



HAL
open science

Getting Stuck or Stepping Back: Effects of Obstacles in the Negotiation of Creative Solutions

Carsten K.W. de Dreu, Mauro Giacomantonio, Shaul Shalvi, Daniel Sligte

► **To cite this version:**

Carsten K.W. de Dreu, Mauro Giacomantonio, Shaul Shalvi, Daniel Sligte. Getting Stuck or Stepping Back: Effects of Obstacles in the Negotiation of Creative Solutions. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 2009, 45 (3), pp.542. 10.1016/j.jesp.2009.01.001 . hal-00673194

HAL Id: hal-00673194

<https://hal.science/hal-00673194>

Submitted on 23 Feb 2012

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Accepted Manuscript

Getting Stuck or Stepping Back: Effects of Obstacles in the Negotiation of Creative Solutions

Carsten K.W. De Dreu, Mauro Giacomantonio, Shaul Shalvi, Daniel Sligte

PII: S0022-1031(09)00024-9
DOI: [10.1016/j.jesp.2009.01.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2009.01.001)
Reference: YJESP 2201

To appear in: *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*

Received Date: 21 January 2008
Revised Date: 15 July 2008
Accepted Date: 20 January 2009

Please cite this article as: De Dreu, C.K.W., Giacomantonio, M., Shalvi, S., Sligte, D., Getting Stuck or Stepping Back: Effects of Obstacles in the Negotiation of Creative Solutions, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* (2009), doi: [10.1016/j.jesp.2009.01.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2009.01.001)

This is a PDF file of an unedited manuscript that has been accepted for publication. As a service to our customers we are providing this early version of the manuscript. The manuscript will undergo copyediting, typesetting, and review of the resulting proof before it is published in its final form. Please note that during the production process errors may be discovered which could affect the content, and all legal disclaimers that apply to the journal pertain.



Getting Stuck or Stepping Back: Effects of Obstacles in the Negotiation of Creative Solutions

Carsten K.W. De Dreu, Mauro Giacomantonio, Shaul Shalvi and Daniel Sligte¹

Word count: 4847 (including abstract and notes; excluding references and tables/figures)

Author Note

Carsten K.W. De Dreu, Shaul Shalvi, and Daniel Sligte, Department of Psychology, University of Amsterdam. Mauro Giacomantonio, Department of Social and Developmental Psychology, “Sapienza” University of Rome. Address correspondence to Carsten K.W. De Dreu, Department of Psychology, University of Amsterdam, Roetersstraat 15, 1018 WB Amsterdam, The Netherlands, or by email at c.k.w.dedreu@uva.nl

Abstract

Difficult issues in negotiation act as interfering forces but their effects on negotiation processes and outcomes are unclear. Perhaps facing such obstacles leads individuals to take a step back, attend to the big picture and, therefore, to be able to craft creative, mutually beneficial solutions. Alternatively, facing obstacles may lead negotiators to focus narrowly on the obstacle issue, so that they no longer consider issues simultaneously, and forego the possibility to reach high quality, integrative agreements. Three experiments involving face-to-face negotiation support the “getting stuck” hypothesis, but only when negotiators are in a local processing mode and not when they are in a global processing mode. Implications for the art and science of negotiation, and for construal level theory, are discussed.

Getting Stuck or Stepping Back: Effects of Obstacles in the Negotiation of Creative Solutions

When negotiating agreement, people oftentimes run into issues that are difficult to settle. Facing such obstacles may create conflict and frustration, and at least temporarily block progress. Yet the more long-lasting impact of facing obstacles is less obvious. Work on social cognition suggests that obstacles lead people to step back, to consider the bigger picture, and to generate creative solutions. Ironically, obstacles may thus facilitate the development of mutually beneficial agreements. However, this notion contrasts sharply with work indicating that one should begin with easy issues first, to create optimism and a sense of locomotion facilitating dealing with more difficult issues later on. In other words, obstacles may undermine constructive negotiation and the development of integrative agreements. Our goal was to examine whether and why obstacles help or hinder integrative negotiation.

Obstacles Help Constructive Negotiation

Obstacles are *interfering forces* (Higgins, 2006) that impede the standard course of action, can make the individual feel stuck, and motivate him or her to ignore, overcome, or get around them in order to move closer to some desired end-state or object. Lewin (1935) argued that obstacles require an initial movement away from the direct path to the goal in order to attain it. The solution to such a detour problem occurs by means of “restructuring” the field and perceiving the total situation “of such a kind that the path to the goal becomes a unitary whole” (p. 82 f). Obstacles thus force the individual to “step back” in order to see the big picture and how to reach the goal. Such a global processing style (i.e., seeing the forest rather than the trees) fosters creativity, whereas a local processing style (i.e., seeing the trees rather than the forest) helps analytical problem solving (Förster, Friedman, & Liberman, 2004).

