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Take a Break! Or not?

The Impact of Mindsets During Breaks on Negotiation Processes and Outcomes

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Abstract

In the current research we investigate the effects of breaks – temporary recesses in which participants stop interacting and withdraw from the situation – on negotiation processes and outcomes. We conducted two laboratory experiments in which participants engaged in buyer-seller negotiations. Experiment 1 ($N = 140$) showed that dyads reached higher-quality agreements after a break in which they were cognitively busy with a distraction task than after a break in which they could reflect upon the negotiation. Experiment 2 ($N = 76$) showed that competitive thinking during a break lead to lower-quality agreements than cooperative thinking during the break. It seems that the negative effects of competitive thoughts during a break can be compensated by turning one's mind to other issues than the negotiation, or by actively engaging in cooperative thinking.

Key words: Negotiation, Integrative Agreements, Negotiation Outcomes, Breaks, Temporary Recess, Rumination, Distraction, Scrambled-Sentences Task.

Take a break! Or not?

The Impact of Mindsets During Breaks on Negotiation Processes and Outcomes

Many social interactions involve negotiation, in which participants cooperate to achieve a mutually acceptable agreement but also compete to achieve an agreement that serves personal needs and desires. Although some interactions may be very short and only involve one or two rounds of negotiation, most evolve over longer periods of time and are characterized by breaks – temporary recesses in which participants stop interacting and withdraw from the situation. Discussions about who does what in the household may continue for days, interrupted by other activities (including household chores). Employees working on a joint task may temporarily halt their debate about the best working procedure to get some lunch, and politicians may stop debating policy implementation issues to attend to more pressing issues that require immediate action. In this research, we investigate the effect of breaks, and the mind-sets during these breaks, on the subsequent negotiation process and outcomes.

Behavioral scientists have long argued that temporary breaks may help parties to switch from competitive to more cooperative interactions. For example, case analyses of labor-management negotiations (Walton & McKersie, 1965) as well as laboratory experiments (Harinck & De Dreu, 2004; Olekalns & Smith, 2005) revealed that negotiation often follows a *differentiation-before-integration pattern* in which individuals start with competitive behavior, such as threatening the other party or arguing for one's own interests. Only after they realize that this competitive behavior merely escalates the conflict, they switch to more cooperative, integrative negotiation. Likewise, in international conflicts we see critical moments, or turning points, that can alter the

negotiation process. For example, during the Camp David talks (1978), held by US President Carter, between the Israeli Prime Minister Begin and Egyptian President Sadat, there was a famous break where they all went to Gettysburg battlefield, and had a nice time.

These research findings and case observations resonate well with the idea that temporary breaks in negotiation allow participants to cool off, to reflect upon the interaction process and to evaluate behavior and strategies. Indeed, Ury (1991) advises negotiators to frequently take a break, and to 'go to the balcony'; to detach oneself physically and mentally from the negotiation to evaluate it as if one were a third party. On the balcony one is supposed to be better able to think constructively for both parties and to look for a mutually beneficial solution. As Ury (1991, p. 48) noted: "If you need more time to think, you should take a break. [...] Negotiations are more productive when they are broken up by frequent time-outs."

Despite the few case observations from international conflict resolution, and the intuitively appealing advice offered by Ury (1991), we know very little about the actual effects of taking a break. Past work has not addressed the influence of breaks on subsequent interaction processes and outcomes, and we have no knowledge of the processes that emerge during breaks that may account for its subsequent effects. This absence of systematic research is all the more unfortunate because withdrawing from conflict and avoiding interaction with the counterpart may lead to rumination and to increased levels of hostility and aggression (Bushman, Bonacci, Pedersen, Vasquez & Miller, 2005). Thus, we need to test whether the putative effects of breaks on social interaction and negotiation processes are indeed positive, or whether taking a break

actually hurts constructive interaction and high-quality agreements. In this article, we present two laboratory experiments in which we examined the effects of breaks, and mental activities during those breaks, on the extent to which negotiators reach mutually beneficial, integrative agreements – agreements that generate greater joint gain than a simple fifty-fifty compromise, or a victory-for-one solution (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993).

