29						
5. Sadness supervisor	1.59	.94	.11	-.22	.22	.34*					
6. M. perception happiness	1.94	1.39	.39*	.25	.00	.00	.07				
7. M. perception enthusiasm	2.14	1.22	.39*	.25	.10	.07	.11	.83**			
8. M. perception anger	2.47	1.25	-.24	-.24	.40*	.45**	.24	.11	.20		
9. M. perception fear	1.73	1.24	.05	-.05	.28	.47**	.42*	.47**	.37*	.54**	
10. M. perception sadness	1.69	1.26	.15	.07	.22	.59**	.47**	.25	.16	.50**	.67**

\*p ≤ .05, \*\*p ≤ .01, \*\*\*p ≤ .001 (two-tailed)

Table 4.3  
*Means (M), standard deviations (SD), and correlations between subordinates' emotions happiness, enthusiasm, anger, fear, sadness and mediator emotion perception (N = 110)*

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Happiness subordinate	1.73	1.12									
2. Enthusiasm subordinate	2.19	1.32	.71**								
3. Anger subordinate	2.98	1.34	-.25	-.27							
4. Fear subordinate	2.19	1.32	-.11	-.04	.42**						
5. Sadness subordinate	2.89	1.41	.24	.29*	.45**	.56**					
6. M. perception happiness	1.93	1.20	-.13	.01	-.06	-.15	-.21				
7. M. perception enthusiasm	1.96	1.13	.07	.26	.09	-.11	-.14	.72**			
8. M. perception anger	3.38	1.13	.07	-.03	.21	-.14	-.12	.03	.32*		
9. M. perception fear	2.89	1.35	.09	.12	.06	-.05	.09	-.07	-.02	.30*	
10. M. perception sadness	3.04	1.30	.03	.09	.10	.22	.29	-.01	.15	.23	.41**

\*p ≤ .05, \*\*p ≤ .01, \*\*\*p ≤ .001 (two-tailed)

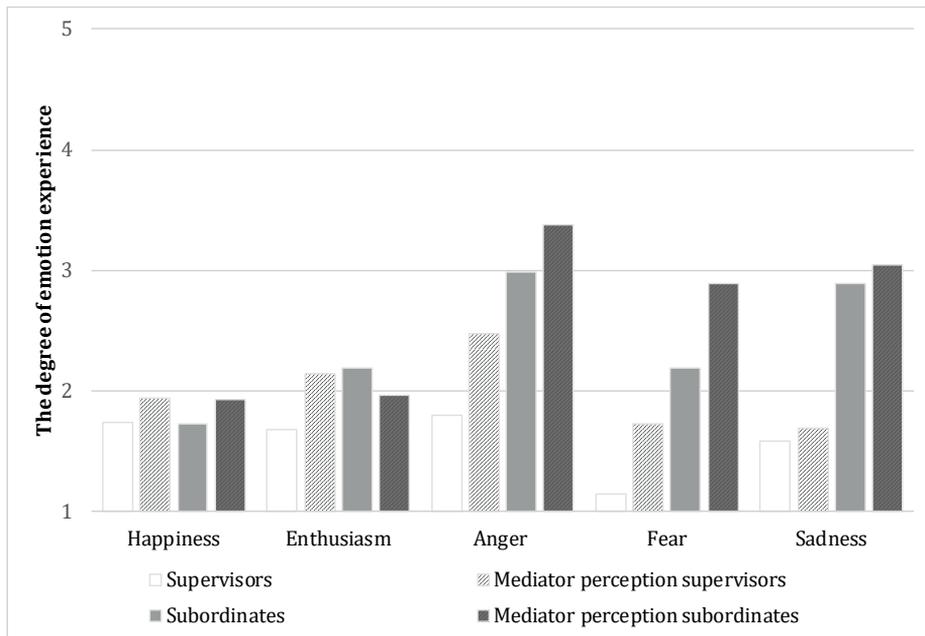


Figure 4.2. Hierarchical position, experience of independent emotions and mediators' perceptions of independent emotions.

## Discussion

Mediation is widely used to constructively resolve workplace conflicts, including hierarchical workplace conflict (Bollen & Euwema, 2013; Kalter, Bollen, & Euwema, 2018; Munduate, Bollen, & Euwema, 2016). In this study, we examined if supervisors and subordinates differ in their emotional experience during mediation, the extent to which mediators are able to correctly perceive positive and negative emotions, and whether they more efficiently perceive negative rather than positive emotions.

Our study reveals that parties who occupy different hierarchical positions have a different emotional experience during mediation. More specifically, we found that subordinates experience higher levels of negative emotions such as anger, fear, and sadness than the supervisors do. These outcomes are in line with the approach/inhibition theory of

power (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Keltner et al., 2003). In contrast to expectations, supervisors and subordinates experienced the same levels of positive emotions during mediation. A possible explanation might be that mediation is about resolving disputes (Moore, 2014). If both supervisor and subordinate feel that a resolution of the problem is at hand, they are likely to experience positive emotions as a result. In addition, subordinates may feel empowered by the mediation process (Bush & Folger, 2004), resulting in positive emotions.

Moreover, our study indicates that mediators more accurately perceive the emotions of supervisors than those of subordinates. This is true for both positive and negative emotions. While mediator perceptions of supervisors' happiness, sadness, and fear are in line with the supervisors' own experiences, there is no significant relationship between mediator perceptions and subordinates' emotions. These findings indicate that hierarchy continues to play a role in workplace mediations. Not only do supervisors and subordinates experience the mediation and its effects differently (e.g., Bollen et al., 2010, 2012; Kalter et al., 2018), it suggests that also mediators are indirectly affected by the hierarchical position parties occupy. The fact that mediators are less able to correctly perceive subordinates' emotions could be due to subordinates' cautions in showing their emotions as predicted by the approach/inhibition theory of power (Keltner et al., 2003). It is striking that mediators generally estimate parties' emotions higher on a scale from 1 to 5 than parties do themselves. Possibly the self-report measures of parties' emotion experiences, may have resulted in minimizing actual emotions because parties wanted to present themselves favorably (Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002; Van de Mortel, 2008) or because mediators perceive the mediation as more of an emotional process than parties do and therefore interpret emotional cues as more "intense" (Elfenbein, 2007).

Finally, our study shows that mediators more accurately perceive negative emotions than positive emotions of supervisors. This may reflect the fact that people more often attend to negative stimuli than to positive stimuli (Carretié et al., 2001), indicating a 'negativity bias' (Huang & Luo, 2006; Rozin & Royzman, 2001).

### **Strengths, limitations, and avenues for future research**

The present study adds to the research on mediation in several ways. First, previous studies have mainly focused on the importance of addressing emotions (Bollen & Euwema, 2014; Jones, 2006; Picard & Siltanen, 2013). However, this study goes considerably further than that by investigating parties' emotional experiences during mediation and mediator perceptions of these emotions.

Second, in contrast to previous research, concentrating on anger (Bollen & Euwema, 2014; Jones & Bodtker, 2001), our study also considered other negative emotions, apart from anger, such as fear and sadness, that are important for mediators to acknowledge. Also, the positive emotions of happiness and enthusiasm were part of our research since they play an important role in mediation by fostering cooperation and deal-making (Carnevale, 2008; Fisher & Shapiro, 2005; Grandey, 2000; Kopelman et al., 2006; Olekalns & Druckman, 2014).

