

# Toward a Theory of Agenda Setting in Negotiations

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To date, negotiation research in two-party situations has largely focused on single issues or on multiple issues bargained simultaneously. In this paper, we develop, from a behavioral perspective, a conceptual framework and an associated set of propositions concerning the influence and interaction of a number of factors on agenda setting. We examine the consequences of negotiating multiple issues sequentially as opposed to discussing them simultaneously. Specifically, we posit (a) conditions under which sequential versus simultaneous negotiations are advantageous, (b) conditions that promote and inhibit integrative agreements between parties involved in sequential negotiations, and (c) conditions that foster greater utility and timeliness to the negotiating parties. In addition, directions for future research and methodological guidelines for testing the propositions are discussed.

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**I**nterest in the most fundamental of marketing processes, face-to-face buyer-seller negotiations, is burgeoning among consumer researchers (Corfman and Lehmann 1987; Dwyer 1984; Graham et al. 1988; Schurr and Ozanne 1985). A review of the relevant bargaining literature reveals that most research efforts in negotiation have been directed toward the study of sin-

gle-issue, two-party situations (Ochs and Roth 1989; Trifon and Landau 1974; Yukl 1974).<sup>1</sup> While a few researchers have also addressed other problems, such as coalition formation in the context of single-issue, multiple-party situations (Kravitz 1981; Murnighan and Roth 1980), negotiations involving multiple issues have received far less attention. While single-issue bargaining, perhaps in the form of bundled issues, deserves study, negotiations over multiple issues are no less common in buyer-seller contexts and equally warrant investigation.

As Gupta (1989) observes, researchers in the diverse buying contexts of industrial buying behavior, family decision making, and marketing channels (e.g., Clopton 1984; Corfman and Lehmann 1987; and Dwyer and Walker 1981; respectively), have recognized the need to explicitly understand the nature of these negotiations, which typically involve multiple issues. In this regard, Jeuland and Shugan (1983), and McAlister, Bazerman, and Fader (1986) note that even a firm's profitability can be significantly affected by the quality of individual buyer-seller negotiations since these negotiations often take place over virtually every element of the marketing mix. Similarly, in consumer purchasing contexts such as buying a house, numerous issues crop up, such as price, financing, repainting, and availability.

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# Toward a Theory of Agenda Setting in Negotiations

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issue (or set of issues) could be used as input for the resolution of the second.

In contrast, agendas are a means of structuring discussions between individuals and groups, and their formation focuses on the ordering of issues and the range of issues to be discussed (Pruitt 1981). While Dobler, Lamar, and Burt (1984, p. 223) note that "most authorities feel that the issues should be discussed in the order of their probable ease of solution," this approach is advanced as a means of fostering the overall negotiation process rather than obtaining an advantage for either side. In our exposition, we do not make such an assumption but attempt to provide a cogent framework for agenda setting that examines (a) the choice of sequential versus simultaneous negotiations and (b) the ordering of issues within sequential negotiations.

The negotiation process can be represented as a series of interrelated and interdependent steps (Fig. 1). A pre-negotiation process establishes the domain of issues over which the negotiations will take place. A decision must then be made to negotiate the issues simultaneously or sequentially. Negotiators' power, issue importance, and time constraints are posited to be important determinants of whether sequential or simultaneous negotiations are the most advantageous course of action to pursue in terms of the potential utilities to the parties. If a sequential agenda strategy is undertaken, time constraints, issue importance, and expectation of future interaction provide further guidance in establishing the most advantageous ordering of the issues. In this regard, the strategic agenda considerations—power, time constraint, issue importance, and expectation of future interaction—are likely to provide much of the basis for determining whether the separate stages of the sequential negotiations, and the overall negotiations, will be more integrative or distributive.

At the end of the first stage of sequential negotiations, the parties' comparisons of the results to their expectations leads to levels of disconfirmation and perceptions of equity with regard to their negotiation counterparts. Disconfirmation leads to a modification of aspiration levels for the second stage of negotiations. Concurrently, perceived inequity modifies each party's evaluation of the other party. These reevaluations affect negotiators' bargaining styles, which, in turn, influence the likely outcomes of the second stage. Examination of the strategic agenda considerations establishes the likely outcomes of the negotiation stages and determines the appropriate sequence of issues that form the basis of the negotiations. However, the actual outcomes from the first stage of negotiations will promote or inhibit the expected second-stage outcomes and, perforce, the overall outcomes.

It is important to note that the steps in the agenda-setting process may not be established unilaterally. The choice of agenda formats and the parameters placed on the discussion of issues are usually the result of pre-

negotiation between the negotiating parties (Ilich 1973). However, as Neslin and Greenhalgh (1983, p. 370) state, power provides "the ability of one party to take the initiative in a given situation and thus shape the issues or agenda in a way that benefits that party." Therefore, the choice of a bargaining strategy—sequential versus simultaneous—may in itself be the result of others' influence (power).

Finally, although the proposed framework discusses the interactions and outcomes of a number of factors in the negotiation processes, it makes no systematic predictions as to which of the various factors is likely to be dominant; that is, it does not specify a hierarchy of effects. Rather, it is believed that a number of the factors may be operant at any time and that the specific characteristics of the situation determine the dominance of one factor over another. In this regard, each of the propositions is presented *ceteris paribus*.

