

## Visibility and Negotiating Flexibility

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THE EFFECTS OF VARIABLES that had been hypothesized to influence negotiators' decisions were compared by Druckman (1993) in a simulated international conference on environmental regulation. The conference was divided into four stages, each of which was described as a scenario: Stage 1, prenegotiation planning; Stage 2, setting-the-stage; Stage 3, give-and-take; and Stage 4, endgame. The variables were embedded in the scenarios to create three conditions that varied in terms of the likelihood that negotiators' decisions would be flexible.

Assuming the role of national representatives, the participants made decisions about an issue that concerned the creation of an international regulatory commission. In each stage in the flexible condition, the participants (a) deviated further from their initial positions on the issue, (b) planned to use less competitive tactics in defending their positions, and (c) perceived their opponents more positively than in the inflexible conditions. These results were obtained for two samples of participants: environmental scientists at an international research institute and mid-level foreign-service officers in training at a diplomatic academy in Vienna, Austria.

Using a pair-comparison procedure, the participants in both samples judged, for each scenario, which variables caused more flexible/inflexible decisions to be made. Both samples perceived the level of media coverage—limited or extensive—to be the strongest influence on decisions made in the two stages that included this variable (give-and-take and endgame). In addition, the participants attributed flexible decisions to their assigned role of delegate–advisor (in Stage 1), a peripheral location for the talks (in Stage 2), and a lack of acceptable alter-

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natives (in Stage 4). Inflexible decisions were attributed to prepared strategies (in Stage 1) and the existence of acceptable alternatives (in Stage 4).

In the present study, the design of the experiment discussed previously was extended in two ways. First, the representatives actually negotiated their positions, and second, they negotiated two issues, one that was considered to be of great importance (the international regulatory commission issue that had been used in the previous study) and one that was considered to be of less importance (a research and development organization issue, which had not been used in the previous study). Twenty-four pairs of environmental scientists from several countries, who were in residence at an international research institute (and comparable to the scientist sample used in the previous study), acted as national representatives. The participants in each dyad were assigned positions at opposite ends of 7-point scales on which were arranged various policies on the issue being discussed. Half the dyads were randomly assigned to the flexible scenario condition, and half to the inflexible condition. The dyads bargained for 30 min, after the preparatory stages and before the endgame, in the same sequence that was used in the previous experiment.

Differences between the conditions were evident for a number of measures. Significantly more settlements were reached for the research and development issue in the flexible condition than in the inflexible condition: 92% vs. 27% of the dyads resolved this issue in the flexible and inflexible conditions, respectively,  $\chi^2(1, N = 23) = 10.56, p < .01$ . The dyads in the flexible condition deviated further from their initial positions (for both issues) on willingness to compromise,  $M_s = 3$  vs. 2.6, respectively,  $F(1, 44) = 3.45, p < .07$ ; desired outcomes,  $M_s = 1.9$  vs. 1.3, respectively,  $F(1, 42) = 5.02, p < .04$ ; and likely outcomes,  $M_s = 3.3$  vs. 2.6, respectively,  $F(1, 41) = 3.72, p < .06$ . Also, the dyads in the flexible condition tended to view the conflict as a problem to be solved rather than as a contest,  $M_s = 3.9$  vs. 3,  $F(1, 44) = 11.36, p < .002$ ; were less interested in having their own position prevail,  $M_s = 2.5$  vs. 2.1, respectively,  $F(1, 44) = 6.18, p < .02$ ; and used less competitive tactics,  $M_s = 2.6$  vs. 2.3, respectively,  $F(1, 44) = 2.84, p < .10$ . The absence of a Condition  $\times$  Stage interaction indicates that these effects occurred across all four stages.

The results of the pair-comparison judgments indicated which variable(s) in each stage had the strongest influence on the negotiators' decisions. These variables can be aligned along a trajectory progressing toward agreement or toward a stalemate. The key variables (those with the highest weightings) that led to flexible decisions in each stage, resulting in agreements, were as follows: friendly relations (Stage 1)→peripheral location (Stage 2)→limited media coverage (Stage 3)→limited media coverage (Stage 4). The key variables that led to relatively inflexible decisions in each stage, resulting in a stalemate, were as follows: lack of familiarity or being the primary representative (Stage 1)→central location (Stage 2)→extensive media coverage or lack of conference leadership (Stage 3)→extensive media coverage (Stage 4).

The variables of location of talks and extent of media coverage had strong and consistent effects on the negotiators' decisions: Negotiators with opposing positions were more flexible when media coverage was limited and when talks were held at a peripheral location. These results confirm and strengthen the findings that were obtained in the previous study and highlight the importance of the setting of talks held in an attempt to reach agreements on divisive issues.

The present findings are consistent with the results of other experiments in which negotiators have been shown to be more flexible in private talks than in public talks. The effects of visibility are likely to be particularly strong when there is pressure to save face, as demonstrated by Brown (1977), in a series of experiments, and by others (Carnevale et al., 1981; Organ, 1971; Pruitt et al., 1986). The present findings also provide evidence for less formal observations that have been made in a real-world context. Walton and McKersie (1965) noted that private settings for labor-management talks allow negotiators to break away from their "scripts" by limiting the influence of constituents and audiences. Druckman (1973, p. 45) noted that, in the context of an international situation, "the same compromises arrived at secretly may not look nearly so bad as if arrived at openly." Indeed, progress toward the recent Arab-Israeli peace agreement may have been largely attributable to this factor (Holst, 1993). The responses of the role-playing participants in the present study were similar to those of the professional negotiators described in these real-world examples. Preliminary evidence suggests that the participants' responses may have reflected their expectations about how professional negotiators in similar situations would be likely to behave (Druckman, 1993). Whether professional negotiators are also influenced by their own role expectations is not yet known.

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