Third, although there have been studies on mediator perception (e.g., Mareschal, 2005; Swaab & Brett, 2007), this is the first study that involved mediators and at least one of the parties in a mediation. This allowed us to look at the degree of similarity between mediators' perceptions of parties' emotions and parties' emotion experiences.

In addition, there are some reasons to exercise caution when

interpreting the findings of this study. Our use of self-report measures raises concerns about social desirable answers (Kuncel & Tellegen, 2009; Paulhus, 1991). Supervisors and subordinates may have presented themselves in a favorable light. Studies on organizational display rules show that maintaining professionalism is central to appropriate emotion management (Flam, 2002; Kramer & Hess, 2002). For example, supervisors may have minimized their experience of emotions that did not align with the display rules for their hierarchical position, such as fear or sadness. In this respect, also a selection bias may have occurred (Collier, Mahoney, & Seawright, 2004). Subordinates who experienced strong emotions may have wanted to participate in our study in order to vent. Conversely, some supervisors who felt strong emotions may have been embarrassed and opted out of participation.

Furthermore, we asked mediation clients about their emotion experience in retrospect. Although we contacted them immediately (within four weeks) after the last mediation session to assess their emotions during the mediation process, the whole mediation could have been over several months. As such, there may have been a considerable time lag between experiencing and assessing emotions, resulting in a recall bias. It is therefore possible that participants' responses were affected by their beliefs of how they should have felt, rather than how they actually did feel (Barclay, Scarlicki, & Pugh, 2005; Robinson & Clore, 2002). To overcome these methodological limitations, researchers should include (quasi-) experimental studies or observational research.

Additionally, we have only considered disputants' emotional experience, and not their emotional expression which may or may not correspond (Davis, 1995; Gibson & Callister, 2010; Gross & Levenson, 1993; Tamir, Mitchel, & Gross, 2008). Discrepancies between felt and

expressed emotions may have a negative effect on the mediation. Past research shows that faking emotions has negative consequences for one's authenticity (Côté, 2005) and credibility (Andrade & Ho, 2009). Studies of negotiation, for instance, find that faking anger creates mistrust and reduces cooperative behavior from counterparts (Campagna, Mislin, Kong, & Bottom, 2016; Côté, Hideg, & Van Kleef, 2013). Also masking emotions can have detrimental effects as it could lead to conflict escalation and dysfunctional behaviors (Vuori et al., 2018). Future research could explore whether there is a discrepancy between felt and expressed emotions and how this affects the mediation. Relatedly, a question remains if mediators are able to detect faked or masked emotions.

### **Practical implications**

Mediating hierarchical workplace mediations can be challenging. The results of the present study illustrate that in this type of mediation subordinates experience more negative emotions than supervisors. However, mediators are more able to accurately perceive emotions of supervisors. For this reason, our results suggest that mediators should pay special attention to the exploration of subordinates' emotions. This is important since a satisfying mediation agreement is more likely if a mediator addresses underlying emotions (Jones, 2006; Jones & Bodtker, 2001). One way to achieve this is through a pre-caucus before the joint face-to-face session or the implementation of a caucus during the mediation (Charkoudian et al., 2009; Poitras & Raines, 2013; Swaab & Brett, 2007). This might be particularly beneficial to subordinates who feel restrained in showing their emotions (Keltner et al., 2003). A one-to-one meeting may provide them with a safe environment in which to express how they feel (Bollen & Euwema, 2014). Although this cannot be directly concluded

from our research, this also suggests that it is important that mediators verify assumptions about perceived emotions since our research shows that they do not accurately perceive subordinates' emotional experiences. In this respect, they might ask clarification questions such as "you are still angry, is that correct?" or "how would that make you feel" to determine whether they are correctly reading emotions (Jones & Bodtger, 2001; Kalf & Uitslag, 2007). Furthermore, although our research did not take into account if a mediation was conducted by one mediator or two, mediators may benefit from a co-mediator being present during the sessions (Love & Stulberg, 1996; Marinova, 2008) as four eyes see more than two. For example, while one mediator asks the questions and focuses on the big picture, the other could make notes and observe, paying special attention to non-verbal emotion cues.

### **Conclusion**

The current research demonstrates that hierarchy affects mediators' perceptions of emotion. Specifically, mediators are able to correctly perceive the extent to which both positive and negative emotions are experienced by supervisors, but not so for subordinates. Our study shows that mediators are better able to perceive negative emotions than positive ones. Furthermore, parties who occupy different hierarchical positions experience emotions differently during mediation. More specifically, subordinates experience higher levels of negative emotions than supervisors do.

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## Appendix

### Measures

#### Mediation clients' emotions

1. To what extent did you feel happy during the mediation?
2. To what extent did you feel enthusiastic during the mediation?
3. To what extent did you feel angry during the mediation?
4. To what extent did you feel afraid during the mediation?
5. To what extent did you feel sad during the mediation?

#### Perception of parties' emotions by mediators

##### *Supervisors' emotions*

1. The supervisor was happy during the mediation.
2. The supervisor was enthusiastic during the mediation.
3. The supervisor was angry during the mediation.
4. The supervisor was afraid during the mediation.
5. The supervisor was sad during the mediation.

*Subordinates' emotions*

1. The subordinate was happy during the mediation.
2. The subordinate was enthusiastic during the mediation.
3. The subordinate was angry during the mediation.
4. The subordinate was afraid during the mediation.
5. The subordinate was sad during the mediation.

**Perceived situational power**

1. I had more influence over the mediation process than the other party.
2. I had more influence over the mediation outcome than the other party.
3. I felt as the more powerful during the mediation.

**Short-term mediation effectiveness**

1. The mediation meeting was run without bias.
2. Mediation was run in a neutral and objective manner.
3. The motives and intentions of the mediator were good.
4. The mediator treated me in a consistent and predictable way.
5. I am happy with the solution we came to.
6. The settlement of the conflict was satisfactory to me.
7. I am satisfied with the outcome we reached.
8. To what extent did the mediation solve the personal conflict?





# Chapter 5

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## *General Discussion*

The goal of the present dissertation has been to enhance scholarly understanding of the influence of hierarchical conflict on how mediators and parties perceive mediation *across time* and *across dyads*. We proposed that the hierarchical relations between parties would determine how the parties (and mediators) perceive power and emotion during mediation, thus affecting their perceptions of short-term and long-term effectiveness, as presented in our heuristic model (see Figure 5.1). In three chapters, we examined this assumption by posing the following research questions: (a) How effective in the long-term is the mediation of hierarchical workplace conflicts? (b) How does perceived situational power in supervisor-subordinate dyads relate to mediation effectiveness? (c) Do supervisors and subordinates differ in their emotional experiences during mediation, and are mediators able to perceive these emotions accurately? In this final chapter, we outline the most important findings in relation to these research questions. We then discuss the general implications for research and theory and address the limitations of this dissertation, while reflecting on avenues for future research. We conclude with several implications for mediation practice.

