

Why are Industrial Relations in Spain Competitive? Trust in Management, Union Support and Conflict Behaviour in Worker Representatives*

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Abstract: In the current context of limited resources and economic, social and labour changes, organizational conflicts are becoming more and more competitive. Two possible explanations for this approach to conflict in Spain are the low trust between unions and management and the long tradition of confrontation in industrial relations. In this study we analyse the conflict pattern from worker representatives and the relation to trust in management and union support. The hypotheses are tested in a quantitative study of 719 representatives. Results show that a) representatives use a competitive conflict style; b) trust is negatively related to this style; and c) union support is positively related to the style. We explore how societal culture and historical industrial relations tradition explain these relations.

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Keywords: Worker representatives, conflict behaviour, trust, union support and societal culture.

Resumen: En el contexto actual de escasez de recursos y de cambios económicos, sociales y laborales, los conflictos organizacionales se están volviendo cada vez más competitivos. Dos posibles explicaciones para esta visión del conflicto en España son la baja confianza entre los sindicatos y la patronal, y la larga tradición de confrontación en las relaciones laborales. En este estudio analizamos el patrón del conflicto desde el punto de vista de los representantes de los trabajadores, la relación de confianza con la patronal y el apoyo de los sindicatos. Las hipótesis están contrastadas con un estudio cuantitativo de 719 representantes. Los resultados muestran que a) los representantes usan un estilo de conflicto competitivo; b) la confianza está negativamente relacionada con este estilo de conflicto; y c) el apoyo de los sindicatos está positivamente relacionada con este estilo. Exploramos cómo la cultura social y la tradición histórica de las relaciones laborales explican estas relaciones.

Palabras clave: representantes de los trabajadores, conducta de conflicto, confianza, apoyo sindical, cultura social.

1. Introduction

The new competitive demands of organizations, the globalization process and economic turbulence are causing new organizational conflicts in which worker representatives (WRs) play a central role. WRs are typically employees within a company who have a (part-time or full-time) role as representatives. They represent their colleagues in different types of organizational conflicts and decision-making processes with the management. Their ability to find and negotiate new organizational arrangements is fundamental to supporting these changes (Rocha, 2010), and they play a critical role in shaping and mediating the relationship between managers and employees (Bacon and Blyton, 1999; Stuart and Lucio, 2002).

As organizational conflict is ubiquitous, the ability to understand, predict, and manage it is one of the most important challenges in organizations (Gelfand and Dyer, 2000). Conflict management is a key competence for managers and professionals (Euwema, Kop and Bakker, 2004) in general, and it is essential for semi-professional negotiators such as WRs. Therefore, the success of internal negotiation and problem solving largely depends on the ability of WRs to manage these conflicts. In this paper we analyse the conflict pattern followed by WRs in Spain and explore two antecedents: Trust in management and perceived union support. We take our starting point in the conglomerated conflict behaviour theory (Van de Vliert, Euwema and Huismans, 1995).

2. Conflict behaviour by WRs

Conflict behaviour is an individual's reaction to the perceptions that one's own and another party's current aspiration cannot be achieved simultaneously (Deutsch, 1973; Pruitt and Rubin, 1986; Rubin, Pruitt and Kim, 1994). In the literature on conflict management (Blake and Mouton, 1964, 1970; Pruitt and Rubin, 1986; Rahim, 1992; Thomas, 1992), too often the use of specific styles or strategies are analysed in their unique contribution to conflict processes and outcomes. Here, a contrast is typically made between integrating and forcing, as two opposed behavioural approaches (e.g. Tjosvold, Morishima and Belsheim, 1999). This involves a negative correlation between both. However, the combination of these two behaviours can enhance effectiveness by minimizing the tendency for integrating to produce stagnation and the tendency for forcing to produce escalation (Walton, Cutcher-Gershenfeld and McKersie, 1994). Generally, parties try to achieve personal outcomes and reach mutual agreement

at the same time, typically combining cooperative and competitive behaviours (Thompson and Nadler, 2000). For WRs with the double role of employee and representative, the combination of forcing and integrating seems almost natural; they have to stand up for the rights and interests of the employees, and they have an interest in solving problems constructively because of their role in the organisation.

