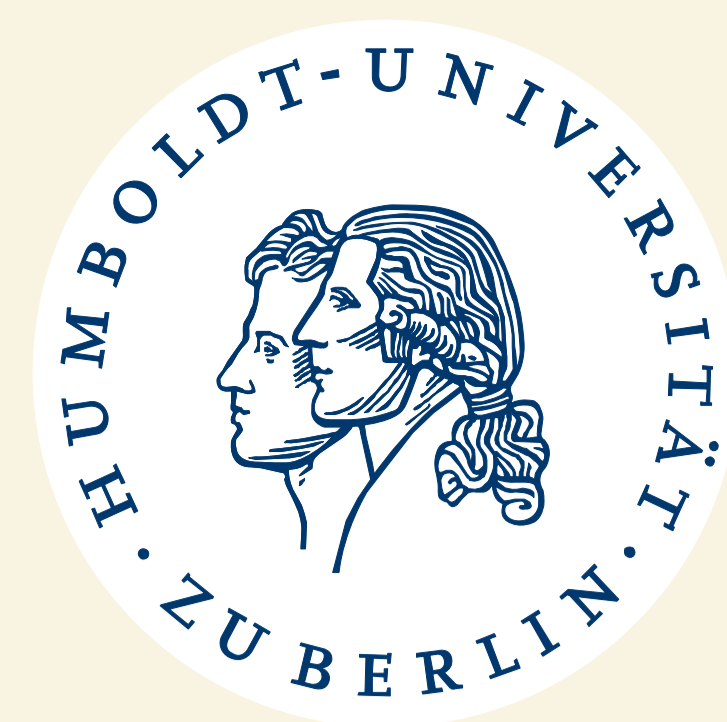


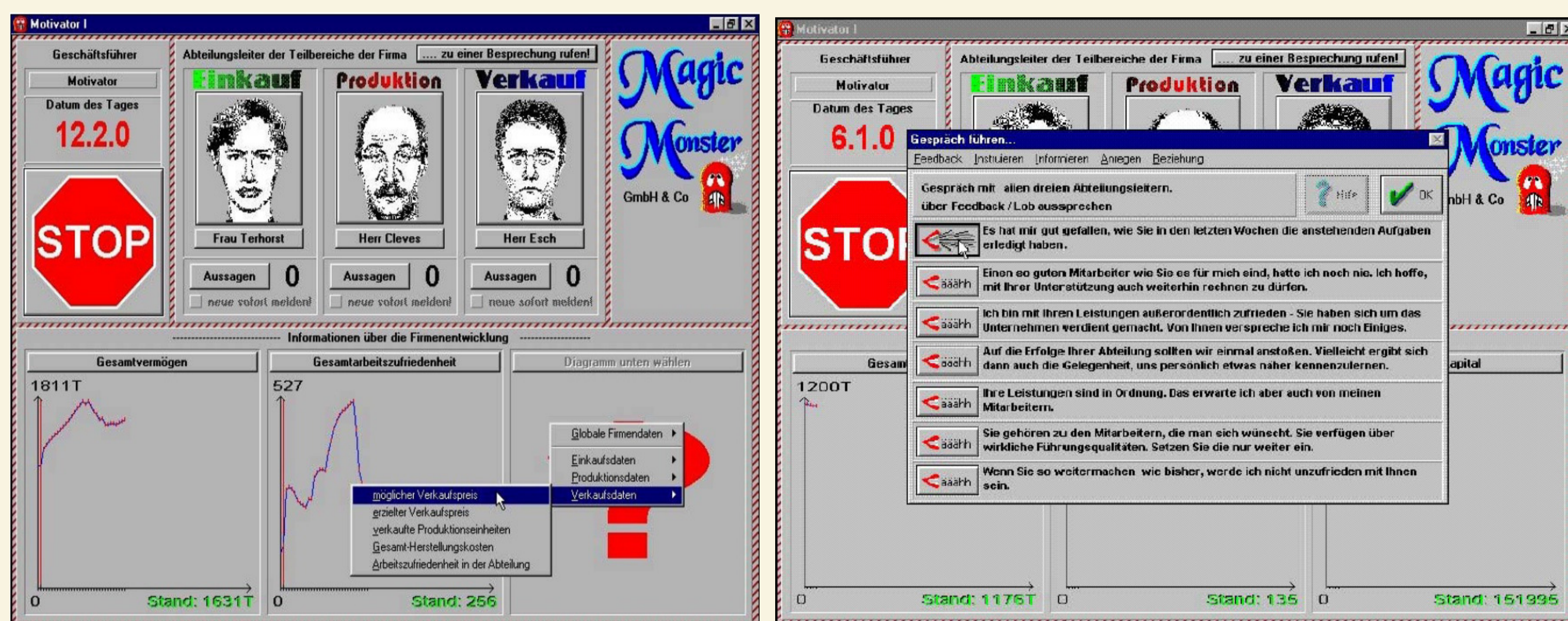
Affect Control Theory: Linking Social Cognition to Symbolic Interactionism



