Distinguishing Best and Strategic Practices: A Framework for Managing the Dilemma between Creating and Claiming Value

Keith G. Allred

Most negotiation courses and textbooks focus a good deal of attention on the tension between competitive moves to claim value and cooperative moves to create value. However, relatively little empirically-based advice is offered about how to manage that tension effectively. Drawing broadly on negotiation research, this essay elaborates a framework of prescriptive advice for how negotiators can manage the tension effectively by distinguishing between best practices and strategic practices. Best practices are defined as those that tend to work well in all situations. Strategic practices are defined as those that tend to work well in certain situations and poorly in others. Best and strategic asserting, accommodating, integrating, and avoiding practices are elaborated.

Most courses and many books on negotiation describe a basic tension between two dimensions of negotiation performance. The first dimension, named the distributive or claiming value dimension, concerns the extent to which a party achieves an agreement that affords that party a favorable portion of the available benefits and burdens. The second dimension, typically known as the integrative or creating-value dimension, concerns the extent to which the parties craft an agreement that increases the benefits and decreases the burdens to be distributed to both.

The tension between these two dimensions of negotiation performance is that many of the moves to claim value for oneself are competitive and
assertive in nature and tend to drive out the cooperative moves that are effective at creating value. Similarly, cooperative moves to create value often expose one to exploitation in claiming-value terms (Lax and Sebenius 1986). Given how fundamental this dilemma is to the field, it is surprising how little sound prescriptive advice exists for dealing with it. Although a few conceptual frameworks for managing the dilemmas have been offered (e.g., see Mnookin, Peppet and Tulumello 2000; Rubin, Pruitt, and Kim 1994; Savage, Blair, and Sorenson 1989; and Walton and McKersie 1966), virtually no empirically tested frameworks exist.

A third dimension of negotiation performance has been receiving increasing attention. Researchers have argued that beyond crafting a good deal in claiming and creating-value terms, effective negotiators seek to maintain, and even enhance, the relationship with the other party, particularly when that relationship is ongoing, as is the case in most negotiations (e.g., Greenhalgh and Kramer 1990; Kramer and Messick 1995). For the most part, a tension similar to the dilemma between claiming and creating value exists between claiming value and maintaining the relationship, while little tension exists between creating value and maintaining the relationship.

**Best and Strategic Practices**

This essay outlines a prescriptive framework for managing negotiation dilemmas and briefly describes early empirical support for the model. The prescriptive advice is based on drawing a distinction between “best practices” and “strategic practices.” Best practices are defined as those that work well in terms of one or more dimensions of negotiation performance without diminishing one’s performance on the other dimensions. For example, listening may be a practice that helps a negotiator create value and maintain the relationship with the other party without posing much risk to that negotiator’s efforts to claim value. These are practices that pose no real dilemma. They tend to work well in most situations, regardless of what the other party does. The prescriptive advice is simply to use these practices in virtually all situations, even though some situations could be handled more effectively by listening.

Strategic practices are defined as those that tend to work well in terms of one or more dimensions of negotiation performance, but that also tend to diminish one’s performance on other dimensions. These are the practices, such as sharing information, that pose classic negotiation dilemmas. For example, full and truthful information sharing increases the chances of discovering an agreement that creates value and tends to enhance the relationship, but that information may also be exploited by the other party to gain a claiming-value advantage.

Accordingly, these practices work well in some situations and poorly in others. The key to generating prescriptive advice regarding strategic prac-