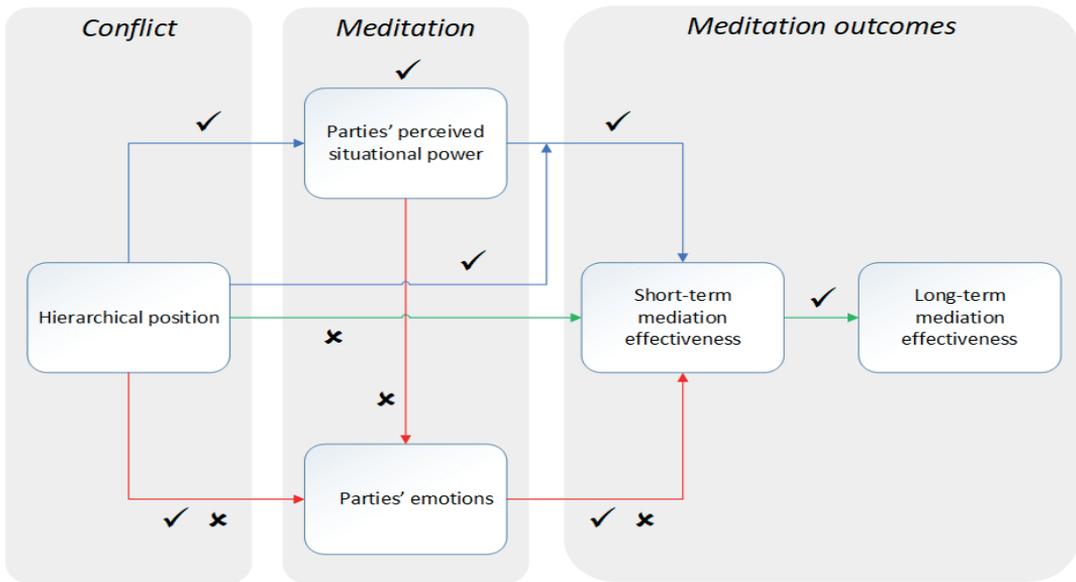


Figure 5.1. Heuristic model of the effectiveness of workplace mediation and a summary of the findings.

Note: green lines = chapter two; blue lines = chapter three; red lines = chapter four

### **RQ 1: How effective in the long-term is the mediation of hierarchical workplace conflicts?**

In chapter two, we explored the long-term effectiveness of mediation in hierarchical workplace conflicts by comparing and analyzing the perceptions of supervisors and subordinates of short-term and long-term mediation effectiveness. The focus was on the extent to which they perceived mediation to be effective one year later. Our results show that the participants' perceptions of short-term mediation effectiveness – such as satisfaction with the mediator and the mediation outcome, as well as the level of confidence in the agreement and reconciliation process – predict similar results one year later. The parties primarily felt satisfied with the mediation process, outcome, and mediator; they perceived

compliance with the agreement; and, to a lesser extent, they felt reconciled with the other party a year after the mediation process had concluded. This outcome underscores research in other fields of mediation showing that parties perceive mediation as effective in the long term (Donnelly & Ebron, 2000; Kaiser & Gabler, 2014; Pruitt, Peirce, McGillicuddy, Welton, & Castrianno, 1993). We conclude that perceptions of short-term mediation effectiveness are an accurate indicator of perceptions of long-term mediation effectiveness in the context of hierarchical conflicts. Although supervisors and subordinates may enter mediation in different ways and may hold different conflict perceptions and expectations (e.g., Bollen, Euwema, & Müller, 2010; Bollen, Ittner, & Euwema, 2012), mediation can lead to satisfying long-term results for both subordinates and supervisors. Nevertheless, subordinates perceive significantly less compliance with mediation agreements on the part of the supervisor than vice versa (although they still scored highly on the compliance scale). In summary, the answer to our research question is that, in general, both supervisors and subordinates consider mediation to be effective in the long run.

**RQ 2: How does perceived situational power in supervisor-subordinate dyads relate to mediation effectiveness?**

In chapter three, we wanted to clarify the impact of power differences on the effectiveness of mediation. We investigated the relation between hierarchical position and power perceptions in hierarchical workplace mediation and how these perceptions influence mediation effectiveness on the individual and the dyadic level.

The results demonstrate that perceived situational power (or power perceived in the mediation) is positively related to perceived mediation effectiveness, subordinates perceive less situational power than

supervisors, and perceived situational power mediates the relationship between hierarchical position and perceived mediation effectiveness. Furthermore, we found that perceived situational power is more important for subordinates to see the mediation as effective than it is for supervisors. On the level of the dyad, symmetrical power perceptions are related to both a higher probability of reaching an agreement and to the parties in a dyad having positive evaluations of the mediation. We also found that the sum of situational power experienced by both parties in the dyad is positively related to the overall level of perceived mediation effectiveness. Our conclusions thus indicate that perceived power and power balance play a significant role in mediation.

In summary, the answer to our research question is that perceived situational power is indeed a key factor in supervisors and subordinates reaching agreements and viewing the mediation as effective. Asymmetry in power perceptions leads to less effective mediation in terms of fewer mediation agreements and less satisfaction with the mediation outcome, while high situational power perceptions by both parties contribute to positive evaluations of the mediation (process and outcome).

**RQ 3: Do supervisors and subordinates differ in their emotional experiences during mediation, and are mediators able to perceive these emotions accurately?**

In chapter four, we examined whether supervisors and subordinates experience emotions differently during mediation and whether mediators perceived the parties' emotions accurately. We achieved this aim by comparing the parties' and mediators' perceptions. As predicted by the approach/inhibition theory of power (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003), our results confirm that mediation is often more emotional for

subordinates than for supervisors. Compared to supervisors, subordinates experience higher levels of negative emotions, such as anger, fear, and sadness. This demonstrates asymmetry in the negative emotional experiences of supervisors and subordinates during mediation. Contrary to our expectations, supervisors and subordinates did not differ in their experiences of positive emotions, such as happiness and enthusiasm. Further analyses showed a positive relationship between the experience of positive emotions and perceived mediation effectiveness, whereas parties' experiences of negative emotions were found not to be significantly related to perceived mediation effectiveness.

Most importantly, our study illustrates, as expected, that mediators more accurately perceive both the positive and negative emotions of supervisors than they do those of subordinates; and, in addition, mediators more accurately perceive negative emotions than positive. Notably, while the results indicate a significant relationship between mediator perceptions of supervisors' positive and negative emotions and supervisors' own experiences, we found no significant relationship between mediator perceptions and subordinates' emotional experiences. This provides support for the idea that subordinates' emotions are more difficult to recognize than those of supervisors. The most probable explanation is that subordinates express their emotions differently (Berdahl & Martorana, 2006; Fitness, 2000; Keltner et al., 2003; Langner, Epel, Matthews, Moskowitz, & Adler, 2012). Therefore, in answer to our research question, supervisors and subordinates differ in their emotional experiences during mediation, but only in their negative emotions. Moreover, mediators do perceive emotions correctly, but only those of supervisors.

## **Implications for research and theory**

An understanding of mediation effectiveness and its preceding factors contributes to theory in the mediation and conflict management field. The theoretical contributions of the present dissertation provide insights into the following: (a) the enduring role of hierarchy in mediation; (b) the effectiveness of workplace mediation in the longer term; (c) (non-) exit mediation and reconciliation; (d) power dynamics and mediation effectiveness; and (e) emotions in mediation of hierarchical workplace conflicts. Below, we elaborate on the specific implications and contributions of our research to these different themes.