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Affect Control Theory (ACT; Heise, 2007) holds that people control social interactions by striving to maintain feelings about the situation. The theory is based on the symbolic interactionist premise that people use their language to assign meaning to social situations and that they base their actions on these meanings (Mead, 1934). The Semantic Differential (Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957) is used to measure the affective meaning of social identities, actions, and emotions on three universal dimensions of Evaluation (*good vs. bad*), Potency (*strong vs. weak*), and Activity (*calm vs. lively*). Empirically derived equations that model the process of impression formation during actions allow for the simulation of social behavior, using a measure of affective deflection to predict the probability of action. E.g., *beating a child* creates high deflection in a *mother*, whereas *praising a child* allows her to confirm her self-sentiment. Thus, the model predicts – along with common sense – that mothers praise their children rather than beating them. Stemming from sociology, ACT has rarely been tested in behavioral experiments.

Method: Running the Computer Simulated Company „Magic Monster Inc.“



Sample: 60 students from different universities in Berlin.

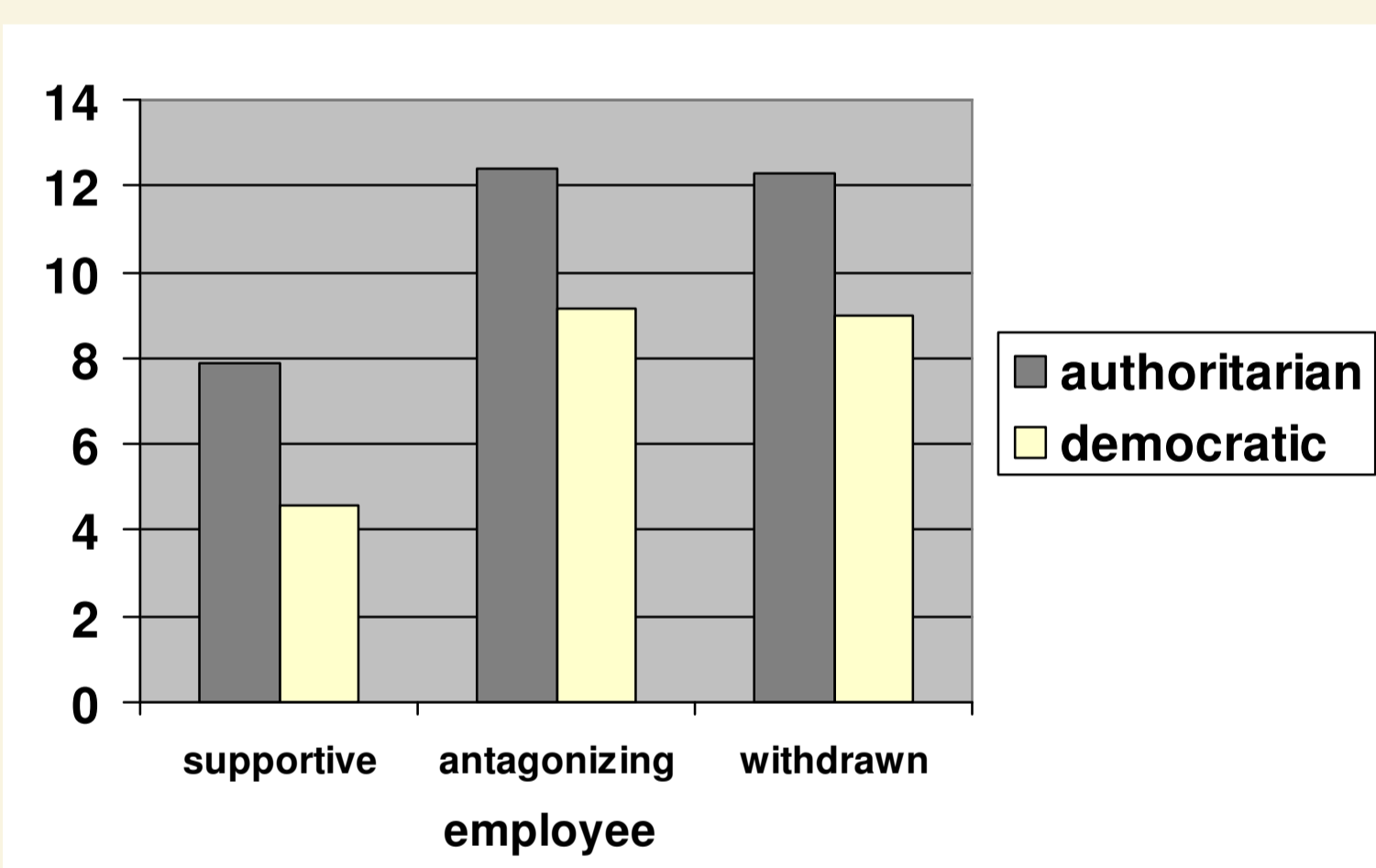
Manipulation of Leadership Style: Half of the subjects were asked in a supposed „leadership experience interview“ to describe situations where they „realized their will over the resistance of the other group members“ (*authoritarian leadership condition*). The remaining Ss were asked to remember situations where they „succeeded in convincing the others“ (*democratic condition*).

