

NEGOTIATION VIA EMAIL

Noam Ebner

Cite as: Ebner, N. (2011). "Negotiating via email". In M. Benoliel (Ed.) **Negotiation Excellence: Successful Deal Making**. pp. 397-415. World Scientific Publishing: Singapore.

Author: **Noam Ebner**
Assistant Professor and Online Program Chair
Werner Institute for Negotiation and Dispute Resolution
Creighton University School of Law
noamebner@creighton.edu

Abstract:

Increasingly, negotiation interactions are taking place through channels other than face-to-face meetings. Negotiators find themselves engaging through e-communication channels – primarily e-mail. The communication channel through which the negotiation is conducted affects the dynamics of the interaction, the degree of inter-party trust and cooperation, the information shared and the outcome.

While theoretical models of negotiation certainly take interparty communication into account, they do not usually examine the characteristics and effects of particular communication media. Similarly, the average professional negotiator is not trained to recognize and cope with the effects of the communication channel on the negotiation interaction. This chapter aims to fill this gap in theory and practice by examining the effects of email communication on relational and transactional elements of negotiation. Practices for avoiding common pitfalls and improving better outcomes in email negotiation are recommended.

Author Bio:

Noam Ebner is an assistant professor at the Werner Institute at Creighton University's School of Law, where he chairs the online graduate program in Negotiation and Dispute Resolution. Previously, he has taught negotiation and conflict resolution at universities in Israel, Turkey and Costa Rica, and directed a commercial mediation center in Jerusalem. He received his LL.M from Hebrew University. In addition to online negotiation, his writing focuses on negotiation pedagogy and the role of trust in negotiation.

Negotiation – here, there, online and everywhere

Negotiation interactions are increasingly taking place through channels other than face-to-face encounters. Negotiators find themselves using e-communication channels, primarily e-mail, but also other media such as instant messaging and videoconferencing.

Given the broad definition granted to the term negotiation in the literature, and the many types of interactions and relationships we now conduct online, many of us are often engaged in online negotiation. This is now obvious in the business world: two lawyers email offers and counteroffers in an attempt to settle a case; a team leader sends out a group message urging his team to work longer hours; a purchaser in Chicago writes to ask for a bulk discount on the price-per-unit from her supplier in Singapore. All are engaging in the allocation of scarce resources (Thompson, 2004), conducting back and forth communication aimed at reaching an agreement (Fisher & Ury, 1991) and in short, negotiating -online.

With the explosive increase in internet usage and online communication, and the surge in e-commerce, online negotiation can only become an increasingly widespread method of interaction.

Negotiating online is unavoidable – and unavoidably different

The proliferation of e-communication media has presented us with a world of opportunity for negotiation interactions. However, the ease with which so many people transferred so many of their interactions online conceals a hidden, yet crucial, truth: online negotiation is significantly different from face-to-face negotiation. While many people intuitively recognize this, the differences are either ignored and dismissed as inconsequential – or seen as insurmountable, a cause to avoid negotiating any significant matter online at all. However, in today's world, we can neither bury our heads in the sand, nor can we avoid online negotiation – we need to understand it, and learn how to conduct it well.

The professional and academic negotiation fields have also, for the large part, ignored this topic in training and teaching. Negotiators were trained for interactions 'at the table' – always assuming that there would, indeed, be a 'table' – *some physical setting* where the parties convened and negotiated. Only recently has a call to incorporate online negotiation as a core topic in negotiation education been voiced, as co-authors Anita Bhappu, Jennifer Brown, Kimberlee Kovach, Andrea Kupfer Schneider and I tried to capture the key elements of e-negotiation that teachers and trainers need to include in their curriculum and to provide ideas for how these can be taught (see Ebner et al, 2009).

This chapter, aimed at students and professionals, is in a sense an implementation of (some of) those recommendations. This chapter will zoom in on the medium for online negotiation most commonly employed, particularly in a professional context: negotiation via e-mail. It opens with a theoretical model explaining the effects that communication media have on the content and dynamics of communication conducted through them. Next, it focuses on e-mail communication, delineating seven particular areas in which this media affects elements or dynamics of negotiation. A discussion of the challenges posed by the medium in each area will also include some potential benefits the medium offers. Finally, each section will make recommendations for practical applications based on the literature presented and best practices noted in the field. While the usual caveats regarding 'tips' and 'recommendations' in negotiation pertain, these should help to bridge theory and practice – and give negotiators ideas for avoiding common pitfalls while advantage of the opportunities presented by the medium.

The medium and the message:

A theoretical model

The communication channel through which negotiations are conducted is neither passive nor neutral. Any communication medium influences both ends of the communication loop, affecting what information negotiators share and how that information is conveyed (Carnevale & Probst, 1997; Friedman & Currall, 2001; Valley, Moage & Bazerman, 1998), as well as how that information is received and interpreted. These effects are called 'media effects'.

