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From Theory to Practice and Back Again: Lessons from Hostage Negotiation for Conflict Management

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Abstract

This article provides five principles for effective conflict management, which are derived from research on hostage negotiation but applied to conflict situations within academic organizational settings. The principles draw from the author's personal experiences as a university administrator and are used to propose research questions that can be used for further study of conflict management. This article is part of a special issue in NCMR entitled "Lessons from Practice: Extensions of Current Negotiation Theory and Research."

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Perhaps because I am afraid that life will prove me wrong, and perhaps because I know my own weaknesses, I am cautious to say that I am good at conflict management. On the one hand, my preference is to avoid conflict whenever possible. I come from a part of Midwestern United States where the cultural norm of always trying to be *nice* also means avoiding confrontations. Yet various aspects of my professional life in university administration have required the ability to manage conflicts, to coach people in conflict management, and to help people navigate challenging interpersonal situations. Although most conflicts I deal with as an academic administrator are not major, a few memorable cases have required a higher level of skill and resilience. Thankfully, I have never had to manage a conflict that rose anywhere close to the high-stakes level of hostage negotiation.

I first encountered hostage negotiation research in graduate communication courses on negotiation and conflict, and I continue to incorporate a section on this area of research whenever I teach communication and conflict management. Hostage negotiation puts the ability to effectively use communication to manage conflict situations to its greatest test. For me, this body of research has provided useful insights about how to communicate when managing conflicts in my own administrative role.

To be clear, the purpose of this article is to derive new directions for research from the practice of conflict management in the professional context of university administration. This is not an article about how to negotiate hostage situations.[1] Instead, this article shows how principles from this area of crisis negotiation have been helpful for me in thinking about how to manage conflicts I have encountered as an administrator in academic settings as a department chair, as an associate dean, and as a leader in an academic association.

This article begins by providing some background to hostage negotiation research. Next, several principles from this body of research are used to explain how to manage some of the more challenging conflict situations that I have encountered in my work as an administrator. From each of these conflicts, research questions are proposed that may be useful for future research on conflict and communication.

Principles from Hostage Negotiation for Practice

Without question, the role and responsibilities of a university administrator are far different from the role and responsibilities of a hostage negotiator. I am grateful that negotiating with a disgruntled faculty member has not been as challenging or as life threatening as negotiating with a hostage taker. I do not mean to suggest these types of conflict are the same.[2]

So why apply principles from hostage negotiation to conflicts in academic settings? Because, in my experience, the lessons I have learned from studying about high stakes crisis negotiations have provided useful principles for managing difficult interactions with faculty, staff, and administrators. To this end, hostage negotiation can serve as a metaphor for other distributive settings in which conflict must be carefully managed and negotiated. Using metaphors requires a lending domain—in this case, principles from hostage negotiation—and a borrowing domain—the context that the metaphor illuminates—in this case, the practice of managing conflicts in academic settings. In other words, principles from one context provide helpful guidance for practice in other difficult—albeit less dire—contexts.

[1] To learn more about hostage negotiation research and practice, a good place to start is Rogan and Lanceley's (2010) edited book, *Contemporary theory, research, and practice of crisis and hostage negotiation*.

[2] Although I did have a panic button installed in my office after one particularly difficult interaction, thankfully, I have never had to use it.

It should be noted that hostage negotiation comprises a wide range of contexts, including situations that involve criminals, prison inmates, political extremism, domestic disputes, or mental illness (Grubb, 2010). Each context has its own set of attributes and challenges, so there is no singular approach to negotiating all these types. Therefore, the term *crisis negotiation* has become widely accepted and is often used interchangeably with *hostage negotiation*. Despite this wide range of crises, some underlying principles have been identified as particularly important for crisis negotiators. To understand why these principles are so important, we start by considering the relatively recent history of negotiating hostage situations.

Principles from Hostage Negotiation for Practice

Research on how to effectively negotiate hostage situations began in the 1970s. One of the primary motivators for finding better ways to negotiate was the terrorist attack on the 1972 Olympics in Munich (West Germany at that time), which resulted in 22 people dead, including a policeman, all ten terrorists, and all eleven hostages (Soskis & Van Zandt, 1986). In the U.S., the 1971 Attica prison uprising, in Attica, New York, left 43 people dead—33 prison inmates and 10 correctional officers and staff members. These deadly situations, which took the lives of both hostages and hostage takers, brought international attention to the need for new approaches to crisis negotiation. By the end of the 1970s, the New York City Police Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation were training negotiators with new basic principles, which have continued to advance over the last fifty years. By now, there is a fairly extensive literature on hostage negotiation, and the knowledge and training has advanced significantly. In 2020, the 30th Annual Hostage Negotiation Competition at Texas State University in San Marcos, TX, was held, in which 30 teams competed over three days on their ability to negotiate hostage and kidnapping situations (McMains, 2004).

