



# Using self-regulation to overcome the detrimental effects of anger in negotiations



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## ABSTRACT

Both being angry (*intrapersonal anger*) and facing expressions of anger (*interpersonal anger*) impair negotiators' goal attainment, as evident in less profitable outcomes. Here, we hypothesize that fostering self-regulation by forming if-then plans helps to overcome these detriments. In Study 1, angry negotiators attained less successful joint gains than non-angry negotiators. Angry negotiators who had formed an if-then plan about how to negotiate, however, attained similarly profitable outcomes as non-angry negotiators. In Study 2, participants negotiating with an angry opponent conceded more than those facing a non-angry opponent. Participants who had formed an if-then plan, however, conceded less than participants without self-regulatory help. These findings demonstrate that fostering self-regulation is a valuable means to overcome the detriments of intrapersonal and interpersonal anger in negotiations.

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## 1. Introduction

*"Anybody can become angry – that is easy, but being angry with the right person, and to the right degree, [. . .] and in the right way – that is not within everybody's power [. . .]"*

[Aristotle]

In negotiations, anger plays a major role in at least two ways: As *intrapersonal anger* – making decisions while being angry (Allred, Mallozzi, Matsui, & Raia, 1997) – and as *interpersonal anger* – negotiating with an opponent who expresses anger (Van Kleef, De Dreu, & Manstead, 2004a). Both forms of anger threaten negotiators' success in terms of joint and individual outcomes (Allred et al., 1997; Fabiansson & Denson, 2012; Van Kleef et al., 2004a). Crafting profitable deals is a major, if not the most important, goal in negotiations (Allred, 2000). Hence, anger is an obstacle to goal attainment. Overcoming this obstacle would be of great value for negotiators. However, while there has been abundant research on how anger impairs negotiation outcomes, there is surprisingly little research on means to overcome these detriments. We investigated the hypothesis that fostering self-regulation can help negotiators to craft better deals despite being angry (Study 1), and despite facing an opponent who expresses anger (Study 2). Specifically, we used the self-regulation technique of forming if-then plans which allows implementing goal directed behaviors to thwart the anger detriment (Gollwitzer, 1999).

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## 2. The two faces of anger

### 2.1. Intrapersonal anger in negotiations

Intrapersonal anger refers to the effect that being angry has on the cognition and behavior of the angry person (Overbeck, Neale, & Govan, 2010). In negotiations, intrapersonal anger leads to decreased first offers (Baron, Fortin, Frei, Hauver, & Shack, 1990), smaller joint gains (Allred et al., 1997), and the irrational rejection of profitable final offers (Pillutla & Murnighan, 1996). Research suggests that angry negotiators show an inaccurate understanding of their opponents' interests (i.e., no perspective taking; Allred et al., 1997). This is of special significance in integrative negotiations, where parties' interests for negotiation items vary (Walton & McKersie, 1965). Such varying interests theoretically bear the potential to find deals that suit both parties more than mere 50/50 splits (i.e., compromise solution). In one classic study, participants negotiated as employer or employee over several items of a job contract, such as salary and vacation (Allred et al., 1997). Anger was induced via a pre-negotiation task designed to frustrate the participants. Angry participants reported a lower regard for their opponents' interests, resulting in an impaired understanding of the opponents' payoff structure (Thompson, 1990; Thompson, 1991). This impaired integrative insight, in turn, led to less successful joint gains (Allred et al., 1997).

In sum, being angry hinders goal achievement in negotiations. Leading negotiators to take their opponents' perspective may counteract these negative effects. If negotiators – despite being angry – tried to understand their opponents, more profitable deals could be crafted and intrapersonal anger detriments would be overcome.

### 2.2. Interpersonal anger in negotiations

Interpersonal anger refers to the effect that an opponent's expressions of anger have on the cognition and behavior of a focal negotiator (Overbeck et al., 2010). In contrast to intrapersonal anger, this latter phenomenon has been mainly investigated in distributive negotiations, in which negotiators' interests are diametrically opposed (Walton & McKersie, 1965). In a prominent experimental paradigm, participants negotiate about the sale of consumer goods (Sinaceur, Van Kleef, Neale, Adam, & Haag, 2011; see also De Dreu, 1995; De Dreu & Van Lange, 1995). During the exchange of offers and counteroffers one negotiator may, for example, state: "I am going to offer x–y–z, because this negotiation pisses me off" (Van Kleef et al., 2004a). When confronted with such an expression of anger, participants tend to concede more compared to participants in a control group who are not confronted with anger-expressions (see also Sinaceur & Tiedens, 2006; Sinaceur et al., 2011).

The *Emotions as Social Information Model* (Van Kleef, De Dreu, & Manstead, 2004b) offers an explanation for the interpersonal effect of expressions of anger. According to the model, emotions of communication partners are used to draw strategic inferences in competitive situations: After negotiator A expresses an emotion, negotiator B asks herself what she can learn from this emotion expression about A's aspirations, limits, alternatives, etc. In the case of expressions of anger, negotiators infer threats by the counterpart to abandon the negotiation (Sinaceur et al., 2011); they infer from the anger "that an impasse is particularly likely" (Van Kleef & Côté, 2007, p. 1558). Consequently, negotiators make concessions to prevent impasses that would result in no gain at all. Concessions may help to reach an agreement, but they also result in comparatively less profitable outcomes for the conceding party.

In sum, interpersonal anger is an obstacle to goal attainment in negotiations. To overcome the detrimental effects of interpersonal anger it might be helpful to question if the opponent's threats are to be taken seriously (e.g., by reminding oneself that there is a mutual interdependence in negotiations) and to resist concessions even when feeling threatened.

It may seem paradoxical that both intra- and interpersonal anger should be detrimental in negotiations. One might argue that if expressions of anger do indeed extract concessions from the opposing party, being angry should be helpful since it raises the probability to express anger. However, being angry does not necessarily lead to expressing anger: If and how emotions are displayed, for example, varies depending on the cultural background (Matsumoto, Takeuchi, Andayani, Kouznetsova, & Krupp, 1998) and even children have internalized display rules for showing anger (Underwood, Coie, & Herbstein, 1992). Thus, being angry is often not overtly expressed, yet nevertheless exerts detrimental consequences on cognition and behavior (e.g., reliance on heuristic processing; Bodenhausen, Sheppard, & Kramer, 1994; Lerner & Tiedens, 2006). Moreover, expressing anger does not require a person to genuinely experience the anger, but may be used as a strategic tool instead. Taken together, genuinely experiencing anger impairs cognition and negotiation behavior in ways that outweigh the advantages of expressing anger.

## 3. Self-regulation in negotiations

Self-regulation encompasses all efforts to alter one's thoughts, emotions, and behavior in the service of goal attainment, including initiating goal-directed behavior and inhibiting behaviors that impair goal attainment (Wagner & Heatherton, 2015). Research into self-regulation offers a variety of techniques that help improving goal attainment in various contexts including negotiations (Friese, Hofmann, & Wiers, 2011; Jäger, Loschelder, & Friese, 2015). One particularly effective self-regulation technique is forming if-then plans (also called implementation intentions; Gollwitzer, 1999; Gollwitzer & Oettingen, 2011). If-then plans specify when and how to carry out a specific goal-directed behavior, according to the pattern

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