

The Social Influence of Confidence in Group Decision Making

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This study investigates the relation between an individual's self-reported confidence and his or her influence within a freely interacting group. Each participant chose responses and provided confidence assessments for choice items of a variety of task types, first as an individual and a second time as a member of a pentad, a member of a dyad, or an individual. The influence of a particular faction within a group was greater if its members were more confident. A participant's response accuracy was related to both greater confidence and greater influence to the extent that the task fell on the intellectual end of the intellectual–judgmental continuum of task types. As a result, the extent to which group members' confidence predicted their influence was also greatest on intellectual rather than judgmental tasks. Results further illustrate that adding group members to work on a problem may increase overconfidence on judgmental tasks but decrease overconfidence on intellectual tasks. © 1997 Academic Press

Confidence is the strength of a person's belief that a specific statement is the best or most accurate response (Peterson & Pitz, 1988).¹ Empirical efforts dedicated toward investigating the various determinants of confidence (e.g., Arkes, Christensen, Lai, & Blumer, 1987; Griffin & Tversky, 1992; Heath & Gonzalez, 1995; Koehler, 1991; Koriat, Lichtenstein, & Fischhoff, 1980; Mayseless & Kruglanski, 1987; Peterson & Pitz, 1988) greatly outweigh those invested in exploring the effects that one's confidence has on the behavior of the self and others (Olson & Sniezek, 1992; Paese & Kinnaly, 1993; Sniezek & Buckley, 1995). This imbalance is troubling. After all, it is of little use to be able to raise or lower a person's confidence if we cannot predict what effects such changes will have. The purpose of the present experiment is to examine the consequents of

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¹ We will limit our discussion of confidence to this rather strict definition. Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977), demeanor (Lee & Ofshe, 1981), and optimism (Zullow & Seligman, 1990) all intuitively seem to share certain similarities with confidence. However, the exact nature of the relationships between these variables and confidence remains unclear.

confidence. Specifically, it attempts to discover if the self-reported confidence of group members predicts who will be most influential in determining the collective decision of a freely interacting group.

The Importance of Task Type

Although there are many factors that could conceivably affect the relation between member confidence and influence within a group, we will focus only on the role of the task, applying the intellectual–judgmental continuum of decision tasks (Laughlin, 1980). Tasks at the extreme judgmental end of the continuum are opinion questions such that no answer is more accurate than any other. Moving toward the opposite end of the continuum, a task is intellectual to the extent that one could prove the accuracy of the correct response. All decision tasks without correct answers are judgmental. On the other hand, not all problems with correct solutions are intellectual. For example, if a problem is extraordinarily difficult, the group may have no available means to demonstrate the superiority of the correct response over any other response.

Laughlin and Ellis (1986) have suggested that it is possible to estimate the intellectual versus judgmental nature of a task by analyzing specific characteristics of the decision task environment. A decision task can be considered intellectual to the degree that it meets *four criteria of demonstrability*. First, a conceptual system must exist, and there must be a consensus on the rules of the system (e.g., the rules of syntax to solve a verbal problem). Second, sufficient information to solve the problem must be available, either in the decision environment or in memory. For example, solving for X using the equation, $X = 5Y$, would not be an intellectual task, assuming the identity of Y is unknown. Third, the incorrect members must have sufficient understanding of the system to recognize a correct answer if it is explained to them. And, finally, at least one correct member must have sufficient time, ability, and motivation to explain the correct answer to the rest of the group. It should be noted that this process of estimating the intellectual/judgmental nature of a task a priori can be difficult and imprecise, particularly since the demonstrability of a task is a function of not only the task itself but also of the group members and the decision environment. For example, the same task may be judgmental for low-ability people under time pressure but intellectual for experts with unlimited time. Thus, whenever the term “intellectual” is used, it should be interpreted as “intellectual for the average member of a given population within the given context.”

The intellectual/judgmental nature of a task may also be estimated empirically by applying a quantitative technique known as social decision scheme (SDS) analysis (see Davis, 1973, for details of the theoretical model). In SDS analysis, a task is classified as intellectual if a correct minority can convince the rest of the group to adopt the correct response. The smaller the size of the correct faction sufficient to prevail, the more intellectual the task is presumed to be. Conversely, if the correct faction has no more persuasive power than any other faction of equal

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