### **The enduring role of hierarchy in mediation**

The central notion in the present dissertation concerns hierarchical position as an indicator of mediation dynamics and mediation effectiveness. Authors in mediation research have only recently begun to pay attention to differences between conflicting parties due to hierarchical positions (e.g., Bollen et al., 2010; 2012; Bollen & Euwema, 2013a, 2014; Wiseman & Poitras, 2002). This dissertation further empirically validates the role that hierarchy plays in conflict and mediation (e.g., Aquino, 2000; Bollen & Euwema, 2013b; Fitness, 2000; Xin & Pelled, 2003) and contributes to a better understanding of the psychological processes at play in mediation. What is more, we have expanded previous research on hierarchy in mediation by demonstrating that the hierarchical positions of the parties also influence the mediators. We do find that hierarchy has an effect on processes during mediation such as experiencing emotions and perceiving power, however, in contrast with previous research (Bingham, 2003, 2004; Bollen et al., 2010, 2012), we found no differences between supervisors

and subordinates regarding perceived mediation effectiveness (except for compliance with the mediation agreement after one year). There are several potential explanations for this. In comparison to mediators in other studies, the mediators in our study may have paid more attention to hierarchical differences and thereby limited the negative impact of power differences (Moore, 2014; Poitras & Raines, 2013). In addition, they may have used a different mediation style (Brett, Drieghe, & Shapiro, 1986; Kressel, Henderson, Reich, & Cohen, 2012) or managed expectations such that both parties had more realistic views about the mediation and what to expect from it (Gray, 2006; Marinova, 2008; Tallodi, 2019). Other explanations lie in the context of our study, specifically the cultural context of the Netherlands. This country has a relatively low power-distance culture: people feel uncomfortable with unequal power distribution, they want to be treated fairly by authority figures, and they feel relatively equal to one another, despite occupying different positions in an organization (Brockner et al., 2001; Hofstede, 2011; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkow, 2010; Taras, Kirkman, & Steel, 2010). This context may have resulted in less extreme perceived power differences, leading to less significant divergence between supervisors and subordinates in terms of their satisfaction with the mediation process and outcome. Importantly, the studies of Bollen and colleagues on mediation in hierarchical workplace conflicts also used data samples comprising Dutch participants, and they did find significant differences in perceptions of mediation effectiveness (Bollen et al., 2010, 2012). However, one of their studies had more ambiguous results, with no significant differences between supervisors and subordinates on the various subscales of mediation effectiveness (Bollen & Euwema, 2014). This last outcome could also be explained by the low power-distance culture of the Netherlands. Studies in other cultural contexts are required to test these assumptions. Another possible explanation for this difference

in research results may be the type of mediator provider that provided the data to Bollen and colleagues (2010, 2012). This provider is known for its fast solution-focused mediation style that is specifically supervisor orientated, which may have resulted in the differences in perceived effectiveness of supervisors and subordinates.

### **The effectiveness of workplace mediation in the longer term**

Policymakers worldwide are increasingly promoting and implementing workplace mediation for several reasons, including the view that mediation leads to sustainable outcomes (Bennett, 2016; Latreille & Saundry, 2014; McArdle & Thomas, 2016). Nonetheless, the literature on (workplace) mediation is mainly descriptive, focusing on benefits of mediation that are not empirically based (Curran, Kenny, Bouchier, & Coakley, 2018; Wall & Dunne, 2012; Wall, Stark, & Standifer, 2001). Empirical studies illustrate that workplace mediation is effective immediately after its conclusion (e.g., Bingham & Pitts, 2002; Mareschal, 2005; Poitras & Le Tareau, 2009). Yet, many questions remain regarding the sustainability of these results. An important contribution of this dissertation is that we show that parties consider mediation effective one year afterward. We have therefore empirically confirmed the commonsense assumption that mediation leads to beneficial long-term results. However, we recommend that future researchers further test this assumption by using a longer time lag between the completion of the mediation and the measurement of long-term effectiveness. Although one year after the mediation may be sufficient for parties to know and feel the consequences of a certain mediation outcome, a longer period of time may further clarify the sustainability of mediation, for example, by testing if the core problem has been resolved, if there are no new problems arising between parties, or if the overall quality of

their relationship is sustained on a longer term than one year after the mediation (Pruitt, Peirce, Zubek, Welton, & Nochajsky, 1990).

Furthermore, our research adds to previous work on mediation effectiveness. We show that, in general, short-term mediation effectiveness is a suitable predictor of long-term mediation effectiveness (Kalter, Bollen, & Euwema, 2018). An interesting related result is that satisfaction with the mediation process (i.e., perceptions of procedural justice in our research) immediately after mediation was the only subscale of mediation effectiveness that did not predict how parties perceived the process one year later. This result surprises us since existing research emphasizes the significance of perceptions of procedural justice for short-term evaluations of mediation (Bollen et al., 2012; Cogburn, Daley, Katz Jameson, & Berry-James, 2018; Poitras & le Tureau, 2009; Pruitt et al., 1993). For instance, parties generally feel satisfied with mediation when they perceive the process to be fair, even if they do not reach a settlement (Kressel & Pruitt, 1985). According to Bollen and colleagues, “fair treatment and procedures are a more pervasive concern to most people than (only) fair outcomes” (Bollen et al., 2012, p. 623). However, our results indicate that the mediation process seemed less prominent for the participants after the passage of time. Tangible results – such as the mediation outcome – may be more noticeable than the mediation process in the longer term, with the outcome ultimately what matters most (Kalter et al., 2018).

### **Exit versus non-exit mediation and the role of reconciliation**

It is also noteworthy that we investigated the role of exit mediation versus mediation involving continuing employment (Kalter et al., 2018). Although workplace mediation often ends in an exit (with employees ending their employment) (Latreille & Saundry, 2014; Munduate, Bollen, & Euwema,

2016), researchers had never studied how parties in this type of mediation evaluate the process and outcome compared to parties who continue their employment. Some scholars doubt mediation is an appropriate instrument if one or more of the parties (especially the supervisor) have already decided that they want to end the working relationship. They are concerned that different solutions are no longer possible and believe that, in mediation, all options should be open, including continuing the employment (Van de Griendt & Schutte, 2006; Schutte, 2008). However, our results demonstrate that whether the mediation involved an exit was not a predictor of mediation effectiveness. Disputants in both types of mediation perceived the mediation as equally effective, even when accounting for parties' intentions regarding their employment relationship at the start of the mediation and their hierarchical position. Reduction of uncertainty may be an important factor in this case, especially for subordinates (Bollen et al., 2010; Bordia, Hobman, Jones, Gallois, & Callan, 2004); knowing where one stands, even if one might, unwillingly, lose a job, may provide closure. An exit mediation may give people the chance to end the conflict and leave on positive terms. Thus, an important message is that exit mediations do have value.

When studying exit mediations, it may be worthwhile to consider what contributes to their effectiveness. The commitment of both parties to the mediation and a shared willingness to arrive at a solution may be very important here (Kressel, 2014; Poitras, 2005). For example, if a supervisor has an agenda to remove the subordinate (and this remains hidden during the mediation), this might prove problematic.