Thus, to study the conflict behaviour of WRs we use the Conglomerate Conflict Behaviour (CCB) model (Van de Vliert *et alii*, 1995), which presumes that conflict handling is an aggregation of various degrees of several modes of conflict behaviours. According to Van de Vliert and colleagues (1997), it is important that this combination follows the right process to enhance the effectiveness of conflict resolution; that is, forcing should be used first followed by integrating (Medina, Dorado, Cisneros, Arévalo and Munduate, 2003, Van de Vliert, Nauta, Giebels and Janssen, 1999; Weingart, Thompson, Bazerman and Carroll, 1990). Also, influential early lines of research into industrial relations conflict concluded that integrating produces better results when it is preceded by a phase of detailed issue fighting or confrontation, during which the conflict topics are defined and analysed (Johnson and Johnson, 1989; Walton and McKersie, 1965).

The main contribution of the CCB theory is that a cooperative pattern can also include competitive elements and, likewise, a competitive approach does not exclude cooperative elements (Euwema and Van Emmerik, 2007). Several studies confirm that effectiveness in conflict management depends on the conglomeration of behavioural components (Van de Vliert *et alii*, 1995). Munduate and colleagues (1999) concluded that managers who engaged in a mix of different strategies were more effective if they were able to integrate more different behaviours (Munduate, Ganaza, Peiró and Euwema, 1999). The amount of integrating and forcing varies to a large extent in these behavioural conglomerates. Following Euwema and Van Emmerik (2007) we differentiate between a cooperative pattern, characterised by relatively high integrating and low forcing; and a competitive pattern, characterised by relatively low integrating and high forcing. Therefore, our first expectation is a positive relation between these two styles.

H.1. Integrating and forcing behaviour of WR will be positively related

Societal culture and conflict behaviour by WR

Following Hofstede (1980: 25) we understand societal culture as «the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another... (and) the interactive aggregate of common characteristics that influences a human group's response to its environment». Culture is a «learned behaviour» (Kluckhohn, 1949) and thus it acts rather like a template, shaping behaviour and consciousness within societies along the generations (Miraglia, Law and Collins, 1999). Societal culture is recognized as a key component and is of obvious importance for the understanding of industrial relations and the conflict behaviour of WRs in Europe (Aguilera and Dabu, 2005; Ferner and Hyman, 1992). Thus, we contextualize the conflict phenomenon in the cultural, political, and economic environment in which it has developed (Munduate, Ganaza, Alcaide and Peiró, 1994). The main aspects of Spanish societal culture that are used to explore the conflict pattern of WRs are: the high power distance (Hofstede, 2001; House, Javidan, Hanges and Dorfman, 2004), masculinity (Hofstede, 2001) and assertiveness (House *et alii*, 2004). Further, the historical industrial relations tradition, based on an authoritarian management style (Munduate *et alii* 1994) is explored in relation to the conflict pattern of WRs.

Power distance is defined as «the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally» (Hofstede, 1997: 28). This definition closely resembles the more recent definition by House and colleagues (House, 2004: 537) who define power distance as «the degree to which members of an organization or society expect and agree that power should be shared unequally». The results from House and colleagues' study (2004) identify Spain as a high power distance country (with a score of 5.52, the highest value being 5.80 in Morocco and Nigeria). The hierarchical structure in Spanish organizations together with the tendency to keep a certain power distance in organizational settings (Munduate, 1993) and centralize the power in management are the main points here.