That obstacles trigger a shift towards global processing and promote creativity is consistent with work on temporary impasse in negotiation. Such impasses lead parties to realize that their current (competitive) strategy is unsuccessful and may result in not reaching an agreement at all. Because such would be undesirable, parties reflect on alternative approaches and switch to a more cooperative, integrative approach. As Walton and McKersie (1965, p.179) noted: “it is possible for distributive bargaining to escalate into a deadly encounter [...]. It is at this point [...] that integrative bargaining may emerge”. Similarly, Pruitt and Carnevale (1993, p. 114) noted that: “joint-concern and integrative behavior often develop as a result of insight into the fact that one is in a hurting stalemate.” Indeed, Harinck and De Dreu (2004) showed that temporary impasses reduce competition, increase problem solving, and thereby facilitate the development of integrative agreements.

Obstacles Hinder Constructive Negotiation

In their analysis of the Oslo talks between Israel and the PLO in the early nineties, Pruitt, Bercovitch and Zartman (1997) note that “Each side agreed that the ... that the best way to proceed was to draft a declaration of principles ... This document specified that Israel would completely withdrawn from Gaza within two years ... that there would be a Marshall Plan for Gaza; and that the final status of Jerusalem, borders, and the settlements, would be negotiated at a later date” (p. 179). Thus, parties postponed discussions about the most difficult obstacles – Jerusalem and settlements – and they focused first on easier issues.

This practice during the Oslo talks reflects a common strategy among negotiators to talk about easy issues first and deal with obstacle issues later.² Moving obstacles towards a later point in time is common advice given by negotiation experts (e.g., Cohen, 1980; Nieremberg, 1968). The idea is that once a certain amount of investment in time and money is made, the sunk-cost

fallacy affects negotiators and they feel obliged to pursue negotiating (Balakrishnan, Patton, & Lewis, 1993). Game theoretical analyses likewise suggest that “one should bargain on ‘easy’ issues first if implementation is sequential (Flamini, 2007). Doing so builds ‘bargaining momentum’ ...” (Busch & Horstmann, 2002, p. 182).

That obstacles hurt is consistent with studies in a variety of domains. Work on social cognition, and goal shielding in particular, showed that the activation of focal goals to which the individual is committed inhibits the accessibility, of alternative goals (Achtziger, Gollwitzer, & Sheeran, 2008; Shah, Friedman, & Kruglanski, 2002; Veling & Van Knippenberg, 2006). Resolving obstacles easily becomes a goal in itself, and through goal shielding leads negotiators to focus on this particular issue to the exclusion of additional issues. Work on social entrainment revealed that both individuals and small groups performed their tasks better when they began with a short time interval and moved on to successively larger time intervals, than when they began with longer and moved to shorter time intervals (e.g., Kelly & McGrath, 1985). This suggests that initial success facilitates subsequent performance, and that facing obstacles early on blocks such early successes and subsequent performance.

Negotiation research also points to the negative effects of obstacles. First, a number of studies showed that loss-framed issues are more difficult to negotiate than gain-framed issues – negotiators make fewer concessions and less likely settle on issues that are framed as losses than as gains (e.g., De Dreu, Carnevale, Emans, & Van de Vliert, 1994; Ockuysen, Galinsky, & Uptigrove, 2003). Group decision making research likewise shows that group members are less likely to settle when they differ on what options they find aversive, than on what options they find attractive (Nijstad & Kaps, 2008). Finally, work on value versus resource conflicts shows that the former type are more difficult and invasive and are more of an obstacle in reaching

agreement (e.g., Rapoport, 1960). Again consistent with the idea that obstacles hurt rather than facilitate agreement, value conflict more often ends in win-lose agreements while resource conflict more often ends in mutually beneficial, integrative agreements (e.g., Druckman, 1994).

The Present Study: Hypotheses and Overview

Combining social cognition research and negotiation studies on temporary impasses suggests the “stepping back hypothesis” that facing obstacles lead negotiators to step back, attend to the bigger picture, see more interrelations among issues, and develop more creative, mutually beneficial agreements. Applied work in international and business negotiations combined with game theoretical analysis and findings on goal shielding, social entrainment, and group decision making all point to the “getting stuck hypothesis:” Negotiators focus on the obstacle issue to the exclusion of other issues, fail to see interrelations among issues, and they create negative emotions. This in turn undermines trust and the constructive climate required to negotiate integrative agreements.

To test these two hypotheses, we conducted experiments in which participants negotiated face-to-face about four integrative issues – they could be traded-off against one another to provide high mutual gain – and two distributive issues – both were equally valuable to each negotiator. The task was designed so that one distributive issue had high value, and the other low value, making the high value distributive issue a prominent obstacle. Issues were depicted in a table that showed for each issue and for each agreement level the point value to the individual negotiator (the partner’s values were not shown; see also below).

We wanted to manipulate obstacles without altering the objective value of the issues, the structure of the negotiation task, or the (historical and reputation) context within which negotiators worked. To do so, we capitalized on the tendency in (western) society to read from

left to right. As a result of this basic tendency, items on the left are noticed, encoded, and retrieved better than items on the right, and are seen as more important and more critical (Dobel, Diesendruck, & Bölte, 2007; Maass & Russo, 2005; Spalek & Hammad, 2005). Thus, by placing the obstacle issue (the high value distributive issue) either in the left-hand or in the right-hand column of the payoff table (and the low value distributive issue thus in the right or left column, respectively), we increased versus decreased the likelihood that the obstacle issue became prominent in the negotiation. Put differently, we expected negotiators in the obstacle-to-the-left condition to begin with the obstacle issue earlier, and to experience its consequences more than those in the obstacle-to-the-right condition.