Furthermore, the results indicate that disputants in both non-exit and exit mediations score lowest on reconciliation in the effectiveness subscales. Reconciliation can be defined as the restoration of the former

relationship (Chapman, 2009). Although reconciliation may not be the primary objective of mediation, particularly in exit mediations, it is considered by some researchers as an important variable when studying mediation effectiveness because reconciled parties are more often able to collaborate again in the future (Pruitt et al., 1990; Poitras & Le Tareau, 2009). In their “quantifying the quality of agreements” study, Poitras and Le Tareau (2009) even considered a high level of reconciliation essential for a value-added agreement (in addition to satisfaction with mediator, process, outcome, and confidence in agreement), comparing it with a satisfactory agreement where parties are “only” satisfied with the mediator, the mediation process, and the outcome and have confidence in the agreement.

This lower score on reconciliation in our research corresponds with findings of other mediation studies, showing that reconciliation is only an occasional outcome (e.g., Kressel & Pruitt, 1989; Poitras & Le Tareau, 2009). Parties are reconciled when they feel they have rebuilt their previous relationship (Poitras, 2010; Rettberg & Ugarriza, 2016). In this respect, it is telling that, in our study, half of the participants in non-exit mediations indicated that, within a year after the mediation ended, they terminated their employment with the other party anyway, and they still felt satisfied with the mediation. An explanation for this outcome could be that, although the parties reached a mediation agreement, something on a deeper level was irreversibly broken. Trust, which is essential for relationship commitment, may not have been repaired (Ferrin, Bligh, & Kohles, 2008; Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Righetti & Finkenauer, 2011). Hence, when the participants saw a chance to end the working relationship, they may have done so. This outcome raises the broader question of why parties, especially in non-exit mediations, do not reconcile more often. Perhaps disputants just want a workable resolution of the conflict, and the

relation with the other party is less important to them. Alternatively, as Poitras and Le Tareau (2009) point out, not all mediators use a style focused on reconciliation (e.g., transformative mediation), and some employ a more direct problem-solving style (e.g. evaluative mediation). Another possibility is that mediation is simply too short to resolve deeper relational problems hindering reconciliation. An average mediation process consists of only three or four meetings of two hours apiece, including the signing of an agreement. Reconciliation, on the other hand, is a process that might require more time (Lederach, 1999) because rebuilding trust takes time (Lewicki, Elgoibar, & Euwema, 2016; Lewicki & Wiethoff, 2000; Pate, Morgan-Thomas, & Beaumont, 2012). Reconciliation may also necessitate more “therapeutic” skills on the part of the mediator (e.g., paying special attention to emotional issues), skills that not every mediator possesses; for example, they may have a legal background, rather than a psychological one (Smyth & Moloney, 2003).

This raises the question of whether reconciliation is important in mediation. Some authors, especially scholars who promote transformative mediation, consider mediation as a way to restore relationships and suggest that reconciliation is one of the goals of mediation (Bush, 2001; Bush & Folger, 2004). In contrast, other scholars who use an evaluative mediation style attach less importance to reconciliation and focus on the settlement (Della Noce, 2009; Riskin, 1996). In our study, we found that parties generally score lower on the reconciliation subscale of mediation effectiveness than on the other subscales; our results also demonstrate a positive relation between the extent of reconciliation and satisfaction with the mediation process and outcome for both exit and non-exit mediations. This finding implies that a certain level of reconciliation is necessary for parties to feel satisfied with the mediation. We hope that our findings stimulate further theoretical and empirical work exploring the conditions

in which reconciliation does occur, for example, a certain level of trust or an apology (Regis & Poitras, 2010; Schneider, 2000), as well as the level of reconciliation necessary for parties to perceive the mediation as effective. We recommend future research exploring when reconciliation is necessary because this may be dependent on the context of the mediation.

### **Power dynamics and mediation effectiveness**

Although mediation scholars generally consider the management of power differences to be among the core tasks of the mediator (e.g., Davis & Salem, 1984; Lewis, 2012; Van Bijnen, 2019; Wiseman & Poitras, 2002), empirical research on the role of power in mediation remains very limited. Our research furthers understanding of power in mediation by not only examining the influence of the formal hierarchical position (being a supervisor or a subordinate), but also by considering parties' subjective experience of power as an underlying psychological mechanism that may explain how parties evaluate the mediation (Anderson & John, 2015; Anderson, John, & Keltner, 2012; Tost, 2015).

A key contribution to mediation theory is that we have shown how important it is for parties, especially the subordinate, to perceive themselves to have situational power to see the mediation as effective. As we examined supervisors and subordinates in the same mediation, we were able to verify a central notion that had not previously been empirically tested; namely, mediators must balance the playing field to reach an agreement that satisfies both parties (Bennett, 2014; Moore, 2014; Poitras & Raines, 2013). Studies have shown that negotiations are more effective and constructive when the parties feel a certain amount of influence and when they do not differ in perceived power (e.g., De Dreu, 1995; Giebels, De Dreu, & Van de Vliert, 2000; Wolfe & McGinn, 2005). However, we

have expanded these findings to mediation theory by demonstrating that perceived power asymmetry leads to less effective mediations. Our study thus supports the idea that the perceived power and power balance play a significant role in mediation. This outcome is also aligned with the mediation goal of striving for equal and full participation by all parties (Kressel, 2014; Moore, 2014).

Moreover, we found that the more the supervisor and subordinate in a dyad perceive themselves as having more influence over the mediation process and outcome than the other, the more they (as a dyad) perceive the mediation as effective. In this respect, “balancing power” could mean that a mediator empowers both parties in such a way that both feel their interests and ideas are especially satisfied (Isaacson, Ricci, & Littlejohn, 2020). This supports the idea of an integrative approach: the mediator attempts to integrate the wishes and needs of both parties to arrive at a win-win solution (De Dreu, Koole, & Steinel, 2000). As such, the question arises as to whether parties who both felt they had more influence or power than the other during mediation felt that the agreement was indeed integrative, or whether they simply focused on what they themselves received from the mediation. Furthermore, it is not clear how integrative their behavior during mediation was (De Dreu, Weingart & Kwon, 2000; Harinck & De Dreu, 2004; Pietroni, Van Kleef, De Dreu, & Pagliaro, 2008). These issues would provide an interesting avenue for future research, and we advise future researchers to include measures that take into account integrative behavior and assess the creative and integrative nature of mediation agreements (Adrian & Mykland, 2014).

In addition, we found that power asymmetry (one party experiencing more power during mediation than the other) is the case in almost all mediations of hierarchical workplace conflicts: in 60% of the

supervisor-subordinate dyads, supervisors perceived themselves as more powerful than the subordinate; while 32% of subordinates perceived themselves as more powerful than supervisors. In only 8% of the dyads did parties perceive comparable levels of situational power. This demonstrates that mediators in hierarchical workplace conflicts indeed often have to work with power asymmetry. Interestingly, although our study shows that supervisors generally perceive themselves as having more situational power than subordinates do, the abovementioned results show that, in a large proportion of the mediations, the reverse is true. However, we are not certain why this is the case. For example, was the mediator able to empower the less powerful party, often the subordinate in the conflict? To test this assumption, researchers should also consider parties' perceptions of relational power: power as perceived in a long-term dyadic relationship (such as the working relationship between a supervisor and subordinate) (Anderson et al., 2012). Situational power might be closely related to perceived relational power, and at the same time, it might be influenced by the mediator's interventions (Anderson & Brion, 2014; Overall, Hammond, McNulty, & Finkel, 2016). By disentangling hierarchical position and different forms of perceived power, such as perceived relational power and perceived situational power, researchers could explore in more detail the power perceptions before and during mediation and their influence on mediation effectiveness.

