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A Review of Distributive and Integrative Strategies in the Negotiation Process

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Abstract

Negotiation is a crucial tool for resolving a dispute. The outcome of every negotiation relies heavily on the negotiation strategies of the parties involved, the exchange of information and their characters during the negotiation process. Considering distributive approach, the negotiators are more interested in the maximization of personal achievements as they are not concern in collective or joint success with their partners. One of the key requirements for the integrative strategy is cooperation between the negotiators while distributive strategy is purely for a competitive approach. These two types of strategies distributive and integrative are in relation to the behavior and attitudes negotiators normally display in a negotiation table: cooperative and competitive. The reason why negotiators commonly used cooperative and competitive strategies are mentioned in this paper, distributive and integrative strategies are also summarized. Follow by possible solution of overcoming the negotiation challenges is discussed.

Keywords: negotiation, distributive strategy, integrative strategy competitive, cooperative, compromise

Introduction

Negotiation is one of the key methods of resolving a disputes between two or more parties who have different demands and point of view with the purpose of reaching satisfactory agreements on issues of their mutual interest (Stoshikj & Greguš, 2014). But the success of negotiation depends largely on the strategies negotiators adopt and the exchange of information during the negotiation process (Pruitt, 1990). Negotiators come to the bargaining table with either distributive or integrative strategies to press home their demands (Thompson, Wang & Gunia, 2010).

Distributive Strategy

Distributive bargaining strategy is competitive approach negotiators adopt to achieve success over the other party in the negotiation process (Olekalns, Kulik & Chew 2014). They use this strategy purposely to take advantage of the other negotiators through win-loss solution (De Cremer et al., 2001). In case distributive negotiators succeed in using this kind of strategy, that would mean that their success will become a failure to the other party. Overall distributive negotiators are more comfortable using this type of bargaining style as it has no psychological distress to them in anyway but success.

Several existing studies (e.g Alavoline, 2014; Miles, & Clenney 2012; Lewicki et al., 2003; Lax, & Sebenius, 1986; Van Kleef et al., 2006) have identified key behaviors which prevents negotiators with distributive strategy from achieving a win-win beneficial solution with their integrative counterparts. These attitudes include Lack of cooperation, compromise, lack of group feeling and competitive which are discussed below:

Non-cooperative Behavior

Evidence shows that distributive negotiators achieve their success on the basis of less cooperative behavior in the negotiation table which results in the exploitation of their counterparts (Kern et al, 2005; Goering, 1997; Lewicki, 1983; Walton & McKersie, 1965). With this mindset, they normally do not accept the point of view of their counterparts (Druckman, 1994), this has greatly contributed to high degree of resistance to important piece of information from their partners which suppose to result in win-win solution as their prime intention is to satisfy their goals at the negotiation table regardless of whether their partners are satisfied or not. For this reason, the two parties cannot be able to reach a fruitful agreements with each other as both parties struggles to meet up their goals at the bargaining table. Hence, the possibility of confrontation among the two disputants becomes high due to clash of interest (Kimmel et al., 1980; Pruitt, 1981; Lax and Sebenius, 1986; Weingart et al., 1996).

Empirical evidence (see Shapiro et al. 1992; Kelly & Stahelski 1970) shows that negotiators who use the distributive style of bargaining do not pay attention to the success of their partners at the negotiation table, this is why they frequently apply the use of threat to force a decision on their partners. This kind of irrational behavior from the side of the distributive negotiators often leads to dispute between the two disputants as the other negotiators with integrative attitudes will not accept forceful proposal below their initial demands (Fells, 2016; Kochan, & Lipsky, 2003; Walton & McKersie, 1965). In reality, disputants with distributive tactics of bargaining have a high tendency to yell at their opponents when their offer is been rejected. At this moment, the two parties may not likely reach an agreement as yelling can easily triggers anger among the negotiators which will later have a greater consequences on the process of negotiation and it outcome (Olekalns, Horan, & Smith, 2014).