Whether an issue is experienced as an obstacle or not may be influenced by whether or not negotiators were, after all, able to settle the issue. Whereas our focus in Experiment 2 and 3 was on the consequences of obstacle placement on negotiation outcomes, we felt it important to establish first whether issue placement affects the perceptions of the issues as obstacles. This was done in Experiment 1.

Experiment 1

Method

Participants and Design. Undergraduate students (32 male, 42 female) received 5€ (approx. US\$6.5) for participation. Participants were randomly assigned to dyads with the restriction that dyad members were unacquainted. Dyads were randomly assigned to the Obstacle-to-the-Left condition ($N = 19$), or to the Obstacle-to-the-Right condition ($N = 18$). Participant gender or dyadic gender composition had no effects.³ Dependent variables were difficulty of the most left (right) issue, the extent to which the issue was deemed an obstacle to reach agreement, and how valuable to issue was.

Procedure. Upon arrival in the laboratory, participants were asked to read an information package containing negotiation materials (role instructions, background information, profit sheets). Hereafter, participants were assigned to dyads and seated in separate cubicles in front of each other at a table, separated by a small partition preventing them from seeing each other's profit schedules. They began the negotiation, but after five minutes the experimenter returned, interrupted the negotiation, and asked participants to complete, individually and without consulting their counterpart, a short questionnaire. The experimenter returned a few minutes later and explained that the study was over. Participants were debriefed, paid, and dismissed.

Negotiation Task and Manipulation of Obstacles. The task was based on De Dreu et al. (2006). Pairs of participants took on the role of union or management representatives who had to reach agreement on six issues: Salary, start date, duration of the contract, annual raise, medical coverage, and holidays. Each negotiator received a schedule that gave information about his or her profits (see Table 1). There were four integrative issues (start date, duration of contract, annual raise and medical coverage), and two distributive issues (salary and holidays). By logrolling (giving up on less valuable issues to maximize outcomes on more valuable issues) negotiators could integrate their interests. Full victory would yield 1300 points; a 50/50 compromise on all issues would give 650 points per negotiator, and an integrative agreement would provide a total of 1640 points, with 820 points per negotiator (see Table 1). Negotiators were told that points represented lottery tickets, and that more points implied more lottery tickets and thus a higher chance on winning one of five prizes of 50€ (because the negotiation was interrupted, during debriefing it was explained that all participants were given an equal chance in the lottery).

To manipulate obstacles we altered the placement of the obstacle (distributive) issue yielding between 0 and 540 points to each party. In the Obstacle-to-the-Left (Right) condition, both parties had this (most valuable) issue placed in the most left (right) column of their pay-off chart. (Placement of label [salary vs. vacation days] was varied orthogonally but had no effects.)

Dependent Variables. To assess whether issues were obstacles participants were asked, for each distributive issue, to rate “how long did you talk about this issue,” “how difficult was this issue to negotiate,” and “did this issue block progress”? (1 = very briefly/very easy/not at all, to 5 = very long/very difficult/very much). Ratings were averaged in an issue difficulty index ($\alpha = .73$). In addition, we asked for each distributive issue “to what extent is this issue an obstacle for reaching agreement,” “without this issue, reaching an agreement would be much easier” (reverse coded), and “I see this issue as a barrier to reaching agreement” ($\alpha = .73$). Finally, to ensure that participants did not bias the perceived value of the issue, we asked them for each distributive issue “how valuable is this issue to you, compared to the other issues on the table” (1 = very low, to 5 = very high).

Results and Discussion

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with obstacle placement between-participants and difficulty ratings of the left vs. right issue within-participants showed a trend for issue, $F(1, 72) = 3.42, p < .10, \eta = .19$, and an obstacle placement \times issue interaction, $F(1, 72) = 4.18, p < .045, \eta = .31$.⁴ The rated difficulty of the low value issue did not differ as a function of placement ($M = 3.17$ vs. $M = 3.14$), $F(1, 72) < 1$, whereas the high value issue was rated more difficult when placed to the left, rather than to the right ($M = 3.47$ vs. $M = 2.93$), $F(1, 72) = 7.68, p < .007$.

ANOVA with obstacle placement between-participants and obstacle ratings of the left versus right issue within-participants only showed an obstacle placement \times issue interaction, $F(1,$

72) = 7.33, $p < .008$, $\eta = .36$. The extent to which the low value issue was seen as an obstacle did not differ as a function of placement ($M = 2.93$ vs. $M = 2.82$), $F(1, 72) < 1$, whereas the high value issue was rated more as obstacle when placed to the left, rather than to the right ($M = 3.07$ vs. $M = 2.66$), $F(1, 72) = 9.02$, $p < .004$.

ANOVA) with obstacle placement between-participants and value ratings of issue 1 vs. issue 6 as within-participant factor showed only a strong effect for a trend for issue, $F(1, 72) = 18.83$, $p < .001$, $\eta = .41$. Regardless of placement, low value issues were rated as lower in value than high value issues. This shows that obstacle placement had no effects on the perceived value of the issue but did influence the extent to which it was deemed a difficult obstacle.