Intuitively, we are all aware that some information could be easy to communicate face-to-face, but difficult to convey in an email; other messages might be hampered by a face-to-face setting. We might have one response to something we are told face-to-face, but respond in a completely different manner to the same message, conveyed by email. What underlies these differences? It is helpful, in this regard, to understand two dimensions of communication media (Barsness & Bhappu, 2004):

- 1) *Media richness*: The capacity of any given media to supply 'contextual cues': body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, etc. Face-to-face communication is considered a "rich" medium: it allows for all of these, which account for a significant proportion of a message's meaning (DePaulo & Friedman, 1998). Email, however, is considered a "lean" medium because it transmits neither visual nor audio cues; we cannot see the other's gestures or facial expressions, or hear their tone of voice. Denied these contextual cues, negotiators both transmit and receive information differently.

On the transmitting side, this affects presentation style: email negotiators rely more heavily on logical

argumentation and the presentation of facts, rather than emotional or personal appeals (Barsness & Bhappu, 2004). It also affects the content of the information negotiators share: The ability to transmit visual, audio and verbal cues allows a medium to provide more immediate feedback -and this, in turn, facilitates communication of information of a personal nature (Daft & Lengel, 1984). Email communicators are more task-oriented and depersonalized than those engaged in face-to-face interactions (Kemp & Rutter, 1982).

Media richness also affects the reception and interpretation side of the communication cycle: Information exchanged in email tends to be less nuanced than information exchanged face-to-face (Friedman & Currall, 2001; Valley et al. 1998), and the elimination of important back-channel and clarifying information such as speech acknowledgements (e.g., “uh-huh” or “huh?”) and reactive body language (e.g., nods) (O’Connell, Whittaker & Wilbur, 1993) compounds this. Communicating through lean media, negotiators focus on the actual *content* of messages (Ocker & Yaverbaum, 1999), lending much more importance to the words that are chosen, and their interpretation. While email does allow for limited visual cues through color, font, and emoticons, these cues are crude, un-nuanced, and are often misused and misinterpreted. Their use -relatively rare in professional communication -could give rise to more confusion than clarity. In email negotiation, as discussed below, ambiguous messages trigger some of the greatest challenges to the process.

- 2) *Interactivity*: The potential of the medium to sustain a seamless flow of information between two or more negotiators (Kraut, Galegher, Fish & Chalfonte, 1992).

Interactivity has two dimensions. The first, a temporal dimension, captures the *synchronicity* of interactions. Face-to-face communication is synchronous and co-temporal. Each party receives an utterance just as it is produced; as a result, speaking “turns” tend to occur sequentially. Email is typically asynchronous: negotiators can read and respond to others’ messages whenever they desire -and not necessarily sequentially. Minutes, hours, or even weeks can pass between the time a negotiator sends a message and the time their counterpart reads it, and reading messages out of order is a common cause of misunderstandings.

The second dimension of interactivity is parallel processing, which describes a medium’s ability to allow negotiators to *simultaneously* transmit messages. In face-to-face communication parallel processing is overt. Email, however, permits the simultaneous exchange of messages, but negotiators will not necessarily *know* that this is occurring – ‘crossing messages’ is ubiquitous and confusing.

These two characteristics of email –asynchronous, and allowing

for parallel processing – have profound effects on the way messages are transmitted and the way they are received. On the transmission side, the use of asynchronous media may accentuate analytical-rational expression of information by negotiators, as opposed to an intuitive-experiential mode (Epstein, Pacini, Denes-Raj & Heier, 1996). This favors individuals who tend to rely more heavily on logic and deductive thinking, and to engage in developing positions and reservation points, logical argumentation, and fact-presentation. By contrast, individuals tending towards appealing to emotion and sharing personal stories (Gelfand & Dyer, 2000) may be put at a disadvantage.

On the receiving side, email imposes high “understanding costs” on negotiators. Negotiators’ understanding is challenged by the lack of contextual cues. The timing and sequence of the information exchange further hamper negotiators’ efforts to accurately decode messages they receive (Clark & Brennan, 1991). In addition, the tendency of email negotiators to “bundle” multiple arguments and issues together in one email message (Adair, Okumura & Brett, 2001; Friedman & Currall, 2001; Rosette, Brett, Barsness & Lytle, 2001) can place high demands on the receiver’s information processing capabilities.

In summary, these two elements, media richness and interactivity, account for important differences across media in the structure, style, and content of information exchanged (for more detail, see Ebner et al., 2009). How do these significantly alter email negotiation dynamics – and what can we do about it?

Negotiating via email:

Seven major challenges:

Building on this understanding of media effects on communication, we can now examine specific media effects affecting negotiation dynamics. We will focus on seven major elements:

1. *Increased contentiousness*
2. *Diminished information sharing*
3. *Diminished inter-party process cooperation*
4. *Diminished privacy*
5. *Diminished trust*
6. *Increased effects of negative attribution*
7. *Diminished party commitment, investment, and focus*

1. **Increased contentiousness:**

Communication at a distance is more susceptible to disruption than face-to-face dialogue. Parties communicating via telephone were found to be prone to more distrust, competition, and contentious behavior than those in comparable face-to-face interactions. (Drolet & Morris, 2000). These findings are intensified in e-communication, which tends to be less inhibited than face-to-face communication due to physical distance, reduced social presence, reduced accountability and a sense of anonymity

(Griffith & Northcraft, 1994; Thompson, 2004; Wallace, 1999). The lack of social cues in e-communication causes people to act more contentiously than they do in face-to-face encounters, resulting in more frequent occurrences of swearing, name calling, insults, and hostile behavior (Kiesler & Sproull, 1992).

