



Get angry, get out: The interpersonal effects of anger communication in multiparty negotiation [☆]

Ilja Van Beest ^{a,*}, Gerben A. Van Kleef ^b, Eric Van Dijk ^a

^a *Social and Organizational Psychology, Leiden University, Institute for Psychological Research, P.O. Box 9555, 2300 RB Leiden, The Netherlands*

^b *University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

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ABSTRACT

Research on multiparty negotiation has investigated how parties form coalitions to secure payoffs but has not addressed how emotions may affect such coalition decisions. Extending research on bilateral negotiations which has generally argued that it is beneficial to communicate anger, we argue that it constitutes a considerable risk when there are more than two people present at the negotiation table. Using a computer-mediated coalition game we show that communicating anger is a risky strategy in multiparty bargaining. The main findings of three studies were that participants: (1) form negative impressions of players who communicate anger and therefore (2) exclude such players from coalitions and from obtaining a payoff share, but (3) make considerable concessions on those rare occasions that they choose to form a coalition with an angry player, or (4) when they had to form a coalition with an angry player. We discuss the implications of these results for theorizing on emotions, negotiations, and coalition formation.

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Negotiation can be defined as a process in which two or more parties try to resolve a (perceived) divergence of interests by exchanging offers and counter offers (Lewicki, Saunders, & Barry, 2006; Pruitt & Carnevale, 2003). Interestingly, negotiation research tends to focus on situations in which only two people perceive divergent interest, ignoring small groups in which three or more individuals are in conflict. This lack of attention to multiparty negotiation is unfortunate because just introducing a third person to the negotiation table increases the complexity and social dynamics of the situation dramatically. When two individuals negotiate they may either reach an agreement or not. When three or more individuals negotiate, an agreement does not necessarily include all. Indeed, a major difference between bilateral and multilateral negotiations is that the latter allow the formation of coalitions.

Early theorizing about coalition formation has its roots in game theory, assuming that individuals are primarily motivated by self-interest (for a review of this approach see e.g., Kahan & Rapoport, 1984; Komerita, 1984; Komerita & Parks, 1995; Murnighan, 1978). In line with this assumption one of the most replicated findings is that individuals rather share payoffs with few others in a

small coalition than with many others in a large coalition. More recent theorizing has taken a different approach to study coalition formation. In contrast to comparing the predictive outcome of various coalition theories to the actual outcome of a coalition game, this approach is more focused at the underlying process by varying structural aspects of the situation (Polzer, Mannix, & Neale, 1998; Van Beest, Van Dijk, & Wilke, 2004a, Van Beest, Van Dijk, & Wilke, 2004b) and by stressing that individuals differ in what they value (Ten Velden, Beersma, & De Dreu, 2007; Van Beest, Van Dijk, De Dreu, & Wilke, 2005; Van Beest, Wilke, & Van Dijk, 2003). Adding to the assumption that people may be motivated by self-interest, this line of research assumes that people are concerned how their actions affect the outcomes of those who are included and excluded from a deal (Van Beest & Van Dijk, 2007).

What is missing in both these coalition approaches is the observation of research on two-party bargaining (for reviews see Thompson, Medvec, Seiden, & Kopelman, 2001; Van Kleef, Van Dijk, Steinel, Harinck, & Van Beest, 2008) that behavior is not only shaped by self-interest and/or concern for others, but also by emotions, and specifically by anger (Allred, 1999) that may be experienced (e.g., Hegtvædt & Killian, 1999; Pillutla & Murnighan, 1996) and communicated (e.g., Kopelman, Rosette, & Thompson, 2006; Sinaceur & Tiedens, 2006; Van Kleef, De Dreu, & Manstead, 2004a, Van Kleef, De Dreu, & Manstead, 2004b, 2006). This neglect of emotions in coalition research is rather surprising because research on social exclusion has shown that being excluded is a very negative experience leading to anger and even retaliation (e.g.,

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* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: vanbeest@fsw.leidenuniv.nl (I.V. Beest).

Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Van Beest & Williams, 2006; Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001; Warburton, Williams, & Cairns, 2006; Williams, 2007; Zadro, Williams, & Richardson, 2004), suggesting that the communication of anger should be an important factor in multiparty bargaining. To advance theorizing on coalition formation we therefore set out to study the interpersonal effects of anger communication in a three-party negotiation setting.

Theoretical background

Our theoretical model is based on the social-functional account of emotions and its application in bilateral negotiations. The basic premise of this account is that emotions have important social functions and consequences (Frijda & Mesquita, 1994; Keltner & Haidt, 1999; Morris & Keltner, 2000; Oatley & Jenkins, 1992; Parkinson, 1996). For example, communicating anger may signal that someone's behavior is undesirable and that adjustment is needed (Averill, 1982). Note that we focus on *communicated* emotions. We thus do not investigate whether negotiators are truly angry, but rather how communicating anger affects the outcomes of those who use such a strategy.

