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# The Power of Nice: Active Listening, Procedural and Interpersonal Fairness Perceptions and Prosocial and Antisocial Negotiation Behaviors

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***The Power of Nice: Active Listening, Procedural and Intepersonal Fairness  
Perceptions and Prosocial and Antisocial Negotiation Behaviors***

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**Abstract:**

I invoke active listening and draw on models of procedural and interpersonal fairness perceptions, perceived organizational support, and organizational prosocial behaviors to articulate and test a model of negotiator willingness to engage in exploitative and prosocial negotiation behaviors. Specifically, active listening is predicted to affect the other party's procedural and interpersonal fairness perceptions. These fairness perceptions are expected to be interpreted as signaling the extent to which the other party cares about one's own well-being. Perceptions of the other party's concern for one's own well-being are predicted to be reciprocated as positive or negative concern for the other party. Finally, one's own concern for the other party leads to exploitative and prosocial behaviors. All hypotheses except for the proposed link between procedural fairness perceptions and perceived other party support were supported.

Running Head: ACTIVE LISTENING AND PROSOCIAL AND ANTISOCIAL  
NEGOTIATOR BEHAVIORS

The Power of Nice: Active Listening, Procedural and Interpersonal Fairness Perceptions  
and Prosocial and Antisocial Negotiator Behaviors

Abstract

The effects of active listening on negotiator prosocial and antisocial behaviors were examined in an asymmetric information bargaining task. Buyers trained to engage in high or low active listening negotiated with sellers who knew the product for sale was faulty. Buyers engaging in high active listening engendered perceptions of procedural and interpersonal fairness on the part of sellers. Interpersonal fairness perceptions were interpreted as signals that the buyers cared about the sellers. Perceived other party concern was reciprocated and expressed as increased honesty, increased prosocial negotiation behaviors, and self-rated intent to help and decreased intent to hurt the other party.

Keywords: negotiator deception, prosocial behaviors, antisocial behaviors, active listening

Negotiators are often faced with the opportunity to take advantage of the other party, causing them harm while pursuing one's interests. This is particularly true in asymmetric information bargaining situations (Akerlof, 1970). Past research on these harmful negotiation behaviors have focused on deception as the primary means of exploiting the other party (e.g., Schweitzer & Croson, 1999; Schweitzer, DeChurch, & Gibson, 2005). The harmful behavior construct can include a variety of other behaviors as well e.g., breach of negotiated agreements, creating ill-will towards to the other party through gossip, and sharing private information about the other party with others.

Alternatively, negotiators could safeguard the other party's well-being, even at one's own expense. Although prosocial attitudes are assumed to be important in negotiations, I am not aware of any research directly assessing prosocial negotiation behaviors. Problem-solving and integrative behaviors are assumed to reflect a prosocial attitude. However, it hard to know to what extent they reflect non-instrumental concern for the other party or instrumental concern based on a recognition that one's own interests are more likely to be met if the other party's interests are at least minimally met. This paper explores negotiators' willingness to engage in exploitative and prosocial negotiator behaviors.

I invoke active listening and draw on models of procedural and interpersonal fairness perceptions, perceived organizational support, and organizational prosocial behaviors to articulate and test a model of negotiator willingness to engage in exploitative and prosocial negotiation behaviors. Specifically, active listening is predicted to affect the other party's procedural and interpersonal fairness perceptions. These fairness perceptions are expected to be interpreted as signaling the extent to which the other party

cares about one's own well-being. Perceptions of the other party's concern for one's own well-being are predicted to be reciprocated as positive or negative concern for the other party. Finally, one's own concern for the other party leads to exploitative and prosocial behaviors. Participants engaged in a negotiation task which afforded the seller the opportunity to deceive the potential buyer by claiming the defective product was of high quality. Buyers were trained to engage in either high or low active listening as a negotiation tactic. Sellers' choice as to deceive or tell the truth, their self-rated willingness to help and to harm the other party after the negotiation, and coded ratings of their self-descriptions of why they made the offers they did were all used to assess exploitative and prosocial negotiation behaviors.

Active listening is a technique for understanding the other party's point of view and making them feel heard, understood, recognized, and accepted as a unique individual (Rogers & Roethlisberger, 1952; Rogers, 1959). Active listening is also espoused as an important negotiation technique in such popular negotiation books as *Getting To Yes* and *Difficult Conversations* (Fisher & Ury, 1983; Stone, Patton), & Heen, 1999). Although active listening has been espoused by the books that form the backbone of the "win-win" approach to negotiation, I am not aware of any research explicitly testing the effects of listening in the negotiation context. Because feeling heard is one of the key components of procedural fairness perceptions, it is plausible that active listening by one party will affect the other party's procedural fairness perceptions. Being treated with respect and dignity is the core of interpersonal fairness perceptions. Therefore, active listening seems likely to engender interpersonal fairness perceptions. Together these yield the following hypotheses:

H1a: Active listening by one party is associated with the other party's procedural fairness perceptions.

H1b: Active listening by one party is associated with the other party's interpersonal fairness perceptions.