Early research on negotiation showed the same tendency for parties-at-a-distance (such as parties negotiating over the phone) to act tough and choose contentious tactics (Raiffa, 1982). Examinations of e-negotiation brought to light the effects of further-diminished media richness: the social presence of others is reduced (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976; Weisband & Atwater, 1999) and the perceived social distance among negotiators increases (Jessup & Tansik, 1991; Sproull & Kiesler, 1986). This might explain why e-negotiators seem less bound by appropriate, normative behavior than face-to-face negotiators. This translates into an increased tendency to threaten and issue ultimata (Morris, Nadler, Kurtzberg & Thompson, 2002); to adopt contentious, “squeaky wheel” behavior; to lie or deceive (Naquin, Kurtzberg & Belkin, 2010); to confront each other negatively, and to engage in flaming (Thompson & Nadler, 2002). In short: email negotiation is a rough playing field!

Advantages:

Can the tables be turned on this state of increased contentiousness? Returning to email’s characteristics, it would seem that conscious utilization of email’s ‘lean media’ nature might sometimes offer opportunity to *reduce* contentiousness. Used properly, lean media may facilitate better processing of social conflict exactly because these media do not transmit visual and verbal cues (Bhappu & Crews, 2005; Carnevale, Pruitt, & Seilheimer, 1981) and defuse triggers caused by the visible, physical presence of an opponent (see Zajonc, 1965). Additionally, email has been found to reduce the impact of unconscious biases which often serve to trigger or escalate conflict, such as group differences and attribution related to gender, race, accent, national origin, etc. (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998). Keeping the ‘interactivity’ element in mind, asynchronicity dictates a different interaction-pace. This can help parties avoid being “emotionally hijacked” into conflict escalation – or into costly avoidance (see Goleman, 1995). The physical separation between parties, coupled with asynchronicity, might make it easier for parties to take time to “step out” of the discussion and respond thoughtfully, rather than suffer the consequences of a knee-jerk response, potentially limiting conflict escalation even further (Bhappu & Crews, 2005; Harasim, 1993).

In practice:

- 1) Unmask yourself: The mutual invisibility inherent in email negotiation facilitates adversarial, contentious, behavior. It is easier to cause damage to a faceless other - particularly when we feel protected by a shield of

anonymity and physical distance, causing us to assume that we can get away this behavior, and to lower any moral inhibitions we might have against doing so (Nadler & Shestowsky, 2006). By adopting a proactive agenda of unmasking ourselves – making ourselves human, present, and real in the other’s eyes -we can protect ourselves from these dynamics. This unmasking process can include sharing personal information, building rapport, and reducing the perception of distance through shared language, or shared geographical or cultural references.

- 2) In the unmasking process, decide carefully what to share about yourself, taking advantage of the masking effect to avoid any anticipated bias.
- 3) Unmask the other: Remember, there is a person behind the other screen as well, whether they have had the foresight to engage in unmasking themselves or not. They are not computers or inboxes – they will respond to your messages on emotional, cognitive and behavioral levels which you will then have to deal with (see Mayer, 2000).
- 4) Use email’s asynchronicity in order to think and work proactively: Read a received message twice instead of banging out an angry reply. When you do write a response -delay sending it, and read it again before clicking send.

2. Diminished inter-party process cooperation

As we’ve noted, information exchanged in email negotiations is likely to be constrained, analytical, and contentious. This might explain why email negotiators suffer from reduced accuracy in judging the other party’s interests (Arunachalam & Dilla, 1995). This affects their ability to accurately assess differential preferences and identify potential joint gains – and therefore, one might posit – their desire to engage in this type of cooperative activity in the first place. Reduced social awareness in lean media causes parties to engage more heavily in self-interested behavior when negotiating by email. Focused inwardly, negotiators may simply ignore or fail to elicit important information regarding the other party’s interests and priorities. The use of email may, therefore, accentuate competitive behavior in negotiations (Barsness & Bhappu, 2004). Email communication is conducive not only to parties acting uncooperatively, but to parties feeling *justified* for choosing this pattern of behavior (Naquin, Kurtzberg & Belkin, 2008). Combine this with increased contentiousness, and with the comparative ease of walking away from the process (see below), and we are faced with a recipe for diminished process cooperation.

Advantages:

Email has the potential to *increase* information exchange. As a lean media with diminished social context cues (Sproull & Kiesler, 1991) and reduced salience of social group differences

(Bhappu, Griffith & Northcraft 1997), the mathematics of social influence which dictate who speaks up, who keeps quiet, who is listened to and who is discounted are fundamentally changed. This might result in higher participation rates, by players – allowing more information to find its way to the table, and be paid attention to. The nature of email interactivity supports this tendency toward increased participation and more diverse information. Parties cannot shout each other down or interrupt.