Another cultural dimension which seems particularly relevant for the study of conflict behaviour is *masculinity* (Hofstede, 2001). Masculinity, according to Hofstede (2001) and Hofstede *et alii* (1998), refers to the distribution of roles between the genders. Highly masculine countries are described as more assertive, whereas low masculine countries give greater value to nurturing relations (Hofstede, 2001). Spain is classified in Hofstede's study (2001) as a relatively high masculine country within Europe. The masculinity dimension originates the

assertiveness dimension included in the GLOBE study developed by House and colleagues (House *et alii*, 2004). Assertiveness is «the degree in which individuals in organizations or societies are assertive, confrontational and aggressive in social relationships» (House *et alii*, 2002: 6). Spain is classified as an assertive societal culture (with a score of 4.42, the highest score being 4.79 in Nigeria).

Historical tradition also influences the conflict pattern followed by WRs. Munduate and colleagues (1994:104) pointed out that «Spain has evolved from a rigid society, with organizations managed in an authoritarian style, as befitted a dictatorial regime, to a more tolerant, creative, and innovative society». Due to the dictatorial regime, negotiations between unions and companies and the right to carry out industrial action in organizations were prohibited until democracy was established in 1978. Despite the fact that Spanish industrial relations quickly adapted to a democratic system (Martinez Lucio, 2008), nowadays there is still a predominant tradition of adversarial relations between representatives and management (Rocha, 2010). One main difference with such other countries as Denmark is decentralization (Knudsen and Bruun, 1998) and the sharing of power between management and workers. In countries following the Scandinavian approach (Hyman, 1997) WRs can influence corporate strategy and development (Rocha, 2010) because they are involved in the governance (Euwema and Elgoibar, 2012; Kristensen and Rocha, 2011). By participating in constructing strategy and linking it to their experiences on the shop floor, WRs become fundamental partners for management in the development of a firm (Rocha, 2010). In other words, if both groups (management and workers) work together as one group (organization), the relationship between them must be based on trust, and this leads to a more cooperative way of managing conflict. However, in Spain, because of the societal culture and historical industrial relations the relations between management and labour are based on confrontation, so we expect WRs to use a competitive pattern.

H.2. The conglomerate conflict pattern of WR in Spain will be primarily competitive.

TRUST IN MANAGEMENT

Following Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt and Camerer (1998: 395) «trust is a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another». Given the competitive challenges of organisational growth, globalization, strategic partnerships (Martinez Lucio and Stuart, 2005) and multicultural relations (Cox

and Tung, 1997), trust has become a critical competence inside organisations (Lewicki, McAllister and Bies, 1998). Thus, numerous researchers from various disciplines agree that trust has important benefits for organizations (Dirks and Ferrin, 2001; Doney, Cannon and Mullen, 1998) and their members (Kramer, 1999). In particular, interpersonal trust in the workplace has been shown to have a strong and robust influence on a variety of organizational phenomena including job satisfaction, stress, organizational commitment, productivity and knowledge sharing (Kramer, 1999; Levin and Cross, 2004; Moradian, Renzl and Matzler, 2006). On an interpersonal level, trust is an essential factor if cooperative relations between the parties are to be built on (Coleman, 1990; Fukuyama, 1995; Kramer and Tyler, 1996; Putman, 1993). Despite the demonstrated value of trust, in employment relationships it is sometimes hard to achieve the appreciated and desired level (Elgoibar, Munduate, Medina and Euwema, 2012). Societal culture plays a main role here (Donney *et alii*, 1998), shaping the form that trust takes in the relationship between parties (Rousseau *et alii*, 1998). In this paper, we explore how the level of trust is related to the conflict pattern used by WRs.

The processes WRs use to decide whether and whom to trust depend to a great extent on the societal culture, especially on the culture of industrial relations within a society (Doney *et alii*, 1998). Hyman (1994) divides the industrial relations in Europe into two different models: *a*) the «Mediterranean model» characterized by authoritarian employers, where decisions are made unilaterally by management; and *b*) the «Nordic model» mainly in the Scandinavian countries, based on cooperation and trust-based relations within organisations, where decisions are made by management and WRs with equal power. In the case of countries following the Mediterranean model (i.e. Spain) industrial relations may appear to be less trust-based due to the strong heritage of an authoritarian style of management (Munduate *et alii*, 1994) and high power distance (Hofstede, 1980, 2001; House *et alii*, 2004). Other authors add to this point that the presence of a divided labour movement along political terms (Pulignano, Martinez-Lucio and Whittall, 2012) influences the level of trust in management in such societies as Spain.