The group-value model of organizational justice suggests that when decision-making procedures and interpersonal treatment are perceived as fair, these perceptions are seen as signals that the other party cares about our well-being (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler & Lind, 1992). Procedural and interpersonal fairness perceptions are related to perceived organizational support (Rhodes & Eisenberger, 2002). This leads to the following two hypotheses:

H2a: Procedural fairness perceptions are positively related with perceived other party support.

H2b: Interpersonal fairness perceptions are positively related with perceived other party support.

The reciprocity principle is a powerful social psychological driver of behaviors (Cialdini, 2008; Gouldner, 1960) and suggests that if we perceive that the other party cares about our well-being, we are likely to respond by caring about their well-being in return. In the organizational literature, the belief that the organization cares about one's well-being is called *perceived organizational support* (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). Individuals who believe that the organization does not care about their well-being are more likely to engage in acts that harm the organization and less likely to engage in unrewarded acts that help the organization; Conversely, individuals who believe that the organization cares about their well being are more likely

to engage in unrewarded behaviors that help the organization. (see Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002 for a review). If the perception that the other party cares about one's well-being operates similarly in the negotiation context, we can expect that *perceived other party support* will elicit concern in-kind. Specifically, negotiators who believe that the other party cares about their well-being, may want to safeguard the other party's welfare; negotiators who believe the other party has little regard for one's welfare may reciprocate by experiencing little positive and perhaps even negative concern for the other party's well-being.

H3: Perceived other party support is related with concern for the other party.

It seems likely that negotiators are more likely to engage in potentially harmful deception and other exploitative behaviors when they have little concern or strongly negative concern for the other party's well-being. Conversely, when one cares about and values another's well-being, one seems unlikely to engage in potentially harmful deception and more likely to engage in prosocial negotiation behaviors. In fact, Moorman, Blakely, & Nihoff (1998) hypothesize but do not test the notion that relationships between organizational prosocial behaviors and perceived organizational support are mediated by concern for the organization. This line of reasoning suggests the following hypotheses:

H4a: High positive concern for the other party is positively related with honesty and negatively related with deception.

H4b: High positive concern for the other party is positively related with prosocial negotiator behaviors.

H4c: High positive concern for the other party is positively related with expressed intent to help the other party.

H4d: High positive concern for the other party is negatively related with expressed intent to harm the other party.

Although there are a number of mediating links in the chain, I expect that one party's active listening will be related with the other party's honesty, prosocial negotiation behaviors, intent to help and intent to hurt the other party.

H5a: Buyers' active listening is related with sellers' honesty and deception.

H5b: Buyers' active listening is related with sellers' expression of prosocial negotiation behaviors..

H5a: Buyers' active listening is related with sellers' expressed intent to help the other party.

H5a: Buyers' active listening is related with sellers' expressed intent to harm the other party.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants were 240 Undergraduate Organizational Behavior students in a West Coast University, participating in a in-class exercise on ethical decision-making. Students had the option of opting out of having their results used for research purposes. No students requested to have their data removed from the data set.

### **Materials and Procedure**

Students engaged in Schweitzer and Croson's (1999) negotiation task, involving a one-time negotiation between strangers. The potential seller has a personal computer that they know has a defective hard drive. Fed up with the defective hard drive and because the computer is no longer under warranty, the potential sellers are motivated to sell it. Potential buyers are interested in purchasing a personal computer and are told that a tech savvy friend advised them that if a computer were a "lemon," it would probably show signs of problems in the first year. So, if they could find a used computer that is reliable and had no problems during the first year of ownership, it would probably be a good computer and could be a good deal. Participants were randomly assigned roles as potential buyers and sellers. Buyers received training in how to engage in or avoid active listening as a negotiation technique designed to enhance performance. Buyers were then randomly asked to either engage in active listening or to avoid active listening as a technique for getting a good deal from the other party.

**Active listening.**

Active listening training was comprised of a 45 minute training program based on Rogers' notions of active listening. Participants received training that either emphasized engaging in high or low amounts of active listening, including empathy, treating the other party with respect, engaging in reflection and expressing immediacy behaviors regardless of whether one agrees with their positions or not.

**Procedural fairness perceptions.**

Procedural fairness perceptions were measured using four items identified by Colquitt (2001). Participants were asked to rate their agreement with the following statements: "The other party listened to what I had to say," I was able to explain my positions and

rationale to the other person,” “I had a lot of control over the negotiation process,” “I had a lot of control over the negotiated outcome.” Unless otherwise noted all questions were assessed on a seven-point Likert scale (1 – I strongly disagree, 7 – I strongly agree).

Coefficient alpha for this scale was .86.

### **Interpersonal fairness perceptions.**

Interpersonal fairness perceptions were measured with the following five items taken from Colquitt (2001): “The other party was polite,” “The other party treated me with respect,” “The other party treated me with dignity,” “The other party refrained from inappropriate remarks or comments,” and “the other person treated me fairly.” Coefficient alpha for this scale was .96.

### **Perceived other party support.**

Perceived other party support was measured by adapting several items from Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa’s (1986) perceived organizational support scale. Sample items include: “The other person cares about my outcomes,” “The other party really cares about my well-being,” and “The other party shows very little concern for me” (R). Coefficient alpha for this scale was .90.

