

Emotions and the decision making process in negotiation psychology essay



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Introduction

“ People wisdom” offer advice about how to deal with emotions in negotiation: Do not get emotional! Most of the times negotiators are encouraged to “ Keep a poker face”, to “ Swallow your pride”. For a negotiator, emotions are seen as an impediment to avoid at all costs. However, as negotiators are common human beings, this advice is very difficult to follow and often makes things worse (Shapiro, 2004).

I, like Shapiro, believe that Human Beings are in state of “ perpetual emotion” (Shapiro, 2001). In any kind of negotiation, with a colleague or a friend, we constantly experience effective states or emotions in different situations such as anger or anxiety. Research has shown, as we will see in the following pages, that Emotions are stimulated by the context surrounding us, by our own actions and thoughts and by the actions of our counterparty toward us.

In these pages I will discuss the role of emotions in negotiations and how can we understand, use or control them to serve the collective interests of the parties around the table. First, I will start by giving some definitions in order to frame the project. Secondly, I will discuss the role of emotion as part of the decision making process. Furthermore, I will talk about the role of emotions in negotiations. Finally, I will describe some techniques that will help us to be aware of our emotions and try to manage them in order to reach the agreement we are looking for.

A definition of Negotiation and Emotions

Fells describe Negotiation as a process where two parties with differences which they need to resolve are trying to reach an agreement through exploring different options and exchanging offers and an agreement (Fells, 2010).

It is very difficult to most of us to put emotions into words, but there are thousands of words in the English lexicon or in any other language to describe different emotions (Keltner and Ekman, 2000) and there are also a lot of definitions of emotion. Here are a few:

An emotion is a felt experience. When someone says or does something that is personally significant to you, your emotions respond, usually along with associated thoughts, physiological changes, and a desire to do something (Keltner and Ekman, 2000).

Most agree in defining emotions as brief, rapid responses involving physiological, experiential, and behavioral activity that help humans respond to survival-related problems and opportunities. Emotions are briefer and have more specific causes than moods (Goleman, 1995).

The influence of emotions in negotiation is given by the influence emotions have in the decision making process we follow before taking an action, it can be unconscious or conscious.

Emotions and the decision making process in Negotiation

Antonio Damasio, one of the world's leader's researchers in neuroscience, helped design a seminal experiment assessing the role of emotions in the

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decision making process. The experiment demonstrates that our emotions are part of our decision-making process. In fact, they concluded that emotions appear to lead the process, because emotions are the motor of the actions we take. (Finkelstein et al., 2008).

The order of the decision-making process appears to be as follow: The process starts with input from the environment, taking this to the negotiation process, the process would start with the information that our counterpart give us conscientious or unconscientiously, including body language and first impression. The next step is an unconscious emotional reaction. This is followed by behavioral change in line with the emotional reaction. Then we became conscious of the feelings that are driving the behavioral change. These are our gut feelings. Finally, we are able to make a decision using a process of reasoning that generates actions in response of the process, this decision is a behaviour or an action that affect the negotiation (Bechara et al., 2000).

As human beings, our decision making process and thus our behaviour, is lead in a big way by our emotions, but how this relationship affect the negotiation process?

The role of emotions in negotiations

While emotions can be a barrier to value-maximizing agreement, the common advice to “ get rid of emotions” is infeasible and unwise. New research suggests that a negotiator can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of a negotiation by gaining and understanding of the information communicated by their own and those of other emotions and

also by showing positive emotions into the negotiation process (Shapiro, 2004).

Emotions are closely linked to action, they do not require reflection. They encourage us to do something; emotions carry with them a sense of simplicity and clarity that makes actions easier (Goleman, 2006). So, if we manage emotions strategically, we can use them as a tool to reach a negotiation goal.

Studies about emotions in negotiation have shown that a “ positive emotion” can signal Cooperativeness and trustworthiness, elicit cooperation, trust and concession from others, and promise rewards for others. “ Negative emotions”, on the other hand, impresses the other party as aggressive, competitive and reckless, elicits compliance from the other party and signals punishment or negative consequences for the non-complying opponent (Thompson et al., 2001). But this doesn't mean that we can't use “ negative emotions” to produce certain effect in our counterparty.

Despite the risk of relational damage, negative emotions do serve important social functions, because the role negative negotiators take is likely to impress the other side as extreme, risky, reckless and seemingly out of control.

The learning seems to be that negotiators should be aware of messages of power hidden emotions, which may be highly effective sources of social influence (Li and Roloff, 2006). If negotiators intend to influence their counterparties through effective displays, they first need to know which

emotions are more powerful and learn to manage emotions to use them strategically.

Strategic Emotion Management and other techniques to channel emotions to serve a purpose

Since emotions influence decisions, thus negotiations, mainly in helpful ways (as emotions are needed to act) we do not want to try to eliminate their effect. In fact, as Finkelstein mentioned, because emotions mostly work on our body and unconscious, we could not eliminate their effect even if we tried. Moreover, he said, we need emotions to make decisions, thus to negotiate: we appear to be specially incompetent decision makers when the emotional part of our brain is damage (Finkelstein et al., 2008).

Daniel Shapiro mentioned that interest-based negotiators can reap great benefit by understanding the information communicated via emotions and by enlisting positive emotions into their interactions.

Awareness of emotions, one's own and those of others, provides a negotiator with an understanding of the importance of each person's interests and concerns. With expanded information about the relative importance of interests, parties are more capable of devising options for mutual gain. Shapiro continue saying that by expressing your emotion, you provide the other negotiator with important information about how you want to be treated (Shapiro, 2004).

Shapiro in his book *Beyond Reason* says that we can use 5 core concerns to understand the emotional climate in a negotiation and improve it:

Appreciation, affiliation, autonomy, status and role.