Demonstrating the pervasive effects of communicating anger, research on bilateral situations has on the one hand acknowledged that communicating anger has *negative consequences*. Individuals tend to form negative impressions of negotiators who communicate anger (Van Kleef et al., 2004a, 2004b), may become angry themselves (Friedman et al., 2004; Van Kleef et al., 2004a), and may be unwilling to engage in future interactions with the opponent (Allred, Mallozzi, Matsui, & Raia, 1997; Kopelman et al., 2006; Van Kleef et al., 2004b). However, regarding the financial consequences of communicating anger, this research has also stressed that communicating anger can have *positive consequences*. Provided that targets of anger communication do not have a high power position, several experiments have now shown that individuals yield to opponents who communicate anger, suggesting that communicating anger is a successful strategy to increase payoffs (Sinaceur & Tiedens, 2006; Van Dijk, Van Kleef, Steinel, & Van Beest, 2008; Van Kleef et al., 2004a, 2004b; but see Kopelman et al., 2006). For example, Van Kleef et al. (2004a) provided participants with information about the opponent's emotional state during a computer-mediated negotiation. Results showed that negotiators who were confronted with an opponent who communicated anger developed negative impressions of the opponent, but nonetheless conceded to the other's anger to avoid costly impasse.

We concur that communicated anger is likely to trigger negative impressions in multiparty negotiations. Yet, we also argue that these negative impressions may have severe consequences because an alternative negotiation partner is highly salient. In multiparty bargaining, individuals do not have to reach an agreement with an angry opponent. They may reach an agreement with an alternative partner. Thus, the effectiveness of communicating anger hinges on whether or not individuals select an angry opponent to form a coalition. If negotiators form a coalition with an angry opponent he/she may benefit. However—and this seems more likely—negotiators who communicate anger can be expected to be liked less, to be less likely to be included in a deal, and to obtain a smaller proportion of the payoffs.

The present research

We tested our model in three studies. In each study participants were led to believe that they negotiated with two other players in a three-player landowner game (Van Beest et al., 2004b). The participants were endowed with a parcel of 4 acres and the other two

players with a parcel of 3 acres, and informed that a project developer wanted to buy 2 parcels for a prize of 70 thousand euros. This setup endowed the participant with a relatively large parcel but with equal opportunities to meet the demands of the project developer. This was done to create some tension between possible ways of allocating payoffs (Komorita & Chertkoff, 1973; Murnighan, 1991; Van Beest et al., 2004b) and thus some room for bargaining in which communications of anger would be credible. In addition, we explicitly informed participants that they could not form a grand coalition of three-players, but that the members of a two-player coalition could decide to allocate payoffs to an excluded player. This was done to address a minor issue in the coalition literature in which the decision to exclude a person from the coalition goes hand in hand with the decision to exclude that person from getting payoffs.

A difference between our studies was that anger was communicated at different phases of the negotiation process. Coalition negotiations are complex. Some deals fail. Some succeed. Some are renegotiated. Consequently, different players may thus be potentially included and excluded from a coalition at different phases of the negotiation. Reflecting these differences we explicitly manipulated anger communications of both potentially included and excluded players across the three studies and reasoned that the effectiveness of their anger communication depends on the negotiation phase. In Study 1 anger was communicated via computer generated messages after a first attempt to form a coalition had failed. In this phase of a negotiation process we hypothesized that it would be a risky strategy to communicate anger for players who are potentially excluded. In Study 2 and Study 3 anger was communicated directly after the first proposal of a participant. In this phase of a negotiation process we hypothesized that it would be a risky strategy to communicate anger for players who are potentially included. Another difference was that we varied the number of players who communicated anger. In Study 1 and Study 2 participants were confronted with only one potential coalition partner who communicated anger whereas in Study 3 both potential coalition partners communicated anger. On a conceptual level Study 3 mimics the standard two-player situation in that participants had to reach an agreement with an angry player.

Study 1: The potentially excluded player

Study 1 focused on the negotiation phase in which a first attempt to form a coalition has failed. In this phase potential coalition partners need to decide whether they want to retry a failed coalition attempt or to switch coalition partner. Based on previous coalition research (e.g., Kahan & Helwig, 1971; Van Beest et al., 2004a) we reasoned that in the absence of anger communication participants would respond to a failed coalition attempt by trying to form a coalition with another player. But, what if participants are confronted with an angry message from the person who they excluded in the first round? Will participants still switch coalition partner or will they retry a coalition with the person who rejected their first proposal?

Depending on experimental condition, participants received an angry message from the player who was included in the failed coalition attempt, from the player who was excluded from the failed coalition attempt, or from neither of the players. We expected participants to form negative impressions of those who communicate anger and that this would mediate their decision to switch partners. We thus expected participants to switch partner after a failed coalition attempt when not given any emotional feedback and when their potentially included player communicated anger, but to stick with their original partner when the potentially excluded player communicated anger.

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