Hostage negotiators must continually manage and assess multiple goals to reach the point of influencing the hostage taker to surrender. Rogan and Hammer (2002) proposed SAFE as the acronym for the demands that must be managed during hostage negotiations and the related communication dynamics that are used to address these concerns. SAFE stands for Substantive (instrumental) demands, Attunement (relational) concerns, Face (identity) concerns, and Emotional concerns.

Substantive demands are tangible wants and needs. In business negotiation, these concerns are referred to as instrumental goals (Wilson & Putnam, 1990), which are measurable goals, such as time, money, goods, terms of insurance, and delivery. Substantive goals in hostage negotiation cover the range of requests from peripheral demands, such as food and drink to meet the hunger needs of the hostages, to central demands, such as requests for a car or a plane for escape.

Attunement demands have to do with the relational concerns between the parties involved. In hostage situations these concerns include threats to the hostage taker's power and control as well as the need for the hostage negotiator to convey empathy and build trust with the hostage taker. Rogan and Hammer (2002) pointed out that, at the beginning of a hostage situation, relational concerns do not begin at a neutral starting point: The hostage negotiator is already at a deficit in terms of trying to establish trust because the hostage taker is surrounded by police. Nevertheless, the hostage negotiator's ability to build trust with the hostage taker is crucial for hostage negotiations to resolve well.

Face concerns are those that promote, protect, or defend from threat our own identity as well as the identity of the other party (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1955). Brown and Levinson (1987) differentiated between positive face, which is the identity a person puts forward, such as being competent, kind, tough, or knowledgeable, and negative face, which is a person's autonomy, or the right to have one's time and decisions respected and not encroached upon by someone else.

Emotional concerns are particularly important to attend to in crisis negotiation because they involve intense emotions of anger, fear, and frustration that prevent the negotiation from moving forward by using normative processes. Ignoring emotional concerns is a recipe for disaster (Matusitz, 2013).

The SAFE model is useful for managing crisis situations because it provides a framework for identifying specific frames that emerge throughout the crisis and a toolbox of communication strategies that can be used to de-escalate the conflict. Donohue, Ramesh, Kaufman, and Smith (1991) distinguished between crisis and normative bargaining. Crisis bargaining is often characterized by intense levels of emotion; substantive demands are difficult to address when emotions, such as anger and fear, are still high. In contrast, normative bargaining processes are more likely to focus primarily on identifiable instrumental outcomes, without the disruption of emotional intensity.

Donohue, Ramesh, and Borchgrevink (1991) proposed a framework for crisis negotiation along two dimensions: affiliation—trust, liking, and acceptance—and interdependence—acceptance of mutual responsibility and obligations. They described how features of coercive versus cooperative relational parameters varied across stages of different types of hostage situations: criminal, mental illness, and domestic violence. In crisis situations, more coercive communication is driven by the hostage taker's high stakes emotional, relational, and identity issues. Further, this type of bargaining lacks clear goals to pursue.

In hostage negotiations, when trust and liking between the hostage taker and the hostage negotiator achieve a level that is relatively stable and high, cooperative outcomes are more likely. But when trust and liking are low, power struggles are more likely to occur. Further, Womack and Walsh (1997) found that sincere communication improves cooperation, but deception damages both affiliation and interdependence. By using effective communication strategies, a capable negotiator is able to move the hostage taker from focusing on emotional, face, and attunement demands to addressing substantive demands, where more normative bargaining processes can be used. In these and other models of hostage negotiation, skilled communication—often over long periods of time—is paramount.

Television depictions of hostage situations—like depictions of other types of conflict management—are usually poor representations of how these conflicts should be handled. For example, the occasional hostage situation on *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* has about fifteen minutes for the hostage situation to be resolved. One such episode showed a situation in which a young man takes his girlfriend and her daughter as hostages (Leight et al., 2012). The police are eager to end the standoff by taking out (i.e., killing) the young man as soon as they have a clear shot. Olivia Benson argues with the officer in charge, demanding the police not shoot but instead wait for the young man to give himself up and release the hostages. It makes good drama. But like so many dramatic depictions, it suggests that ending the situation, and using violence to do so, is more important than preserving the lives of those involved, including the hostage taker. In this episode, Olivia wins out, and the hostage taker is apprehended. But in other episodes and on other shows, expediency—and dramatic effect—result in the hostage taker being killed.[3] Crisis negotiation research predicts that if hostage situations unfold too quickly, the whole process can be derailed.

When I teach courses on conflict management or negotiation, I cover crisis negotiation because there are valuable lessons to learn from hostage negotiation research about communicating in difficult situations that can be applied to less severe crises. For example, one high-stakes goal of hostage negotiation is to save lives—of the hostages as well as of the hostage taker (Magalatta et al., 2005). This goal raises the bar to Fisher and Ury's (2011) goal of a wise agreement, which prescribes, in part, reaching an agreement that improves the relationship with the other party, or at the very least, leaves the relationship no worse off than it was.