Experiment 1

The goal of our first experiment was to examine the impact of breaks on the quality of negotiated agreement. As mentioned, qualitative analyses suggest that temporary recesses lead parties to reflect and to realize the dysfunctionality of the competitive strategies, hence directing them towards more cooperative strategies aimed at reaching mutually rather than personally beneficial agreements (Druckman, 2001, 2004; Putnam, 2004; McGinn, Long Lingo & Ciano 2004; Kolb, 2004; Susskind, 2004; Walton & McKersie, 1965). Taking a more quantitative approach, Olekalns and Smith (2005) had participants in a dyadic negotiation task indicate critical moments and turning points in the negotiation process after the negotiation had taken place. The authors found that negotiation outcomes improved when the negotiation was characterized by more facilitating than inhibitory turning points. Similarly, Harinck and De Dreu (2004) showed that naturally occurring temporary recesses early in a negotiation related to more integrative behavior late in the negotiation.

These lines of research presume that participants reflect on their past and future behavior during the break. In other words, when participants take a break but do not or cannot reflect on the negotiation process, there should be no difference compared to a situation in which no break was taken. Thus, these lines of research, following the

“going-to-the-balcony logic”, suggest that participants who reflect during a break resume in a more cooperative manner and are more likely to reach a high-quality, integrative agreement than participants who do not reflect during the break or who do not take a break at all (*Balcony Hypothesis*).

However, because turning points in Olekalns and Smith’s work were identified retrospectively it may be that outcomes defined turning points, rather than that turning points determined outcomes. Similarly, the data used by Harinck and De Dreu (2004) were correlational and it cannot be excluded that their results were, at least in part, due to some unknown third variable. Thus, the above evidence for the putative positive effects of taking a break is indirect and correlational. This is problematic because an alternative reasoning, based on research into rumination, is available (Bushman, et al., 2005; Rusting & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1998; Zillmann, Hezel & Medoff, 1980).

Rumination is defined as thoughts and behaviors that focus the individuals’ attention on the negative mood, the causes and consequences of this mood, and self-evaluations related to the mood (Rusting & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1998). Specifically, Rusting and Nolen-Hoeksema (1998) found that rumination can increase anger, whereas distraction decreased or had no effect on anger. They brought participants in an angry mood via a scenario. Then, participants had 8 minutes to think of several issues. In the rumination condition, participants focused on themselves with questions like “why do people treat you the way they do”. In the distraction condition, participants focused on an external non-emotional event such as the “the layout of the local post office”. Results showed that anger ratings increased significantly following rumination, whereas anger stayed at the same level after distraction (Rusting & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1998). Thus,

engaging in rumination while in an angry mood can increase feelings of anger and hostility, even displaced hostility towards innocent out-siders (Bushman et al., 2005).

Distraction on the other hand, seems to decrease feelings of anger and hostility. Zillmann and colleagues (Zillmann, 1988; Zillmann, et al. 1980) have shown that negative emotions can be reduced by highly distracting activities, such as exposure to non-hostile humor, such as watching situation comedies or game shows. The idea is that these distracting activities relief the individual (at least temporary) from the emotion-arousing situation (Zillmann et al, 1980). Thus, rumination research suggests that participants who reflect during the break resume in a more competitive manner and are less likely to reach a high-quality, integrative agreement than participants who do not reflect during the break, or who do not take a break at all (*Rumination Hypothesis*).

In Experiment 1, we tested the Balcony Hypothesis and the Rumination Hypothesis and examined the effect on integrative agreements when participants take a break and reflect compared to when they take a break and are distracted during the break and compared to when they do not take a break.

Method

Design and Participants

The experiment had three between-dyad conditions; a reflect condition, a distraction condition, and a no-break condition (control condition). In the reflect condition, participants experienced a break and were able to reflect upon the negotiation. In the distraction condition, participants were less able to reflect upon the negotiation because they had to count backwards during the entire break. Finally, the no-break condition served as the control condition in which participants did not experience a break.

Main dependent variables were amount of task-related reflection, strategy change, and joint outcomes.

One hundred and forty undergraduate students participated (28 men and 112 women). Their mean age was 23.3 years. They received course credit or money (€5.50, equivalent to \$ 6.50) for their participation. The study was run in dyads with 22 to 24 dyads randomly allocated to each condition. Type of reward, or the dyad's gender composition had no effects and is not considered any further.