As explained above, Spanish industrial relations are characterized by centralizing power which is related to the use of legitimate power by management. The use of this legitimate power, as French and Raven (1959) described it, should not be expected to affect trust (Mayer, Bobko, Davis and Gavin, 2011). Where management uses legitimate power, employees as well as WRs tend to trust management less (Maloni and Benton, 1999). On the other hand, reference and expert power are related to enhancing trust in the management (Mayer *et alii* 2011). Some authors have suggested that the level of trust between two parties is

a reciprocal phenomenon, in that one's trust in a given trustee is influenced by the level of trust perceived (Beck and Hillmar, 1986; Deutsch, 1973; Ferrin, Bligh and Kohles, 2008; Kramer, 1999; Mayer *et alii*, 2011; Schoorman, Mayer, and Davis, 1996; Serva, Fuller and Mayer, 2005). In this regard, when management does not share information or does not include WRs in the decision-making process, WRs perceive that management does not trust them. According to the reciprocal phenomenon, WRs decrease their level of trust in the management. This point was studied in the New European Industrial Relations (NEIRE) study (Munduate, Euwema and Elgoibar, 2012), which concluded that sharing information and including WRs in the decision-making process are the main ways of building trust in European labour relations (Elgoibar *et alii* 2012). Specifically, in Spain, the results from the NEIRE study show that WRs do not get accurate information on time and do not feel part of the decision making process: «Trust would increase if management gave us the opportunity to decide, but if they continue providing incomplete information, we cannot trust». (Female WR working in the education sector in Spain. Quota extracted from Munduate *et alii*, 2012: 51).

Because of this relation with conflict behaviour, previous studies (De Dreu, Giebels and Van de Vliert, 1998; Gambetta, 1988; Lewicki *et alii*, 1998; Ross and LaCroix, 1996) have concluded that trust leads to more cooperative negotiation behaviours and more integrative negotiation outcomes in interpersonal and intergroup negotiations. Trust facilitates information sharing about preferences and priorities because the parties are not afraid that they may be taken advantage of (De Dreu *et alii*, 1998; Pruitt and Kimmel, 1977). Trust also increases the willingness to accept information provided as sincere and accurate (Parks, Henager and Scamahorn, 1996).

A successful cooperative conflict resolution requires a maximum gathering and exchange of information between management and WRs in order to help identify problems and areas of mutual concern, search for alternative solutions and assess their implications, and achieve openness about preferences to select optimal solutions (Bacon and Blyton, 2007; Johnson and Johnson, 1989; Tjosvold, 1999). To sum up, centralization of power in organizations, little sharing of information and low inclusiveness of WRs in the decision-making process are the main characteristics of Spanish industrial relations related to the level of trust in management. Dirks and Ferrin (2001) concluded that cooperative behaviours are used under conditions of high trust only; under low trust, negotiators choose methods that put them at lower risk to reach their goals (i.e. competitive behaviour). Thus, according to the characteristics of Spanish

industrial relations mentioned above, we expect that low level of trust in the management will be related to the competitive conflict pattern.

H.3 The level of trust from WRs in the management will be negatively related to the use of a competitive conflict pattern.

UNION SUPPORT PERCEIVED BY WRs

According to Eisenberg and colleagues (1986), union support is based on members' global beliefs concerning the extent to which the union values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberg, Huntington, Hutchinson and Sowa, 1986). As such, union support reflects the extent to which members view the union as being committed to them (Shore, Tetrick, Sinclair and Newton, 1994) and produces a felt obligation to help the union reach its objectives (Rhoades and Eisenberg, 2005). Perception of support coming from the organization is positively related to job satisfaction (Eisenberg, Cummings, Armeli and Lynch, 1997), psychological contract (Rousseau, 1990), trust (Robinson and Morrison, 1995), organizational commitment (Rhoades, Eisenberg and Armeli, 2001) and procedural justice (Fasolo, 1995) among other things (see Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey and Toth, 1997, for further review). But, how does the support from the union influence the conflict pattern that the WRs use with the management of the company where they work? We explore how union support is related to the conflict pattern that WRs use.