The nature of email parallel processing further throws traditional dynamics into skew, as it prevents one party taking control of an entire discussion, at the cost of others' expounding, sharing or suggestion-making (Nunamaker, Dennis, Valancich & Vogel, 1991). Parallel processing has advantages beyond its supporting of wider and fuller participation; it allows for the tendency and ability to simultaneously discuss multiple issues, a characteristic that encourages the search for joint gains (Barsness & Bhappu, 2004) Having pie-expanding possibilities right there on the same 'page', which negotiators relate to one after another, can easily lead into differential valuation, prioritization and logrolling dynamics to occur. A caveat: "over-bundling" too many issues (usually entailing delivering a lot of information simultaneously) might overload the receiver's information processing capabilities. This may be a reason that negotiators have more difficulty establishing meaning and managing feedback in asynchronous media (DeSanctis & Monge, 1999). As a result, negotiators can be left with partial and disconnected information – hardly the type that is necessary to form an integrative agreement.

In practice:

- 1) Use interest-related language intentionally, and often, when discussing your own position and inquiring about theirs. Use process-cooperative language overtly, and try and set the tone for others to do so. This might give process-cooperation a much-needed boost.
- 2) Take the stage: You have the opportunity to speak your mind, state what you want and explain why you should get it. No one can shout or shut you down. Utilize this clear stage.
- 3) In a multiparty interaction, if one party is dominating the conversation and others are quiet, you might invite them in, either in a "Let's hear what some others have to think" email to the group, or in a private, behind-the-scenes message to reticent parties.
- 4) Use bundling intentionally, highlighting connections between the issues, and perhaps using language you felt might trigger similar thinking in your negotiation opposite.
- 5) A familiar source of confusion in email negotiation occurs when your opposite party relates to some of the issues you raised in a letter, but not to others.

This might not be a deliberate, contentious omission – it may simply be information overload. Consider whether you want to call their attention to this as an oversight, before assuming there is some underlying meaning in the omission.

3. Reduction in integrative outcomes

The potential for email negotiation to result in lower rates of integrative outcome is partially connected to the previous challenge of reduced process cooperation. Indeed, many experiments measuring these two indicators indicate significant challenges: First, that e-negotiation entails lower rates of process cooperation, and lower rates of integrative outcomes, when compared to face-to-face negotiation (Arunachalam & Dilla, 1995; Valley et al., 1998; see also Nadler & Shestowsky, 2006) (for contrasting research, see Galin, Gross & Gosalker, 2007; Nadler & Shestowsky, 2006; Naquin & Paulson, 2003). Second, that the potential for impasse appears to be greater than in face-to-face negotiation (Croson, 1999).

These findings don't clearly explain *why* email negotiation results may be less integrative. Is it an outcome of reduced process cooperation? Of increased contentiousness? Of the difficulty of establishing rapport in email? Of reduced interparty trust? Or, perhaps of a combination of some or all of these elements? This crucial issue – which determines if email negotiation might be, inherently, a *value-diminishing* playing field -is sure to intrigue researchers over the coming years.

Advantages:

One effect of email's asynchronous character nature is negotiators' tendency to bundle multiple issues together in one letter; we've also noted that this might encourage process cooperation dynamics. These same dynamics, such as logrolling and prioritization -should they reach fruition -might well result in integrative agreements in a manner that separate discussions of each issue might not. Another effect is that time allows for reflection and for careful, overt use of cooperative language, which may increase the odds of reaching an integrative outcome.

In practice:

Most of the suggestions made above (regarding process cooperation) apply here as well. In addition:

- 1) Consider using the multimedia potentialities used in e-mail in order to portray integrative offers or ideas. Charts, graphs, presentations – all easily attached to an email – are powerful tools for overcoming the challenges of lean media.
- 2) Frame: In email negotiation, every message is an opportunity to set a new frame around the interaction, much more than rapid-fire statements and reactions in face-to-face processes.

Intentional and repeated integrative framing might have an effect on the outcome.

4. Diminished privacy

Maintaining a negotiation process' privacy is never an easy task. In face-to-face negotiation, absent a confidentiality agreement (and too often, in practice, even when one exists!) parties can and do share information about the negotiation with their friends, families and colleagues, and occasionally with wider circles. However, you can meet in a private setting, physically shut out the rest of the world, or relate something confidentially in a lowered voice. Anything shared with external parties will always be subjective, after-the-fact, secondhand (and in legal terms, hearsay). In email negotiation, by contrast, you never know who is 'in the room' with you. Is your opposite showing your letter to their boss, to their colleagues or to your competition?

The messages you transmit are recorded, and forever archived somewhere beyond your control; they can be adjusted or tampered with, altering what you wrote. Personal or proprietary information you send might be made public to wider circles than intended, whether due to the other's bad intentions or their technical shortcomings. Who among us has never clicked "reply all" instead of reply, and sent a personal message into a public domain?