Further, in phase models of crisis negotiation (e.g., Madrigal et al., 2009), the initial phase involves information gathering, which takes place before the negotiation even begins. This is the preparation stage. Lewicki and Litterer (1985) wrote that planning is the most important part of the negotiation. Yet this process is often overlooked (Molhotra, 2015), because people are overconfident in their abilities, or they

[3] As much as I enjoy watching the show, *Law and Order SVU* is not a good model for conflict management. Most episodes show detectives and attorneys yelling at each other in one scene and calmly working together in the next. It makes good TV drama, which means it sets a poor example for how disagreements ought to be handled.

underestimate the need to be more fully prepared. In crisis negotiation, this phase sets the stage for the negotiation that will unfold. Crisis negotiation research drives home how essential careful and thoughtful planning is to being a successful negotiator.

Thankfully, most day-to-day interactions with my colleagues are cooperative. Plus, I have a fairly short memory about most conflicts. Once finished, they're done. The Zeigarnik effect (Zeigarnik, 1938) posits that completed tasks tend to be forgotten, but uncompleted ones are more likely to stay with us. I feel this way about most conflicts: Once they are managed, I tend to forget them. In this regard, good relationships are fostered by a short memory.

However, challenging conflicts do arise that are difficult to manage. Drawing from knowledge and skills in the crisis negotiation literature has helped in managing these conflicts. The following sections describe some of these cases, organized around some key principles of hostage negotiation, and followed by questions that are proposed for future inquiry and research in conflict management.

Principle 1: Building Rapport

Thompson (2015), a psychologist who trains hostage negotiators, wrote, "Active listening is the most important set of communication skills that a crisis negotiator must not only use, but must use properly" (p. 1). Active listening allows people's emotions to calm down and lets them know they are being heard. It is also an essential tool for finding out what is at the source of the conflict.

According to the phase models, the second phase of hostage negotiation focuses on using active listening and empathy to build rapport with the other party (Madrigal et al., 2009). One of the longest phases in the process, it is during this stage that the hostage negotiator works at building rapport and trust with the hostage taker while also working to understand the issues that are at the root of the crisis (Donohue, Ramesh, & Borchgrevink, 1991). This ability to build rapport is essential in conflict management.

Back when I was a new department chair, we were in the process of hiring a new faculty member. The process was nearly complete, and it was my job to make the final decision. I had laid out expectations for how the search was to be conducted, and I was proud of how my department's faculty had managed the process. The search committee did its job well, and a diverse pool of applicants was narrowed to three good candidates. After a full round of campus interviews, the pool was narrowed to two candidates. After the final round of interviews, the search committee met and made its recommendation to me. In addition to their recommendation, I asked all the faculty members to express their preferences to me privately. I had not yet announced who would be offered the position, but one candidate, who was from an underrepresented population, had edged out the other. From my perspective, the process was fair and inclusive to all parties involved.

The morning I was planning to announce the hiring decision, one faculty member (we'll call him *Mark*)[4] sent me an email, copying the whole faculty, claiming that the whole hiring process was racist. I responded to Mark directly by email, asking that he come see me as soon as possible. Later that morning, Mark was sitting in the chair across from me in my office.

Mark was clearly upset when he came into my office that morning. Some might have perceived him as aggressive, and perhaps I did too. My recollection is of a calm conversation, though I know it did not start out that way. Mark was angry. Nonetheless, I was determined that, before he walked out of my office, he would understand that the search had not only been fair and equitable but had been handled very well.

As discussed above, Donohue, Ramesh, and Borchgrevink (1991) differentiated between crisis (i.e., distributive) and normative (i.e., integrative) negotiation processes, and Rogan and Hammer's (2002) SAFE

[4] The names of the people in my examples have all been changed.

model identified four concerns that arise in crisis negotiations: Substantive, Attunement, Face, and Emotional. Both these models identify the importance of using effective communication strategies to address high intensity emotions, which contribute to the crisis mode and prevent the use of normative negotiation processes in which substantive issues can be addressed. In Mark's case, he was highly emotional, expressing anger and frustration.

Mark repeated several times his claim that the process was racist. Without becoming defensive, I laid out the exact process, how we sought a diverse pool of applicants and finalists, the various ways that different interests were given voice, and that, given how comparable the two finalists were judged by the faculty, my decision to go with the person who was from an underrepresented population. Still, Mark repeated his claim.

It wasn't until we went through several rounds of Mark claiming the process was racist, and my asking Mark questions about why, that it became clear that what he was talking about was faculty hiring processes in general. It turned out that Mark was expressing bitterness about how he felt his own hiring had been managed, which had occurred years before I was at this university, and how his own hiring was, in his mind, fraught with racially-biased decision making.

Mark had his own goal in mind—to make sure I understood the bias that he felt was underlying hiring processes across the university. Once I understood that goal, I could show how we did things differently in the current hiring process from what he had experienced before. Subsequently, we could talk about what else could be done in future hiring to ensure a fair, inclusive, and equitable process.