Lack of Collective Feeling

According to De Dreu, Giacomantonio and Mannetti (2010) bargainers who utilize this strategy lack collective mutual feelings for joint maximization. They exhibit this type of behavior with the intention of winning the largest part of the negotiation outcome irrespective of how the other party feels. Disputants with this kind of negotiating tactics show no kindness, compassion and generosity to their partners (Harinck, De Dreu & 2004). The reason why distributive negotiators are putting on these very attitudes is because they believe that they cannot accomplish their goals through collective means.

Lack of Compromise Attitude

A previous study (e.g, Tremblay, 2016; Pon, 2014; De Cremer, Snyder & Dewitte, 2001) have documented lack of compromise as a behavior of negotiators with distributive strategy. This kind of non-compromising attitudes from the distributive negotiators often undermines and weakens the success of their negotiation with their partners as they struggle to achieve all their demands. In addition to that, unpleasant behavior such as insincerity and fake promises are other common tactics adopted by negotiators with distributive strategy. They do so with the intention of misleading their partners to reach a deceptive agreement which they will not fulfill afterward (Weingart et al., 1990). This frequent unfulfilled agreement may further complicate their future negotiation because their counterparts will no longer trust a statements from their distributive counterparts and that may likely cause a delay in reaching meaningful a agreement between the two parties.

Competitive Approach /Behavior

Moving further, another important study by Allred (2000) disagrees with the above discussion on the basis that, distributive strategy is very important for the purpose of self-actualization. Distributive disputants normally acquired their goals through competitive means rather than cooperation with the other negotiators for a collective agreement. Such negotiators believe that adopting a cooperatively oriented bargaining attitudes will obstructs their chances of self-achievements at the negotiation table. Allred further maintains that disputants cannot always achieve what they needed through cooperation and sincerity. Allred argued that there are fundamental key issues which may hinder the two parties from reaching an agreement in the name of been absolute honesty and sincerity.

More-over, excessive truth-telling in the negotiation result to more topics of discussion and argument which potentially prolong the negotiation process without achieving success. All in all, the Allred stated that competitive and cooperative approach creates a dilemma for disputants to reach mutual agreements in a negotiation. Allred suggested that the best alternative for disputants to resolve their misunderstanding is to move away from the combination of integrative and distributive strategies and move towards distributive tactics for the purpose of personal accomplishment. More-so, Walto and MC Kersie (1992) have a common view with Allred study, that a dilemma in negotiation occur the moment negotiators approach the negotiation process with the mixture of competitive and cooperative behaviors. Walto and his friend in their negotiation studies have a contradicted view with Allred (1992) that negotiators should rather move away from distributive bargaining strategy which prolongs peaceful settlement and shift towards integrative to facilitate quick resolution process. Additionally, Walto and MC Kersie observed that negotiators who have a different approach in the negotiation often perceived the process of negotiation differently. For instance, a cooperative negotiators considered the negotiation as a process of achieving a collective win-win agreement through effective and honest communication. On the other hand, negotiators with competitive approach view the negotiation as a win-loss process through aggression and authoritative means. Subsequently, these authors concluded that a combination of different behaviors in the negotiation process becomes a challenge for disputants to reach a meaningful agreement. These two authors are of the view that, it is essential for the two negotiators to drop their ego and embrace cooperation if the two parties are to reach a successful agreement. Furthermore, Inhyu et al. (2012) reported a contrasting result which indicates that negotiating parties are more successful with the combination of integrative and distributive strategies in the bargaining process. These authors assumption is that negotiators have different demands/wants so; they have to apply a different suitable approaches to achieve their goals. The authors suggested that, combination of integrative and distributive tactics should be used for the negotiation to be flexible. This means that, negotiators should employ integrative style for flexibility when they want to achieve collective goals and uses distributive strategy to remain firm in achieving their primary goals which are important to them in the negotiation.