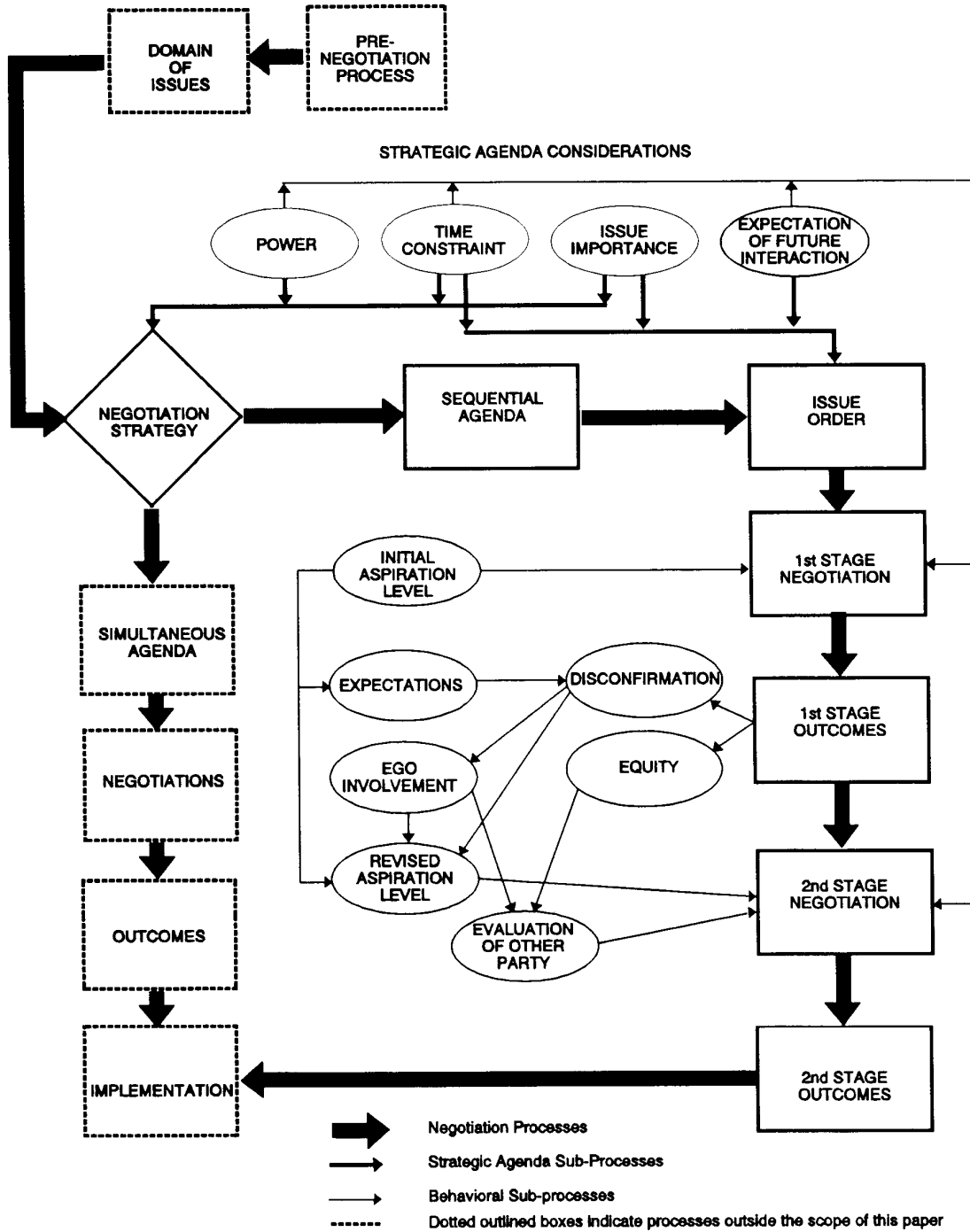
## STRATEGIC AGENDA CONSIDERATIONS

The limited studies that have compared the imposition on subjects of a sequential consideration of issues with a simultaneous consideration of issues have generally found that a simultaneous consideration of issues results in the negotiating parties' achieving more integrative agreements and thereby receiving higher joint profits (Mannix, Thompson, and Bazerman 1989; Pruitt 1981). This is not surprising, because sequential agendas restrict the ability of negotiators to make trade-offs or logroll, making integrative solutions more difficult to achieve. In this regard, Mannix et al. (1989, p. 509) comment that "sequential agendas limit the information available to decision makers about the pattern of preferences in the group . . . [and] constrain the ability of group members to make trade-offs." Thus, in establishing a theory of agenda setting, it is important not only to posit the conditions that dictate the order in which issues should be addressed, but also to posit the conditions that dictate whether negotiations should be undertaken in a sequential or simultaneous manner.

The major factors that contribute to these conditions, grouped under the aegis of strategic agenda considerations, are clearly differentiated from the various interpersonal influence "tactics" that negotiators employ in their attempts to gain a bargaining advantage. Typical of such tactics are argumentation, bluffing, and threats (Bacharach and Lawler 1981). In contrast, strategic agenda considerations are broader in scope and comprise factors that generalize across diverse negotiation settings where such specific tactics may or may not be employed.

The domain of potential strategic agenda considerations was established by a broad review and integration of the literature on social psychology, group decision making, experimental economics, organizational buy-

FIGURE 1  
THE TWO-STAGE NEGOTIATION PROCESS



ing behavior, negotiations, conflict resolution, and consumer buying behavior. Through this process, a limited number of factors emerged that spanned the range of the diverse literature and had theoretical and/or empirical links to negotiation outcomes. The factors were selected on the basis of (1) the frequency of their occurrence in the literature, (2) our judgment as to which of the potential factors appeared to be most salient in their impact on agenda structures and the related sequential outcomes, and (3) our judgment concerning the generalizability of each potential factor to the extensive range of negotiation contexts. In addition, it should be noted that the domain is also found to be largely summarized by a few "foundation" sources within the negotiation literature (e.g., Raiffa 1982; Rubin and Brown 1975). Thus, strategic agenda considerations encompass a number of diverse factors that are both important in determining negotiated outcomes and applicable to a broad range of bargaining contexts. Each of these factors is explored in depth below.

### Power

Power has been conceptualized in a number of ways, but perhaps the most fundamental and commonly accepted is Emerson's (1962, p. 33) characterization that "the power of A over B is equal to and based upon the dependence of B upon A." In agreement with Emerson's conceptualization, Thibaut and Kelley (1959) posit that power is related to the "comparison level for alternatives" (CL) available to a party, and Chamberlain (1951, p. 126) argues that "bargaining power must always be expressed relative to another's bargaining power." In this regard, Bonoma (1979) has developed a typology of buyer-seller relationships founded on the relative power of the parties. In the context of our framework, power is examined on a relative basis between negotiation parties. Thus, power is defined in a manner similar to that of Corfman and Lehmann (1987) in describing group decision making as the ability of one party to change the other party's behavior in an intended direction.

Using a laboratory setting, Dwyer (1984) and Dwyer and Walker (1981) have shown that bargainers in positions of greater relative power earn more than those in weaker positions. Mannix et al. (1989) have provided a rationale for this outcome in unequal power situations. They suggest that negotiators "focus on the norms of distribution rather than on ways in which the joint outcomes might be increased" (p. 510). Indeed, unequal power fosters what Bazerman (1983, pp. 215-216) has called "the mythical fixed-pie of negotiations," in which parties assume that negotiations are a zero-sum game in which "their interests directly conflict with the other party's interests." When combined with a sequential issue agenda, an unequal power balance should make integrative agreements even less likely. In unequal

power situations, the weaker party strives to make trade-offs to minimize its overall disadvantageous position. Sequential agenda negotiations, however, limit the range of opportunities the weaker party has to gain more advantageous outcomes. In this circumstance, the more powerful party dominates each stage of the negotiations, and few, if any, trade-offs are made. Recent empirical evidence from Gupta (1989) seems to support the viewpoint that the overall balance of power tends to be maintained in multiple-issue bargaining. Thus, these conditions lead to the following propositions:

**PROPOSITION 1.** Unequal power between negotiators and the use of a sequential agenda will tend to result in less integrative overall agreements than when a simultaneous agenda is used.

**PROPOSITION 2.** Unequal power between negotiators and the use of a sequential agenda will tend to result in a more unequal distribution of resources than when a simultaneous agenda is used.

**COROLLARY 2a.** In asymmetrical power relationships, the negotiator with greater power will tend to achieve higher utility by negotiating in a sequential manner than by negotiating in a simultaneous manner.