Negotiation Task

The negotiation task was adapted from De Dreu, Koole and Steinel (2000). Each participant took the role of car seller or car buyer. Participants had to negotiate in dyads, to reach agreement on six issues (warranty, delivery date, color, price, extras and radio). Participants had 15 minutes to negotiate. Each negotiator received a pay-off schedule with information about his or her personal outcomes, but not about the other negotiator's outcomes (see Appendix). The task contained integrative potential because issues that were important to the car seller (delivery date and extras) were less important to the car buyer, and issues that were important to the car buyer (warranty and radio) were less important to the car seller. By making large concessions on less important issues and small concessions on important issues (logrolling), negotiators could reach a maximum joint outcome of 22,800 that exceeded the fifty-fifty compromise of 16,800 points. To motivate participants to negotiate seriously and to prevent them from agreeing immediately, we followed a standard procedure to provide participants with a limit – they were told not to accept agreements that resulted in less than 8,000 points individually (Carnevale & Isen, 1986; Pruitt & Lewis, 1975).

Procedure and Break Manipulations

Participants entered the laboratory in randomly paired dyads and were placed face-to-face at a table. The experimenter gave participants written instructions about their role in the negotiation and their pay-off schedule. After reading the instructions, they started negotiating. After 5 minutes, the experimenter stopped the negotiation for three minutes. In the *reflect-break condition*, the participants were told that they had three minutes to reflect upon the negotiation and to think about how they wanted to continue the negotiation. They were left alone for these three minutes, but were not allowed to communicate with each other. In the *distraction condition*, the participants had three minutes to do a distraction task. They had to count backwards from 3600 in steps of 13 for three minutes. They had to carefully write down each step. The break time was identical to the reflection break, but participants in the distraction condition were less able to reflect consciously upon the negotiation, due to the backwards counting. After the break, the participants continued the negotiation for 10 more minutes. In the *no-break condition*, the participant did not experience a break and negotiated without interruption. The negotiation was stopped when the 15 minutes were over or when agreement was reached on all six issues. Participants then filled out a questionnaire, were debriefed, paid and thanked for their participation.

Dependent Variables

The questionnaire contained a manipulation check for reflection possibilities. The item was 'I was able to reflect upon the negotiation during the break'. Answers could be given on a seven-point scale (1 = '*absolutely not*', to 7 = '*yes, absolutely*').

Task-related reflection. The amount of task-related reflection during the break was measured with six items, derived from prior work on task-reflexivity (De Dreu, in press; Somech, 2006) and adapted for current purposes. Sample items are: ‘During the break I thought about different strategies for the rest of the negotiation’, and ‘During the break I lined up the facts’. Answers were given on a seven-point scale (1 = ‘*absolutely not*’, to 7 = ‘*yes, absolutely*’). Ratings were averaged into one index ($\alpha = .82$).

Strategic change. To assess whether breaks resulted in changes in strategies before vs. after the break, we included two items: (1) “After the break I used a different strategy than before” and (2) “I behaved similarly before and after the break (reverse scored) (both 1 = ‘*not at all*’, to 7 = ‘*a whole lot*’). Ratings were correlated, $r = .53$, $p < .001$, and averaged into one index.

To get at the content of behavioral strategies used during the negotiation, we asked participants (1) “I was more cooperative after the break” and (2) “I was more competitive after the break” (both 1 = ‘*absolutely not*’, to 7 = ‘*yes, absolutely*’).

Joint outcomes. The quality of the negotiated agreement was assessed by calculating the joint outcomes by summing the points of the buyer and seller for those issues on which they reached an agreement (range = 16,800 -- 22,800). While all dyads reached agreement on at least four issues, 3 dyads (all in the reflect-break condition) did not settle all six issues within the time allotted. In line with past work, we assigned these no-agreement issues the 50-50 split outcome (assigning a score of zero points would lead to severe heterogeneity of variance) (Ben-Yoav & Pruitt, 1984; Pruitt & Lewis, 1975). Note that alternative ways of dealing with this issue led to similar results and identical conclusions.

Results and Discussion

Because individual observations within dyads were not independent, we averaged ratings on questionnaire items within dyads and used the dyad as unit of analysis. Joint outcome data were analyzed using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with break condition (reflect vs. distraction vs. no break) as a three-level between-dyad factor. Because questionnaire items were collected in the two break conditions only, questionnaire data were analyzed using t-tests for independent samples.