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Appreciation refers to understand others perspective and communicate understanding through words and actions. Shapiro mentions that by appreciating people's points of views reduces the counterparty resistance to your ideas. And even if they remain defensive, you learn information that can be used to influence them.

Affiliation is about finding commonalities that you share with your counterpart or built new ones to carry you forward. Negotiators strengthen trust and decrease tension by building affiliation. But we have to be aware because affiliation can be used in strategic emotion.

Respecting Autonomy will help to avoid the emotional pitfalls that trip up many negotiators when they feel their autonomy is being overpass, at the end no one likes to be told what to do.

Acknowledge Status: Failing to recognize someone's status appropriately can trigger negative emotions.

Choose a fulfilling Role: As negotiators, we may find ourselves playing the role of an agent on behalf of a client or boss. Strong negative emotions can build up when our roles don't suit us well or when these roles are in conflict.

When effectively channeled, strong emotions can help us to be a better negotiator, but when our feelings get the better of us during a negotiation, they become distracting and potentially destructive.

If we can anticipate when an emotion might distort our judgment, we can install some mechanism in the process that will help us to combat the

distortion. Some of the mechanisms are: Emotional Control refers to an
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individual's ability to exhibit or avoid exhibiting an emotional response as a matter of personal desire rather than as an involuntary consequence of environmental condition (Li and Roloff, 2006).

Emotional regulation is a set of processes by which emotions are themselves regulated and reappraisal modifies how we evaluate situations that induce emotions. Suppression is about inhibiting emotion-expressive behaviour, which decreases self reported experiences of such emotions. Emotion Work is defined as the “ management of feelings to create a publicly observable facial and body display” (Li and Roloff, 2006).

Because emotions communicate information, an observant negotiator may try to exploit that information. Some negotiators try to stimulate an emotion -positive or negative- in others for strategic gain.

Shu Li (2006) perfectly describes strategic emotion with an example: As a negotiator displays sadness or frustration that he does not genuinely feel in order to evoke the opponent's compassion, as he tries to mask the happiness of achieving a desired outcome so that the opponent does not become alarmed and discontent, or when he makes an effort to stay calm while truly infuriated by this opponent just because that is the appropriate thing to do, the negotiator engages in emotion management. But to be able to use emotions strategically, we should be able to manage the techniques of emotional control, emotional regulation and emotional work. Successful strategic emotion requires accurate assessment of the emotional needs in specific situations, integration of such needs with one's affective tendencies (positive or negative) and efficacy in deploying the strategy.

It is important to address that strategic emotion management is different from person to person as we do not all share the same emotional management styles and competencies. Although I am not going to go deep in this extend, I would like to mention the individual characteristics founded by Shu Li, that are most proximately related to the strategic expression of emotions:

Affectivity, which captures individual tendencies in emotional experiences and can be positive and negative; negotiators with High negative affectivity are not only more likely to experience negative emotions during typical conflict-ridden moments of contention, but also when they are faced with ambiguity in the situation and the opponent. Therefore, they may prefer negative to positive emotions as well.

Emotional Expressivity is related with a stable individual trait associated with emotion expressive behaviour and can be high or low; high expressivity, either positive or negative, could be detrimental for a negotiator because the overflowing emotions may reveal too much about a negotiator's positions, preferences and strategies.

Affectivity and Emotional Expressivity focus around natural individual tendencies toward emotion, with affectivity focusing on emotional experience and expressivity capturing emotional expression. These traits would impact on effective behaviors in negotiation, but since they do not capture the cognitive and strategic-motivational process, strategic emotional display would be influenced more heavily by the following traits that do

embody individual differences in the conscientious management of emotions.

Emotional Intelligence (EI) refers to four branches of core emotional regulation competencies: perceiving emotions, using emotions to facilitate thinking, understanding emotions and managing emotions. Individuals High in EI, especially Strategic EI, are more likely to be able to maintain control over their affective state than those low in EI. They may be able to use emotions strategically, “ knowing when to and when not to express emotion and knowing how much and in what form to express emotion when its use is necessary.

Self Monitoring is concerned with the process by which individuals actively plan, enact and guide their behaviour in social situations; high self-monitoring individuals ask the question: What does the situation demand of me and what image should I project? They demonstrate exquisite situation-to-situation discriminativeness and variation in their social behaviour, and the correspondence between behaviour and attitude is often low.

The major difference between the two is that EI focuses on emotional expression, while self monitoring guides a wider range of self-presentation behaviours. Both traits might predict the effective use of strategic emotions (Li and Roloff, 2006).

The strategic use of emotions in negotiation, according to Barry (Barry and Oliver, 1996), is the “ willful use of emotional display or expression as a tactical gambit by an individual negotiator” it could reflect dissociation from one’s genuine emotional experience, in that a negotiator displays emotions
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that are sometimes altered in intensity or nature, and at other times not driven by real emotional experience at all. In order to use emotions strategically, individuals need to be able to exercise emotional control and engage in emotion work if they intend to project a desired self image. A strategic negotiator assesses the need for specific emotions, plans for the display of such emotions, and executes the plan with appropriate expressive behaviour.

Negotiators that use Strategic emotion can be caught, a customer may learn that the car sales person is lying as a tactic to emphasize with him and take his business elsewhere. Strategic emotion runs the additional risk of damaging long-term relationships. Strategic emotion may work to one negotiator's advantage in the short-term, but over the course of time others may become aware of the manipulation, become angry, and undermine the tactic through retaliation.

Conclusions

As a negotiator, you cannot avoid emotions any more that you can avoid thoughts. They are powerful, hard to handle and always present. And far from being weak, emotions are perhaps your greatest source of strength as a negotiator, if you know how to use them wisely.