**COROLLARY 2b.** In asymmetrical power relationships, the negotiator with less power will tend to achieve higher utility by negotiating in a simultaneous manner than by negotiating in a sequential manner.

### Issue Importance

The term "issue importance" denotes the negotiation parties' perceived utility of the negotiation issues (or sets of issues). These perceptions may be similar, indicating situations in which both the parties perceive one of the issues to be more important than the other, or dissimilar, indicating situations in which there is disagreement by the parties over which of the issues is more important. However, in the interests of simplicity, the terms "issue importance," "more important," and "less important," when used without further qualification, denote situations in which there is agreement between the parties on which of the two issues is more important, that is, situations in which there are similar priorities.

*Similar Priorities.* Anecdotal evidence (Cohen 1980; Nieremberg 1968) suggests a bargaining strategy in which a less important issue is discussed first in order to get the other party committed to the deal. Once a certain amount of investment in time and money is made, the sunk-cost fallacy affects the negotiators. That is, people often feel obliged to pursue a course of action to its logical conclusion even though the potential re-

wards are not greater than their associated costs (Bazerman 1983). Supporting anecdotal evidence is also provided by Graham and Sano (1984) and Raiffa (1982). If this evidence is taken in conjunction with the view that issues should be discussed in their order of probable ease of solution in order to promote the negotiation process (Dobler et al. 1984), it can be posited that

**PROPOSITION 3.** Negotiating over the less important issue (or set of issues) first, followed by the more important issue (or set of issues), creates a greater likelihood that an agreement will be reached than negotiating the important-unimportant sequence of issues.

Negotiations themselves may be viewed as a learning process in which, through the process of communication, the parties involved gain an understanding of their relative priorities and aspirations and how they may work to obtain more integrative agreements. Accordingly, Pruitt and Drews (1969) found that, as time elapsed in bargaining sessions, softer bargaining approaches were initiated, resulting in lower levels of demand and less bluffing. Similarly, Walker (1971) found that, as bargainers gained experience in negotiating with their opposing parties, they submitted more reasonable bids, tended to yield less profit, required less communication, and in general became more "efficient" in the negotiation process itself. Less competitive positions also increase the likelihood of what Pruitt (1981) terms "coordinative behavior," in which negotiators adopt a problem-solving orientation. As Stephenson (1981, p. 173) notes, "Over time, by cooperation, (subjects) achieve more than by pursuing jointly competitive and exploitive strategies." Therefore, negotiation in the second stage should be marked by more integrative outcomes than negotiation in the first stage. Coupled with issue importance, this strongly suggests that

**PROPOSITION 4.** Negotiating over the less important issue (or set of issues) first, followed by the more important issue (or set of issues), will lead to more integrative overall outcomes than negotiating over the important-unimportant sequence of issues.

*Dissimilar Priorities.* Pruitt (1981, p. 153) has noted that for trade-offs to be utilized to maximum advantage "the parties must have differing priorities across the issues at hand." When the two parties have the same priorities, they will not be able to logroll and are deprived of the heuristic trial and error necessary to obtain greater integrative agreement. In this regard, Mumpower (1991), using simulations, demonstrated that the maximum utilities obtained for equally valued settlements were larger for situations in which different issues were more important to each negotiator than for situations in which all issues had the same importance. Moreover, he noted that the same issues were more important to each of the negotiators. When differing

priorities are present under sequential agenda negotiations, it follows that one party's highest-priority issue will be negotiated first, followed by the other party's highest-priority issue. Thus, even when the basic condition that fosters a highly integrative negotiation climate, that is, different issue priorities, is present, the use of sequential agenda negotiations is largely nullified by limiting the opportunities for trade-offs. This implies that

**PROPOSITION 5.** When negotiators have differing priorities across the issues at hand, each will do better in terms of total utility when the issues are negotiated simultaneously than when they are negotiated sequentially.

### Time Constraint

External constraints placed on the negotiation process may also play a role in determining the influence of the order in which issues are negotiated. Perhaps the most frequent and important of these constraints is the limited time available to complete many negotiations (Carnevale and Lawler 1986). Typical conditions that generate such situations are when products are perishable, negotiations are in progress with other parties, or contracts are due to expire. Walton and McKersie (1965) posit that time constraints leave less time for trade-offs and also lead to a greater propensity on the part of negotiators to yield unilaterally on issues. These conditions foster less integrative agreements.

In sequential agenda negotiations, time constraints are likely to be more pronounced for the second issue (or set of issues) as negotiators engage in posturing tactics during the initial stage of the negotiations, which diminish the proportionate time available for the second stage; moreover, the psychological impact of the time constraint is more immediate. In agreement with this view, Stevens (1963) noted that, in the early stages of collective bargaining sessions, when little time pressure is present, concessions are usually viewed as a sign of weakness and promote a tough bargaining position in return. However, in the late stages of bargaining, when time pressure becomes important, a concession by one party frequently elicits concessions on the part of the other party.

Time constraint situations may occur in the purchase of major consumer appliances or products. Since many salespeople work on commission, a bargaining session with a customer that ends in no sale costs the salesperson not only the commission but a considerable amount of his or her limited time. Therefore, after a lengthy negotiation session to sell the customer a product at an acceptable price, the salesperson may be more amenable to accommodating the customer on issues such as delivery fee or price of the extended warranty coverage. On the other hand, if the customer is under time constraint, say, shopping on a lunch hour, the salesperson

may be able to increase his or her revenue from these secondary issues since the customer is faced with the alternative of incurring the cost of returning a second time to conclude the purchase.

Empirical support for the influence of time pressure is also provided by Pruitt and Drews (1969), who demonstrated in a laboratory experiment that increased time pressure produced lower aspiration levels and less bluffing. Accordingly, negotiations conducted during the second stage are more likely to be characterized by compromise and a search for an acceptable distributive agreement than by a search for a solution that maximizes joint utility. Therefore, time constraints, taken in concert with the previous discussion of issue importance, suggest that

**PROPOSITION 6.** Under a time constraint, negotiating over the less important issue (or set of issues) first, followed by the more important issue (or set of issues), promotes less integrative overall agreements than negotiating over the important-unimportant sequence of issues.

**COROLLARY 6a.** Under a time constraint, negotiators are likely to obtain more integrative agreements over the first issue (or set of issues) than over the second issue (or set of issues).

**COROLLARY 6b.** Under a time constraint, negotiators are likely to obtain more equally distributed agreements over the second issue (or set of issues) than over the first issue (or set of issues).

However, when differing priorities are combined with an asymmetric time constraint between the negotiating parties, the selection of a negotiation strategy may significantly affect the utility that each party finally receives. Under these conditions, the party with a less pressing time constraint may desire to have its issue of less importance negotiated first and to devote as much time as possible to achieving the highest utility. In the second session, during which the other party's issue of less importance is negotiated, the time pressure should force that party to make larger concessions in order to reach the agreement within the required time limitations. Similarly, the party with the more pressing time constraint should seek to have its issue of importance discussed first in order to use the available time to maximum advantage. Alternatively, the party with the greater time constraint should seek to conduct simultaneous negotiations in which the available time may be used to make trade-offs and achieve the most integrative outcome available. Under these conditions it follows that

**COROLLARY 6c.** Negotiators with a less (more) pressing time constraint and different priorities than the opposite party will obtain greater utility if they negotiate their less (more) important issue

first than if they negotiate their more (less) important issue first.