Advantages:

Consulting with others is an excellent way to diminish many of the challenging media effects of email we've noted in this chapter. Email provides asynchronicity and recorded messages – allowing us to consult optimally.

Getting practical:

- 1) Consider each address field carefully. To whom should a message be sent? Should anyone appear in the "cc" field? Do you want anyone invisibly lurking on the conversation, from the "bcc" field?
- 2) Use the lack of privacy to your advantage: Record the interactions, return to them when things get unclear, and relate to them when it seems the other party is being inconsistent. Share messages with anybody you feel you need to share them with, and consult – often – about the process.
- 3) Increasingly, individuals' online activities are becoming public, widespread, sought out by future opponents and admissible in court. Be cautious of what you write in an email, particularly before trust is established. A good rule of thumb might be: Don't write anything in an email that you wouldn't want shown on the news.

5. Diminished degree of interparty trust

Diminished privacy is but one factor that affects the much wider issue of inter-party trust. This issue has been identified as playing a key role in enabling cooperation (Deutsch, 1962), problem solving (Pruitt, Rubin & Kim, 1994), achieving integrative solutions (Lax & Sebenius, 1986; Lewicki & Litterer, 1985), effectiveness (Schneider, 2002) and resolving disputes (Moore, 2003). "Build trust!" is a key edict in any negotiation teaching or training.

Communicating via email, negotiators must cope with threats to trust that are inherent in the medium and in its employ (Ebner, 2007). Email negotiators trust their counterparts less than negotiators in similar face-to-face interactions – at all stages of the process. Before the process' inception, e-negotiators report a comparatively low level of trust in their opposite. This low trust-level persists throughout the course of the negotiation, resulting in diminished process cooperation and information sharing (Naquin & Paulson, 2003). E-negotiators are more likely to suspect their opposite of lying, even when no actual deception has taken place (Thompson & Nadler, 2002). Post-negotiation, e-negotiators trust their opposites less than do participants in face-to-face negotiations, manifesting in lower degrees of desire for future interaction with them (Naquin & Paulson, 2003).

Advantages:

The online venue requires negotiators to be much more conscious regarding trust – something often missing face-to-face -people seeing trust as something that "happens". The slowed-down interaction pace provides e-negotiators with time and opportunity to recognize, and proactively initiate, trust-building opportunities.

In practice:

The following practices are helpful for building trust in email interactions (for more on these and other methods, see Ebner, 2007):

- 1) Build rapport: Try to 'bond', building an instant relationship with your opposite.
- 2) Apply social lubrication: Take the time, at the beginning of a negotiation and in its course, for light conversation. While this does not come naturally in email interactions as it does face-to-face email doesn't make icebreaking or small talk superfluous – the contrary is true. Even minimal pre-negotiation, socially-oriented contact, such as preliminary email introductory messages, can build trust, improve mutual impressions, and facilitate integrative outcomes (Morris et al. 2002; Nadler & Shestowsky, 2006).
- 3) Mix media, if possible: Holding a preliminary face-to-face meeting can assist in setting the stage for a trust-filled

e-negotiation. (Rocco, 1998; Zheng, Veinott, Bos, Olson & Olson, 2002). Meeting face-to-face in the middle of the process can also be beneficial (Cellich & Jain, 2003).

- 4) Show e-empathy: Showing empathy performs multiple roles in negotiation (Mnookin, Peppet, & Tulumello, 2000; Schneider, 2002; Ury, 1991), including trustbuilding. E-negotiators who show empathy are more trusted by their negotiation opposites more than those who do not (Feng, Lazar, & Preece, 2004). This cannot be neglected just because the medium seems to be 'cold' and impersonal. Utilize email's characteristics which allow considered, careful language to intentionally show e-empathy (see Ebner, 2007).

6. Increased attribution, increased misinterpretation

Communicating through lean media increases the tendency toward the fundamental attribution error: parties perceive negative actions or statements on their opposite's part, and interpret these as outgrowth of the other's negative intentions and character -rather than as unintended results of circumstance. Reduced social presence and few contextual cues lend a sense of distance and vagueness to the interaction.

The media richness element of interactivity compounds this: E-negotiators ask fewer clarifying questions than face-to-face negotiators – leaving more room for assumptions to form and take root (Thompson & Nadler, 2002). Attribution dynamics will cause these assumptions to tend toward the negative. Analysis of failed email negotiations shows that they tend to include unclear messages, irrelevant points, and long general statements (Thompson, 2004), each of which provides ample breeding ground for attribution.

Advantages:

Used intentionally, email allows for well-crafted messages, which try to preempt lack of clarity and misunderstandings. Negotiators can consult with others – about the perceived meaning of a message they received, or about the potential interpretations in their own writing. Asynchronicity facilitates real-time interpretations and their accompanying negative attributions to be replaced by considered understanding of meaning, intent and character.

In practice:

- 1) Increase your social presence: constantly remind the other of the real person opposite them.
- 2) Write clearly, taking into account negative interpretations. Clarify much more than you do face-to-face. Several rules of thumb for enhancing email clarity:
 - a) Avoid unnecessary length – don't overload your opposite.