Experiment 2

Experiment 1 confirmed that the left-to-right-bias makes issues placed to the left more of an obstacle in the eyes of the negotiator than placing these very same (difficult) issues to the right. In Experiment 2 we examined implications for joint outcomes, and assessed trust to examine the possibility that obstacle placement to the left creates less constructive processes and lower trust than placement to the right. Less trust associates with lower joint outcome (De Dreu et al., 2006).

Method

Participants and Design. Students (43 male, 51 female) received 5€ (approx. US\$6.5) for participation and were randomly assigned to dyads with the restriction that dyad members were unacquainted. Dyads were randomly assigned to the Obstacle-to-the-Left condition ($N = 24$), or to the Obstacle-to-the-Right condition ($N = 23$). Gender or dyadic gender composition had no effects.

Procedure, Negotiation Task and Manipulation of Obstacles. These were the same as in Experiment 1, except that the negotiation was not interrupted and participants had twenty minutes to negotiate; After the negotiation, they individually and independently filled out a questionnaire.

Dependent Variables. Issue difficulty was assessed as before. Joint outcomes were the sum of two dyad members' outcomes across all issues (range between 0 and 1640, see Table 1). Trust was assessed with three items (e.g., "there was trust among the two of us," "I feared to be exploited by my counterpart" [recoded], 1 = not at all, to 5 = very much; $\alpha = .83$).

Results and Discussion

Obstacle Issues and the Left-to-Right Bias. ANOVA with obstacle placement between-participants and difficulty ratings of the most left versus most right issue within-participants showed an effect for obstacle placement, $F(1, 45) = 4.77, p < .034, \eta = .23$, a trend for issue, $F(1, 45) = 2.89, p < .10, \eta = .24$, and an obstacle placement x issue interaction, $F(1, 45) = 19.03, p < .001, \eta = .54$. Figure 1 shows that the difficulty of the low value issue did not differ as a function of placement, $F(1, 45) < 1$, whereas the high value issue was rated more difficult when placed to the left, rather than to the right, $F(1, 45) = 16.62, p < .001$. This replicates the results from Experiment 1.

Trust and Joint Outcomes. The Obstacle-to-the-Right condition produced more trust than the Obstacle-to-the-Left condition, $M = 3.02$ vs. $M = 2.61, F(1, 45) = 5.48, p < .024, \eta = .35$. Furthermore, joint outcome was higher in the Obstacle-to-the-Right condition than in the Obstacle-to-the-Left condition, $M = 1516$ vs. $M = 1445, F(1, 45) = 5.89, p < .019, \eta = .34$. These results support the "getting stuck" hypothesis and contradict the "stepping back" hypothesis. However, mediation analysis did not support the hypothesis that trust mediated the effects of obstacle placement on joint outcome. Trust and joint outcome were positively but not

significantly correlated, $r(47) = .18, p < .24$. In Experiment 3 we measured trust again to exclude a Type II error.

Experiment 3

Central in the “getting stuck” hypothesis is that once negotiators confront an obstacle, zoom in on it to the exclusion of other issues, and fail to consider interrelations among issues. This suggests also that if one would be able to lead negotiators to adopt a global processing mode that helps them seeing the big picture, negotiators more easily overcome their obstacle issue, become more constructive, and develop more creative, integrative agreements. There are various ways to induce a global versus a local processing style, one being to focus individuals on temporally distal versus close events (see e.g., Forster et al., 2004). Indeed, negotiators who focus on temporarily distal events (e.g., 10 years from now) adopt a global processing mode, process issues simultaneously and see possibilities for trade-off more than negotiators who focus on temporarily close events (e.g., next month; Henderson, Trope & Carnevale, 2006). And consistent with the idea that a global processing mode facilitates dealing with obstacles, Ockhyusen et al. (2003) found that benefits versus burdens had less impact on negotiated outcomes when such outcomes were expected after a long time, rather than immediately. Thus, in Experiment 3 we tested the idea that the getting stuck effect is stronger under a local rather than global processing mode.

In Experiment 3 we again tested the possible mediating role of trust, and also measured mood. Our reasoning was that negotiators facing obstacles might not perform as well because the difficult negotiation process creates less positive and more negative mood, which undermines flexible thinking and information processing (De Dreu, Baas, & Nijstad, 2008; Hirt, Devers, &

McCrea, 2008). Thus, less positive and more negative mood might account for the effects on joint outcome.

Method

Participants and Design. Participants (50 males, 64 females) were compensated as before and randomly assigned to dyads and then to the conditions of a 2 (obstacle placement) x 2 (processing mode) factorial. In addition to the measures taken before, we also assessed mood (anger, happiness, sadness).

Procedure and Negotiation Task. These were identical as before.

Manipulation of Processing Mode. After reading their negotiation instructions, participants were asked to assist in a short pilot study on “autobiographical forecasting.” Those in the local (global) processing mode condition were asked to write a short statement of about 10 lines about how their upcoming Monday (Monday two years from now) would look like – where they are, what they are doing, with whom. Participants were given five minutes to write, and then asked to hand in their statement. Past work showed that this manipulation induces a local (global) processing mode that transfers to subsequent task performance (e.g., Forster et al., 2004). Hereafter the procedure was as in Experiment 2.