**COROLLARY 6d.** Negotiators with a more pressing time constraint and different priorities than the opposite party will obtain greater utility negotiating in a simultaneous manner than in a sequential manner.

Note, however, that, under the same conditions, but with the expectation of future interactions present, a negotiator with the lesser time constraint would be inhibited from creating a competitive environment that would negatively influence later relations. Consequently, the scope of the influence of the expectations of future interactions on sequential agenda negotiations is discussed below.

### Expectation of Future Interaction

As has been noted before, with few exceptions, bargaining research has restricted itself to examining ephemeral relationships. Essentially, these bargaining encounters can be likened to the negotiations occurring in a used-car dealer's lot without the promise of an ongoing relationship. In other words, it is a once-only transaction with a lack of expectation of future interaction. A prominent exception to this perspective in the bargaining literature is the study by Roering, Slusher, and Schooler (1975). They note that parties in a "once-only transaction may stand in a psychologically different relation to one another than do parties in an enduring association. The difference in these psychological orientations is encompassed by the concept of commitment to future interaction. Future interaction may involve either bargaining or non-bargaining situations with either the same or a different person" (p. 386). Another important exception is a study by Ben-Yoav and Pruitt (1984) that investigates expectations of future interaction. On the basis of the works of Reis and Gruen (1976) and Shapiro (1975), they note that individuals anticipating cooperative future interaction with an opposing party tend to act in a more accommodating fashion.

In a multiple-issue negotiation context that involves an ongoing relationship, two stages of expectation of future interaction exist. The bargaining encounter over the second set of issues at the conclusion of the first can be construed as the first-stage commitment to future interaction. The second stage begins after agreement is reached on all of the issues under consideration. In the vast majority of buyer-seller contexts, this second stage of expectations of future interaction marks a period when the two parties find themselves working toward a common goal (e.g., implementing the agreement) and involved in a more or less cooperative relationship. However, expectation of future interaction spans the entire gamut of conceivable interchanges, which also

includes the knowledge that a new series of negotiations will take place in the future.<sup>4</sup>

The commitment to future bargaining, the first stage of expectations of future interaction, has been described by Roering et al. (1975) as involving two competing pressures: first, the need to establish a strong bargaining image to discourage future exploitation by the opponent, and, second, the risk of social disapproval and the consequent retaliation for the violation of "fairness" norms. However, when future interaction is expected to be cooperative, they suggest that there are no competing pressures, and, therefore, there is no need to project a strong bargaining image. In keeping with this view, they found parties committed to future bargaining, as opposed to those committed to future nonbargaining encounters, made more extreme initial bids (i.e., had higher aspiration levels) and achieved less equally distributed bargaining outcomes (i.e., were less accommodative). This suggests that negotiators are likely to have higher aspirations over the first set of issues and be less accommodative than they are over the second set of issues. In these circumstances,

**PROPOSITION 7.** Negotiators committed to interaction after the conclusion of the negotiations are likely to obtain more integrative agreement over the first set of issues than over the second set of issues.

During the second stage of negotiations, the parties' predisposition to end their negotiations on a positive note and enter into the implementation phase of their relationship in a trusting environment promotes concessions on the part of the negotiators. Such actions have been found by Corfman and Lehmann (1987) in studying group decision making. They note that, when spouses have different but equally intense preferences, "the couple chooses the alternative preferred by the spouse who has had his/her way less often in the past" (p. 11). Choices are made in the interest of maintaining the long-term harmony of a relationship at the expense of potentially greater overall utility in the short-term.

**PROPOSITION 8.** Negotiators committed to interaction after the conclusion of the negotiations are likely to obtain a more equally distributed agreement over the second issue (or set of issues) than over the first issue (or set of issues).

<sup>4</sup>A reviewer has indicated the distinct differences that one-time vs. repeat purchase situations are likely to have on the expectations of future interactions. This is worthy of detailed investigation, especially since recent empirical evidence suggests that transitory bargaining may be more common than previously conjectured (Balakrishnan 1988). Nevertheless, expectations of future interactions should not be considered a dichotomous situation. Rather, the myriad of possible interactions dictates that expectations of future interactions is a continuum that ranges from nil to extensive.

In negotiations involving complex issues and large financial stakes, buyers and sellers are often represented in the negotiation process by teams of specialists. Indeed, the term "team selling" (Shapiro 1979) was coined to designate the group of specialists involved in making sales (often concluding in extensive negotiations) with their counterparts within a firm's buying center. Thus, it is sometimes the case that more than one person negotiates the entire package of issues. For instance, there may be a product manager who negotiates the price and an operations manager who negotiates the delivery date. Similarly, when consumers are engaged in a major purchase, they may bargain with a salesperson to establish a price and then deal with a finance manager to set the financing terms. In this context, Roering et al. (1975) found that subjects committed to future interaction with the same person, as opposed to a different person, had significantly lower minimum acceptable profits (i.e., aspiration level) and achieved more equally distributed bargaining outcomes. Essentially, when there is expectation of future interaction with one person, the norms of "fairness" are more salient than in the case of expectation of future interaction with different people. Consequently,

**PROPOSITION 9.** A negotiator committed to future interaction with the other party will achieve higher utility when negotiating with different members of the other party over the various issues than when negotiating with the same person of the other party.

Thus, power, issue importance, issue priorities, time constraints, and expectations of future interactions serve to determine whether a sequential or simultaneous agenda negotiation structure should be used. These factors also help to establish the appropriate ordering of issues once the use of a sequential agenda has been selected. However, a careful consideration of the influence of the strategic agenda considerations prior to the negotiation sessions does not guarantee "successful" negotiations. In this regard, negotiators must gain an understanding of how the outcomes from the initial stage of negotiations are likely to influence the second-stage outcomes. This knowledge not only provides a basis for understanding the outcomes of the sequential agenda negotiation process, but may also provide guidance as to how a negotiation strategy might be modified after the initial negotiation session.

### THE INFLUENCE OF FIRST-STAGE OUTCOMES: A THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The factors influencing negotiation outcomes and their resultant impact on agenda setting are drawn from a number of research areas. The following discussion provides an overview of the relevant research in the areas of expectancy disconfirmation, attribution of



causality, aspiration levels, and equity theory. These paradigms were selected for several reasons: their extensive investigation in the areas of consumer behavior, buyer-seller interactions (expectancy disconfirmation), and negotiation processes (aspiration levels); social scientists' recent rekindling of interest in these theories (attribution of causality and equity theory); their salience to the sequential agenda negotiation process. Together, these paradigms provide a theoretical basis for understanding how the outcomes of the initial negotiation session are likely to affect the second stage of negotiations. In this regard, the propositions based on these theories provide focused perspectives that complement the more global propositions involving the strategic agenda considerations.

