



Mini biography

Cooperation is one of the most intriguing behaviors that people exhibit. It is not only interesting that we trust, coordinate and cooperate with each other, but also the quite specific and predictable ways in which we do it. But why do we cooperate? Why are we willing to engage in a joint activity that will impose personal costs and expect benefits in the future? Why, in a world of egoists, do we even care about others? And if it is beneficial, how can we enhance it? Panos Mitkidis has long been fascinated with how cognition, emotion, and cultural norms affect how people make decisions in their coordination and cooperative interaction with others, from personal decisions (like love), to market decisions (like the production line), and is trying to figure out the answers to these questions through research based on experiments that explore the nature of coordination and cooperation.

Panos produced his PhD dissertation at the Department of Culture and Society, Aarhus University, where he has been part of the Interacting Minds Centre, the Behavioral Economics, and the Religion, Cognition and Culture research programs.

Time and place for the PhD Defence

The 22nd of October, 12.00-16.00

Aarhus University, building 1333, room no. 101 (A1), 8000 Aarhus C

Contact

Panagiotis Mitkidis

E-mail: mitkidispan@gmail.com

Aarhus University
Department of Culture and Society
Building 1451-319
Jens Chr. Skous Vej 3
8000 Aarhus C.

PHD DEFENCE

COORDINATION, COOPERATION AND COHESION

PhD dissertation by Panagiotis Mitkidis



AARHUS UNIVERSITET

COORDINATION, COOPERATION AND COHESION

Summary of the PhD dissertation : "In this dissertation, I propose a theoretical and methodological framework for the study of collective interactions and I apply this framework to the study of coordination and cooperation in three experiments, which were conducted both in the lab and in the wild."

Collective-Goal Ascription Increases Cooperation in Humans

The first article, Collective-Goal Ascription Increases Cooperation in Humans (Mitkidis, Sørensen et al., 2013), is an investigation of process vs. goal in relation to cooperation enhancement. We study whether ascription of a transparent collective goal in a joint action promotes cooperation in a group. The study found that the clear knowledge of the goal of a joint action, is associated with an increase of cooperation in future interactions. Seeing or knowing the end-game of our cooperative effort makes us more cooperative and reliable to others, but also, by knowing how the fruit of our collaboration looks like, we are more willing to overcome selfishness and share with the others.

Does Goal-Demotion enhance Cooperation?

The second article, Does Goal-Demotion enhance Cooperation? (Mitkidis, Lienard et al., 2013), is a study of ritualized behavior, and particularly on goal demotion, a subject of great importance in the scientific study of religion. In this article, we investigate if a conspicuous and recurrent feature of collective ritualized behavior, goal-demotion, promotes lasting cooperation. We report that goal-directed collective behavior is more efficient than goal-demoted behavior for motivating participants to engage in ulterior cooperation.

Extreme Rituals Promote Prosociality

The third article, Extreme Rituals Promote Prosociality (Xygalatas, Mitkidis, et al., 2013), brings the focus out of the laboratory settings and into a natural setting (Mauritius), by comparing religious rituals that varied in levels of intensity. We found that participation in a religious ritual involving multiple body piercings and physical exhaustion increased generosity compared with a similar ritual that lacked severity, while perceived pain was correlated with generosity both among performers and observers. Furthermore, we report that high ordeal rituals increased superordinate inclusive over parochial identities.

Division of Labor on the Social Micro-scale: the secret of our success

The fourth article, Division of Labor on the Social Micro-scale: the secret of our success (Wallot, Mitkidis, McGraw, & Roepstorff, 2013), finds us back to the lab where we used a joint action task to investigate the role of DOL for action coordination. We designed a joint construction task where pairs of participants were instructed to build several model cars using LEGO® bricks. We found that by leaving people free to decide what they will do, how they will build the car, the division of labor gets increased. We also found that the more the division of labor between participants during the joint construction is the better the product performance is, both aesthetically and functionally. We finally found that higher division of labor is associated with higher subjective perception of fun and cooperation during the task. Dividing the labor and having shared goal about the final product makes us more satisfied with our cooperative work and more productive.

Conclusion

Trust and cooperation are aspects of human behavior necessary for almost any type of collective activity. We trust and cooperate in our love relations; in our friendships. But also we do it when it comes to production line, policy making and governance. In the experiments described above we found indications that: 1. Dividing the labor makes us more satisfied with our cooperative work and more productive, but we need something more: So, 2. Seeing or knowing the end-game of our cooperative effort makes us more cooperative and reliable to others, but also, by knowing how the fruit of our collaboration looks like, we are more willing to overcome selfishness and share with the others. Finally, 3. Knowing the function of what we are conjointly doing makes us more cooperative, both within our group but also out of it. Two minds are better than one. But when? How in a world of egoists we can trust and enhance cooperation and productivity? We saw that by dividing our work we become more interdependent to each other and by having a clear, common goal and shared information of what we want to do we can have more fun, become more cooperative, and build trust.