Integrative Strategy

The integrative strategy is a cooperative approach disputant adopt in a negotiation process for joint maximization (Paavola, 2014). In other to achieve a collective win-win agreement, integrative negotiators tend to be cooperatively oriented with the intention of reaching a satisfactory 50-50 agreement at the negotiation table with their opponents. This means they sacrifice their personal needs for the purpose of collective interest to their enhance future relationship with their partners (Pon, 2014).

Evidence from most current literature (Fells, 2016; Kong, 2015; Miles & Clenney, 2012) shows that integrative negotiators place a strong emphasis on high degree of trust and commitment to integrate their ideas with their counterparts in order to come out with a meaningful and logical solutions to ensure integrative agreement. They consider information exchange as their top priority for the purpose of achieving a collective goals. Negotiators with integrative bargaining tactic also seek for more clarification and understanding from their counterparts in relation to their interest in dispute (Harinck & De Dreu, 2004) with this kind of mind set; they often succeed in accomplishing a collective goals

during the negotiation process beneficial for all the parties involved (Goering, 1997; Walton & McKersie, 1965).

Further on, Aquino and Becker (2005) reported that negotiators who utilize integrative strategy are honest in the negotiation table as they believe that it is a way of been fair and kind to the other negotiators. They also believe in cooperation to honestly and fairly reveal their priorities and preferences to the other party's to avoid suppressing each other. This type of kind and generous behavior from the negotiators with integrative attitudes often lead to a less considerable level of psychological distress between the two disputants during the negotiation process. This makes it much easier for the disputants to successfully reach an agreement (Aquino & Becker, 2005).

More-so, studies (see, Neale & Bazerman, 1991; Fry et al. 1983; Lewicki & Litterer, 1985; Pruitt & Lewis, 1975) suggests that integrative bargaining style is crucial in achieving a collective mutual achievement. These authors strongly encourage disputants to maintain this kind of strategy to foster cooperation and harmony for integrative agreement. Evidence from the existing studies shows that, integrative disputants are more concern of addressing a collective preferences to search for the best alternatives for joint maximization. They suppress their desire for self-interest for the sake of their distributive counterpart who would not reciprocate the same way (Lewicki, Barry , Saunders & Minton 2003; Jehn,Chadwick & Thatcher,1997; Rubin & Brown,1975).

Furthermore, evidence indicates that negotiators who refused to show a cooperative behavior with their partners intentionally maintain hard bargaining strategy for their personal interest which reduces the possibility of mutual joint agreement with their partners (Brewer et al., 2002; Greenhalgh et al., 1985; Ohbuchi & Fukushima, 1997; Rubin & Brown, 1975). Moving further, such disputants retain this kind of difficult negotiating tactics as they believe that they cannot gain from bargaining with integrative strategy. This is because there are some instances and situations where employees, for example, cannot benefit from a cooperating with their counterparts in the name of reaching an integrative or 50-50 agreement in a situation where their employers deny them their salaries and allowances without reasons. In a situation like this, adopting a distributive tactics to remain firm with their demands would be the best option so that they would receive their full salaries/allowances.

Empirical evidence from the existing literature (e.g., Lewicki, 1983; Pruitt, 1981) documented that distributive tactics is however effective to reach an integrative agreement. In order to achieve a collective outcome, disputants must be flexible in their rule. Meaning, negotiators should remain firm in achieving their specific goals/interest while maintaining that same flexibility to reach joint agreements. These scholars suggested that bargainers should maintain their firmness in using distributive strategy at the negotiation table or else, they would not find an actual integrative potency if their level of cooperation becomes high than that of their counterparts (Kern et al. 2005; Goering, 1997; Neale & Bazerman, 1991; Pruitt & Rubin 1986; Pruitt, & Lewis, 1975).