### Expectancy Disconfirmation

Expectancy disconfirmation evolved out of research conducted in social psychology and organizational behavior (Ilgen 1971). As noted by Oliver (1977, 1980), expectancy disconfirmation is the result of prior performance expectations formed by the subject and the disconfirmation of these expectations by means of subsequent performance comparisons. Performance better than the prior expectations is labeled "positive disconfirmation," while performance worse than expected is labeled "negative disconfirmation."

However, there is uncertainty concerning how expectations and outcomes combine to yield levels of disconfirmation. Initially, researchers posited that disconfirmation was a function of the absolute discrepancies between expectations and performance (e.g., Oliver 1977). That is, the sum of the attribute-specific disconfirmations yields a level of overall disconfirmation. However, Swan and Trawick (1981) suggested that the sum of the attribute-specific (inferred) disconfirmations generates an overall (perceived) disconfirmation level that incorporates the perceptual distortion inherent in individuals' judgments. Oliver and Beardon (1985) confirmed this hypothesis, while Tse and Wilton (1988) have demonstrated that subjective evaluations of the differences between performance and expectations appear to offer a better representation of disconfirmation than "subtractive" evaluations that use algebraic differences between performance and expectations.

In negotiation contexts, these findings suggest that the issues and structure of the negotiation process, as well as the individual nature of the negotiators, may influence the resulting perceived disconfirmation. However, while these fundamental issues concerning the formation of expectations are of paramount importance in empirical investigations, for the sake of simplicity in our discussion we shall refer to disconfirmation as a difference (where the precise mathematical function is undefined) between expectations and outcomes.

### Attribution of Causality

Attribution theory grew out of "a number of converging lines of inquiry in social psychology" (Jones et al. 1972, p. ix) and the seminal works of Festinger (1954) and Heider (1958). This research stream links together a number of common assumptions about how individuals make causal inferences. While this theory has seen wide usage in areas of social psychology, Folkes (1988, p. 548) observes that attribution theory has had "little impact on the field of consumer behavior." However, in the past few years, attribution theory has begun to receive increasing attention in research investigating buyer behavior (e.g., Folkes and Kotsos 1986; Oliver and DeSarbo 1988).

To date, most of the research involving buyer-seller contexts has used the taxonomy developed by Weiner et al. (1971). They have suggested that an individual's inferences of causality can be analyzed using a two-dimensional classification based on locus of control and stability. According to Weiner et al. (1971, p. 96), an outcome is a function of "ability," "effort," "task difficulty," and "luck." The characteristics of ability and effort were classified by Weiner and his colleagues as internal to the attributor, while task difficulty and luck were seen as external properties. Moreover, ability and task difficulty were defined as stable properties, while effort and luck were viewed as unstable properties. Later findings (Lau and Russell 1980; Meyer 1980) have tended to support the Weiner et al. (1971) taxonomy.

It has been noted that people tend to attribute failures to external causes and successes to internal factors. In other words, according to Weary (1980, p. 348), there is "a tendency for individuals to make greater self-attributions for their own positive behaviors than for their own negative behaviors." Anderson and Jennings (1980, p. 395) state that "people often believe that failures are due to using the wrong technique." The actual nature of this attributional distortion has been the subject of some debate. Arkin, Appleman, and Burger (1980, p. 23) state that self-serving, or hedonic, bias stems "from a motive to maintain or enhance self-esteem." Others (Bradley 1978; Harvey and Weary 1981; Weary 1979, 1980) have argued that individuals engage in self-serving bias to increase self-esteem by increasing the esteem in which they are held by others. The nonmotivational explanation for self-serving bias "assumes that attributions are determined by intentions, expectations, and the perceived covariations between behavior and outcomes" (Miller and Ross 1975, p. 216). Developed independently, expectancy disconfirmation and attribution theory are nonetheless related. As discussed by Harvey and Weary (1984), expectancy disconfirmation is one of three factors that seem to instigate explicit attribution-type inquiries on the part of the attributor. Wong and Weiner (1981, p. 661) provided evidence to suggest that "frustration (failure) and expectancy dis-

confirmation (unexpected outcomes) promote attributional search." In addition, they found that "attributional search primarily is focused on the locus and control dimensions of causality" (p. 662).

From these findings we conclude that success (positive disconfirmation) is generally attributed to some function of the individual's (the attributor's) ability and effort, while failure (negative disconfirmation) is attributed to some function of task difficulty, luck, or another's ability. It can be further argued that failure results in more attribution-instigating activities. This immediately suggests that negotiators experiencing negative disconfirmation will tend to engage in more attributional activity. Further, negotiators experiencing success, that is, positive disconfirmation in a bargaining interaction, will tend to attribute it to internal factors, such as strategy or skill. Conversely, negotiators experiencing failure, that is, negative disconfirmation, will tend to attribute it to external causes, such as the opponents' power or tactics.

### Aspiration Level

Since the seminal work by Siegal and Fouraker (1960), aspiration level has been one of the major paradigms employed on a widespread basis in the bargaining literature. Unfortunately, a consequence of its use in a number of diverse research areas, ranging from social psychology (e.g., Rubin and Brown 1975) to experimental economics (e.g., Tietz 1983), is that it has been operationalized in an inconsistent manner.

In experimental economics literature, aspiration levels are seen as an internalized scale having a finite number of points with at least a weak ordering. That is, the aspiration levels are a heuristic for reducing the complexity of decision making in negotiations (Tietz 1983; Werner and Tietz 1983). Tietz (as reported in Bartos, Tietz, and McClean 1983; Werner and Tietz 1983) assumes that negotiators enter a bargaining situation with not one but five aspiration levels, placed in descending order: P (planned goal), AT (agreement seen as attainable), AC (lowest acceptable agreement), T (planned threat to break off negotiation), and L (planned break-off of negotiation).

In social psychology, works by Ben-Yoav and Pruitt (1982) and McAlister et al. (1986) have treated aspiration levels of negotiation as externally set profitability constraints. These externally imposed goals or limits are the negotiators' ultimate fallback position beyond which the person will not concede. Alternatively, this has been termed the "minimum necessary share" (Kelley, Beckman, and Fischer 1967). Chertkoff and Esser (1976, p. 470) view this as the zero profit point, "the amount that must be exceeded in order to obtain a profit," and note that other terms used to refer to it are "breakeven point," "resistance point," and "minimum disposition."

Pruitt (1981) makes a distinction between limit and level of aspiration. The level of aspiration, he notes, is the amount of benefit or goal toward which the negotiator is striving, and it is always greater than or equal to his or her limit. Walton and McKersie (1965) use the term "aspiration" to refer to both the negotiation target and resistance points. Yukl (1974) operationalizes the target point as the best settlement that one can expect to get from an opponent. His operationalization of the resistance point, however, is not consistent with (symmetric to) that of the target point. He views it as an internally specified limit, rather than the worst (lowest) settlement that one can expect to get from an opponent.