If I came into the discussion on defense—or offense—the conversation would not have had a constructive outcome. In the end, Mark shook my hand, thanked me for hearing him, and we left the conversation with a stronger working relationship than before.

The dean I currently work for as an associate dean frequently reminds our leadership team to "seek to understand before trying to be understood." Good conflict management starts with active listening: Asking questions and receiving information without judgment, and then repeating and rephrasing what the person is feeling and what you understand them to be saying.

Active listening in conflict management serves four purposes in a situation like the one just described. First, active listening communicates empathy and concern for the other person and what the other person is thinking. Second, active listening is useful for managing emotions, both by lowering the level of emotion the other person may be feeling and deflecting my own defensiveness. Third, it is through active listening that we begin to gauge the other person's substantive concerns. And fourth, active listening is a very good way to buy time to figure out where the conversation needs to go, to identify what the next steps need to be and how to choose the right words to say. If I'm listening, I'm not talking, and if I'm not talking, I'm not saying something before I'm ready to say it. This example suggests the following research questions:

RQ1. Do more questions and fewer statements in the early stages of conflict and negotiation yield better outcomes (e.g., satisfaction, instrumental)?

RQ2. What is the role of asking questions in de-escalating conflict?

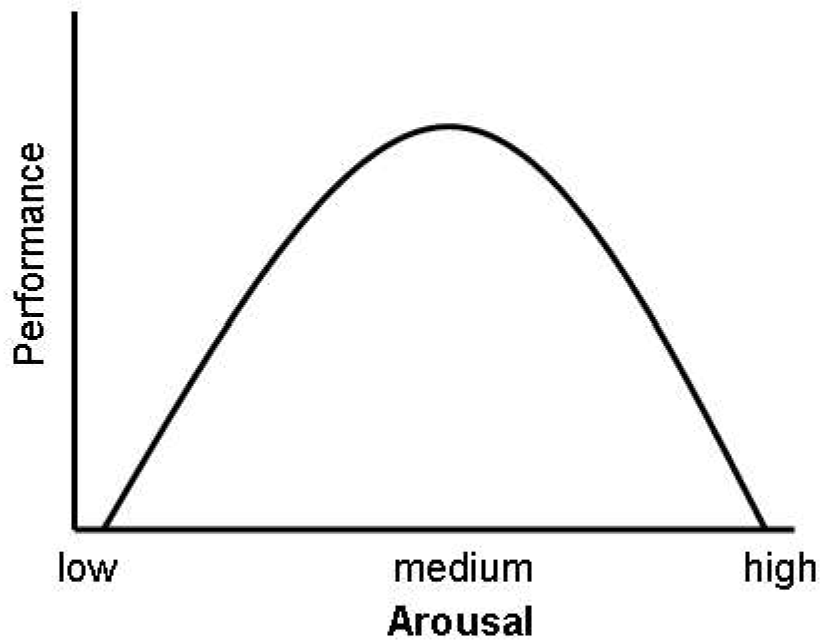
Principle 2: Message Affect

Because emotions play such a central role in crisis negotiation, managing how emotions are expressed and allowing time for emotions to cool are frequently a focus in hostage negotiation research. Allowing intense emotional levels to calm is essential before substantive processes can unfold, which is one reason hostage situations may take many hours to resolve. Whereas business negotiation typically focuses on instrumental, relational, and identity goals (Wilson & Putnam, 1990), in the context of hostage negotiations, Rogan and Hammer's (2002; Hammer, 2007) SAFE added emotion to this set of concerns.

From a communication perspective, language intensity is the strength of verbal expression a person uses about an object or issue; greater intensity is associated with higher levels of emotion and stress (Rogan & Hammer, 1995). Because it is both difficult and unwise to try to negotiate with a person who is in a highly emotional state, language intensity can indicate that person's emotional and stress levels. The Yerkes-Dodson law predicts that, as stress increases, performance quality also increases, up to a point (Gino, 2016; see Figure 1). After that point, with increased stress, anxiety, and negative emotion, performance quality drops significantly. Or as one friend put it: "When people are too highly stressed, they get stupid." Understanding patterns of communication, and having strategies to respond, is part of the conflict management toolkit.

Figure 1

Performance-Emotional Arousal Curve



Note. Image available at
https://static.wikia.nocookie.net/psychology/images/6/61/YerkesDodsonLawGraph.png

Here is the case of Molly. As associate dean, I had received many complaints over time about how she treated her colleagues and students, such as being dismissive of colleagues, loudly packing up and leaving meetings when others did not agree with her, and speaking to staff and graduate students with a tone that was perceived as contempt. I was sad to have to address this pattern of behavior, because personally I never experienced these issues with her. Yet enough complaints came in to warrant intervention: We needed to talk. Molly held positions of leadership, so her behavior was making other people's work difficult. I had to address it. When I sought guidance about handling the situation, a colleague in human resources advised: "The first time we receive a complaint about a colleague it could just be a mistake—we all act poorly sometimes; a second time is a bit of a warning – but still, it could just be another bad day; however, a third time indicates a pattern that probably needs to be addressed." At this point, I had a list of about 12 complaints.