Manipulation of employee personality: One of the virtual employees was programmed to „support“ the Ss in their actions, the second was meant to „antagonize“ them, while the third „avoided“ too much contact.

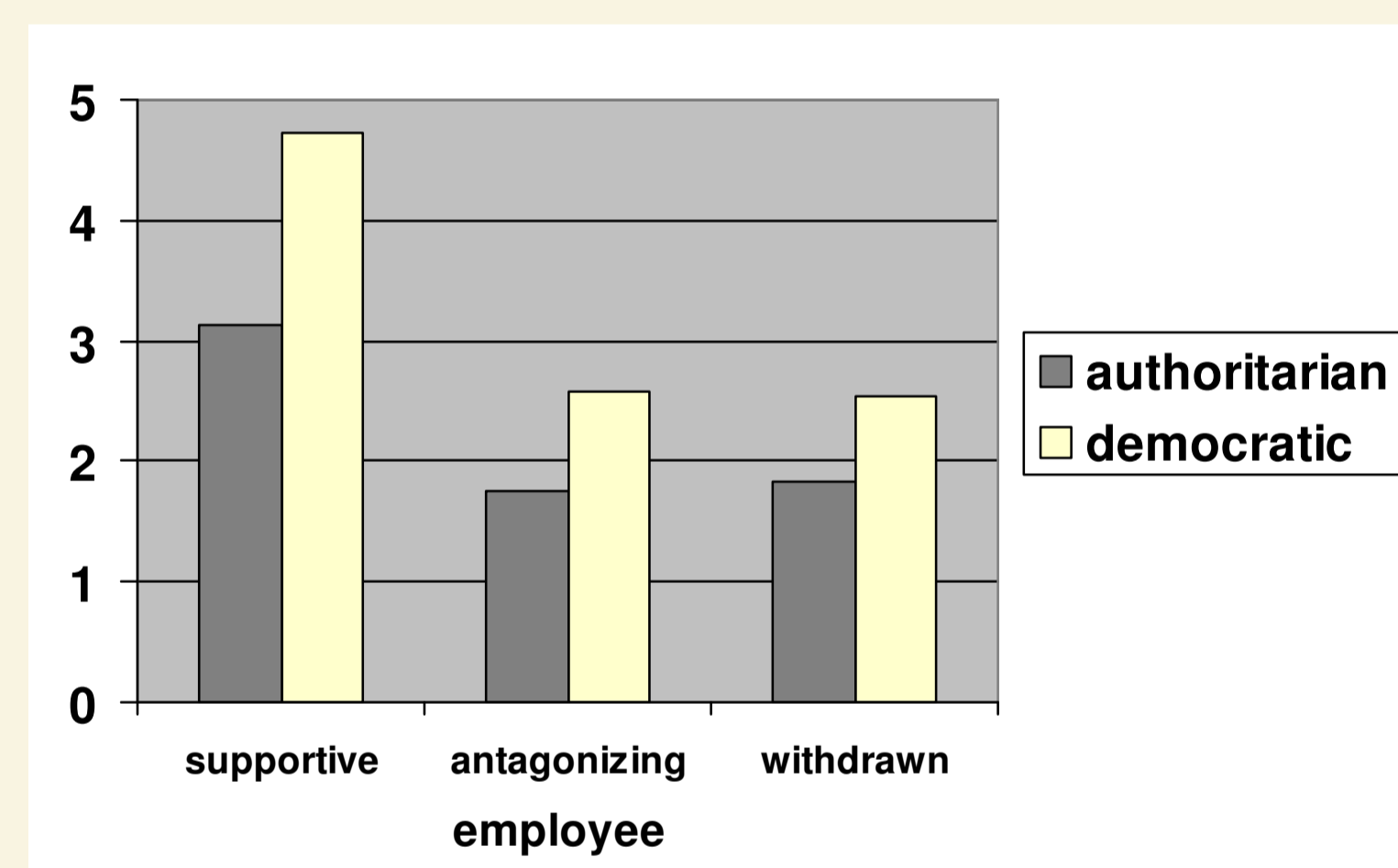
Procedure: The software Motivator One (Heineken et al., 1996) was used to create the virtual company *Magic Monster Inc.* The subjects were to run the company by communicating with three different virtual employees. They could click on sentences out of their choice from fourteen different categories of leadership behavior.