In this article the use of the term "aspiration level" is similar to that of Pruitt (1981) and Yukl (1974) and corresponds to the P level of Tietz (1983). It is defined only as the internally set scale points reflecting a negotiator's urge for achievement. This precludes the consideration of scale points at which a bargainer may engage in strategic actions such as the breaking-off of negotiations, as well as externally imposed constraints. Therefore, in the context of our discussions, aspiration levels are the levels of utility for which the negotiator is striving, while expectations are the outcome levels that the negotiator believes will most likely transpire given the circumstances of the negotiations (the AT level of Tietz [1983]). In general, expectations will always be less than or equal to aspiration levels and the two constructs will move in concert with one another. That is, higher aspiration levels foster higher expectations, while a lowering of aspiration levels causes a corresponding lowering of expectations.

On the basis of the investigations of Siegal and Fouraker (1960; Fouraker and Siegal 1963), Bartos (1974) notes that a person's wants or aspirations depend on the successes and failures in that person's past. The success or failure experienced by a negotiator is essentially positive or negative disconfirmation, that is, people doing better or worse than they expected. Success and failure are not absolutes in negotiations; rather, they are outcomes relative to one's performance expectations (i.e., expectancy disconfirmation). Thus, positive disconfirmation is viewed as the result of internal causes and reaffirms negotiators' confidence in themselves. In contrast, negative disconfirmation is attributed to outside causes and does not correspondingly diminish negotiators' perceptions of their abilities. Consequently, one would expect that

**PROPOSITION 10.** Negotiators experiencing positive disconfirmation over the first issue (or set of issues) are likely to make a larger revision in the absolute magnitude of their aspiration levels over the next issue (or set of issues) than if they had experienced negative disconfirmation.

Since there is considerable research evidence to indicate that higher aspiration levels result in larger profits for the bargainer (see Chertkoff and Conley 1967; Pruitt 1981; Rubin and Brown 1975), we may also expect that

**PROPOSITION 11.** Negotiators experiencing positive disconfirmation over the first issue (or set of issues) will achieve higher utility over the second issue (or set of issues) than if they had experienced negative disconfirmation.

In contrast, Kahan (1968) has shown that high aspiration levels have a negative aspect in that they can result in longer times to reach agreements. This may not be a drawback, however, especially as integrative agreements (Walton and McKersie 1965) are usually not obvious in bargaining encounters and require longer negotiations and highly motivated negotiators. Pruitt and Lewis (1975, 1977) suggest that a high aspiration level is one important element leading to the development of integrative solutions.

**PROPOSITION 12a.** If either negotiating party experiences positive disconfirmation over the first issue (or set of issues), negotiations over the second issue (or set of issues) are likely to be more integrative than if neither party had experienced positive disconfirmation.

**PROPOSITION 12b.** If either negotiating party experiences positive disconfirmation over the first issue (or set of issues), negotiations over the second issue (or set of issues) are likely to require more time than if neither party had experienced positive disconfirmation.

### Ego Involvement

Sherif and Sherif (1967, p. 126) posit that the degree of ego involvement that an object has with an individual corresponds to the extent to which an object has high priority in an individual's "self system." In a complementary manner, Snyder, Stephan, and Rosenfield (1976, p. 435) define egotism as those "attributional biases that serve to protect and enhance self-esteem." Therefore, in terms of negotiation issues, ego involvement may be defined as a bargainer's perception of a close association between certain issues and his or her self-esteem. The concept of ego involvement may be particularly relevant in the context of intergroup consumption decisions and interorganizational buying and selling where an individual member has championed a specific part of a plan or purchase decision. Under these circumstances, these individuals feel personally responsible for these issues when they are negotiated, and the success or failure of the negotiations with respect to these issues is perceived by them to reflect directly on their self-esteem.

Sherif and Hovland (1961) have suggested that individuals have narrower latitudes of acceptance when dealing with issues that are more ego involving. According to Cooper and Fazio (1984), dissonance is aroused when an individual feels personally responsible for a behavioral outcome and when the focus of causation is attributed to internal factors. Thus, negotiators experiencing negative disconfirmation over a relatively more ego-involving issue would experience relatively more psychological discomfort, or dissonance.

Weary (1980) and Lau and Russell (1980) have concluded that failure is frequently attributed to external causes. In this regard, and in agreement with Kelley's (1972) discounting principle, Cooper and Croyle (1984) have noted that, in situations where attitude change is not a viable possibility, unpleasant dissonance arousal (failure) would be misattributed to members of the outgroup (i.e., the other negotiating party in this case). These conditions mirror negotiation contexts where attitudinal change is usually less viable, particularly when an issue has substantial ego involvement.

Steele and Liu (1983) noted that self-affirmation is a dissonance reducer. They imply that people experiencing cognitive dissonance may diminish the ego-threatening dissonance by activities that affirm the self. Thus, negotiators who experience failure could be expected to misattribute their failure to a greater degree to the other party when negotiating over the more ego-involving issue first. The negotiator's misattribution might include accusations that the other party used unfair tactics or pressured the negotiator. Such misattribution would lead to a less favorable overall perception of the other party.

Unfavorable evaluations of an opposing negotiator have strong implications for the second stage of negotiations. Foremost of these is the decrease in trust that the evaluator places on the other party. In decision-making contexts, it has been found that, when low levels of trust are held by either party, these perceptions inhibit the exchange of information, limit problem-solving efforts, and lower goal clarification (Zand 1972). In negotiation contexts, both social psychologists (e.g., Pruitt 1981) and consumer researchers (e.g., Schurr and Ozanne 1985) have found that low levels of trust are associated with distributive behavior, while high levels of trust are associated with integrative behavior. Under these circumstances,

**PROPOSITION 13.** Negotiators negotiating over the more ego-involving issue (or set of issues) first whose expectancies are disconfirmed negatively will evaluate the other party less favorably and are likely to experience less integrative overall agreements than if they had negotiated a less ego-involving issue (or set of issues) first and had had their expectancies similarly disconfirmed.

Taylor and Fiske (1978) note that the salience of the stimuli influences the attribution of causality. In addition, "people attempt to gain credit for positive outcomes of behavior by claiming credit where credit was not due" (Cooper and Croyle 1984, p. 407). Therefore, more ego-involving issues, being more salient, would strengthen the attribution of causality. In conjunction with research (Lau and Russell 1980; Schlenker 1982; Weary 1980) suggesting that negotiators would attribute their successes to factors over which they have control, one would expect to see a greater sense of confidence manifest itself over the next issue when the negotiator has had expectancies positively disconfirmed over a more ego-involving first issue. Consequently,

**PROPOSITION 14.** Negotiators with expectancies positively disconfirmed negotiating over the more ego-involving issue (or set of issues) first will have a greater increase in their aspiration levels than if they had negotiated a less ego-involving issue (or set of issues) first and had their expectancies similarly disconfirmed.

