

Get mad and get more than even: When and why anger expression is effective in negotiations

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Abstract

We hypothesized that anger expressions increase expressers' ability to claim value in negotiations, but only when the recipients of these expressions have poor alternatives. This effect occurs because anger expression communicates toughness, and only recipients who have poor alternatives are affected by the toughness of their counterpart. In Experiment 1, participants read a scenario about a negotiator who either was angry or not. In Experiment 2, dyads negotiated face-to-face after one negotiator within each dyad was advised to show either anger or no emotion. In both studies, recipients of anger expressions who had poor alternatives conceded more. Experiment 2 also provided evidence that toughness ascribed to the expresser mediated the effect of anger expression on claiming value.

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“The way in which he made use ... of anger contributed to make one feel what a mastery he had of the terrible game in which he was engaged...” (De Gaulle, 1954/1964, pp. 57–58).

In his memoirs, French President Charles De Gaulle recalled his impressions of Winston Churchill. De Gaulle says that Churchill was persuasive by conveying toughness. According to De Gaulle, one tactic Churchill used was the expression of anger. In this way, De Gaulle suggested that anger might be used strategically in negotiations and that its advantage might rest in its ability to create the perception that the expresser is tough. In this paper we examine De Gaulle's claim by investigating whether people who express anger in a negotiation are effective in inducing more concessions in their negotiation partners.

Experienced emotions in negotiation

Most of the existing research on affect in negotiation has focused on emotional experience, rather than on emotional expression. That research has consistently found that experiencing positive emotions is beneficial to negotiators, but that experiencing negative emotions is not. For example, negotiators in a positive mood are less likely to adopt contentious behaviors, and more likely to propose alternatives, and suggest trade-offs than negotiators in a neutral mood. In turn, when negotiators feel good, negotiation outcomes are better (Carnevale & Isen, 1986; Forgas, 1998). Other research has demonstrated a negative impact of negative feelings in negotiation. Allred, Mallozzi, Matsui, and Raia (1997) found that negotiators who felt angry achieved fewer joint gains than did negotiators who had more positive feelings. Similarly, Pillutla and Murnighan's (1996) participants who felt angry refused offers that served their economic interests.

Although the results from the literature on felt emotion in negotiations do not seem to support De Gaulle's

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observations about Churchill, they may be irrelevant to Churchill's strategy. De Gaulle did not say that Churchill necessarily *felt* anger while being so persuasive, he merely indicated that he "used" it, which could mean that he expressed it without feeling the slightest bit angry. Research on emotional expression suggests that emotional expressions can occur independently from feelings (Fridlund, 1991; Tourangeau & Ellsworth, 1979) and can have independent effects (McCaul, Holmes, & Solomon, 1982). Thus, expressions of anger might have different effects than feelings of anger. In this paper, we argue that anger expressions are noticed and processed by negotiators and that the inferences people draw based on these expressions affect negotiation behavior.

Anger expressions and resulting inferences

People are quite adept at noticing and reading the emotion expressions of others. In fact, research has shown that people are very accurate when matching cues (from the face, the voice, or the body) to the emotional state of the expresser (Ekman, 1993; Scherer, 1986). Observers infer more than felt affect from such expressive cues; they also infer characteristics of the expresser. In particular, people believe that someone expressing anger is dominant (Knutson, 1996; Tiedens, 2001; Tiedens, Ellsworth, & Mesquita, 2000), strong, and tough (e.g., Clark, Pataki, & Carver, 1996; Karasawa, 2001; Knutson, 1996).

Although the effect of anger expressions on perceptions of toughness has not been demonstrated in the domain of negotiation, it seems likely that this effect would generalize, and that such perceptions could affect the outcome of the negotiation. In general, people concede more to negotiators they perceive as tough or dominant than to those they perceive as soft or submissive (e.g., Bacharach & Lawler, 1981; Komorita & Brenner, 1968; Pruitt, 1981; Yukl, 1974). If anger expressions lead to perceptions of toughness, and perceptions of toughness generally lead to concessions, it seems possible that anger expressions in negotiations would result in concessions.

Perceived alternatives moderate responses to toughness

People's perception of their alternatives dramatically influences concession making. Better alternatives increase one's walk away point, reduce one's perceived dependence on the counterpart, and thus decrease concessions (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Kelley, Beckman, & Fischer, 1967; Mannix, Thompson, & Bazerman, 1989; Pinkley, Neale, & Bennett, 1994). In fact, people's perception of their alternatives may affect their behavior more strongly than any other kind of information (White, Valley, Bazerman, Neale, & Peck, 1994).

One advantage of having good alternatives is that it makes the negotiator less susceptible to the tactics of the opponent (Lawler & Bacharach, 1979; Tedeschi, Lindsold, Horai, & Gahagan, 1969; Yukl, 1974), particularly tactics that involve creating the perception of toughness. When recipients have good alternatives tough tactics might result in impasses or the unwillingness to compromise but as Yukl (1974) showed, a strategy relying on tough moves was effective at inducing concessions from recipients who did not have any alternatives. Similarly, Komorita and Barnes (1969) found that negotiators who had unattractive alternatives conceded a lot when they were confronted with tough behavior from their counterparts, whereas negotiators with an acceptable alternative were unaffected. Thus, if anger communicates toughness, it should function like other strategies that rely on conveying toughness, and only affect those who perceive themselves as having unattractive alternatives.

Experiment 1

Method

Participants

One-hundred-fifty-seven undergraduates (68 female, 89 male) at a large U.S. University participated in the study for \$10 payment. They were recruited from an electronic mailing list that advertises opportunities to participate in studies. This study was conducted in conjunction with other studies presented in a random order during a mass-testing session.

Materials

All participants read a negotiation vignette in which they were asked to imagine that they were playing the role of a negotiator who was finalizing a deal about the sale of technical equipment (see Appendix A for full text). The vignette informed participants that they were negotiating the terms of the warranty, which involved three issues: liability coverage; time needed for possible repair; and a discount for spare parts. The negotiation dialogue was comprised of eleven statements made alternately by the participants' character and their counterpart. The only aspects of the vignette that varied across conditions were (a) the participants' character's alternatives and (b) the emotional tone of the counterpart's last four statements.

Alternatives manipulation. The alternatives manipulation consisted of information given prior to the dialogue. It read as follows, with the poor perceived alternatives wording in parentheses:

You are (are not) working on many other deals right now. It is a good (slack) period for your company. Business is prosperous (rare). It will be easy (difficult) to find another

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