From the descriptive statistics in Table 1 it can be seen that the amount of task-related reflection was positively related to strategy change and negatively related to joint outcomes. This runs against the Balcony Hypothesis, which implied that task-related reflection during the break would lead to higher, not lower joint outcomes. Interestingly, the manipulation check for reflection correlated positively with cooperative change, which seems at odds with the negative correlation between the manipulation check for reflection and task-related reflection on the one hand, and joint outcomes on the other. However, the same manipulation check item also correlated positively with competitive change (albeit not significantly). Perhaps reflection breaks induced a tendency to employ both cooperative and competitive strategies and tactics to a greater degree; however, because competitive tactic use tends to impact the negotiation process more than cooperative tactics, we may see a disparity between people reporting more cooperation, yet achieving less integrative outcomes. Obviously, this is rather speculative and requires follow-up research to enable more conclusive statements.

As expected, dyads in the reflect condition ($M = 6.02$, $SD = .81$) were more able to reflect upon the negotiation during the break than dyads in the distraction condition (M

= 2.80, $SD = 1.52$), $t(42) = 8.63$, $p < .001$. Furthermore, participants in the reflect condition reported more task-related reflection than participants in the distraction condition, $M = 4.33$, $SD = 0.43$ vs. $M = 3.26$, $SD = .95$; $t(42) = 4.74$, $p < .001$. Finally, dyads in the reflect condition reported larger strategy changes ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.01$) than dyads in the distraction condition ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 1.10$), $t(42) = 1.98$, $p < .054$ (marginal).

Thus far, results are in line with the idea that breaks facilitate reflection on the negotiation process and that this results in strategy changes. However, and quite contrary to past theorizing, dyads in the reflect condition were more competitive after the break ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 1.13$) than dyads in the distraction condition ($M = 3.10$, $SD = .97$), $t(42) = 2.04$, $p < .05$, and did not report more or less cooperation after the break ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 1.00$, vs. $M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.20$, $t(42) = 1.34$, ns).

Although not very strong, this pattern resonates with the findings for joint outcome. A Chi-Square test showed no effect of break condition on the number of agreements reached, $\chi^2(6, N = 70) = 8.66$, ns . However, there was an effect of break condition on the joint outcomes, $F(2, 67) = 3.13$, $p < .05$. Planned contrasts showed that dyads reached lower joint outcomes in the reflect condition ($M = 19,096$, $SD = 1,459$) than dyads in the distraction condition ($M = 20,033$, $SD = 1,208$), $t(67) = 2.35$, $p < .05$, and than dyads in the no-break condition ($M = 19,873$, $SD = 1,416$), $t(67) = 1.93$, $p < .06$. The distraction condition and the no-break condition did not differ, $t(67) = .38$, ns .

The results for competitive behavior and for joint outcomes go against the Balcony Hypothesis, and support the Rumination Hypothesis. To better understand this result, we conducted a series of mediation analyses using the task-related reflection scale

as mediator of the difference in joint outcome between the two break conditions (recall that we had no questionnaire items in the no-break condition), see also Figure 1. A first regression with joint outcomes as criterion and break conditions (reflect break vs. distraction break) as predictor showed a significant effect of break, $B = 937.68$, $t = 2.39$, $p < .05$. A second regression analysis with task-related reflection as criterion and break condition (reflect break vs. distraction break) as predictor also showed a significant effect of break, $B = -1.00$, $t = -4.66$, $p < .001$. A third regression with joint outcomes as criterion and task-related reflection as predictor showed an effect of task-related reflection, $B = -539.79$, $t = -2.42$, $p < .05$. Finally, a regression analysis with the joint outcomes as criterion and break (reflect break vs. distraction break) and task-related reflection as predictors, showed that the effect of break on joint outcomes became non-significant, $B = 590$, $t = 1.25$, ns , when controlling for the level of task-related reflection. The reduction in explained variance was significant, Sobel $z = 2.15$, $p < .05$ (Preacher & Leonardelli, 2001). Dyads in the reflect-break condition thus achieved lower joint outcomes because they engaged in more task-related reflection than the dyads in the distraction condition.

Experiment 2

Study 1 showed that dyads that could reflect on the negotiation during the break reported more task-related reflection during the break, reported more change in strategy after the break. However, contrary to predictions, they also reported more competitive change and achieved lower joint outcomes than those dyads that either had no break at all, or were distracted during the break. This result clearly undermines Ury's (1991) advice to "go to the balcony" because doing so appears to hurt rather than help the development of mutually beneficial, integrative agreement.

