

Research Briefing for Practitioners: Negotiating Effectively

Weiss, S.E. "Negotiators' Effectiveness with Mixed Agendas: An Empirical Exploration of Tasks, Decisions and Performance Criteria," *Group Decision and Negotiation*, 2012, 21:255-290
<http://www.springerlink.com/content/100270/?k=Weiss&sortorder=asc&v=condensed&o=10>

To improve their effectiveness, negotiators today are generally advised to adopt integrative bargaining techniques. Researchers and trainers alike emphasize joint value creation and "logrolling" (trading concessions on low-priority agenda items for gains on high-priority items). The logic, which seems irrefutable, is that expanding the pie leads to more pie for everyone—including oneself. This empirical study shows, however, that this advice is not always appropriate or accurate.

High-level performance by individuals in this study was *not* significantly related to logrolling or creating joint value to the maximum extent possible. For the full sample of individuals in the study, the degree of logrolling and amount of joint value created had little or no significant impact on effectiveness when it was measured as the total value obtained by an individual. In this negotiation, with its varied agenda items (see insert), individual effectiveness was most affected by negotiators' decisions on pure conflict items: in short, by value-claiming. Their "distributive" decisions had twice as much impact as integrative decisions did.

The Empirical Study. Over 1000 MBA students participated in a two-person negotiation over eight agenda items. Two items had logrolling or integrative potential, three involved pure conflict, and three represented no conflict. For each item, there were five possible solutions of varying, confidential value to each negotiator. Based on these values, negotiator effectiveness was assessed in several ways. Negotiators' solution choices for different agenda items and their influence on effectiveness were analyzed through contingency analysis, multiple regression and other statistical techniques.

Not all results ran counter to current wisdom. Individuals typically achieved less than they could have. The middle solution of the five possible—a "compromise"—was the most frequent choice on pure conflict agenda items. A small number of negotiators (16%) logrolled completely. Not logrolling and low joint value creation did have a significant impact on ineffective and weak performers, if not on others.

In general, negotiators chose different solutions for the three types of agenda items, and each of these decision sets significantly influenced individual effectiveness.

What do these results suggest for practitioners? First, one should clearly establish one's criteria for negotiation effectiveness. Maximum joint value is only one option. Second, to improve *individual* effectiveness, a negotiator should not necessarily rely on logrolling and other integrative techniques. In some negotiations, integrative items have low value relative to other items on the agenda. The potential impact of logrolling is not the same across all negotiations. Third, in a negotiation like the one in this study, the strong influence of value-claiming should not be neglected. For measures of individual performance, it deserves even more attention than value-creation.* Claiming can be taken to extremes and cause irreparable damage, but there is a lot of ground that can be explored, in creative and sophisticated ways, before reaching that point.

Ultimately, the message is not that integrative decision-making should be rejected or replaced, but that it is only one approach in a mixed-agenda negotiation. Depending on the structural features of the negotiation and criteria for negotiator effectiveness, it may not even be the most important approach. Negotiators should consider its applicability judiciously, case by case and in context.

S. Weiss
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*Logrolling is usually considered superior to compromise on individual and joint grounds, but a negotiator may gain even more as an individual by claiming more value on each of the agenda items with integrative potential.