Unions in Europe offer WRs support (i.e. legal services, consultancy, training, emotional support). This support is especially needed in countries such as Spain, where the group the WRs belong to is not the strongest. Due to the high power distance and the other reasons explained above, WRs are in a weak position in industrial relations. Here, management amasses the power without incorporating WRs in the decision-making process. As one WR expressed in an interview carried out in the framework of the NEIRE project, «Management doesn't consider us part of the decision making process. It's a cultural matter here: Management is management» (Male WR working in the communication sector in Spain. Quota extracted from Munduate *et alii*, 2012: 50). In this context, unions try to empower their WRs, mainly through training and emotional support.

Despite the fact that union support can be regarded as very positive, then, *extremes are never good*, and there can be a downside to the excessive perception of union support. We approach this downside from the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). Social exchange theory assumes that different individuals and groups interact to exchange outcomes (Blau, 1964; Rogers and Mainous, 1988; Rusbult

and Farrell, 1983; Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers and Mainous, 1988). For example, pay is given for productive performance or friendship might be exchanged for a desirable assignment (Cropanzano *et alii*, 1997). When levels of union support are too high, they create a feeling of obligation in employees whereby employees feel not only that they ought to be committed to the union but also that they should return the union's commitment by engaging in behaviours that support union goals (Gouldner, 1960; Tetrick, Shore, McClurg and Vandenberg, 2007; Wayne, Shore and Liden, 1997). Therefore, union culture and goals affect WR behaviour through the kind and level of support they perceive.

Industrial relations in Spain, as mentioned, are characterized by a high power distance and traditional confrontation between parties. The strong division between management and unions leads them to take an inattentive, perhaps even destructive approach to the needs of others. In this political context, «the work environment is characterized by groups and individuals who competitively pursue their own ends» (Cropanzano *et alii*, 1997: 160). Therefore, the response adopted by unions is self-serving and promotes competitive behaviours among WRs (Cropanzano *et alii*, 1997). This philosophy is transmitted to WRs through the support offered, especially through training courses or by emotional support provided by the union leaders. We expect WRs who perceive high levels of support to feel obligated and encouraged to take a competitive approach in conflict.

H.4. The level of union support perceived by WRs will be positively related to a competitive conflict pattern with the management.

METHOD

SAMPLE AND PROCEDURE

The present analyses were conducted with data gathered from 719 WRs in Spain (216 females, 503 males). The average age was 45 years (S.D.: 1.1) and the average educational level was technical degree (S.D.: 1.07). To collect the data we used a quantitative methodology (questionnaires). The questionnaire used for this evaluation was developed in close collaboration with the main Spanish trade unions (Unión General de Trabajadores [UGT] and Comisiones Obreras [CCOO]). The questionnaire was available online at the New European Industrial Relations (NEIRE) project website (www.dialogueatwork.eu.nowonline.nl). Questionnaires were also sent online to the WRs through the union dataset. The following conflict scenario was presented in the questionnaire to the participants:

Management is working on a reorganization process. However, they did not inform either the trade unions or the workers council. As worker representative, you have already asked for information several times about the consequences of this process for the employees. They informed you that it is difficult to specify the consequences as there are some uncertainties. Now the management has presented a plan. For you, this plan is unacceptable, as the consequences for employees are not clear. What would you do in this situation?

