Greetings,

A few months ago you participated in a study about business negotiations between a local company and a multinational corporation, and said that you would be interested in hearing about the results. We appreciate your help with our research, and we are happy to tell you about the findings. The study was conducted by Janie Busby under the supervision of Dr. Winnifred Louis. If you would like to ask questions, to comment on what you read, or to find out more, you can contact project staff by phoning (07) 3346 9515, by emailing w.louis@psy.uq.edu.au, or by writing to Dr. Winnifred Louis, School of Psychology, McElwain Building / University of Queensland / St. Lucia, QLD 4072. You can also read about other studies that we’ve done on opinion group norms at http://www.psy.uq.edu.au/~wlouis/.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS: MOTIVATIONS TO COOPERATE WITH HIGH AND LOW POWER GROUPS.
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WHAT WE WERE LOOKING FOR.

The primary goal of this study was to investigate whether belonging to a high power group or a low power group influences people’s willingness to cooperate with their own group or another group in a negotiations scenario. Participants were told to imagine that they were working for either a multinational corporation (high power) or a small local company (low power). They were then informed that they were engaged in a business negotiation with a company of the other type (low/high power). In this negotiation their own company supports the implementation of two options, and rejects two others. The other company also supports two options and rejects two other options. Participants were then asked how they would vote across the four options and how they thought people in their own and the other company generally would vote. They were also asked to judge whether these options (having been implemented) would harm or benefit themselves and the company as a whole. We also measured participants’ identification with their company.

This study’s theoretical context is a model called “referent information influence” (Terry & Hogg, 1996), which says that the norms of groups you belong to (‘ingroups’) are very important in decisions, while the norms of groups that you don’t belong to (‘outgroups’) are generally unimportant in shaping attitudes. So, the model says that participants should vote according to the recommendations of their own group, but not be influenced by the recommendations of the other group. We also wanted to see whether manipulating the power of the ingroup and outgroup would affect this relationship.

SOME DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS

During May 2006, 168 people completed the study. Participants were approached to complete the questionnaire while at the St. Lucia campus of UQ. Participants ranged in age from 17 to 57 (but 75% were 21 or younger), with equal numbers of males and females.

WHAT WE FOUND

1. IDENTIFICATION WITH A GROUP. After being told to imagine that they were employees of either a local company or a multinational corporation, participants were asked whether, in this situation, they would identify with the company, and feel a sense of commitment and solidarity with that company. Overall, people tended to feel a sense of
association with the company, with 69% of participants stating that they were committed to
the company, 68% that they identified with the company, and 67% said that they would feel a
sense of solidarity with other workers in their company. These ratings did not differ between
participants assigned to the high and low power company.

2. COOPERATION PATTERNS AMONG GROUPS. We then told participants that
negotiators for their own company/corporation had decided to support two of the options put
forward by the companies (Options A and B) and reject the other two (C and D). They were
also told that the negotiators for the other company endorsed two (A and C) and rejected two
(B and D).

First we asked the participants how they thought other people would vote. As
expected, the majority of people thought that workers of their own company would support
the options endorsed by their company, and reject the options of the other company. Most
participants also thought that the workers of the other company would behave the same way,
supporting the options endorsed by that company and rejecting the others. Similarly, most
people stated that they thought that the options that their company endorsed would benefit
the company and themselves, and that those endorsed by the other company would probably harm
their company and themselves.

Then participants were asked how they would vote in this situation. Most people
supported the option both companies supported (78%) and very few people supported the
option both sides rejected (13%). Fifty-eight percent of participants stated that they would
support the option supported by their own company but rejected by the other, but only 21% of
all participants supported a proposal rejected by their own company and endorsed by another.

3. LINKS BETWEEN GROUP IDENTIFICATION, GROUP POWER AND
COOPERATION. We were interested to see whether the type of company the participants
were assigned to (the high power multinational corporation or the low power local company)
and participants’ identification with their company would affect their decision to support each
of the options.

We found that people’s willingness to cooperate with the negotiators from their own
company was predicted by how much they identified with their company (their ingroup), but
was not influenced by the power level of the company. Further analyses revealed that people
who identified with their group were more likely to think that the options their negotiators
represented would benefit the company, and more likely to think that the options that
benefited the company would benefit themselves. Thus overall we found that people’s
willingness to vote according to the suggestions of their own company could be predicted by
(a) how much participants identified with their company; (b) this identification as mediated
by the belief that such a decision would benefit the group; and (c) the effect of identification
as mediated by the belief it benefits the self (through benefiting the group).

We then examined why people cooperated with the suggestions of the other company
(the outgroup). Cooperation with the other group’s suggestions was negatively predicted by
identification with their own group (i.e., those who identified more with their own company
were less likely to vote in accordance with the other company). Participants who were
employees of the high power corporation were also more likely to vote in accordance with the
other company. This was not expected, but perhaps reflects a sense of confidence in their own
high power and willingness to make concessions because of their security. Further analyses
also revealed that participants who thought it would benefit their own company voted with the
other company. Thus people’s willingness to cooperate with an outgroup could be predicted
by a lack of identification with their own company, a belief that voting in such a way would
benefit their own company, and being an employee of the high power corporation. These
were each three independent motivations, whereas people’s identity motivation to cooperate with their own company was intertwined with cost-benefit analyses (and independent of power).

CONCLUSION
In this study we investigated whether belonging to a high or low power group affected how people cooperated with the endorsements of their own and another group. These results suggested that people are more likely to cooperate with their own group when they identify with that group, and that this was influenced by how much they thought those behaviours would benefit the group and themselves. People were more likely to go along with the recommendations of the other group when they did not identify with their own group, and when they thought that choice would benefit their own group. People’s likelihood of cooperating with the other group was also more likely when they were part of the high status group. This is an interesting finding that will be followed up in future research.

THANKS AGAIN…
So that’s a description of what we found in this study. If you have any questions, or would like a copy of the longer write-up when we get that done (in several months) please get in touch. And thank you again for your participation and interest!