Dependent variables. In addition to trust, left-to-right-bias, and joint outcome, participants indicated their happiness, anger, and sadness (each three items, with 1 = not at all; to 5 = to a great extent; $\alpha s > .72$).

Results and Discussion

Obstacle Issues and the Left-to-Right Bias. ANOVA with obstacle placement and processing mode between-participants and issue (issue 1 vs. issue 6) within-participants showed effects for obstacle placement, $F(1, 53) = 5.02, p < .029, \eta = .29$, processing mode, $F(1, 53) =$

5.61, $p < .025$, $\eta = .31$, and issue, $F(1, 53) = 3.86$, $p < .03$, $\eta = .26$, an obstacle placement \times issue interaction, $F(1, 53) = 18.27$, $p < .001$, $\eta = .51$, and an obstacle placement \times processing mode \times issue interaction, $F(1, 53) = 5.12$, $p < .03$, $\eta = .29$. Figure 2 shows that under local processing, rated difficulty of the low value issue did not differ as a function of placement, $F(1, 53) < 1$, whereas the high value issue was rated more difficult when placed to the left, rather than to the right, $F(1, 53) = 19.64$, $p < .001$. Under global processing, however, no effect of obstacle placement emerged and the valuable issue was rated more difficult than the non-valuable issue, $F(1, 53) = 4.87$, $p < .05$. This supports the left-to-right bias literature, and the idea that difficult issues to the left more readily become an obstacle. It also indicates that global processing overcomes this left-to-right bias.

Negotiation Outcomes. ANOVA only revealed an obstacle \times processing mode interaction, $F(1, 53) = 4.87$, $p < .032$, $\eta = .29$. Figure 3 shows higher joint outcomes in the Obstacle-to-the-Right, than in the Obstacle-to-the-Left condition when participants were in a local processing mode, $F(1, 53) = 6.28$, $p < .015$. When participants were in a global processing mode, obstacle placement had no effect, $F(1, 53) < 1$, ns. Thus, the “getting stuck” hypothesis is valid when negotiators engage in local rather than global processing.

Trust and Negotiation Strategy. Similar to Experiment 2, the Obstacle-to-the-Right produced more trust than the Obstacle-to-the-Left condition, $M = 3.51$ vs. $M = 3.12$, $F(1, 53) = 2.95$, $p < .10$, $\eta = .22$, but this time the effect was not significant. There were no other effects, and trust and joint outcome were not correlated, $r(57) = .07$, ns. Again, trust cannot account for the effects of obstacle placement on joint outcome.

Negotiator Mood. ANOVA on happiness, anger, and sadness showed no effects for anger, all $F(1, 53) < 1$. However, negotiators in a global rather than local processing mode reported

greater happiness, $F(1, 53) = 9.66, p < .003, \eta = .39$. This effect was qualified by a marginal processing mode x obstacle placement interaction, $F(1, 53) = 2.73, p < .10, \eta = .22$. Table 2 shows less happiness in the Obstacle-to-the-Left condition, than in the Obstacle-to-the-Right condition when negotiators were in a local processing mode, $F(1, 53) = 4.06, p < .05$. When in a global processing mode, obstacle placement had no effect, $F(1, 53) < 1$. However, because happiness was not correlated with joint outcome, $r(57) = .13, p < .35$, happiness does not qualify as a mediator.

For sadness, ANOVA showed an effect for processing mode, $F(1, 53) = 8.77, p < .001, \eta = .38$, which was qualified by a marginal processing mode x obstacle placement interaction, $F(1, 53) = 2.93, p < .10, \eta = .23$. Table 2 shows greater sadness among negotiators in the Obstacle-to-the-Left condition than in the Obstacle-to-the-Right condition when they were in a local processing mode, $F(1, 53) = 11.61, p < .001$, but not when they were in a global processing mode, $F(1, 53) < 1$. Sadness was negatively correlated with joint outcome, $r(57) = -.27, p < .05$, but controlling for sadness as a mediator in the regression from joint outcome on the main and interaction effects of obstacle placement and processing mode only reduced the originally significant effect ($p < .032$) to marginally significant ($p < .07$), and the Sobel test was not significant, $z = 1.32, p > .18$. In short, we cannot conclude that mood states mediate the effects of obstacle placement and processing mode on joint outcome.

Conclusions and Discussion

The idea that obstacles lead people to take a step back, engage in more global and abstract reasoning and focus on the big picture (Lewin, 1935; Higgins, 2006), ultimately becoming more creative, was not supported in the context of interpersonal negotiation. Rather, negotiators facing obstacles tend to get stuck, focus on the obstacle to the exclusion of other issues and their

interrelations, experience less trust, less happiness and more sadness, and they are less able to negotiate creative solutions to mutual benefit. These findings substantiate the advice offered by negotiation experts (e.g., Cohen, 1980), game-theoretic analysis (e.g., Busch & Horstmann, 2002) and in-depth case analyses (e.g., Pruitt et al., 1997).