INSTRUMENTS

- *Integrating behaviour*: A sub-scale of the Dutch test of conflict handling (DUTCH) (De Dreu, Evers, Beersma, Kluster and Nauta, 2001) was used to assess the integrating conflict behaviour (6 items). After carrying out a factor analysis, problem solving (3 items) and compromising (3 items) were computed as one factor: Integrating behaviour. Items were scored on a 5-point-scale (1=never, 5=always). A sample item was, «I stand up for my own and the board's goals and interest». Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .747.
- *Forcing behaviour*: A sub-scale of the Dutch test of conflict handling (DUTCH) (De Dreu *et alii* 2001) was used to assess the forcing conflict behaviour (3 items). Items were scored on a 5-point-scale (1=never, 5=always). A sample item was, «I fight for a good outcome for myself». Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .707.
- *Trust in management*: Trust in management was assessed with a five-item scale adapted from the Organizational Trust Inventory (Nyhan and Marlowe, 1997). Items were scored on a 5-point scale (1=totally disagree, 5=totally agree). A sample item was «Employees think the management of this organisation is always honest and acts in good faith». Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .895.
- *Union support*: Union support was assessed with a seven-item scale adapted from the Perceived Union Support Scale (Shore *et alii* 1994). Items were scored on a 5-point-scale (1=never, 5=always). A sample item was, «The union has respect and understanding for my problems and wishes regarding my work as representative». Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .909.
- *Control variables*: Because the respondents were different genders and ages, and have different educational levels, we controlled for these variables (Bear, 2011; Korabik, Baril and Watson, 1993; Posthuma, 2009).

Results

Prior to analysing the hypotheses, we show in Table 1 the descriptive results (means, standard deviations and Pearson correlations) for this study.

Table 1 Means, standard deviations and Pearson correlation

	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Integrating behaviour ¹	3.89	.67	–		
2. Forcing behaviour ¹	4.33	.62	.370**	–	
3. Trust in management. ²	2.29	.87	-.050	-.120**	
4. Union support ¹	3.99	.76	.126**	.143**	.098**

N = 717

¹The scale goes from 1 = never to 5 = always

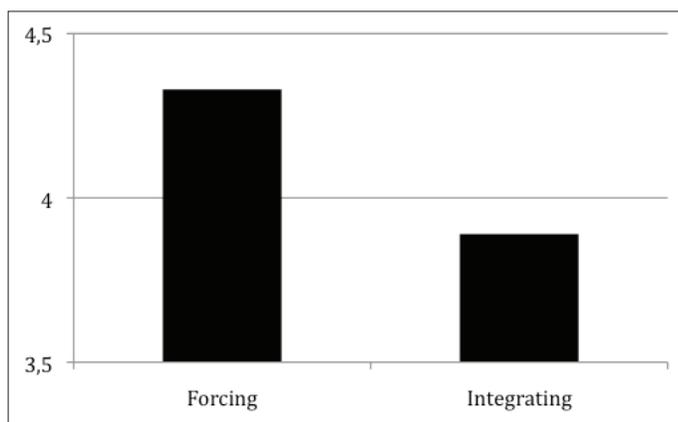
²The scale goes from 1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree

H.1. Conglomerated Conflict Behaviour theory

In H.1. we state that integrating and forcing behaviours are positively correlated for Spanish WR. To test this hypothesis we used Pearson correlation analyses. Results show that integrative and forcing behaviour are indeed positively related ($r = 0.37, p < 0.01$) (see Table 1). These results confirm that different behaviours are used in the same conflict, which leads to a conglomerate conflict pattern (Van Vliert *et alii*, 1995). H.1. is supported.

H.2. Competitive pattern

In H.2. we predict that Spanish WRs primarily use a competitive pattern (a behavioural conglomerate in which forcing behaviour is dominant over integrating behaviour). Descriptive results show that forcing behaviour (M = 4.33) is used considerably more among WRs than integrating behaviour (M = 3.89) (see Table 1). As seen in H.1. both behaviours are positively related, merging into a competitive pattern. H.2. is supported.