I welcomed Molly into my office, offered her a chair, and opened the conversation with the need to talk about some concerns about her that had come to my attention. Although Molly and I usually got along well, she immediately became emotional and defensive. She announced, "You should know that I come from a difficult family, so when I feel I'm being attacked, I throw up." I reached under my desk, pulled out a wastebasket, and set it next to her. I continued, "I'm not here to attack but to let you know a number of concerns that have been raised."

Due to her emotional state, her first tactic was to start asking for specific details of who complained, about what, and when. This tactic was a defensive strategy to protect her own face and not have to accept responsibility for the concerns that had been raised. The tactic can derail the focus of the conversation, which in this case, was to identify patterns that had emerged and to help her to realize the benefit of seeking guidance to do better. I had learned that the strategy for addressing this tactic is to continue addressing the issues without giving specific details of the person, place, and episode, but instead, to keep focusing on the desired outcome. In this case, the desired outcome was to get this colleague to seek guidance on how to become a more effective colleague.

When the first tactic didn't work, Molly turned to a second tactic, *guilt shoving*, which was to turn her defensiveness on me, with accusations of how I didn't care, this was all my fault, how I never liked her, and how I never had her best interest in mind. Her language intensity increased, and she became more accusatory, indicating even greater stress and anger.

I knew this tactic would be coming. I also knew the accusations were her defense against what I'm sure felt like an attack on her identity. I did not need to defend myself, because the attacks were an effort to defend her own face by threatening mine. In a calm and quiet voice, I reminded Molly that it would be easier for me to let this issue go than to address it, and I reminded her that she knows me, knows who I am, and knows that deep down I have her long-term best interest in mind.

After several days, I followed up with Molly. In the end, she sought out some helpful resources. I will never know if her attitudes changed toward those she worked with, but her behavior did. And for her and for everyone else, that made a big difference.

Gladwell (2000) differentiated between panic and choke: Panic occurs when we stop thinking but need to think, whereas choke occurs when we have trained ourselves to respond with appropriate and well-prepared tactics, but due to anxiety, we forget to use those tactics. Every conflict provides the opportunity to practice what works effectively and prepares us to respond to future stressful situations more calmly.[5] Hostage negotiators are experienced and prepared with a repertoire of strategies to bring down stress levels, build rapport, prevent further escalation, and move the negotiation into resolution. On my side of the desk, every conflict situation has taught me to respond more calmly when a person needs to vent, becomes defensive, or uses guilt-shoving—trying to put the blame on me when I know I am not the cause of the problem. And I have learned that the high emotional state of the person is likely more to blame for that person's outburst than reason and clear cognitive processing. This experience leads to the following research questions:

> ***RQ3.*** What constitutes tactics of personal attacks in verbal and nonverbal communication, what triggers them, what are the most effective strategies for managing these attacks, and what goals best guide choices in effective strategies to address them?
>
> ***RQ4.*** How are choke and panic evident in conflict management situations? What tactics and training can prepare people to prevent these responses in their various forms?

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[5] As a music teacher once told me, "Practice makes permanent—not perfect." If one practices mistakes, those mistakes will be repeated. Practicing something the way it should be done makes it easier to do it correctly next time.

Principle 3: Relational Goals

An essential part of hostage negotiation is to build rapport with the hostage taker. Efforts to preserve the relationship, or at least not damage it (Fisher & Ury, 2011), temper how many conflicts are handled. As the crisis negotiation literature illustrates, showing empathy and building rapport are crucial for resolving crises. Much of what we know about good conflict management includes the assumption that relational concerns are an important part of working through conflict with another party. But how we think about relationships during negotiation can be complex. Principled negotiation (Fisher & Ury, 2011) recommends "separating the people from the problem" and being "soft on the people and hard on the problem" (p. 13). Yet, one of my most freeing experiences in working through a very challenging conflict situation was when my opponent labelled me simply as *the enemy*. Here's what happened.

We had spent a couple months trying to negotiate a very difficult situation involving the financial and legal position of an academic association. Emotions were high. Lawyers were involved. I was working hard to navigate the tensions of a messy situation while also working hard to maintain a good relationship with the person leading the other side of the conflict, someone with whom I had had a good working relationship for several years. I had made every effort to maintain some type of good relationship with our opponent, thinking it would help in the effort to find a solution.

But after months of battling, during a conference call with people from both sides, she spoke directly to me and said, "You are the enemy."

I am certain she meant it as an attack, but for me, it was a statement of freedom. My concern over protecting and preserving the relationship had just been removed from the negotiation, at least with the person who was at the center of the conflict. Now I was free to get down to business and work on a solution that addressed the overarching issues. No longer did I need to worry about how I was perceived by my opponent. No longer was I concerned about building rapport or about keeping the relationship intact or about whether there would be a relationship left if we ever reached the end of the conflict.