Another interesting line of research would be to examine the power dynamics between the mediator and the conflicting parties. Mediation in hierarchical labor conflicts is not only a dyadic phenomenon between a supervisor and a subordinate, the mediator is also part of the mediation dynamics and an important actor when it comes to power relations (Shapira, 2008). A mediator controls the mediation process (Jordaan, 2016) and, as highlighted by French and Raven (1959), may employ different forms of

power – such as legitimate power, expert power, or informational power. As such, it is important to understand how mediators use their power bases to affect the power dynamics within a mediation and how this may add to parties' situational power perceptions and mediation effectiveness. Relatedly, a question remains as to how mediators may use their power and at the same time appear neutral (Astor, 2007; Field, 2000), for example by being transparent (Menkel-Meadow, Porter Love, Schneider, & Moffit, 2019).

### **Emotions during mediation**

While many studies have explored the role of emotion in conflict (e.g., Friedman, Arieli, & Aboud-Armali, 2018; Lindner, 2014; Nair, 2008) and negotiation (e.g., Adler, Rosen, & Silverstein, 1998; Druckman & Olekalns, 2008; Sinaceur, Adam, Van Kleef, & Galinsky, 2013; Van Kleef & De Dreu, 2010), little empirical research has considered the role of emotion in mediation (Jameson, Bodtker, Porch, & Jordan, 2009; Jones & Bodtker, 2001). Our contributions are important because emotion, both positive and negative, forms an integral part of disputes and their resolution (Friedman et al., 2018; Halperin, 2014; Jones, 2006; Rispens & Demerouti, 2016). While mediators must acknowledge negative emotions because they may hinder a satisfying mediation agreement (Bollen & Euwema, 2014; Jones, 2006), positive emotions can create a positive atmosphere and enhance collaboration among the parties (Fredrickson, 1998; Shapiro, 2002; Vulpe & Dafinoiu, 2012; Zhang, Bollen, Pei, & Euwema, 2018). In our study, analyses found that parties, especially subordinates, experience more negative emotions – in terms of both frequency and intensity – than positive emotions during mediation. This indicates that mediators should give particular attention to negative emotions. However, we did not

examine when parties experienced the emotions in the mediation process and whether their emotional experiences differed during mediation phases (Gilman, 2017; Kressel, 2014). Mediation usually comprises more than one session and can take place over several weeks or months. The mediation literature suggests that parties usually experience more intense negative emotions at the beginning of the process, and if a mediator deals appropriately with these emotions, this results in more positive emotions later in the process, thus helping the mediation to move forward (Jones & Bodtker, 2001; Moore, 2014). This may also explain why we found that positive emotions are positively related to perceived mediation effectiveness, while we did not find a significant negative relation between the experience of negative emotions and perceived mediation effectiveness. Mediators possibly work with negative emotions at the beginning, and these emotions are later reduced in the mediation when parties work towards an agreement. We recommend that future researchers further explore this aspect.

In addition, we contribute to previous research linking power and emotion (e.g., Berdahl & Martorana, 2006; Overbeck, Neale, & Govan, 2010; Ragins & Winkel, 2011; Van Kleef, De Dreu, Pietroni, Manstead, 2006) by exploring this relationship in the context of mediation. We found partial support for the approach/inhibition theory predictions concerning the experience of emotions, indicating a relationship between hierarchical position and negative emotions (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003; Keltner et al., 2003). Contrary to expectations, hierarchical position was not related to experiences of positive emotions during mediation. Theoretically, compared to low-power individuals, high-power individuals can act with relatively few limitations because they usually have relative control over valued outcomes. As a result, they are likely to perceive fewer threats and more opportunities in their environment, resulting in positive

emotions (Berdahl & Martorana, 2006; Keltner et al., 2003). A potential explanation for the result could be the context of conflict and mediation. Due to the conflict itself, a higher power position during mediation does not necessary lead to positive emotions. For example, Euwema (1992) found that, during conflict, supervisors experience more stress than subordinates. Indeed, research shows that power can bring responsibility for others (Chen, Lee-Chai, & Barght, 2001; De Wit, Scheepers, Ellemers, Sassenberg, & Scholl, 2017; Sassenberg, Ellemers, Scheepers, & Scholl, 2014), which might be a burden, especially in conflict situations. On the other hand, during mediation, both supervisors and subordinates may feel relieved when a conflict is being resolved, resulting in equally positive emotions for both. It is also possible for both subordinates and supervisors to feel empowered by the mediation process, resulting in equal positive emotions (Bush, 2001; Bush & Folger, 2004).

Surprisingly, further enquiry found no significant relationship between perceived situational power and emotional experience, although one might expect a strong emotional effect of perceived power because the social interaction was meaningful and not experimentally manipulated (Berdahl & Martorana, 2006). We found no evidence for this relation combining emotions in two overall measures (a negative and a positive), nor did we identify any significant effects of situational power on the separate emotions. This contradicts Bombari, Schmid Mast, and Bachmann (2017), who conclude that perceived power mediates the relationship between a formal power position and the experience of emotions and is thus responsible for the experience of positive or negative emotions. This discrepancy may be explained by the specific context of a conflict or mediation, as stated above. A possible explanation is that it is not the perceived situational power that explains the relationship between hierarchical position and experienced emotions during

mediation, but rather the perceived relational power (as perceived in the working relationship) (Anderson et al., 2012). Emotions are triggered and built during the conflict *before* the mediation, and parties probably take these emotions with them at the mediation table. These emotions are consequently not directly related to the situational power parties experience during mediation: they do not stem from the mediation but originate from the past. Future research should therefore take perceived relational power into account when studying the relationship between emotions and experiences of power and how such may be determined by the context, such as a conflict or a mediation.

Furthermore, it may be worthwhile to consider the interpersonal effects of emotions in mediation. Although we examined the different emotions experienced by parties with different power positions, we did not include emotional expressions and the effect of one party's individual emotional expression on the behavior of the other party (Van Kleef, 2009, 2014). We likewise did not examine the emotional interactions between the parties (Fischer & Van Kleef, 2010; Van Kleef, 2016) and how these may influence mediation. Such interactions may be particularly important when parties differ in their hierarchical positions: people higher in power pay less attention to the emotions expressed by others whereas people lower in power are usually strongly impacted by the emotions expressed by a superior (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Fitness, 2000; Keltner et al., 2003; Mast & Palese, 2019). However, we do not yet know how supervisors and subordinates trigger emotions in one another during mediation and how this interplay can hinder or help the mediation process. For example, the literature shows that compassion and/or empathy are linked to successful conflict management (Chetkow-Yanoov, 1996; De Wied, Branje, & Meeus, 2007; Liu & Wang, 2010), but it remains to be seen how this occurs between conflicting parties and how it may be of help to the mediation (Della Noce,

1999). We invite future researchers to further explore emotional dynamics in workplace mediation.