Fig.1 Forcing behaviour and integrating behaviour among Spanish WRs

H.3 Trust in management

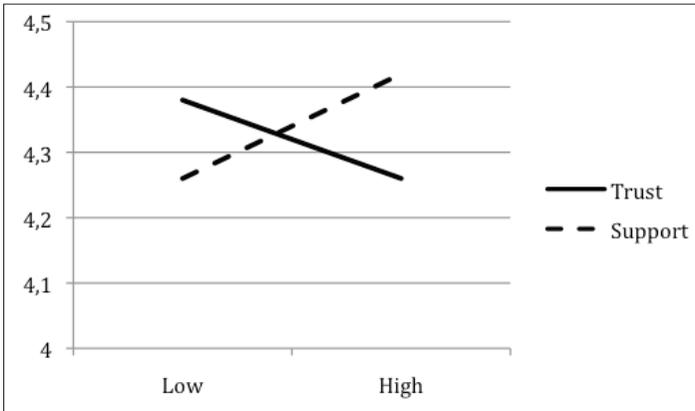
In H.3 we state that the level of trust in management is negatively related to the competitive pattern. Descriptive results show that trust in management is relatively low ($M = 2.29$ on a scale from 1 to 5) (see Table 1). We explore a multiple regression analysis to analyse the relation between trust and the competitive pattern. In the first step we introduce gender, age and educational level as control variables. In the second step we introduced trust in management as an independent variable. Results show that trust in management is negatively and strongly related to the competitive pattern ($\beta = -.125, p < .001$). Gender, age and educational level are not related to the competitive pattern. H.3. is supported. (See figure 2).

H.4. Union support

In H.4. we predict that union support is positively related to the competitive pattern. Descriptive results show that union support is relatively high ($M = 3.99$ on a scale from 1 to 5) (see Table 1). We explore a multiple regression analysis to analyse the relation between union support and the competitive pattern, controlling for gender, age and education level. In the first step we introduce gender, age and educational level as control variables. In the second step we introduced union support as an independent variable. Results show that union support is positively related to the competitive pattern ($\beta = 0.145, p < 0.01$).

Gender, age and educational level are not related to the competitive pattern. H.4. is supported (see figure 2).

Fig. 2 The relation between trust in management and union support with competitive behaviour



3. Discussion

The present study focused on the conflict pattern used by WRs in Spain and the relation between the conflict pattern and *a)* trust in management; and *b)* union support. First of all, the results confirm the CCB theory (Van de Vliert *et alii*, 1995). As we indicate above, integrating as well as forcing behaviour are positively correlated. Secondly, these two behaviours compound a competitive pattern, as the degree of forcing is higher than the degree of integrating behaviour in the conflict pattern. Thirdly, the negative relation between trust in management and the competitive conflict pattern is confirmed. More specifically, the low level of trust in management is related to a greater use of the competitive pattern. Finally, the level of union support is high in Spain. This high union support seems to stimulate the competitive conflict pattern.

We explore the main reasons for these results from the perspective of the *a)* societal culture (power distance and assertiveness) and *b)* the industrial relations tradition. In societies such as Spain characterized by a high power distance (Hofstede, 2001), unions play a leading role in empowering WRs and supporting workers. Due to the low power status that WRs have in organizations, WRs are less able to stand up for their rights, and are more easily intimidated. In this context of conflict, WRs use a competitive approach to conflict, trying to serve their own

interest. Further, societal culture in Spain gives a high value to assertiveness (House *et alii*, 2004). Thus, WRs tend to be assertive, confrontational and aggressive in their relationship with the management. We should point out that this can be also apply to management behaviour towards WRs, but in this study we focus on the WR's role. Using a competitive pattern is viewed as a sign of playing a powerful role in societies where assertiveness is positively valued. Thus, assertive behaviour is understood positively by the constituency (Medina, Povedano, Martinez and Munduate, 2009), leading to greater social support for the WRs. Further, the low power status occupied by WRs within organizations is also related to the fact that management neither provides WRs with accurate information nor includes WRs in the decision-making process. These factors indicate that management has little trust in workers, which is reciprocal. Thus, WRs do not trust management. Therefore, in Spain, where WRs have little power and neither WRs nor management trust each other, the support perceived by the trade union plays a leading role in WR empowerment. WRs are extremely committed to the union as the union provides them with support to balance the unequal power at the bargaining table.