Let me be clear. This was not *carte blanche* to do whatever I wanted. Freedom to pursue our own side of the issues still required a clear moral compass on what was right. It required seeing things from both sides of the conflict, because it was clear I could no longer rely, whatsoever, on the other side to rationally contribute to a normative negotiation process.

This was a big conflict, because the outcome could potentially impact a lot of people. But thanks to the opponent's declaration, the relationship with the opponent was no longer going to help—or hurt—the effort to find a resolution. The parameters of trying to keep a good long-term working relationship or seeking common goals were no longer guiding, or constraining, how the conflict could be addressed. Once I was labelled as the enemy by the other side, I was free to pursue what needed to be done to bring an end to the conflict, perhaps because "focusing on the person" was no longer an option. This experience raises the following research question:

> ***RQ5.*** Under what conditions does seeking to build rapport become a hindrance to achieving successful outcomes?

Team Relationships

Freedom from that relationship, however, did not mean there were no other relational concerns. This conflict involved teams of people on both sides: I led one side and my opponent led the other. When my opponent severed our relationship, that meant good people were also cut out of the conversations and were forced into sides they didn't necessarily want to be on, which made the situation difficult for them. In this case, members of the opposing team had been pulled into a side of the conflict they didn't necessarily believe in. As a result, they played as much of a role behind the scenes on the other side as our own team did on the front lines: Never underestimate the voice of reasonable people seeking good, even when they may seem to be on the other side of the conflict. They shared the stress and anxiety of the conflict while doing what they could to find a solution to the challenging goals we needed to achieve. The team behind the scenes on the other side share in the credit for ending the conflict.

Hostage negotiators may get the credit for bringing the hostage situation to successful closure with no loss of life. But there are teams of police and counselors securing the premises, keeping bystanders out of the way, researching information about the hostage taker that the negotiator can use, monitoring changes in the situation, and ensuring the crisis comes to a successful close. This is why the annual hostage negotiation competition, mentioned above, engages teams, not individuals, to compete. Effective negotiators often rely on a team of people to bring about safe and effective closure.

Only rarely have I had to manage a professional conflict in which others were not involved. Sometimes it has been one or two people who serve as perception checks, people who help me think through my own biases, plan strategies, or process the outcome. Other times there have been teams involved who help by providing support, fact checking, and strategizing. Although much of our negotiation and conflict management research focuses on individual strategies and tactics, it is rare for professional conflicts to be simply one-on-one endeavors. The team leader may get the credit, but the team is crucial to the outcome.

I often say, “The assistant director does not get the Oscar,” because in most team efforts, usually one person gets most of the credit and recognition for what is accomplished—a great movie, a Nobel prize, a major conflict resolved effectively. Yet, in many cases in which someone is recognized for outstanding work, there are teams of people behind the scenes, feeding information, backing up the lead negotiator, and keeping the team on task and focused on the outcome.

This long and difficult conflict eventually came to an end. We created a path that led to closure, and we were able to move forward. Although I received a lot of credit for achieving a successful outcome, it took a really good team of people on both sides, working hard behind the scenes and not giving up, to resolve the crisis.

RQ6. What are the most effective strategies for managing intergroup conflicts when there are factions on the other side or on both sides?

RQ7. If the team leader is creating most of the conflict, what ethical strategies can be used by the rest of the team or for working with the rest of the opponent’s team?

Principle 4: Communication

One of the most important lessons from crisis negotiation research is the crucial role of effective communication (Matusitz, 2013). As Mullins (2002) wrote, “Hostage negotiators are in the communication business” (p. 63). Many tactics and strategies have been developed that work well for building rapport and de-escalating hostage situations. Further, skilled negotiators know what warning signals to listen for in the hostage taker’s communication, and they know what strategies to use in response (see, e.g., Miller, 2005).

Although the crisis negotiation literature identifies many aspects of communication that have been studied in the context of hostage negotiations, during the association conflict case sited above, I identified two tactics used by the other side that were undermining our ability to make progress.

Conversational Control

One of the tactics the opponent used to control interactions was to dominate the conversation. She spoke over people, interrupted people, was the first to respond—and talk at length—to any question raised by either side. We'll call this tactic *conversational control*: While controlling the interaction, she was also controlling the content of the conversation.

On the one hand, crisis negotiation strongly advocates for active listening. But active listening is not just letting the other person talk. In crisis negotiation, for example, allowing the hostage taker to vent is not considered active listening and can contribute to a dangerous situation as language intensity increases (Rogan & Hammer, 1995). Active listening must also involve observing communication dynamics and patterns that emerge. In the association conflict, it became evident that too much listening on our side, and too much talking on the other, was giving the opponent the advantage. We already knew what the issues were that needed to be addressed, so conference calls were supposed to yield small moves toward a resolution. Instead, the opponent actively worked against discussion and problem solving. By dominating the interaction, the opponent obstructed constructive processes and prevented us from presenting our side of the issues. It was a subtle but effective tactic: Just keep talking; don't let the other side move the discussion forward.