Current findings make two other contributions. First, our findings add to the literature showing that people (in western society) process and visualize material from left to right more than vice versa (Maass & Russo, 2005). Across experiments, obstacles placed in the left-hand column of the issue chart had more impact, both psychologically and behaviorally, than obstacles placed in the right-hand column. The present results are among the first to demonstrate that this very basic and habituated tendency has interpersonal consequences and affects strategic decision making. Second, we replicate the original finding by Henderson et al. (2006) that negotiators with a distal rather than proximal time perspective engage in more constructive negotiation and achieve more integrative agreements. We also show that a distal time perspective helps negotiators to overcome obstacles – because they attend to the bigger picture and continue to consider interrelations among issues, negotiators are less likely to get stuck and more likely to develop creative, integrative agreements.

Whereas our findings suggest that difficult issues serving as obstacles not necessarily lead parties to take a more global perspective – as was hypothesized under the “stepping back” hypothesis – present findings do not exclude the possibility that some (difficult) issues in themselves trigger a more distal, global perspective. In fact, issues in the negotiation may co-vary with time perspective (Henderson et al., 2006) and it could be that when such issues are confronted early in the negotiation they promote global processing, helping negotiators to achieve mutually beneficial agreements. Future research could examine such possibilities.

Our findings indicate that obstacles in negotiation generally impede progress and the achievement of creative solutions, but should not be taken as if obstacles never have the positive effects hypothesized by Lewin (1935). A starting point for further research may be the moderators of goal shielding, such as need for closure (Shah et al., 2002), construal level found in Experiment 2, or individual differences in concern for future consequences (e.g., Joireman, Kamdan, Daniels, & Duell, 2006). In addition, more work on the “stepping back” versus “getting stuck” hypothesis is needed in other areas than negotiation, at the least to see whether findings replicate. For example, our findings may have implications for work on how people deal with daily stressors (e.g., Bolger & Zuckerman, 1995). Daily hassles are often portrayed as short-term hurdles that need to be cleared in order to execute a more complex daily behavioral plan. Finally, individuals may face other types of obstacles than the difficult material issues in the current study. These include historical issues that impede negotiation (Bilewicz, 2007), or issues with strong symbolic value (Ledgerwood, Liviatan, & Carnevale, 2007) to name but a few. Future research could examine possible differences in the impact of material and immaterial obstacles in negotiation and social decision making. In the absence of such studies, we conclude that obstacles hurt negotiation. They focus parties on one issue to the exclusion of the others, and their interrelations, and prohibit parties to develop creative, mutually beneficial agreements.

References

- Achtziger, A., Gollwitzer, P.M., & Sheeran, P. (2008). Implementation intentions and shielding goal striving from unwanted thoughts and feelings. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 34*, 381 – 393.
- Balakrishnan, P.V., Patton, C., & Lewis, P.A. (1993). Toward a theory of agenda setting in negotiations. *Journal of Consumer Research, 19*, 637 – 654.
- Bilewicz, M. (2007). History as an obstacle: Impact of temporal-based social categorizations on Polish-Jewish intergroup contact. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations, 10*, 551 – 563.
- Bolger, N., & Zuckerman, A. (1995). A framework for studying personality in the stress process. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69*, 890-902.
- Busch, L.A., & Horstmann, I.J. (2002). The game of negotiations: Ordering issues and implementing agreements. *Games and Economic Behavior, 41*, 169 – 191.
- Cohen, H. (1980). *You can negotiate anything*. New York: Bantam.
- De Dreu, C.K.W., Baas, M., & Nijstad, B.A. (2008). Hedonic tone and activation in the mood – creativity link: Towards a Dual Pathway to Creativity model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 94*, 739 – 756.
- De Dreu, C.K.W., Beersma, B., Stroebe, K., & Euwema, M.C. (2006). Motivated information processing, strategic choice, and the quality of negotiated agreement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 90*, 927 – 943.
- De Dreu, C. K. W., Carnevale, P. J. D., Emans, B. J. M., & Van de Vliert, E. (1994). Effects of gain loss frames in negotiation: Loss aversion, mismatching, and frame adoption. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 60*, 90-107.

- Dobel, C., Diesendruck, G., & Bolte, J. (2007). How writing system and age influences spatial representations of actions. *Psychological Science, 18*, 487 – 491.
- Druckman, D. (1977). Social psychological approaches to the study of negotiation. In D. Druckman (Ed.), *Negotiation: Social Psychological Perspectives*. Thousand Oakes: Sage.
- Druckman, D. (1994). Determinants of compromising behavior in negotiation: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Conflict Resolution, 38*, 507-556.
- Flamini, F. (2007). First things first? The agenda formation problem for multi-issue committees. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization, 63*, 138 – 157.
- Förster, J., Friedman, R. & Liberman, N. (2004). Temporal construal effects on abstract and concrete thinking: Consequences for insight and creative cognition. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 87*, 177-189.
- Harinck, F., & De Dreu, C. K. W. (2004). Negotiating values or resources: The moderating impact of time pressure. *European Journal of Social Psychology*.
- Henderson, M.D., Trope, Y., & Carnevale, P.J. (2006). Negotiation from a near and distant time perspective. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 91*, 721-729.
- Higgins, E. T. (2006). Value from hedonic experience and engagement. *Psychological Review, 113*, 439-460.
- Hirt, E.R., Devers, E.E., & McCrae, S.M. (2008). I want to be creative: Exploring the role of hedonic experiences in the positive mood-cognitive flexibility link. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 94*, 214 – 230.
- Joireman, J., Kamdar, D., Daniels, D., & Duell, B. (2006). Good citizens to the end? It depends: Empathy and concern with future consequences moderate the impact of a short-term time horizon on OCBs. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 91*, 1307-1320.

