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# Research Digest

## The Stickiness Factor

In his 1906 book *Folkways*, William Graham Sumner called attention to the universality of ethnocentrism. A large volume of research since then has documented the prevalence of an in-group-favoring or partisan bias, a bias that reflects people's attachments to groups. These attachments are the "ties that bind" negotiating representatives and can account in large part for their inflexibility. In this article, Daniel Druckman asks four questions: *what* is the phenomenon, *why* does it occur, *how* can it be reduced, and *where* does it manifest itself in larger-policy contexts within which negotiations take place?

Regarding the *what* question, Druckman's review of ethnographic and laboratory evidence indicates that this is a robust phenomenon: the desire to form groups and differentiate them from others is so strong that it is easily activated under a variety of conditions. On the *why* question, he suggests six alternative explanations for its occurrence, including psychological processes of self-esteem, self-categorization, and uncertainty; social-psychological processes involving the development of group cohesion; and social-system maintenance functions served by the bias.

With regard to the *how* question, the author highlights fleeting emotions, intergroup contacts, multiple group identities, and, especially, the distinction between patriotism (in-group amity without out-group enmity) and nationalism (in-group amity *with* out-group enmity). And, on the *where* question, he proposes a path that extends from group loyalties to collective action. Along the way, negotiation plays an important role in the development of policies that encourage or discourage group actions. A key negotiating challenge is to retain flexibility while articulating the interests and values of the groups being represented.

The article concludes with several suggestions for further research. The recommended research would contribute to our understanding of the attachment-flexibility connection. How can the empathy we need to create durable agreements be balanced with the accountability required for effective group performance? How can negotiators best muddle through the sticky landscape of intergroup or international relations?

**Source:** Druckman, D. 2006. Group attachments in negotiation and collective action. *International Negotiation* 11(2): 229-252.

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## Trust, Part One: Building and Maintaining

The important role that trust plays in fostering collaboration with colleagues has been long acknowledged by scholars. But much of the literature has been based on the premise that trust is either present or absent, or that it evolves slowly as a secondary effect of other interactions.

Michele Williams offers a new perspective on trust. In this article, she argues that trust can be encouraged proactively through deliberative emotional management. In her view, a key factor is whether one anticipates how others may feel threatened by one's perceived role and agenda. She describes a three-step threat regulation process that draws on social cognitive theory, symbolic interactionism, and the psychology of emotion regulation.

Her three-step process, unlike past passive trust-development processes, focuses on intentionally building and maintaining trusting relationships; she argues that this process can be especially important when authority relationships are absent in a collaborative interorganizational project. Active trust seeking is also necessary to counteract the perceived risks associated with cooperation — opportunism, neglect of interests, and identity damage. Her model also seeks to contribute to our understanding of the role of emotional management in organizations.

**Source:** Williams, M. 2007. Building genuine trust through interpersonal emotion management: A threat regulation model of trust and collaboration across boundaries. *Academy of Management Review* 103(2): 595–621.

## Trust, Part Two: The Role of Frames

Being trusted, it is often said, is a plus in its own right, and being perceived as trustworthy encourages others to work with us. While the former may well be true, recent studies by Gideon Keren suggest that there are certain situations in which being perceived as virtuous is not always rewarded. His experiments examine the influence of positive and negative framing on choice decisions and the construction of trust.

Participants in the experiments he describes in this article all reported a solid preference for the message that was framed positively. But they also reported a clear preference to trust the more negatively framed option. For example, when offered the choice of buying ground beef that was described as 75 percent lean or 25 percent fat, most participants reported having more trust in the second description, but preferring to purchase the beef described in the former.

Admitting that an option has some weaknesses and is not perfect makes the choice itself less appealing, but participants judge the “negative” information as more realistic and trustworthy. Keren concludes that this

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“trust-choice incompatibility” is not a logical contradiction, but that it reflects overweighing positively framed information over negatively framed information when making choices and negative over positive frames when assessing trustworthiness.

**Source:** Keren, G. 2007. Framing, intensions, and trust-choice incompatibility. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 103: 238-255.

## **Present Fear of Future Regret**

Cognitive psychologists have long demonstrated that “sunk costs” can escalate commitment to a lost cause — a bad business decision, an expensive lawsuit, or — worst of all — an unwinnable war. Uneasy people “throw good money after bad” in futile attempts to justify bad decisions.

In four recent studies, authors Kin Wong and Jessica Kwong identified another factor that can induce commitment and escalation: “anticipatory regret,” the feeling that you may later kick yourself for getting out too soon. Using four different hypothetical scenarios that they tested on both students and teachers, the authors found that participants’ desire to minimize future regret motivated the decisions they made in escalation situations.

Their research provides evidence that when decision makers choose to persist in a failing course of action, their decisions are simultaneously shaped by what happened in the past and what they fear could happen in the future. And, while past escalation research has focused on self-justification, goal substitution, or illusion of control, their research suggests that people in escalation situations are also motivated by a fear of future emotional pain.

**Source:** Wong, K. F. E. and J. Y. Y Kwong. 2007. The role of anticipated regret in escalation commitment. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 92(2): 545-554.