
Research Digest

Cooperation: A By-Product of Anger?

When a negotiator feels anger, it can spark competition. But when that anger is communicated interpersonally, that is not always the case. In fact, it can sometimes prompt cooperation. This article provides an overview of the growing literature on the impact of anger on conflict, focusing on *intrapersonal* and *interpersonal* effects.

Gerben Van Kleef and his coauthors begin by summarizing research on intrapersonal and interpersonal effects in various conflict settings: negotiation, ultimatum bargaining, prisoner's dilemma, and resource dilemma. They conclude that the intrapersonal effects of anger tend to elicit competitive behavior, regardless of the type of conflict.

In contrast, the research has found that the interpersonal effects are more complex and heavily dependent on variations in the social context. For example, expressions of anger are more likely to be effective if the anger is perceived as justified. But if the negotiator perceives it as unjustified, it could elicit a more competitive response.

The authors' overview of research on anger in conflict also suggests several avenues for future research, including examining why angry disputants behave more competitively than nonangry disputants, sensitivity to the possible short- and long-term consequences of displaying anger, learning more about the role of anger in close relationships, and the role played by types of issues such as the distinction between values and interests.

Source: Van Kleef, A. G., E. van Dijk, W. Steinel, F. Harinck, and I. van Beest. 2008. Anger in social conflict: Cross-situational comparisons and suggestions for the future. *Group Decision and Negotiation* 17: 13-30.

The Proper Use of Conflict Resolution Techniques Makes for Happy and Successful Teams

Some teams get stymied by conflict while others somehow overcome seemingly stark differences. A recent study suggests three key conflict resolution techniques that are linked to overall team performance and member satisfaction.

Kristin Behfar and her coauthors examined teams with consistently high performance and member satisfaction and also those with consistently low performance and member satisfaction. They found that the top

performers share three conflict resolution techniques: focusing on the content of interpersonal interactions, explicitly discussing the decisions involved in distributing work assignments, and assigning work to members who have relevant task experience rather than through volunteering or convenience.

By applying conflict resolution strategies to the entire group, rather than simply satisfying or containing individual members, and by using the strategies to preempt the negative effects of conflict instead of just reacting to existing problems, groups are able to improve or maintain top performance over time.

Source: Behfar, K. J., R. Peterson, E. Mannix, and W. Trochim. 2008. The critical role of conflict resolution in teams: A close look at the links between conflict type, conflict management strategies, and team outcomes. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 93(1): 170-188.

Earning Your License to Fail

Managers are encouraged to give employees who report to them “permission to fail.” This is certainly important in negotiation (otherwise one might be compelled to accept “unfavorable terms”). But how do employees view their leaders after the leaders fail?

In this study, Steffen Giessner and Daan van Knippenberg examined the question: do failing leaders always lose the endorsement of followers or are there conditions in which they might have “license to fail”? The authors build on the social identity framework theory of leadership in which leaders get more from their followers, which may help protect them from failure.

The authors found that, under certain conditions, a failing leader may still be endorsed. The more a leader embodies a group’s identity and is perceived as having the group’s best interests at heart, the more likely he or she is to be given a “license to fail.” This is demonstrated through positive leadership evaluations after a failure. They also found that positive or negative evaluations are also related to the size of the goal.

Source: Giessner, S., and D. van Knippenberg. 2007. “License to fail”: Goal definition, leader group prototypicality, and perceptions of leadership effectiveness after leader failure. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 105(1): 14-35.

Activating Fault Lines

Researchers have warned that “fault lines” (divisions based on gender, race, age, or hierarchy) in teams can prompt conflict and stifle creativity. Recent findings by Matthew Pearsall, Aleksander Ellis, and Joel Evans indicate, however, that the negative impact is not inevitable. The key issue, they discover, is how awareness of the fault line is activated.

Using fault-line theory to examine the effects of gender diversity on team creativity, they found that creativity and idea generation were significantly lower in teams with activated fault lines. When left dormant, however, gender fault lines in the team did not affect emotional conflict within the team. In this study, the fault line was activated by having mixed-gender team members brainstorm about a gender-specific product.

The researchers suggest that managers can prevent fault lines from being activated by encouraging their members to identify with the team rather than with a subgroup. For example, they could focus on selecting team members with similar educational backgrounds.

The authors also note some limitations of their study, such as the focus on a single fault line (gender). They also consider directions for future research that would examine the effects of fault-line activation over a long period of time.

Source: Pearsall, M. J., A. P. J. Ellis, and J. M. Evans. 2008. Unlocking the effects of gender faultlines on team creativity: Is activation the key? *Journal of Applied Psychology* 93(1): 225–234.

Applying Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) to International Investor–State Disputes

The explosion of global investments has bred a growing number of disputes between investors and host nations. An increasing number of these disputes are settled through international arbitration, but large awards and the increasing costs (indirect and process) have led parties to search for other means to settle these disputes. Jeswald Salacuse explores alternate ways of resolving them efficiently and fairly.

He first looked at the unique nature of these disputes, the growth of investor–state disputes, and the potential significance and causes of this growth. For example, investor–state disputes are both legal and political, and this political nature makes it difficult to negotiate a settlement and leads to arbitration. And, although an investor–state arbitration is costly, risky, and time consuming, investors feel there is no other cost-effective, reliable method for resolving such disputes.

Salacuse identifies possible alternatives and how they can be shaped to meet the needs of investor–state relationships. He describes the general dispute resolution process and ADR processes and goes on to detail how they can be applied to treaty-based investor–state disputes. They include utilizing local courts, conducting a negotiation after arbitration begins, voluntary third-party intervention (mediation), and creating an international investment mediation service that could be called upon to offer assistance in these kinds of disputes.

Source: Salacuse, J. W. 2007. Is there a better way? Alternative methods of treaty-based, investor-state dispute resolution. *Fordham International Law Journal* 31: 138-185.

Complex and Challenging Emotional Expressions

In a recent essay, Bruce Barry acknowledges the importance of emotion in negotiation and joint decision making but cautions that research in this domain raises some challenging theoretical and methodological issues.

His article discusses the evolution of the study of affect in negotiation, from the mid-1980s through the present, with particular attention to the articles in a recent special issue of *Group Decision and Negotiation*. Clearly, the role of affect has become a central topic in negotiation research, even though its impact is often hard to pin down. To quote Barry, “the study of emotion . . . is an enormously complex enterprise.” Earlier research was focused on how positive emotions elevate cooperation and how negative ones have the opposite effect. But he argues that this research did not always address the complexity of the way that emotions are expressed and their impact on negotiating processes and outcomes.

The role of emotion in negotiation is no longer a peripheral pursuit in negotiation research. Nonetheless, researchers should continue to address the challenges that the study of emotions raises, including evaluating the relevance of the many theories of emotions, examining the interplay between affect and cognition, and investigating reasons why negotiators choose a particular strategy for managing or controlling emotional expressions.

Source: Barry, B. 2008. Negotiator affect: The state of the art (and science). *Group Decision Negotiation* 17: 97-105.