- b) Use "In summary" sentences to highlight your main points.

- c) Use the subject field intentionally. This introduces your letter (preparing your opposite for the content), provides a frame through which it will be read (diminishing negative interpretation), allows your opposite to find it when they want to review it for clarity before responding, and helps organize messages bundling multiple issues.

- d) Avoid use of emoticons – particularly in early message exchanges.

- 3) Waiting and perceived delay cause anxiety, which is conducive to negative attribution. Manage both sides of this cycle: Don't expect immediate answers to your own letters, and do your best to provide prompt responses to your opposites (see Thompson & Nadler 2002; Wallace, 1999; Walther & Bunz 2005).
- 4) Be very careful when using humor: While humor has been shown to be a valuable tool in online negotiation, leading to increased trust and satisfaction levels, higher joint gains and higher individual gains for the party who initiated the humorous event (Kurtzburg, Naquin & Belkin, 2009), humor is often misunderstood, misinterpreted and misattributed – and can easily backfire.
- 5) When you are concerned that all this mindfulness and caution might not suffice, don't leave it to email: Recognize situations in which you need to pick up the phone and call, or meet in person with your negotiation opposite.

7. Diminished party commitment, investment and focus

Parties to e-mail negotiation might be less motivated than face-to-face negotiators. They have not displayed the minimum commitment of getting up, getting dressed and coming to the table; indeed, there might not be any sunk costs at all. Email may be the easiest medium there is for making 'shot in the dark' approaches (perhaps best exemplified by the 62 trillion spam e-mails sent yearly (McAfee, 2009), most of which are 'shot in the dark' scamming or marketing efforts). This might provide partial explanation for reports of higher rates of impasse in email negotiation (see above) and for the familiar phenomena of email negotiations simply evaporating, with one party simply dropping out of the conversation, either disappearing in a whiff of smoke or dissolving into a cloud of 'I'll get back to you'.

E-negotiators, even if committed and invested at the same level one might encounter in face-to-face negotiation, are likely to suffer media-related effects including confusion, low cognitive

retention of previous messages and diminished concentration. This is due to several factors, including time passage between information exchanges, the tendency to answer emails in spurts and sections rather than finding the time to write full messages, and the tendency to answer emails in less-than-optimal surroundings and circumstances.

In addition, email is often not something we train our full attention on, but rather something we do as part of our media multitasking. We check our email as we surf the web, and we surf the web as we read or reply to our email -perhaps holding in-person or phone conversations at the same time. Recent research addressing this issue indicates that we are not as good multitaskers as we like to think we are. Heavy multitaskers suffer a range of shortcomings as opposed to 'focusers', many of which are pertinent to negotiation: They are not good at filtering out irrelevant information, and are easily distracted. They tend to have low detail recall, and despite their tendency to switch between tasks rapidly – they are not skilled at this, as their brain is always somewhat focused on the task they are not doing (Ofir, Nass & Wagner, 2009). Negotiators suffering from any of these, due to their multitasking tendency, work surroundings or email-management habits, might be confused and unfocused.

Advantages:

The low commitment and investment level required to engage in email negotiation might certainly help negotiators engage in negotiation, at low cost. This can allow negotiators to engage in multiple processes, expanding their knowledge and improving their BATNA. It is also beneficial by providing a low-intensity interaction environment to negotiators who are conflict averse or tend towards avoidance as a conflict strategy.

Getting practical:

- 1) Stay on top of things: Provide regular contact, keeping your counterpart engaged -without getting pushy (see Shipley & Schwalbe, 2007, for some guidance on this balance).
- 2) Bridge time gaps: Try to create the illusion or experience of an uninterrupted conversation. For example, write "As I wrote you..." and then copy and paste a quote from your previous letter.
- 3) It could happen to you: The implications of this section are not only about roping in and maintaining contact with your opposite. You yourself might be prone to underinvestment and a low level of commitment. Email negotiation tends to confuse us in this regard; keep a constant eye on your motivation level, and make sure it matches your commitment and the resources you invest.
- 4) Stay focused: The greater the importance of the negotiation to you, the more it pays to concentrate on it. Read and write messages in an environment that allows you to concentrate. Close your Internet web browser while reading and writing email.

Conclusion:

Communicating by email, negotiators face a rougher playing field, a more contentious opposite and numerous process-challenges. The good news is, that armed with some knowledge and a healthy dose of awareness, negotiators can navigate these challenges and even turn use of the media to their advantage. Given the anticipated increase in e-negotiation processes, the sooner negotiators get started on improving their skills and awareness in this area, the better.