Secondly, the industrial relations tradition has a major effect on the way that WRs behave in conflict as well as on the level of trust in management and the way in which the union supports their WRs. The Spanish Union Freedom Law was passed in 1985, almost a century later than in other European countries (in Denmark it was passed in 1899). Despite coming into effect at such a late date, we should point out that Spanish unions were able to adjust quickly and to consolidate their position very fast (Martinez Lucio, 2008). However, due to this belated union freedom in Spain (Munduate *et alii*, 1994), industrial relations still have a competitive approach, and unions do not have the same power status as in other countries. Thus, the philosophy disseminated by Spanish unions focuses on achieving the union purpose instead of cooperating and looking for integrative outcomes. This philosophy includes the perception of the management as an opponent group, which encourages WRs to behave competitively in organizational conflicts. Hence, the strong ideology originated by the long period of oppression influences the competitive pattern against management promoted by unions. This also induces Spanish WRs to have a low level of trust in management as they see management as an opponent. Furthermore, due to the industrial relations tradition, WRs have a strong emotional relationship with the union – they are part of the family – instead of with the organization where they develop their professional role. WRs perceive a high level of support from

the union and therefore they feel strongly committed to union goals and to using the conflict pattern promoted by the union, which is competitive.

4. Limitations and future research

The hypotheses have been explored only in one sample from one specific culture (Spain), where societal culture and historical tradition explain the results. Thus, the conclusions cannot be generalized to other societal cultures. A study of the relations that trust and union support have the conflict pattern used by WRs in other countries with other societal cultures and industrial relations traditions may confirm our results in future research and will have important implications for the field of organizational conflict resolution in different cultural contexts.

5. Theoretical and practical implications

Despite the obvious limitations, our study makes important contributions to the literature and to practice. The main contributions to the literature are: *a)* WRs use a conglomerate conflict pattern in conflicts with management; *b)* the societal culture and the industrial relations tradition are related to the WR conflict pattern, the level of trust that WRs have in management and the level of union support perceived by WRs; *c)* trust in management is negatively related to the competitive conflict pattern; and *d)* union support is positively related to the competitive conflict pattern. As far as practical implications are concerned, first we conclude that unions still have an old-fashioned philosophy about industrial relations by promoting competitive patterns within the organization. If unions are to come up to date, they may need to promote innovative and more cooperative conflict patterns among WRs. Previous studies concluded that cooperative patterns (higher level of integrative behaviour mixed with a lower level of forcing) lead to better win-win solutions (Coleman, 1990; Fukuyama, 1995). Further, the dissemination of more cooperative relations with the management increases trust-based relationships (Ross and LaCroix, 1996; Tjosvold, 1998). Increasing trust-based relations will lead to sharing information and including WRs in the decision-making process, thus balancing the power structure of organizations. Union support based on the professionalization and empowerment of WRs is needed as an instrument for WRs to deal with the information provided and to participate effectively in the decision-making process (Munduate, Euwema and Elgoibar, 2012). Hence, union training programmes in the new industrial

relations will be more productive if they focus on empowering WRs and guide them to take the initiative, instead of increasing commitment and forcing them to follow an old-fashioned competitive pattern towards organizational conflicts.

As organizational conflicts between workers and management are inevitable in organizations, we believe that our conclusions are important in the field of organizational conflict management, and particularly in the approach to conflict of the CCB model and the relation of the conflict pattern with trust in management and union support. We hope that our findings are of interest a) to managers so that they will consider increasing the information they share with the WRs and including them in the decision-making process; and b) to unions so that they can empower WRs effectively. Following Tjosvold (1997: 23) «Well-managed conflict is an investment in the future. People trust each other more, feel more powerful and efficacious, and believe their joint efforts will pay off». So, with the intention of increasing trust and power equality inside organizations, managers and union should make an effort to disseminate an effective conflict pattern which contributes to more cooperative industrial relations.

6. References

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