It is likely that the content of the thought developed during a temporary recess is pivotal in determining whether breaks help or hinder high-quality agreement. Although not directly shown, the data from Experiment 1 suggest that participants in the reflect break engaged in competitive strategizing, using their breaktime to design additional and perhaps new strategies to win from their counterpart. This explanation fits work showing that individuals often perceive a negotiation as zero-sum and a win-lose game (De Dreu et al., 2000; Pruitt, 1990; Thompson & Hastie, 1990). Similarly, pro-social negotiators, who are focused on fairness and collective outcomes, achieve higher joint outcomes than pro-self negotiators, who are focused on personal outcomes and winning, especially when they engage in deep and systematic information processing (De Dreu, Beersma, Stroebe, & Euwema, 2006; De Dreu & Carnevale, 2003).

The above suggests that when individuals have a cooperative mindset and engage in cooperative strategizing during the break they achieve higher joint outcomes than when they engage in competitive strategizing, or do not take a break at all. Furthermore, the above suggests that when individuals have a competitive mind-set and engage in competitive strategizing during a break they do worse in terms of agreement quality than those not taking a break at all (cf., Rumination-Hypothesis). Testing these predictions was the goal of Experiment 2.

To manipulate task-related reflection during the break, we used a priming procedure. Research has shown that participants who were subconsciously primed with cooperative or competitive thoughts also behaved more cooperatively or competitively in a subsequent social dilemma game (Hertel & Fiedler, 1994; 1998; Smeesters, Warlop, Van Avermaet, Corneille & Yzerbyt, 2003). In the research by Smeesters et al. (2003),

for example, participants filled out a so-called Scrambled Sentences Task (Srull & Wyer, 1979), a supraliminal priming technique. Participants had to make grammatically correct sentences with four out of five words presented in a scrambled order. Within these scrambled sentences, there were priming words. In the cooperative-prime condition, these words were associated with cooperation, such as cooperative, helpful and constructive. In the competitive-prime condition, these words were associated with competition, such as winning, striving and dominant. Smeesters et al. (2003) showed that participants were more willing to cooperate after they completed the cooperative scrambled sentences than after the competitive scrambled sentences.

Method

Design and Participants

The experiment had three between-dyad conditions; a competitive-thoughts condition, a cooperative-thoughts condition and no-break condition (control condition). Main dependent variable was joint outcome.

Seventy-six undergraduate students participated. Their mean age was 20.7 years. They received money (€5.50, equivalent to \$ 6.50) for their participation. The study was run in dyads with 12 to 14 dyads randomly allocated to each condition. Gender had no effects and is not considered any further.

Task, Procedure and Break Manipulations

The negotiation task and experimental procedures were similar to Study 1. In the two break conditions, the experimenter stopped the negotiation after five minutes. In the competitive-thoughts (cooperative-thoughts) break condition, the participants filled out the competitive (cooperative) version of Smeesters et al.'s scrambled-sentences task

(Smeesters et al. 2003)¹. The scrambled-sentences task consisted of 30 items. Each item consisted of five words, in a random order. Participants had to make correct grammatical sentences with four out of the five words. For example, the item: “him, saw, animal, she, often” would result in “she saw him often”. In fifty percent of the items, there were priming words. In the competitive-thoughts condition, these words were associated with competition, such as ‘winning’, ‘striving’ and ‘dominant’. In the cooperative-thoughts condition, these words were associated with cooperation, such as ‘cooperative’, ‘helpful’ and ‘constructive’.

Participants in the break conditions were left alone for five minutes to do the scrambled-sentences task, but were not allowed to communicate with each other. None of the participants finished the task before the five minutes ran out, so each participant engaged in the task for the full five minutes. In the no-break condition, the participants did not experience a break and negotiated without interruption. The negotiation was stopped when the 15 minutes were over or when the negotiators reached agreement on all six issues. Participants then filled out a questionnaire, were debriefed, paid and thanked for their participation.

Dependent Variables

To assess the adequacy of the priming manipulation, we assessed cooperative orientation with three items ($\alpha = .84$ before the negotiation, and $\alpha = .84$ after the negotiation). An example of an item was “I think it is very important to take other’s interests into account” (1 = ‘*totally disagree*’, 7 = ‘*totally agree*’).