No matter what boundaries we tried to set for who would speak and for how long, nothing worked. Eventually, I enlisted a mediator to help control the conversation, but even the mediator had difficulty keeping the opponent from dominating the conversations. More forceful countertactics of controlling the floor became necessary. The opponent's conversational control was an effective tactic. Identifying it—and then finding ways to work around it—became crucial for moving the case forward. This tactic rendered what should have been normal negotiations to be useless.

> ***RQ8.*** What are the effects of conversational control on information sharing and on integrative processes?
>
> ***RQ9.*** What tactics and strategies can be used to effectively manage the use of conversational control?

Manufactured Agreement

The other tactic the opponent used took longer to identify. I call this tactic *manufactured agreement*. Here's how it works.

On a regular basis, and to our team's surprise, the opponent would come to the table with reports that she had garnered support for her side—on whatever issue was being discussed—from respected parties we knew were invested in the outcome of the conflict. Here's what she would say:

> *I spoke with [this person], who agreed with me about [whatever issue was at stake], and then I spoke with [this other person], who also supported me.*

These reports were disconcerting because each expression of support seemed to weaken our side's position; it seemed we were losing support from key stakeholders we thought were supporting our side of the issues: We believed our position was widely supported by these same concerned parties the opponent just said supported her position. Then, finally, I realized what was happening.

The opponent was speaking to each of these individuals one at a time. The conversations would start something like this [the opponent is speaking to one of these interested parties]:

> *Here is my view on how things work . . . [she explains her position in very broad terms, with no facts and details clarified]. Doesn't that seem reasonable?*

To make sense of what was happening, consider the communication concept of a *demand ticket*. A demand ticket is a question that requires a response, usually a formulaic one (Nofsinger, 1975). For example, "How are you?" is generally met with the appropriate and well-trained response, "Fine." When I lived in China, I learned an effective response to the demand ticket, "Have you eaten?" was "Yes, I have eaten enough," or to the demand ticket, "Where are you going?" was simply "Out." It was sufficient to respond to the question without divulging information that the other person did not need to know, and that response was generally sufficient and acceptable.

In this case, “Doesn’t that seem reasonable?” is a demand ticket that can generate a formulaic and cursory response, such as “Sure” or “I guess so.” These responses are a type of backchanneling, which is used to convey the meaning “I’m listening” more than “I agree.” But the affirmative responses from these one-on-one conversations with individual stakeholders were then used by the opponent to suggest these stakeholders supported her side’s positions. Further, because each of these conversations was one-on-one, no one could refute or reframe the content of the conversation.

Once this tactic of manufactured agreement was identified, it became much easier to respond to the opponent when she said she had broad support for her positions: “So if we call this person, they will verify their support?” “Who else was on the call when you spoke to that person?” Further, once the tactic was identified, I asked members of our team to cease having one-on-one conversations with the opponent. We agreed that, going forward, there must be at least three people on any call with this person. It was the only way to combat the opponent’s misrepresentation that she had support that she did not have.

But this tactic also raises a cautionary note about backchanneling. Americans, especially women in the U.S., are more often socialized to use backchanneling: “Mmmhmm,” “I see,” “Go on.” Especially on the phone, we may feel the need to fill the vocal vacuum. In this case, the expression of interpersonal support was being twisted into support for the opponent’s positions. It is an instructive example of learning to keep quiet rather than allowing everyday communication norms to convey positions that we do not hold.

RQ10. How does manufactured agreement work?

RQ11. Can backchanneling result in misperceptions about agreement?

Principle 5: Take Your Time

One of the important lessons from hostage negotiation is the length of time it takes to resolve hostage situations. Phase models (Donohue, Ramesh, Kaufman, & Smith, 1991; Holmes & Sykes, 1993; Madrigal et al., 2009) have proposed that, in criminal hostage cases (e.g., when a convenience store robbery ends up in an unexpected hostage-taking situation), the resolution may last several hours. Domestic crises may take longer. Although the media tend to fret over hostage standoffs lasting more than an hour, crisis negotiation can take several hours to several days to reach an outcome. Nonetheless, 85% to 95% of hostage negotiations end successfully (Rogan, 2013), with all hostages and the hostage taker emerging from the standoff physically unharmed.

The association conflict took months to resolve. Emotions were high with anger, fear, and frustration. The stakes were high, with the association’s survival on the line. At times, some of the key stakeholders thought it would be best to call it quits and just shut the whole association down—no one wins, we’re finished—rather than to continue the battle. In organizational conflicts, when a heated conflict unfolds and persists over weeks or months, one of the most difficult challenges is keeping one’s team from just giving up and giving in. Resilience sometimes comes down to a daily determination to keep working at the problem for one more day, with hope that perseverance will pay off in the end. Divorces, custody battles, hostage situations, and high stakes business negotiations require keeping in mind the long-haul process, even when no end is in sight and the outcome remains uncertain.