References

- Adair, W., Okumura, T. & Brett, J. 2001. Negotiation behavior when cultures collide. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 86(3): 372-385.
- Arunachalam, V., & Dilla, W. 1995. Judgment accuracy and outcomes in negotiation: A causal modeling analysis of decision-aiding effects. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 61(3): 289-304.
- Barsness, Z. I. & Bhappu, A. D. 2004. At the crossroads of technology and culture: Social influence, information sharing, and sense-making processes during negotiations. In M.J. Gelfand and J.M. Brett (Eds.), *The handbook of negotiation & culture*: 350-373. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bhappu, A.D., Griffith, T.L. & Northcraft, G.B. 1997. Media effects and communication bias in diverse groups. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 70: 199-205.
- Bhappu, A.D., & Crews, J.M. 2005. The effects of communication media and conflict on team identification in diverse groups. *Proceedings of the 38th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*: 50-56. Los Alamitos, California.
- Carnevale, P.J., Pruitt, D.G. and Seilheimer S.D. 1981. Looking and competing: Accountability and visual access in integrative bargaining. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 40: 111-20.
- Carnevale, P.J. & Probst, T.M. 1997. Conflict on the internet. In S. Kiesler (Ed.), *Culture of the internet*: 233-55. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Cellich, C., & Jain, S.C. 2003. *Global business negotiations: A practical guide*. Mason, OH: Thomson/South-Western.
- Clark, H. and Brennan, S. 1991. Grounding in communication. In L. Resnick, J. Levine, and S. Teasley (Eds.), *Perspectives on socially shared cognition*: 127-149. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association,
- Croson, R. 1999. Look at me when you say that: An electronic negotiation simulation. *Simulation & Gaming* 30: 23-27.
- Daft, R.L. & Lengel, R.H. 1984. Information richness: A new approach to managerial behavior and organizational design. *Research in Organizational Behavior* 6: 191-233.
- DePaulo, B.M. and Friedman, H.S. 1998. Nonverbal communication. In D.T. Gilber, S.T. Fiske and G. Lidzey (Eds.), *The handbook of social psychology* (4th Edition): 3-40. Boston, MA: McGraw Hill.
- DeSanctis, G. & Monge, P. 1999. Introduction to the special issues: Communication processes for virtual organizations. *Organization Science* 10: 693-703.
- Deutsch, M. 1962. Cooperation and trust: Some theoretical notes. *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*: 275-320. Lincoln: Nebraska University Press.
- Drolet, A.L. and Morris M.W. 2000. Rapport in conflict resolution: Accounting for how face-to-face contact fosters mutual cooperation in mixed-motive conflicts. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 36: 26-50.
- Ebner, N. 2007. Trust-building in e-negotiation. In L. Brennan and V. Johnson (Eds.), *Computer-mediated relationships and trust: Managerial and organizational effects*: 139-157. Hershey, PA: Information Science Publishing.
- Ebner, N., Bhappu, A., Brown, J.G., Kovach, K.K. & Kupfer Schneider, A. 2009. "You've got agreement: Negoti@ing via email." In C. Honeyman, J. Coben & G. DiPalo (Eds.), *Rethinking Negotiation Teaching: Innovations for Context and Culture*: 89-114. St Paul, MN: DRI Press.
- Epstein, S., Pacini, R., Denes-Raj, V., & Heier, H. 1996. Individual differences in intuitive-experimental and analytical-rational thinking styles. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 71(2): 390-405.
- Feng, J., Lazar, J. and Preece, J. 2004. Empathy and online interpersonal trust: A fragile relationship. *Behavior & Information Technology* 23(2): 97-106.
- Fisher, R., Ury, W., & Patton, B. 1991. *Getting to yes* (2nd ed.). New York: Penguin Books.
- Friedman, R.A. & Currall, S.C. 2003. E-mail escalation: Dispute exacerbating elements of electronic communication. *Human Relations* 56: 1325-1357
- Galin, A., Gross, M. & Gosalker, G. 2007. E-negotiation versus face-to-face negotiation: What has changed – if anything? *Computers in Human Behavior* 23: 787-797.
- Gelfand, M.J. and Dyer, N. 2000. A cultural perspective on negotiation: Progress, pitfalls, and prospects. *Applied Psychology: An International Review* 49: 62-69.
- Goleman, D. 1995. *Emotional intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books
- Greenwald, A.G., McGhee, D.E. & Schwartz, J.K.L. 1998. Measuring individual differences in implicit cognition: The implicit association test. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 74: 1464-1480.
- Griffith, T.L. & Northcraft, G.B. 1994. Distinguishing between the forest and the trees: Media, features, and methodology in electronic communication research. *Organization Science* 5: 272-285.
- Harasim, L.M. 1993. *Networks: Networks as a social space*. In L.M. Harasim (Ed.), *Global networks: Computers and international communication*: 15-34. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Jessup, L.M., & Tansik, D.A. 1991. Decision making in an automated environment: The effects of anonymity and proximity with a group decision support system. *Decision Sciences* 22: 266-279.
- Kemp, N.J. & Rutter D.R. 1982. Duelessness and the content and style of conversation. *British Journal of Social Psychology* 21: 43-9.
- Kiesler, S. & Sproull, L. 1992. Group-decision making and communication technology. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 52: 96-123.
- Kraut, R., Galegher, J., Fish, R. & Chalfonte, B. 1992. Task requirements and media choice in collaborative writing. *Human Computer Interactions* 7: 375-408.

