

Not always cool to stay cool in negotiations, study finds

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Negotiators shouldn't always try to keep their cool during a heated meeting. Trying to suppress their anger about important points related to the negotiations could, in fact, cause them to lose the focus of discussions, says Bo Shao of the University of New South Wales in Australia, who led a [study](#) in Springer's *Journal of Business and Psychology*.

Much is known about the impact of how anger is experienced and expressed in negotiations, but not necessarily about the role that the suppression of heated emotions has in such situations. Shao and his fellow researchers therefore examined how and when anger suppression affects negotiators' mental states and indirectly also their performance. The study is also one of the first to consider the role that the source of anger plays in negotiations.

Given the growing popularity of e-commerce and virtual teams in the economy, computer-mediated negotiations are becoming more common to resolve conflicting interests. Therefore, 204 undergraduate students from a university in the United States were enrolled to participate in an online negotiation experiment. The intervention lasted 20 minutes and participants filled out a questionnaire afterwards. In the part of the experiment that tested the influence of an anger source, nearly half of the participants were made to feel heated emotions unrelated or incidental to the negotiation. This was done by showing them a video clip of a bully in action.

To test the influence of anger that is related to the issue at hand, the person with whom the participants negotiated online was intentionally provocative throughout the [negotiations](#). This included using tactics such as telling the other side what to do, labelling their behaviors negatively, making accusations of intentional violations, and blaming the other.

It was found that negotiators did not necessarily become mentally exhausted when they tried to suppress their anger. Instead, they lost focus on the matters at hand if they tried to quash their feelings about issues that were integral to the discussions. The same did not happen if the negotiators bottled up their infuriation about an incidental matter. This shows that the source of emotions can play an important role in regulating feelings.

"These findings cast doubts on the belief that negotiators should always suppress their [anger](#)," says Shao. "To be effective, negotiators should be aware when it is detrimental or not to do so, and adopt strategies that help them maintain their focus."

More information: Shao, B. et al (2014). Anger suppression in negotiations: The roles of attentional focus and anger source, *Journal of Business and Psychology*. [DOI: 10.1007/s10869-014-9392-3](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-014-9392-3)

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