On the basis of the earlier discussions of the impact of higher aspiration levels on negotiators' utilities in Proposition 11, that is, higher aspiration levels result in larger profits for the bargainer (see, e.g., Chertkoff and Conley 1967), we should also expect that

**PROPOSITION 15.** Negotiators with expectancies positively disconfirmed negotiating over the more ego-involving issue (or set of issues) first will achieve higher utility over the second issue (or set of issues) than if they had negotiated a less ego-involving issue (or set of issues) first and had their expectancies similarly disconfirmed.

### Equity Theory

While research into postpurchase buyer behavior has been largely dominated by the expectancy-disconfirmation paradigm, a limited number of studies have investigated the impact of fairness or equity on exchange relationships (Huppertz 1979; Huppertz, Arenson, and Evans 1978; Mowen and Grove 1983; Oliver and DeSarbo 1988; Swan and Mercer 1982; Tse and Wilton 1988). Recently, studies evaluating the perceived equity of the parties in exchange relationships have shown that disconfirmation and equity are separate dimensions of posttransaction dispositions and should be jointly considered in evaluating the outcomes of buyer-seller relationships (Oliver and Swan 1989). Equity is also likely to have the strongest implications for buyer-seller contexts in which reference outcomes and/or norms of exchange allow the negotiators to compare their outcomes with similar situations outside their specific bargaining situation (see, e.g., Gupta and Livne 1989; Puto 1987). Thus, a party that believes it has not received an eq-

uitable first-stage outcome is likely to evaluate its negotiation partner unfavorably.

Equity theory (Adams 1963) posits that a party to an exchange is satisfied in proportion to the ratio of its inputs to its outputs relative to the ratio of inputs to outputs of the other party. More specifically, a party's perceptions of equity are believed to follow an integration rule in which a party compares its outcomes to its inputs, compares the other party's outcomes to the other party's inputs, and then compares the two combinations of outcomes and inputs (Farkas and Anderson 1979). This comparison is made in accordance with a distribution rule that results in a perception of equity (Cook and Yamagishi 1983). The larger the inequity, the more negative the evaluation of the negotiation partner is likely to be. As in situations involving ego involvement discussed above, a negative evaluation of an opposing negotiator inhibits the exchange of information, limits problem-solving efforts, and generally promotes a climate favoring distributive agreements.

Furthermore, the actor-observer phenomenon (Jones and Nisbett 1972) suggests that a negotiator experiencing an inequitable outcome of a positive nature will attribute his or her gain to situational factors, while a negotiator experiencing an inequitable outcome of a negative nature will attribute the gain by the other party to that party's personal actions. Therefore, negotiators are likely to modify their evaluations of their negotiation partners in an asymmetric manner in response to positive or negative inequitable first-stage outcomes. Under these circumstances it follows that

**PROPOSITION 16.** Negotiators who perceive first-stage outcomes to be inequitable in a negative sense will evaluate the other party less favorably and obtain less integrative agreements in the second stage of negotiations than if they had perceived the first-stage outcome to be equitable or inequitable in a positive sense.

## DISCUSSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

### Summary and Discussion

The propositions presented above hold significant theoretical and behavioral implications for selecting an overall bargaining strategy, creating an agenda and responding to negotiated outcomes. For the first of these major decisions, an asymmetric power relationship offers different options for the parties. The party with greater power could choose a sequential agenda in an attempt to dominate each phase of the negotiations. The weaker party could select a simultaneous consideration of the issues in order to make the most advantageous trade-offs possible and achieve greater integrative outcomes.

When the parties have different priorities across issues and there is the likelihood that major trade-offs can be made, a simultaneous consideration of the issues offers far greater utility to negotiators than sequential agenda negotiations. Similarly, a simultaneous consideration of issues also appears to be beneficial to parties that are under greater time constraint and have different priorities. In contrast, parties under less time pressure and different priorities may opt for a sequential approach.

In sequential agenda negotiations, issue importance, time constraints, and expectations of future interactions help to shape the agenda by determining the appropriate ordering of issues from the standpoint of the negotiating parties. After the first stage of negotiations, comparison of the results to expectations leads to levels of disconfirmation. In turn, disconfirmation levels lead to modification of aspiration levels for the second stage of negotiations.

In situations of positive disconfirmation on the first issue (or set of issues) negotiated, that party's aspiration levels are raised when the second stage of negotiations begins. Positive disconfirmation is likely to lead to higher utility for that party, more integrative agreements, and a longer duration of the negotiation process. When positive disconfirmation in the first negotiation stage is coupled with a highly ego-involving issue, then aspiration levels are raised even higher when the second stage begins.

Conversely, expectations of future interaction serve as a moderating variable on first-stage positive disconfirmation and attenuate aspiration levels as individuals forgo their desires to maximize immediate gains (second-stage outcomes) in favor of more advantageous long-term relationships. Thus, when second-stage expectations of future interaction are present, negotiated outcomes over the first issue(s) are likely to be more integrative but less equally distributed than the second-stage outcomes. However, when different members of the opposite party are present at each of the negotiation stages, the effect of expectations of future interaction is likely to be less pronounced and lead to less equally distributed outcomes than if the same individuals had been present at both sessions.

The relative importance of the issues being negotiated also has considerable influence on the outcomes of a sequential consideration of issues. The unimportant-important ordering of issues appears to offer an opportunity for more equally distributed overall negotiations and the greater likelihood that the negotiations will be concluded. However, when time pressures affect the negotiation process, the reverse ordering of issues (important-unimportant) is likely to lead to more integrative agreements.

Finally, the perceived equity of the first-stage outcomes to the parties will influence second-stage negotiations. Perceptions of positive inequity are likely to have little impact on a negotiator, as he or she will at-

tribute such perceptions to outside circumstances. However, perceived negative inequity promotes an unfavorable evaluation of the other negotiating party, which promotes an environment that inhibits integrative agreements.

In summary, the structuring of sequential agenda negotiations should be viewed as a multistage process. In the first stage, the viability of simultaneous versus sequential agenda negotiations needs to be assessed on the basis of a review of the strategic agenda considerations. Given the decision to negotiate in a sequential manner, strategic agenda considerations should be further assessed to determine the most advantageous ordering of the issues. Through these steps an agenda that is most likely to promote the utility and timeliness of the overall negotiated outcomes can be determined. At the conclusion of the first stage of negotiations, an examination of the outcomes in concert with the strategic agenda considerations may modify negotiators' bargaining positions in the second stage of negotiations.

Overall, this article extends the general understanding of buyer-seller relationships in nonadministered contexts (Dwyer 1984). To this end, the propositions set forth have broad applicability to both consumer and industrial contexts, especially to situations such as the purchase of major consumer durables and bargaining within channels of distribution. On the other hand, these propositions would appear to have less applicability to joint decision making, such as husband-wife contexts, that involve "fully cooperative partners" where the bargainers are totally open to one another and no strategic posturing takes place (Raiffa 1982, p. 18). Moreover, as with any article that addresses the theoretical aspects of negotiations, our framework also possesses potential application to the general area of conflict resolution.