### **Concern for the other party.**

Concern for the other party was assessed by asking to what extent: “I cared about the other party’s outcomes,” “I really cared about the other party’s well-being,” and “I showed little concern for the other party” (R). Coefficient alpha for this scale was .91.

### **Honesty and deception.**

Honesty and deception were measured by asking buyers what they were told by the sellers regarding the computer’s quality and reliability. Because all sellers were told

that the computer was unreliable and prone to hard drive failure, buyer reports that the seller told them that the computer was defective were coded as honesty and reports that the seller told them that the computer was reliable and of high quality were coded as deception.

### **Prosocial negotiator behaviors.**

Two additional measures of negotiator prosocial behaviors were obtained. Prosocial behaviors are characterized as manifesting concern for the other party. Sellers were asked to describe the negotiated outcome and also their explanation of why the negotiated outcome occurred as it did. Two independent coders rated the final agreements and seller self-reports of why the negotiated outcomes occurred as they did for the presence or absence of expressions of concern for the other party. Descriptions in which sellers described the negotiated outcome as reflecting positive concern for the other party were coded as prosocial negotiation behaviors e.g., “I didn’t want them to be stuck with a broken hard drive. That would be too awful. So, I offered to replace the hard drive myself” and “I couldn’t do it. They were just too nice to rip off like that. So, I called off the negotiation” are examples of statements coded as *prosocial negotiation behaviors*. *Intent to help other party* was assessed by asking “I would be willing to help the other party if they needed a special favor.”

### **Intent to harm the other party.**

Intent to harm the other party was assessed by asking “I would harm the other party if I could.”

## **Results**

Hypotheses one and two predicted that buyers' active listening would affect sellers' procedural and interpersonal fairness perceptions. Active listening condition was related with sellers' procedural fairness perceptions ( $r=.74, p<.01$ ) and interpersonal fairness perceptions ( $r=.87, p<.01$ ). This supports hypotheses one and two.

Hypotheses 2a and 2b were tested by regressing perceived other party support on both procedural and interpersonal fairness perceptions. This allows us to assess each construct's unique relationship with perceived other party support. Interpersonal fairness perceptions uniquely predicted perceived other party support ( $r=.64, p<.01$ ) although procedural fairness perceptions did not ( $r=.19, r=.11$ ). The simple bivariate relationship between procedural fairness perceptions and perceived other party support were the result of shared variance with interpersonal fairness perceptions. So, hypothesis 2a was not supported although hypothesis 2b was supported.

Concern for the other party was strongly related with perceptions of other party support ( $r=.46, p<.01$ ), supporting hypothesis 3. Concern for the other party was strongly related with honesty ( $r=.72, p<.01$ ), supporting hypothesis 4a. Concern for the other party was also related with coded examples of prosocial negotiation behaviors ( $r=.39, p<.01$ ), self-rated willingness to help the other party ( $r=.53, p<.01$ ) and negatively related with self-rated willingness to harm the other party ( $r=-.31, p<.01$ ) supporting hypotheses 4b, 4c, and 4d.

Finally, buyers' condition (engaging in high or low active listening) was related with sellers' honesty and deception ( $r=.37, p<.01$ ), coded prosocial negotiation behavior ( $r=.41, p<.01$ ), self-expressed intent to help the other party ( $r=.47, p<.01$ ) and intent to hurt the other party ( $r=-.40, p<.01$ ), supporting hypotheses 5a, 5b, 5c, and 5d.

### Discussion

This study increases our understanding of active listening in negotiations as well as prosocial and antisocial behaviors. First, this study revealed that one can elicit honesty or deception from others through one's behavior. Specifically, engaging in active listening led to a significant increase in honesty from one's negotiator partners.

Negotiators attempting to engage in active listening were more than four times more likely to be met with honesty than negotiators engaging in inactive listening, a hard bargaining approach. Furthermore, engaging in active listening increased the other party's prosocial negotiation behaviors and their intent to help and harm the party in the future. Second, this paper explores the exploitative and prosocial negotiator behavior constructs. Future research should widen the scope of exploitative negotiation behaviors to include other types of harm beyond exploitative deception. Negotiators might breach agreements, reduce their efforts or in other ways harm the other party. Future research should also explore prosocial negotiator behaviors. One area ripe for future research is to identify what types of behaviors real-world negotiators use to help or harm other parties.

Third, this paper suggests the usefulness of increasing the use of procedural and interpersonal fairness constructs in negotiation domains. There are only a handful of studies using procedural or interpersonal fairness in negotiation contexts. Fourth, perceived other party support is identified as a useful negotiation construct. Finally, this study also integrates the active listening technique with the justice and negotiation literatures. Active listening seems like it should be an integral part of the justice literature as a means of inducing procedural and interpersonal fairness perceptions. The book *Getting to yes* suggested active listening as a powerful tool to transform negotiations into

more collaborative enterprises. Although *Getting to yes* has fostered a lot of research (Thompson & Leonardelli, 2004), and in spite of the face validity of its usefulness, active listening has not received any research attention in negotiations.

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