A new and important contribution to mediation research is our finding that mediators perceive the positive and negative emotions of supervisors more accurately than they do those of subordinates. A probable explanation for this is that subordinates feel less powerful than supervisors and consequently tend to hide their (negative) emotions, while supervisors do not (Keltner, et al., 2003). This interpretation suggests that mediators should be especially alert to the emotions of subordinates and seek to explore their emotional experiences. Having said that, we did not take into account the role of emotional intelligence in effectively mediating disputing parties (Goleman, 2006; Kelly & Kaminskiene, 2016; Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Tapia, 2001). Emotional intelligence is “the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth” (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p. 10). Accurate perception of emotion is just one aspect of emotional intelligence that may determine mediation effectiveness, and other aspects include the use of emotion to enhance cognitive processes and decision making, knowledge of emotion, and the ability to manage emotions (George, 2000). More research is needed to explore how these different aspects of emotional intelligence may enhance the effectiveness of mediators’ practice. Furthermore, emotional intelligence in the disputing parties may be an interesting topic to explore, since research on negotiation has shown the positive effect of emotional intelligence on the negotiation experience (Der Foo, Anger Elfenbein, Hoon Tan, & Chuan Aik, 2004; Sharma, Bottom, & Elfenbein, 2013; Smithey Fulmer & Barry, 2004).

## **Limitations**

### **Data collection**

It should be noted that our research relied upon self-report surveys. Although this was logical because we wanted to explore the perceptions of the parties themselves, this introduced a risk of participants responding in a socially desirable manner (Kuncel & Tellegen, 2009; McDonald, 2008; Paulhus, 1991). For example, participants might have underreported their emotions to demonstrate “professionalism,” since display rules in work situations involve less emotional expressivity than display rules outside work (Moran, Diefendorff, & Greguras, 2013). During data collection, some supervisors asked the researcher if they had received the wrong survey (i.e., the one meant for subordinates) because the version they had received included questions about their emotions. This reflects a presumption that only subordinates, and not supervisors, experience emotion during mediation. We attempted to decrease the risk of such a social desirability bias by making participation in the study voluntary and ensuring that the data were collected and stored confidentially (King & Bruner, 2000; Nederhof, 1985). At the same time, these self-reports were sent within four weeks after the mediation had ended and they assessed perceptions that had emerged during the mediation (which could have taken a couple of weeks or months), such as “perceived situational power” and “emotion perception.” Such retrospective measurements may have resulted in a recall bias. People may recall previously experienced states differently (Eisenhower, Mathiowetz, & Morganstein, 2011; Feldman Barrett, 1997) because their memories are influenced by their current emotional state (Keuler & Safer, 1998) or by new appraisals of the event (Levine, Prohaska, Burgess, Rice, & Laulhere, 2001). For example, the participants might have remembered in retrospect experiencing more situational power

than they did in reality because they were satisfied with the mediation outcome after the fact. Relatedly, the collected data was cross-sectional. Although we assessed the power perceptions of both parties in mediation, which decreased the risk of common method bias (Conway & Lance, 2010), power perceptions were measured at the same time as mediation effectiveness perceptions in a post-mediation survey. Therefore, the observed relationship could also be the result of reverse causality. Future research could resolve the above-mentioned methodological problems by including other types of measurement, such as observations of the parties' behavior in real or (quasi-)experimental mediations assessed by external assessors (Podsakoff, McKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003; Wall & Dunne, 2012) and/or by using a longitudinal design (Bollen, 2014). For example, although one strength of this dissertation is its use of a repeated-measure design, one could improve the approach by using a full-panel longitudinal design, including measurements *before*, *during*, and *after* the mediation, such as conflict escalation and the parties' intentions (before mediation), satisfaction with the mediator and process (during mediation), satisfaction with the mediation outcome and reconciliation (immediately after mediation), and compliance with the agreement and satisfaction with the mediation outcome and reconciliation (one year after mediation). In this way, researchers could obtain an even better understanding of the mediation process and the evolution of parties' perceptions over time.

### **Characteristics of the dataset**

First, our sample solely consisted of Dutch mediators, supervisors, and subordinates. The ability to generalize our findings to other cultural contexts may thus be limited. That is, mediation in hierarchical workplace conflicts may be experienced differently in other cultures. As stated

earlier, the Netherlands is a relatively low power-distance culture (Hofstede, 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010; Taras et al., 2010), which may have influenced our Dutch participants' perceptions of power and mediation effectiveness. Future research may want to explore mediation practices in other countries.

Second, our studies focused on mediation between supervisors and subordinates, but it did not consider the specific issues mediated. In general, studies of workplace mediation effectiveness do not address the genre of dispute (e.g., Bollen et al., 2010, 2012; Bollen & Euwema, 2014) or focus exclusively on workplace harassment and discrimination (e.g., Bingham & Novac, 2001; Cogburn et al., 2018; Nesbit, Nabatchi, & Bingham, 2012). Further investigation could reveal how disputants perceive mediation effectiveness for different types of conflict. Accounting for genres of conflict could clarify whether all types are appropriate for mediation (Such, Verbeke, & Menkel-Meadow, 2016). For example, some scholars have raised concerns about the fairness and justice of mediation concerning workplace bullying (Ballard & Eastal, 2016; Jenkins, 2011).

A final limitation relates to the sample size, particularly the part of the dataset used in chapter two. Although we found a strong relation between hierarchical position and one subscale of long-term mediation effectiveness (compliance with the agreement) in a limited sample ( $N = 41$ ) that indicates a clear effect (Combs, 2010), we advise future researchers to test our hypotheses with a larger dataset.

## **Practical implications**

To answer the question raised in the mediation literature as to whether mediating hierarchical workplace conflicts is fair and effective, given

structural power imbalances, we have found that mediation between supervisors and subordinates is certainly appropriate. Although hierarchical position does affect mediation perceptions, the process can still have satisfying results for both parties. However, our findings underscore the complexity of mediating hierarchical workplace conflicts (Jehn, Rupert, Nauta, & Van den Bossche, 2010; Poitras & Raines, 2013), with extra attention and space needed for hierarchical (power) differences. This section summarizes several recommendations for mediation practitioners.

### **Be alert to power differences and empower both parties, especially the subordinates**

This dissertation demonstrates that mediators often face asymmetrical power relations when mediating hierarchical workplace conflicts. Mediators must handle power asymmetry such that both parties feel they are able to influence the mediation process and outcome. The less powerful party should be empowered, while the more powerful party should also feel in control. Although our research did not take neutrality of the mediator into account, other studies have shown that dealing with power relations while remaining neutral may be a challenge (e.g., Astor, 2007). We therefore think it is important for mediators to make both parties feel that they are there for them. This can be described as multi-partiality (Assegued, 2018; Verbeke, 2009) for which transparency may help (Moffitt, 1997). As such, they can empower one of the parties and, at the same time, assure the other party that his or her input is also important. Transparency also means that mediators are open about the power differences between parties. Mediators, for example, can tell parties that in hierarchical workplace conflicts, the supervisor often has more to

say over the subordinate than the other way around or tell parties that they differ in their formal position, and this may influence their perception of the situation. Mediators can subsequently ask what both parties need from each other in order to converse, taking these power differences in mind.