It is hoped that this exposition provides a better understanding of the role that each of the selected groups of factors plays in determining the likely outcomes from a chosen agenda and of the theoretical basis for their roles. New findings in the areas of social psychology and behavioral sciences evolve; they may extend and modify the interrelationships that have been presented. However, this conceptual framework must not be viewed as a substitute for the work of others in the areas of game theory, expert systems, or conflict resolution (cf. Eliashberg et al. 1986; Neslin and Greenhalgh 1983; Rangaswamy et al. 1989). Rather, this effort supplements the work of others by providing a more specifically behavioral interpretation of the agenda-setting process. It is the view of the authors that this framework can be integrated into much of the existing work in the field. Finally, this framework provides a much-needed starting point for developing a more comprehensive theory for viewing, understanding, and structuring the negotiation processes over multiple issues in buyer-seller interactions.

## Future Research Directions

The conceptual framework presented here suggests specific directions for future research. The two distinct avenues for future research relate to theoretical extensions and empirical investigations of the proposed framework. The focus of the theoretical stream should be on incorporating additional constructs into the framework. Specifically, we think that the generalizability of the model across different cross-cultural settings deserves attention. This is of special interest, given the heightened importance of international trade and the evidence of current research that negotiation styles vary across nationalities (Graham et al. 1988). By extension, it is only appropriate that specific personality traits, such as the need for cognition (Cacioppo and Petty 1982) and self-monitoring (Snyder 1974), which may have an effect on the choice of negotiation styles and consequently the outcomes, be incorporated explicitly within the framework. Finally, the generalizability of theoretical frameworks regarding two-party, two-issue negotiations should be extended to cover multiparty and multi-issue negotiations.

However, it is clear that, prior to the development of a comprehensive theory of agenda setting, additional empirical evidence is needed. This need implies that (1) systematic and rigorous testing of the propositions and suggested interactions is required, (2) determination of the general hierarchy of effects of the various strategic agenda considerations (power, issue importance, expectation of future interaction, and time constraints) must be established along with the conditions that foster the dominance of one over the other, and (3) for further theoretical extensions of the conceptual model, it is imperative that we have additional empirical research. For instance, in order to incorporate various important personality traits into the framework, it is necessary to empirically examine the generalizability of current empirical evidence on aspects such as the impact of disconfirmation on attributions and the resulting expectation revision across diverse cross-cultural settings.

A large number of constructs have been considered in this article that play an important theoretical role in the understanding of the process of agenda setting. Based on an examination of the framework advanced here, it should be readily apparent that no single research effort will be able to test all of the propositions linking the various constructs. Instead, a number of related yet distinct studies must be designed in which one or a small number of the propositions are examined.

Specifically, research approaches to test the theoretical framework may be divided into two broad groups, namely, (1) those examining the macro-level strategic agenda considerations and (2) those examining the behavioral subprocesses of the impact of first-stage outcomes. The research approaches that have been employed to investigate the effect of various buyer-seller

interactions have been described in Rubin and Brown (1975). The research paradigms, based on the Prisoner's Dilemma or the Acme-Bolt Trucking games, do not easily lend themselves to investigating the propositional inventory presented here. Of the various paradigms employed by behavioral researchers, the Bilateral Monopoly game holds the most promise because of its close resemblance to real-life bargaining encounters. Simulation games, based on the paradigm initially proposed by Kelley (1966), have been employed by Clopton (1984), Graham et al. (1988), and Pruitt and Lewis (1975). However, the negotiation games based on this research paradigm need to be modified before they can be employed for our purpose.

At a minimum, the current Bilateral Monopoly paradigm has to be expanded to permit the possibility of two sets of issues. In addition, each set should comprise at least two issues so that it is possible to attain integrative agreements over each set. In order to test the validity of the strategic agenda considerations framework, we need to manipulate power, issue importance, issue priorities, time constraints, and expectation of future interaction. Moreover, in order to examine the relative merits of sequential and simultaneous agendas, it will be necessary to manipulate the temporal order in which the two sets of issues are discussed. Therefore, at a minimum, if one considers only two levels of each factor, the research design would be relatively large. However, it is possible to study smaller subsets of the comprehensive design for two reasons. First, at this stage of theory development it is not necessary to investigate empirically, nor have we postulated, all second-order and higher interactions. Second, it is possible, because of the "environmental correlation" between some of the factors, to reduce the number of possible combinations from those in a fully crossed design.

For example, the design for testing the propositions and the associated corollaries dealing with power would require manipulating, at the least, relative power balance, issue importance (i.e., important and unimportant), and the agenda employed (i.e., simultaneous vs. sequential), keeping all other factors constant. However, thanks to the environmental correlation between agendas and issue importance, the number of possible combinations would be limited to three. These would be the two combinations of important-unimportant and unimportant-important within the sequential format where the order of discussion of the two sets of issues of differing importance matter and the third combination where all of the important and unimportant issues are discussed simultaneously. That is, in the sequential format, subjects would be asked to reach a settlement over the first set of issues before going on to discuss the second set.

On the other hand, studies aimed at testing the behavioral subprocess propositions present much greater methodological challenges. For instance, consider the

manipulation of a subject's expectancy disconfirmation. While there has been precedence for this in the consumer behavior literature, it has typically been done at an individual level (Oliver and DeSarbo 1988). The manipulation of a subject's expectancy disconfirmation in an interactive, dyadic setting presents new and interesting challenges to the researcher.

Foremost among these challenges is that any manipulation of expectancy disconfirmation must be credible to the subjects. Manipulating positive (negative) disconfirmation implies having the negotiator reach an agreement that is better (worse) than his or her expectations. Such manipulation becomes more difficult to achieve in a context wherein the negotiated outcome (performance) that results depends in part on the abilities of the subjects. One possibility is to check retrospectively the performance relative to the initial expectations and then classify the subjects as falling into the two (i.e., positive and negative) disconfirmation groups. Such a procedure, however, is clearly subject to the self-selection bias problem. Another possibility may be to employ a stooge for the negotiating partner. Based on prior instructions, the stooge would try to achieve negotiated outcomes that disconfirm the subject's expectations either positively or negatively. The problem associated with such an approach, especially if not done with the proper finesse, is that the subject may question the very credibility of the stooge rather than engaging in the intended self-attribution.

The task of empirically testing some of these propositions is clearly not an easy one. In order to fully investigate them, a researcher must gain detailed knowledge about individuals from both sides of a negotiation process prior to its commencement. However, it should be possible to examine the individual components of the framework (e.g., issue importance) in laboratory settings. In this regard, the use of computer simulations at executive seminars may offer a flexible means of testing a number of the propositions with real-life subjects. While this is, no doubt, a challenging task, it is by no means an impossible one. It is only through these empirical efforts that a better theoretical understanding of the behavioral aspects of agenda setting in negotiations can be achieved.

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