Simulation of the outcome: Heise's software INTERACT was used to create ACT predictions for the outcome of the experiment. For each possible leadership category, measures of affective deflection were calculated.

Results



Deflection caused by the action of *raising the employee's pay* in the different conditions of the experiment. Deflections are higher for the subjects in the authoritarian leadership condition, predicting that they are less likely to grant a raise in salary. The supportive employee is the one most likely to get a raise in pay in both priming conditions.



Observed relative frequency of *raising the employee's salary* in the different experimental conditions. Be aware that the relationship between deflection and the probability of action is inverse. In order to confirm predictions, high bars in the left fig. should correspond with low bars in the right fig. Predictions held up for all but one of the contrasts involved.

The combination of 14 possible leadership behaviors with two leadership styles and three types of employee yielded 84 possible interactions. Each was implemented into INTERACT as a sequence of events. For example, the deflection resulting from a student in the democratic condition raising the pay of the antagonizing employee was $d = 9.15$, calculated from the following simulation:

1. STUDENT CONVINCED STUDENT = DEM_STUDENT
2. EMPLOYEE ANTAGONIZE DEM_STUDENT
3. DEM_STUDENT RAISE_PAY EMPLOYEE

In total, there were 42 possible between-subjects contrasts. Of these, 28 were correctly predicted by the difference in deflection. The binomial probability of obtaining such a result by chance is $p < .05$. Also, 56 out of possible 84 within-subjects contrasts were correctly predicted by ACT ($p < .01$). There were positive correlations between the differences in deflection and the effect sizes of the corresponding contrasts (betw.: $r = .39$, $p < .05$; within: $r = .29$, $p < .01$).

Discussion

These results corroborate the proposition that language-based impression formation as modeled mathematically by ACT predicts actions and emotions that correspond to verbal actions and emotions that occur in realistic social interaction. We propose that ACT can be useful for overcoming the gap between the „two social psychologies“ via linking two dominant paradigms: Symbolic Interactionism from sociology, and Social Cognition from psychology. Experiments are social situations to which the subjects ascribe meaning. They rely on their (sub)culture-specific language to do so; hence, people's social cognitions are synchronized by the same language that they once learned. This process can be modeled with ACT: in the present experiment, the predictions of the Ss' behaviors were based on a model of the affective structure of the German language.

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