Our results suggest that mediators should pay attention to power differences from the outset – for example, by analyzing the parties' dependency and power sources – and to employ empowering strategies, if necessary. Although we did not examine which interventions are appropriate for handling power differences in our research, mediators may empower both parties through basic mediation skills, such as listening, paraphrasing or summarizing, and questioning. Offering disputants the chance to speak up or to clearly summarize their stories can also make them feel heard and empowered (Domenici & Littlejohn, 2001). Moreover, mediators can balance power by taking their own power position, especially when they feel that one of the parties is not fully committed to the mediation. Accordingly, mediators can use one their own sources of power (e.g., legitimate power) when, for example, a supervisor literary takes the chair of the mediator when he enters the room and tells both mediator and subordinate that they should move on fast because he has other more important meetings to attend to. In this case, the mediator can ask the supervisor to sit on another chair and subsequently ask him how important this meeting is for him. If the supervisor is still sputtering, then the mediator can acknowledge the supervisor's formal position but, at the same time, confront him by saying "I need you to accept me as the mediator. I understand that in your position, you are the one in the lead, but here I need you to allow me to have that role. If that is not possible, I am perhaps not the right mediator for you." While diminishing the supervisor's power (i.e., if he eventually accepts the mediator and wants

to come to a solution), doing so helps empower the subordinate who now may consider the supervisor more of as a conversational partner, not only as a boss.

There could also be some other empowering strategies. According to those in our research, mediators can use the following:

- allowing parties to bring a family member, a friend, or lawyer to the mediation for moral support or legal advice
- informing parties that they can always stop the mediation process if they feel it is not helping them
- monitoring the duration of speaking time (ensuring both parties have the same amount of time)
- using an intake or caucus during which parties can safely express themselves
- normalizing the situation or feelings that parties express
- being attentive to emotions
- offering the parties a reality check about their power sources (e.g., stopping parties from victimizing themselves by showing them that they have more influence than they think)
- encouraging disputants to obtain information from an expert, such as a legal advisor

**Spend sufficient time exploring emotions and verifying assumptions about emotions**

Our findings show that one's role identity as a supervisor or subordinate

has a significant impact on one's emotional experience, but mediators often do not accurately perceive subordinates' emotions. Hence, this suggests that mediators should spend sufficient time exploring the emotions that emerge, especially those of subordinates. Mediators may achieve this by giving the parties the space they need to express their feelings and by asking clarifying questions (Kalff & Uitslag, 2007). Mediators may also pay special attention to verbal and non-verbal behavior and mention what they hear and see. The mediator could double-check whether the perceived emotion is actually playing a role in the mediation, for example: "I see that you are angry, is that right? Can you tell more about this?"

Furthermore, our results suggest that mediators should explicitly ask the parties whether their emotions have been adequately addressed, before entering the negotiation phase. Although a joint session can address emotions, mediators could consider an individual intake or caucus. A caucus is a confidential private meeting held by the mediator with the individual parties (Moore, 1987). Subordinates might find this especially helpful if they struggle to express their felt emotions in the presence of their supervisor (Keltner et al., 2003). With a (pre-)caucus, mediators can provide the subordinates with a safe environment to vent their emotions and discuss their feelings (Calhoun, 2004; Charkoudian, De Ritis, Buck, & Wilson, 2009; Poitras & Raines, 2013; Swaab & Brett, 2007) while acting more empathic without appearing partial (Poitras, 2013). However, there are some situations in which a caucus may not be appropriate, for example, when mediators and parties are "in the flow" and separate talks may disrupt the process. Moreover, according to some scholars, a caucus may be inappropriate for mediation because it interferes with certain values, such as openness and transparency (Verbeke, 2009). In addition, Friedman and Himmelstein (2008) identified certain risks when using a caucus in mediation, such as the risk of mediators having too much of a

leading role and the risk of mediator manipulation. As such, when using a caucus, we advise mediators to be transparent and to leave the decision for a caucus to the parties involved. For example, mediators can tell parties to consider a caucus because they are struggling with something, but this would depend on how the parties react and what they decide to do. By doing so, mediators can determine when or where a caucus is suitable for the context of a specific mediation.

### **Consider a co-mediator**

Co-mediation is when two mediators work together during the same mediation. Although our research did not take into account if a mediation was mediated by one or two mediators, other studies have shown that mediation with multiple mediators generally has advantages, and in particular when parties differ in power (Epstein & Epstein, 2006; Love & Stulberg, 1996; Mason & Kassam, 2011; Rosengard, 2004). While one mediator takes the lead in the conversation, the other mediator can observe the parties' reactions, monitor their engagement, and observe their body language (Foley, 2017). When mediating hierarchical workplace conflicts, two mediators can reduce the risk of missing emotional cues, especially those of subordinates. Other cues indicating power status – such as posture, eye gaze, and patterns of interaction – might also be easier to detect and act upon. In addition, co-mediators could consult one another during breaks and after mediation sessions and plan appropriate interventions for dealing with power differences (Bowen, 2015). As stated above, multi-partiality is important in mediation. Co-mediation can foster the feeling of multi-partiality: while one mediator speaks with one of the parties, the other mediator can pay extra attention to the other party and let them feel acknowledged. As such, co-mediation can contribute to multi-partiality

and balance of power as there are four people at the table, and there is one mediator for each party. When the parties consist of a woman and a man, for example, it may help that the mediators are also a woman and a man so that parties can connect to one of them (e.g., “She must understand me because she is also a woman”). Furthermore, since two mediators often have two different personalities and two different styles, parties may feel more at ease with either one of the mediators. For example, a mediator with more empathic skills can serve as a safety net for the less powerful party, while the other mediator who is more straightforward and to-the-point may be more appealing to the more powerful party.

**Pay special attention to the implementation and monitoring of the mediation agreement**

As subordinates are more likely to experience limited compliance with the agreement by their supervisor than vice versa, this suggests that mediators must work with the parties toward the implementation and monitoring of the agreement. For example, mediators could help the parties to compose a monitoring plan that includes arrangements for evaluation and guidelines on how to handle new problems. Moreover, since our results suggest that subordinates tend to face more challenges than supervisors do when addressing the other party if they feel the agreement is not respected (see also Keltner et al., 2003; Morrison & Rothman, 2009), mediators could make the parties aware of power dynamics when discussing how to evaluate the agreement. For example, mediators could ask supervisors how they could make their subordinates less hesitant to confront them, as well as probing subordinates about what they need from their supervisors to achieve that assertiveness. Another possibility, if both parties agree, is to incorporate a follow-up session with the mediator to evaluate the

workability of the mediation agreement and discuss “how things stand” (Hoskins & Stoltz, 2003).

## **Conclusion**

The present dissertation adds to a small but growing body of research exploring the influence of hierarchical position on workplace mediation. In particular, we examined how hierarchical conflict and perceived power affect how parties and mediators perceive mediation across time and across dyads. To this end, we combined insights from theories and research on power, emotions, and conflict management into a single heuristic research model. First and foremost, we have shown that mediation is an effective and sustainable tool with which to resolve hierarchical workplace conflicts. Furthermore, we have demonstrated that hierarchical position indeed keeps on playing a role during mediation with regard to experiencing emotions and situational power. Additionally, mediators are also affected by the hierarchical position parties occupy. However, we found few hierarchical differences in terms of perceptions of the short-term and long-term mediation effectiveness. Finally, the data seem to suggest that perceiving oneself to have situational power is critical during mediation, especially for subordinates and that an asymmetry in perceived situational power has a detrimental effect on the mediation. All in all, the present dissertation highlights the complexity of mediating hierarchical workplace conflicts. Mediators should take into account power differences in order to mediate effectively and to empower parties in such a way that both perceive influence over the mediation process and outcome.

We hope to contribute to mediation theory and practice in ways that improve the quality of mediation in general and mediation in hierarchical workplace conflicts in particular.

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