The joint outcomes were calculated as in Study 1. Whereas all dyads settled at least four out of the six issues, in 4 cases dyads settled on only 4 or 5 issues (3 in

competitive-thoughts condition and 1 in the cooperative-thoughts condition). Their missing data were treated as in Experiment 1, and exploratory analyses revealed that alternative substitution procedures did not lead to different conclusions.

Results and Discussion

As in Experiment 1, questionnaire data were averaged within dyads to account for interdependence of observation. Data were analyzed using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with break condition (competitive vs. cooperative vs. no break) as between-dyad factor.

Cooperative orientation was analyzed with a 3 (break condition: competitive vs. cooperative vs. control) by 2 (time: before vs. after the negotiation) repeated measures ANOVA with time as a within-dyad factor. There was a marginal effect of break, $F(2, 32) = 2.86, p < .072$, qualified by an interaction of break and time, $F(2, 32) = 3.48, p < .05$. Simple main effects showed that there was a significant decrease in cooperative orientation in the competitive-thoughts condition ($M_{before} = 4.18, SD = .54$ vs. $M_{after} = 3.61, SD = .70$), $F(1, 32) = 6.85, p < .05$. There was no difference between cooperative orientation before and after the negotiation in the cooperative-thoughts condition, $F(1, 32) = .35, ns.$, or in the control condition, $F(1, 32) = .35, ns.$

Joint outcomes. As in Experiment 1, there was no effect of experimental condition on the number of agreements reached, $\chi^2(2, N = 38) = 2.47, ns.$ As expected, however, joint outcome varied as a function of break condition, $F(2, 35) = 3.18, p = .05$ (see Figure 2). Planned contrasts showed that dyads in the competitive-thoughts break reached lower joint outcomes ($M = 18,783, SD = 1503$) than dyads in the cooperative-thoughts condition ($M = 19,900, SD = 1223$), $t(35) = 2.17, p < .05$, and also lower than dyads in

the no-break condition ($M = 19,885$, $SD = 1049$), $t(35) = 2.22$, $p < .05$. Dyads in the cooperative-thoughts condition and the no-break condition did not differ significantly, $t(35) = 0.29$, *ns*. These results support the Rumination Hypothesis, and the Balcony Hypothesis thus needs to be rejected.

Conclusions and General Discussion

Although behavioral scientists assumed that taking a break during negotiation might be beneficial and help disputants to create mutually beneficial agreements, the two experiments presented here suggest otherwise. Experiment 1 showed that taking a break and engaging in task-related reflection impeded joint outcomes from the negotiation, compared to a no-break condition or a break condition in which participants could not reflect on the negotiation process. Experiment 2 showed that cooperative thinking during the break has no beneficial effects (compared to a no-break control), and that competitive thinking during the break undermined the development of mutually beneficial, integrative agreements. In short, the present study shows that taking a break doesn't help, and is likely to hurt constructive negotiation.

That cooperative thinking during a break did not improve constructive negotiation may seem at odds with other findings showing that negotiators with a pro-social motive do better collectively when they are also motivated to engage in deep and systematic information processing (De Dreu & Carnevale, 2003; De Dreu et al., 2006). Perhaps the task used in the current study was relatively easy to do, so that a little bit of cooperation already led to high joint outcomes. This explanation is consistent with the findings in Experiment 1; a distraction break in which participants were cognitively busy produced equally high joint outcomes as the no-break control condition. Alternatively, it may be

that the scrambled-sentence task used in the break conditions of Experiment 2 produced a cooperative vs. competitive mindset, but not the high levels of subsequent systematic information processing needed for pro-social orientation to produce its truly beneficial effects. Future research could test these possibilities by using a more difficult task and to manipulate epistemic motivation independently of the mindset activated during the break.

A third possible explanation for the set of results reported here is that it is not so much whether cooperative thoughts are activated, but rather that competitive thoughts are prevented or suppressed. Both the distraction condition in Experiment 1 and the cooperative-thoughts condition in Experiment 2 may have prevented participants from engaging in competitive strategizing, something they spontaneously in the reflect condition of Experiment 1, and were induced to do in the competitive-thoughts condition of Experiment 2. This third possibility resonates with work by Bushman et al. (2005), and others, who showed that rumination increases angry feelings and hostility, while distraction from these negative thoughts decreases those angry feelings and hostility.