- Kelly, J.R., & McGrath, J.E. (1985). Effects of time limits and task types on task performance and interaction in four-person groups. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *49*, 395 – 407.
- Ledgerwood, A. Liviatan, I., & Carnevale, P.J. (2007). Group-identity completion and the symbolic value of property. *Psychological Science*, *18*, 873 – 878.
- Lewin, K. (1935). *A dynamic theory of personality: Selected papers*. McGraw Hill: New York.
- Maass, A., & Russo, A. (2003). Directional bias in the mental representation of spatial events: Nature or culture? *Psychological Science*, *14*, 296 – 301.
- Nieremberg, G.I. (1968). *The art of negotiation*. New York: Hawthorn.
- Nijstad, B.A., & Kaps, S.C. (2008). Taking the easy way out: Preference diversity, decision strategies, and decision refusal in groups. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *94*, 860 – 870.
- Okhuysen, G. A., Galinsky, A. D., & Uptigrove, T. A. (2003). Saving the worst for last: The effect of time horizon on the efficiency of negotiating benefits and burdens. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*. *91*(2), 269-279.
- Pruitt, D.G., Bercovitch, J., & Zartman, I.W. (1997). A brief history of the Oslo Talks. *International Negotiation*, *2*, 177 – 182.
- Pruitt, D. G., & Carnevale, P. J. (1993). *Negotiation in social conflict*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- Rapoport, A. (1960). *Fight, games, and debates*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Schelling, T. (1960). *The strategy of conflict*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Shah, J.Y., Friedman, R., & Kruglanski, A.W. (2002). Forgetting all else: In the antecedents and consequences of goal shielding. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *83*, 1261-

1280.

Spalec, T.M., Hammad, S. (2005). The left-to-right bias in inhibition of return is due to the direction of reading. *Psychological Science, 16*, 15 – 18.

Veling, H., & Van Knippenberg, A.(2006). Shielding intentions from distraction: Forming an intention reduces inhibition of distracting stimuli. *Social Cognition, 24*, 409 – 425.

Walton, R. E., & McKersie, R. (1965). A behavioral theory of labor negotiations: An analysis of a social interaction system. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Footnotes

¹ This research was financially supported by Grant NWO-400-07-701 awarded to the first author. We thank Wouter de Bruijn, Jens Forster, and Bernard Nijstad for their help at various stages of the project.

² This advice contradicts the finding that negotiators achieve integrative agreements especially when they make multi-issue offers rather than single-issue offers and move towards a next issue only when the first is settled (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993). However, Druckman (1977, p. 165) notes: “sequential agendas are often hard to avoid. Either the issues are too complex to be handled simultaneously, or they arise and must be resolved at different times.” Negotiators avoid multi-issue offering because of beliefs that such “horse-trading” discussions are inappropriate and that each issue should be considered on its own merits, because bounded rationality prohibits them from considering all issues and their interrelations simultaneously, and because sequential offering provides signaling power and strategic advantages (Schelling, 1960).

³ The experiment followed a study on individual choices; controlling for assignment to conditions in this prior experiment had no influence and this “variable” is further ignored.

⁴ Because participants interacted for some time, we verified that individual data were not statistically interdependent, and proceeded using the individual as the level of analysis (using the dyad as the level of analysis confirmed individual-level results). In Experiment 2 and 3, there was statistical interdependency and those data were analyzed at the dyadic level.

Table 1

Profit Schedules for the Management and Union Representative

Management					
Salary	Start Date	Duration of Contract	Annual Raise	Medical Coverage	Holidays
€ 14.000 (540)	14 weeks (90)	0,5 year (240)	1% (270)	10% (120)	10 days (80)
• 15.000 (450)	12 weeks (75)	1,0 year (180)	2% (225)	20% (90)	13 days (60)
• 16.000 (360)	10 weeks (60)	1,5 year (120)	3% (180)	30% (60)	16 days (40)
• 17.000 (270)	8 weeks (45)	2,0 year (60)	4% (135)	40% (30)	19 days (20)
• 18.000 (180)	6 weeks (30)	2,5 year (00)	5% (90)	50% (00)	22 days (00)
• 19.000 (90)	4 weeks (15)		6% (45)		
• 20.000 (00)	2 weeks (00)		7% (00)		
Union					
Salary	Start Date	Duration of Contract	Annual Raise	Medical Coverage	Holidays
€ 20.000 (540)	2 weeks (270)	2,5 year (120)	7% (90)	50% (240)	22 days (80)
• 19.000 (450)	4 weeks (225)	2,0 year (90)	6% (75)	40% (180)	19 days (60)
• 18.000 (360)	6 weeks (180)	1,5 year (60)	5% (60)	30% (120)	16 days (40)
• 17.000 (270)	8 weeks (135)	1,0 year (30)	4% (45)	20% (60)	13 days (20)
• 16.000 (180)	10 weeks (90)	0,5 year (00)	3% (30)	10% (00)	10 days (00)
• 15.000 (90)	12 weeks (45)		2% (15)		
• 14.000 (00)	14 weeks (00)		1% (00)		

Note. Numbers in brackets refer to points earned by the participant.