And then, when the end seems to be finally in sight, an important lesson from hostage negotiation is to slow down when the resolution seems close; do not speed up at the end. Negotiation is not a sprint to the finish. In international business, American negotiators are often taken by surprise when, on their way to the airport, their international counterparts suddenly ask for “just one more thing.” This time-pressure tactic leaves the American having to decide if they should return to the negotiation table and miss their flight home. If unprepared for such a tactic, the inexperienced negotiator may be caught off guard and simply concede to the request rather than returning to the negotiation table. Instead, expect the unexpected and slow down as you near the finish line. Some examples of hostage negotiations that fell apart—either for the police or for the hostage negotiators—are ones in which one side or the other let its guard down and rushed to bring the situation to a close (Fuselier et al., 1989; Mullins, 2002).

After months of difficult negotiations, we were close to an end, brought about in part by an impending change in leadership that was supposed to take place but was still tenuous. It was a time when there should have been a collective sigh of relief on all sides. Yet, the day before the scheduled hand off, the outgoing board members received new information about the association's finances: Suddenly the new leadership was being strapped with huge debt they did not know existed, along with an accelerating—rather than decelerating—conflict.

Being prepared for last minute surprises does not make them go away, but it does help provide the needed resilience to work through them. It would have been easier to say, "We're done," or "I resign," and let someone else try to figure it out. But a good team knows, especially in conflict, not to let down its guard, not to expect the conflict is over until the other party is fully constrained, contained, and restrained, and all agreements are signed and acted on in full.

> ***RQ12.*** In a long-term conflict, how is resilience affected by focusing on short-term versus long-term goals?
>
> ***RQ13.*** Does a process orientation versus an outcome orientation affect the ability and willingness to pursue a successful outcome in a long-lasting negotiation or conflict situation?

Final Comments

Hostage negotiation is a unique context of intense conflict in which lives—including the life of the hostage taker—are at stake and that requires skilled training on the part of the crisis negotiator to communicate with the hostage taker: To listen and know what to listen for, to build rapport and trust with the hostage taker, to express empathy as well as to manage multiple high-stake goals. It is a context that puts everything we know about communication in the context of negotiation to the test at the most difficult and consequential levels.

My upbringing is rooted in Midwestern values: Keep everything calm, do not allow disagreements to escalate, and avoid confrontational arguments—until they explode in venting and anger. I used to experience fear of escalating conflict: feeling nervous, ruminating over what someone said or wrote, worrying about what to do, wondering whether the situation will resolve itself or whether I would have to do something about it, and if so, what. Therefore, an important lesson for managing conflict has been to learn that many situations that we perceive as conflicts—because they involve conflicting goals and expectations—can be managed with ordinary conversations.

One thing experience has done for me is lower the emotional temperature of conflict situations. Keeping emotions in check, not getting worked up over what someone said—or how it was said—helps lower the perception that the situation is a conflict in the first place. If I anticipate that the other side may become angry, I consider ahead of our interaction the ways to diffuse the other side's anger or keep that person from feeling threatened. I still feel anxious walking into any interaction where I expect that the other side may be or will become angry. But if I don't expect the other person to be angry, then I feel less tense about handling it. As a result, I ruminate less about the situation both before and after the interaction, am less likely to work myself up over it, and therefore can be more focused.

Thankfully, most of my daily work does not involve conflict. Or perhaps it's just that the bar has been raised on what situations count as conflicts compared to those that just need a bit of attention: a faculty member questioning a decision, a student unhappy because she does not like how the teaching assistant graded her paper. The wide range of situations that used to feel like conflicts has narrowed significantly. For the most part, I find people to be quite reasonable; they want to be treated with respect and want to be provided with sound reasons for decisions.

After the 2016 election, I heard Hillary Clinton speak about the need for more women to run for elected office: "But if they run for office," she said, "they need to have thicker skin." To keep focused on the primary goals in difficult conversations, I have had to learn to develop thicker skin. Every difficult conversation makes the next one just a bit easier to handle. Now my skin is thicker, which makes it easier to let the person express emotion, even burst out and yell. It's never pleasant. But sometimes it is a necessary part of the conflict management process, either by getting people to the place where they will seek the help they need or by finding ways to prevent their behavior from harming others.

Learning the best strategies and tactics in crisis negotiation has been very helpful for managing less intense situations. Other chairs, associate deans, and administrators may draw guidance from other sources for managing conflict; I have found the hostage negotiation literature to be a useful and insightful guide to communication and conflict. The biggest lessons I have learned are how to do active listen, build rapport, and not be surprised when the process takes much longer than expected, and then to appreciate that each conflict managed is part of the process it takes to develop thicker skin.

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