Although our results cast doubt on the balcony hypothesis, it should be emphasized that our results do not necessarily generalize to the intense, high-stake negotiations that Ury (1991) has in mind when offering his advice to go to the balcony. Indeed, it may very well be that when emotions run high, and reason flies out of the window, going to the balcony may be more helpful than continuing the negotiation. In a similar vein, Zartman (1991) has suggested that conflicts may escalate up to a “point of ripeness” where parties start to realize that negotiating may be in their own and mutual interests more than continued hostility. Thus, the intervention by President Carter, during

the Camp David talks, to take a break and visit Gettysburg, may indeed have been pivotal in turning hostility into constructive negotiation.

Future research may continue to investigate the boundary conditions under which taking a break is helpful, or instead fueling hostility. One way to study this issue would be to ask participants in a difficult negotiation to take a five-minute break when they feel the negotiation is in an impasse or is at the verge of escalating. The present findings show, at the very least, that other processes than constructive thinking may emerge during temporary breaks, and that the social and cognitive activities during such temporary breaks are vital in turning escalated conflict into constructive negotiation, or vice versa, turning moderately competitive interactions into exceedingly hostile exchanges.

Our results have rather straightforward implications for third party interventions, where mediators assisting the negotiators may call for a break and ask parties to reflect, in private, on the process and the ways they wish to continue. Without explicit instructions driving parties away from competitive strategizing, negotiators are likely to use their private time to do exactly that -- design new strategies that foster personal gain and relative advantage, rather than fairness and collective gain. Rather than returning to the bargaining table with a more constructive and open mind, negotiators return after a break well armed to pursue, with refreshed energy, a competitive strategy.

Taken together, and unlike popular advice, this research showed that the quality of negotiated agreement suffers when parties take a break to reflect upon the negotiation. The competitive thoughts during a break reduce concern for the other party's interests, tend to increase the use of competitive strategies, and result in less integrative negotiated

agreement. These negative effects can be overcome by turning one's mind to other issues than the negotiation, or by actively engaging in cooperative thinking.

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Appendix

Profit schedules for a new car negotiation task.

Seller

Warranty		Delivery date		Color	
6 months	(1600)	5 weeks	(4000)	Yellow	(1200)
12 months	(1200)	4 weeks	(3000)	Green	(900)
18 months	(800)	3 weeks	(2000)	Blue	(600)
24 months	(400)	2 weeks	(1000)	Red	(300)
30 months	(0)	1 week	(0)	Black	(0)
Price		Extras		Radio	
€12.000	(6000)	0	(3200)	None	(800)
€11.500	(4500)	1	(2400)	Radio	(600)
€11.000	(3000)	2	(1600)	Radio/tape	(400)
€10.500	(1500)	3	(800)	Radio/CD	(200)
€10.000	(0)	4	(0)	Radio/CD/ Navigation system	(0)

Buyer

Warranty		Delivery date		Color	
6 months	(0)	5 weeks	(0)	Black	(0)
12 months	(1000)	4 weeks	(400)	Red	(300)
18 months	(2000)	3 weeks	(800)	Blue	(600)
24 months	(3000)	2 weeks	(1200)	Green	(900)
30 months	(4000)	1 week	(1600)	Yellow	(1200)
Price		Extras		Radio	
€12.000	(0)	0	(0)	None	(0)
€11.500	(1500)	1	(200)	Radio	(800)
€11.000	(3000)	2	(400)	Radio/tape	(1600)
€10.500	(4500)	3	(600)	Radio/CD	(2400)
€10.000	(6000)	4	800)	Radio/CD/ Navigation system	(3200)

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Footnotes

¹ The original scrambled-sentences tasks by Smeesters et al (2003) were used.

These tasks were originally in Dutch, so no translation was needed.

Table 1

Correlations between Joint Outcomes and Main Dependent Variables in Study 1 (N = 44 dyads, Reflect condition and Distraction Condition)

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Reflection (MC)	--					
2. Number of agreements	-.12					
3. Joint outcomes	-.28 ⁺	.44**				
4. Strategy change	.17	-.18	-.13			
5. Competitive change	.21	-.16	.06	.47**		
6. Cooperative change	.32*	.14	-.06	.32*	.15	
7. Task-related reflection	.56**	.00	-.34*	.32*	.06	.24

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, ⁺ $p < .10$

Figure Caption

Figure 1. The effect of break on joint outcomes is mediated by task-related reflection

(Study 1).

Figure 2. Joint outcomes as a function of break (Study 2).



