

Distributive Spirals: Negotiation Impasses and the Moderating Role of Disputant Self-Efficacy

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Negotiations do not always end in agreements. Yet, we know little about impasses and how they affect negotiators. In three studies, we compare how negotiators experience impasses and agreements, paying particular attention to the moderating role of disputant self-efficacy. Specifically, we propose and find that negotiators who impasse find themselves caught in a *distributive spiral*—they interpret their performance as unsuccessful, experience negative emotions, and develop negative perceptions of their counterpart and the process. In terms of their future behavioral intentions, they are less willing to work together in the future, plan to share less information, plan to behave less cooperatively, and they lose faith in negotiation as an effective means of managing conflicts. As predicted, negotiators with relatively high levels of self-efficacy were insulated from some of these negative outcomes. © 2000 Academic Press

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People negotiate all the time. At home we negotiate with our children over curfews, spouses over chores, and extended families over holiday plans. Once we get to work, we negotiate with project team members over task assignments, supervisors over budgets, and clients over deadlines. Negotiations are simply part of our daily routine. From this perspective, any one negotiation can be seen as a link in a longer chain of negotiations in which a single experience is likely to affect subsequent ones. Imagine a managing director negotiating with another director over budget allocations. If she is unable to reach a satisfactory agreement, how will she negotiate with this same colleague in the future? Will this experience affect how she negotiates with another set of colleagues about hiring decisions later in the afternoon? Although scholars acknowledge the prevalence of impasses and the iterative nature of negotiation, questions like these have received little empirical attention (for an exception, see Mannix, Tinsley, & Bazerman, 1995).

We compare negotiators who have experienced qualitatively different outcomes—either an impasse or an agreement—and examine their reactions to these experiences as well as their behavioral intentions for managing future conflicts. We propose that impasses trigger a set of emotions, perceptions, and intentions for future behavior that may yield suboptimal settlements or even impasses on future occasions. We refer to this cycle as a *distributive spiral*, and we examine it in three studies. In the first study, we investigate whether negotiators perceive impasses to be relatively unsuccessful outcomes and whether they are dissatisfied with these outcomes. These results lay the groundwork for the second study in which we examine the immediate (negative) consequences of impasses on negotiators' emotions and cognitions. Specifically, we test whether negotiators who impasse develop more negative emotional reactions and impressions of their counterparts. In the third study, we investigate the longer range implications of impasses and agreements on negotiators' decisions about how they will approach subsequent negotiations as well as their general attitudes about negotiation. Taken together, these three studies establish that impasses foster distributive spirals that are likely to impair future negotiation performance. We also examine whether self-efficacy moderates this cycle.

INTRODUCTION

For over two decades, negotiation researchers have shone their empirical spotlights on the quality of negotiation outcomes, predominantly by studying these outcomes as dependent variables. This body of research reveals that a number of factors influence the outcomes negotiators reach, including negotiators' motivational orientations (e.g., Pruitt, 1981), their decision frames (de Dreu, Carnevale, Emans, & Van de Vliert, 1994), their moods and emotions (Allred, Mallozzi, Matsui, & Raia, 1997; Carnevale & Isen, 1986), and their personalities (Barry & Friedman, 1998). More recently, scholars have investigated the impact of party configuration (O'Connor, 1997a; Thompson, Peterson, & Brodt, 1996) and culture (Brett & Okumura, 1998) on the quality

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