Table 2

Means and standard deviations for negotiator mood as a function of processing mode and obstacle placement (Experiment 3)

Obstacle Placement	Time-Perspective			
	Proximal		Distal	
	Left	Right	Left	Right
Measure				
Sadness	3.33 (0.43)	2.95 (0.87)	2.45 (0.52)	2.72 (0.87)
Happiness	2.59 (0.66)	3.22 (1.06)	3.40 (0.90)	3.41 (0.99)

Figure 1

Issue Difficulty as a function of Issue Value and Obstacle Placement (Experiment 2)

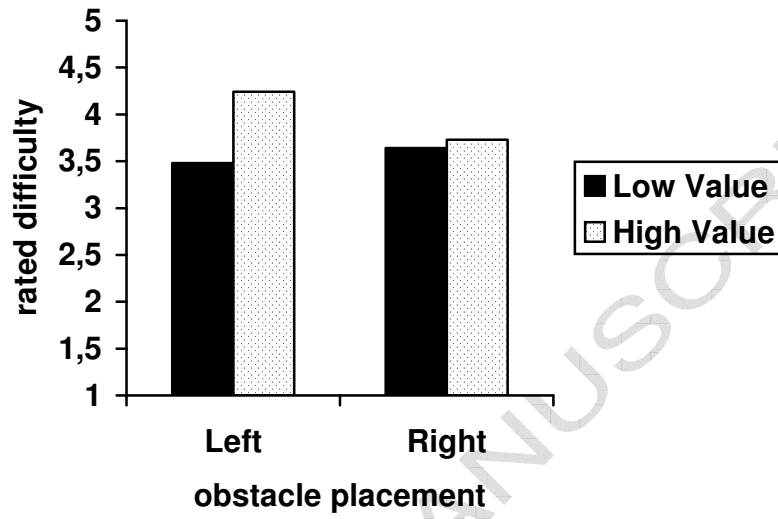


Figure 2

Issue Difficulty as a function of Issue Value and Obstacle Placement under Local Processing (Top Panel) and Global Processing (Bottom Panel); Experiment 3

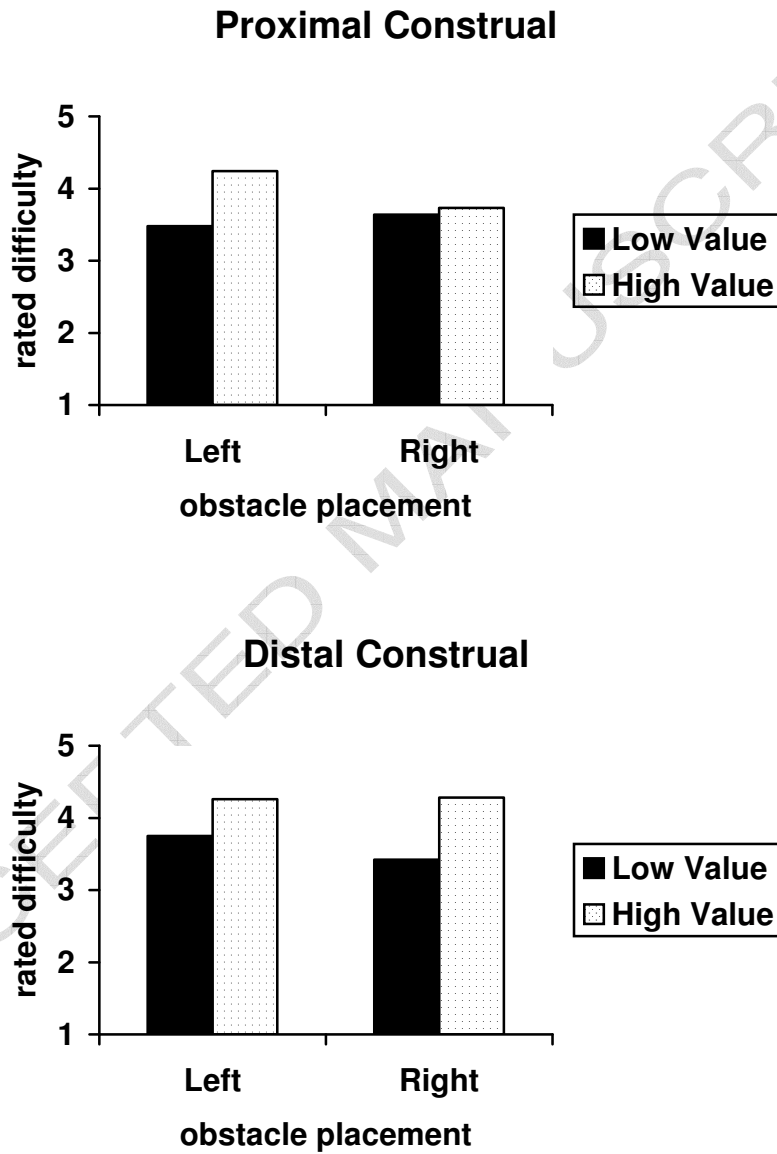


Figure 3

Joint Outcome as a function of Obstacle Placement and Processing Mode; Experiment 3

