

---

# Research Digests

## Was That a Threat?

Which is more intimidating: a threat or an expression of anger? A set of computer-mediated negotiation experiments indicate that threats tend to produce greater concessions, although they may be mitigated by other factors.

In this study, Marwan Sinaceur and his colleagues conducted three experiments to examine the effects of communicating anger and communicating threats in negotiations. The first experiment showed that anger communication worked because it conveyed an implied threat. Based on this outcome, the second and third experiments compared anger and threat, and found that a direct threat was more effective than mere expressions of anger and that recipients viewed a threatening counterpart as more poised than an angry one.

Both threats and anger are perceived as aggressive negotiation tactics. But these experiments demonstrate that a negotiation strategy does not need to communicate the aggressive emotions associated with anger to be effective. Communicating a colder message with a perceived greater sense of confidence and control just may be your best strategy.

**Source:** Sinaceur, M., G. A. Van Kleef, M. Neale, H. Adam, and C. Haag. 2011. Hot or cold: Is communicating anger or threats more effective in negotiation? *Journal of Applied Psychology* 96(5): 1018–1032.

## Justice through the Ages

Are findings from contemporaneous studies about the role of justice in negotiation relevant to an earlier era of international negotiation? This question was addressed in an article by Lynn Wagner and Daniel Druckman that appeared in a special issue of *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research* devoted to “Justice, Conflict and Negotiation” A recent study conducted in simulated legal settings reported relationships among principles of procedural justice (PJ), problem-solving processes, and integrative outcomes. Another study on peace agreements negotiated in the 1990s showed that the durability of agreements was influenced by principles of distributive justice (DJ), particularly the equality principle (see the “Equality Matters” digest in *Negotiation Journal* 27[4]).

Similar findings were obtained by Wagner and Druckman with eleven cases of negotiations that occurred before, during, and shortly after World War II. Their analyses revealed that the relationship between PJ and integrative outcomes depended on problem-solving processes: PJ produced integrative outcomes when negotiators used problem solving but not when they used distributive strategies. Both PJ and problem solving occurred primarily during the early phases of the negotiations. They also found that

---

DJ correlated with the durability of the agreements: DJ principles were more central in outcomes for the more durable agreements, and less central for the less durable agreements.

These findings make evident that justice considerations have been a central concern to negotiators through the ages. They motivate agreements in many different kinds of negotiations, including those conducted in the simulation laboratory.

**Source:** Wagner, L. and D. Druckman. 2012. The role of justice in historical negotiations. *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research* 5: 49-71.

## Social Networks and Negotiating Flexibility

In a recent article, Jannie Lilja asked the question: Why are some rebel groups that participate in peace talks to end civil wars flexible while others are not? She addressed the question by examining two cases: a negotiation between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sri Lankan government, and peace talks between Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM) and the Indonesian government.

She found that the key to flexibility resides in the rebel groups' social network structure. The GAM case shows that sustained flexibility was facilitated by a network structure that served to increase trust between negotiators and nonnegotiating leaders as well as to reduce the perceived risks associated with being flexible. In contrast, the LTTE case shows that temporary flexibility reflected the group's military strength compared with the government. It did not have the social network that would have sustained the flexibility needed for a durable peace agreement.

These findings challenge the rival explanation that the differences between these cases derive from the relative attractiveness of their alternatives to a negotiated agreement (best alternative to a negotiated agreement). In these cases, their alternatives were military struggle, so that explanation would hold that GAM's sustained flexibility resulted from its relative military weakness. To the contrary, Lilja argued that military strength was relevant primarily in relation to social network structures: LTTE's inflexibility stemmed from an overreliance on dyadic rather than networked relationships.

This study calls attention to the importance of treating parties not as unitary actors but as networks of factions that are often divided on negotiating approaches. It also extends social network analysis from such areas as organized crime and terrorism to the domain of peacemaking in civil wars.

**Source:** Lilja, J. 2012. Trust and treason: Social network structure as a source of flexibility in peace negotiations. *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research* 5: 96-125.