Harinck and De Dreu (2004) also found that integrative agreements can be reached with the combination of distributive and integrative strategy. In line with that, Harinck and De Dreu stated that early application of integrative behavior is not so effective in finding integrative agreement in a negotiation. In order to achieve an integrative result, integrative attitudes should come later in the negotiation process. Again, Pruitt and Rubin,(1986) found that negotiators who are self-concern in the negotiation table often use problem-solving method in an attempt to reach integrative agreements. From the other side, disputants who are concern about their partners especially, those negotiating with friends, tend show cooperative behaviors to reach a satisfactory agreement as compare to negotiators who negotiates with strangers (Aquino et al. 2009; Weingart, Hyder & Prietula, 1996; Greenhalgh & Chapman, 1998).

Summary of Integrative and Distributive Strategies

Not all negotiation problems have the potential to be solved with an integrative approach. Some disputants may adopt distributive strategy as a way to achieve their demands, which have been taken

for granted by another party for just no cause. Though such disputants might not have such intention to use this approach, but due to failed promises. In spite of this, as stated above, it is most unlikely to use distributive strategy to achieve fruitful results because one thing about distributive negotiators is that they try to gain as much as they can, leaving the other parties with nothing. This extreme behavior obstructs the integrative potential, therefore, in the spirit of equity, and to avoid prolong dispute, both parties need to drop their preconceived idea and jointly look at their problem in a simple way by adopting an integrative strategy which may be the best approach to safely reach a constructive agreement.

Ways of Overcoming Challenges in the Negotiation

When negotiators come to the bargaining table with mixed-motive integrative and distributive strategies, they tend to behave non-cooperatively. For instances, distributive negotiators display irrationally competitive behaviors to make extreme demands for win-loss solution. Integrative negotiators, however considered the negotiation as a process of cooperation to rationally reach a collective win-win solution. Negotiators who bargain with integrative tactics lower their demands for the sake of achieving a collective agreement. For this reason, they have a higher chances of reaching a mutually acceptable agreement within a short period of time as compare to those distributive negotiators whose demands remains high. In reality, when negotiating parties come to the negotiation table with a high demands without compromise. They may end up receiving nothing and in case they succeed, they achieve all their demands leaving their counterparts with nothing. Further on, negotiators should move away from distributive attitude in the negotiation and shift towards integrative bargaining behavior. This is because it is crucial for negotiators to recognize interests for one's own and the interest of the other party involved in the bargaining process for peaceful settlement rather than struggling to achieve personal goals which will result to the exploitation of the other party.

Additionally, it is important for the parties to come together and recognize their different value and find mutual solution through cooperation in the bargaining table. In doing so, both parties can fulfill their preferences with just integrative tactics because of their trust and sincerity for each other. Negotiators cannot resolve their dispute with the combination of competitive and cooperation as they would likely clash with each other due to different interest at play. In addition to that, when negotiators come to the bargaining table with these kinds of different tactics. Thus, negotiators should consider looking for the possibilities of achieving amicable and peaceful resolution through cooperation and concern for others as it does not make sense to allow negotiation fail due to a high level of self-concern.

Conclusion

Negotiation is a process of communication where disputants persuade each other to reach an agreement over their disputed issues. However, the success of every negotiation depends much on the approach/attitudes negotiators come to the table to bargain with. Disputants either adopt integrative or distributive tactics. Negotiator who approach negotiation with distributive bargaining style often engage in telling lies, deceptive/fake promise to reach an agreement while claiming the largest part of the negotiation through competition as compare to integrative negotiators who emphasize much on cooperation, honesty and vital information sharing to reach win-win negotiation agreement beneficial for all the parties involved in the negotiation process. They use all the effective method within their power to utilize appropriate tactics to gain successful outcome at the negotiation table. Hence, it is difficult for disputants to achieve a fruitful result if the negotiation process contain a combination of distributive/competitive and integrative/cooperative. The reason is that, both parties cannot agree on common solution to their misunderstanding as both parties have different objectives/targets to be accomplished.

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