- Kurtzberg, T.R., Naquin, C.E. & Belkin, L.T. 2009. Humor as a relationship-building tool in online negotiations. *International Journal of Conflict Management* 20(4): 377-397
- Lax, D.A. & Sebenius, J.K. 1986. *The manager as negotiator*. New York: Free Press.
- Lewicki, R.J. & Litterer, J. 1985. *Negotiation: Readings, exercises and cases*. Boston, MA: Irwin.
- Mayer, B. 2000. *The Dynamics of conflict resolution*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- McAfee. 2009. *The Carbon Impact of Spam Report*. <http://resources.mcafee.com/content/NACarbonFootprintSpamConfirm>. Last accessed Sept 6th, 2010.
- Mnookin, R.H., Peppet, S.R. & Tulumello, A.S. 2000. *Beyond winning: Negotiating to create value in deals and disputes*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Moore, C. 2003. *The mediation process* (3rd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Morris, M., Nadler, J., Kurtzberg, T.R. & Thompson, L. 2002. Schmooze or lose: Social friction and lubrication in e-mail negotiations. *Group Dynamics* 6(1): 89-100.
- Nadler, J. and Shestowsky, D. 2006. Negotiation, information technology and the problem of the faceless other. In L. Thompson (Ed.) *Negotiation theory and research*: 145-172. New York, NY: Psychology Press.
- Naquin, C.E., & Paulson, G.D. 2003. Online bargaining and interpersonal trust. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 88(1): 113-120.
- Naquin, C.E., Kurtzberg, T.R., & Belkin, L.T. 2008. E-Mail communication and group cooperation in mixed motive contexts. *Social Justice Research* 21(4): 470-489.
- Naquin, C.E., Kurtzberg, T.R., & Belkin, L.T. 2010. The finer points of lying online: E-mail versus pen and paper. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 95(2): 387-394.
- Nunamaker, J.F., Dennis, A.R., Valancich, J.S. & Vogel, D.R. 1991. Information technology for negotiating groups: Generating options for mutual gain. *Management Science* 37(10): 1325-1346.
- O'Connell, B., Whittaker, S. & Wilbur, S. 1993. Conversations over video conferences: An evaluation of the spoken aspects of video-mediated communication. *Human Computer Interaction* 8: 389-428.
- Ocker, R.J. & Yaverbaum, G.J. 1999. Asynchronous computer-mediated communication versus face-to-face collaboration: Results on student learning, quality and satisfaction. *Group Decision and Negotiations* 8(5): 427-40.
- Ofir, E., Nass, C. & Wagner, A.D. 2009. Cognitive control in media multitaskers. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 106 (37): 15583-87.
- Pruitt, D., Rubin, J. and Kim, S. 2004. *Social conflict: Escalation, stalemate, and settlement*, (3rd ed.). New York: McGraw Hill.
- Raiffa, H. 1982. *The art and science of negotiation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Rocco, E. 1998. Trust breaks down in electronic contexts but can be repaired by some initial face-to-face contact. In *Proceedings of the 1998 SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*: 496-502. Los Angeles: ACM Press.
- Rosette, A.S., Brett, J.M., Barsness, Z & Lytle, A. 2001. The influence of e-mail on Hong Kong and U.S. intra-cultural negotiations. Paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the International Association for Conflict Management, Paris, France, June 23-27, 2001.
- Schneider, A.K. 2002. Shattering negotiation myths: Empirical evidence on the effectiveness of negotiation style, *Harvard Negotiation Law Review* 7: 143-233.
- Shipley, D. and Schwalbe, W. 2007. *Send: The essential guide to email for office and home*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Short, J., Williams, E. and Christie, B. 1976. *The social psychology of telecommunications*. Chichester, England: John Wiley and Sons Ltd.
- Sproull, L. & Kiesler, S. 1986. Reducing social context cues: Electronic mail in organizational communication. *Management Science* 32(11): 1492-513.
- Sproull, L. and Kiesler, S. 1991. *Connections: New ways of working in the networked organization*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Thompson, L. 2004. *The mind and heart of the negotiator*, (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Thompson, L. & Nadler, J. 2002. Negotiating via information technology: Theory and application. *Journal of Social Issues* 58(1): 109-24.
- Ury, W. 1991. *Getting past no*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.
- Valley, K.L., Moage, J. & Bazerman, M.H. 1998. 'A matter of trust': Effects of communication on the efficiency and distribution of outcomes." *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* 34: 211-38.
- Wallace, P. 1999. *The psychology of the internet*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Walther, J.B., & Bunz, U. 2005. The rules of virtual groups: Trust, liking and performance in computer-mediated communication. *Journal of Communication* 55(4): 828-46.
- Weisband, S. & Atwater, L. 1999. Evaluating self and others in electronic and face-to-face groups. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 84(4): 632-639.
- Zajonc, R.B. 1965. Social facilitation. *Science* 149: 269-74.
- Zheng, J., Veinott, E., Bos, N., Olson, J.S. & Olson, G.M. 2002. Trust without touch: Jumpstarting long-distance trust with initial social activities. In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI 2002 Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*: 141-6. New York, NY: ACM Press.