

Framing Matters

*Perspectives on Negotiation Research
and Practice in Communication*

EDITED BY WILLIAM A. DONOHUE,
RANDALL G. ROGAN, AND SANDA KAUFMAN



Introduction

Framing in Negotiation: State of the Art

William Donohue

Randall Rogan

Sanda Kaufman

The framing metaphor is very commonly used to characterize the placing of limits around a particular phenomenon, object, or event. Bowling has frames that delineate the game into a series of discrete events. Pictures have frames that provide discrete borders for viewing the object within. Glasses have frames that hold lenses on our heads. Builders must “frame in” a structure with various materials to give the building shape so they can attach walls to it resulting in its ultimate external appearance. In one of the more interesting applications of the concept that permits the creation of this document, computer operating software, like Windows, uses frames to present documents in multiple views of independent windows or sub-windows that allow us to toggle back and forth between documents. The list of how pervasively the concept of framing has infiltrated everyday life goes on and on.

What is appealing about the framing metaphor for scholars studying negotiation? Three elements come to mind. First, the attraction may lie in the notion that discrete structures like frames give shape to complex processes. The frame metaphor provides a convenient and powerful way of separating certain phenomena as being more relevant or important than others in affecting outcomes. There is an in-group and out-group of phenomena, or a key separation that is important and impactful. Frames give shape to the relevance of some phenomena over others.

A second appealing feature of the metaphor is that the phenomena within the frame are not randomly organized. In other words, they have a coherent shape and function in a particular way. A picture has a recognizable shape as does a bowling frame or glass lenses. All phenomena within the frame are interconnected in some way to create a recognizable system of information that creates some kind of force or influence on other phenomena outside the frame. This is an important point because using the frame metaphor obligates us to account for these processes and how they function collectively to main-

tain the integrity of the frame. What makes the frame sustainable over time and perhaps even strengthens it?

A third feature of the frame metaphor is the assumption that the frame plays a major role in driving outcomes, so that by not accounting for it, a substantial hole is left in understanding and predicting the phenomena of interest. Picture frames separate the picture from the rest of the wall and play a major role in focusing the eyes on the object. Bowling frames shape our strategy for winning in that game. Glass frames hold the lenses on one's face while building frames hold up the walls and form the building. They exert a major influence in understanding the whole phenomenon, giving it meaning, and driving the outcome.

If we examine these three frame features in relation to negotiation phenomena, we come away impressed by the insights created by employing this metaphor. The positive and negative framing process initiated by Kahneman and Tversky's Prospect Theory, which is discussed in detail in several chapters, serves as an excellent example. This theory argues convincingly that a very coherent set of perceptual orientations and biases forms a frame that negotiators use when approaching this context to solve a problem. The theory outlines these biases, how they function collectively, and how they influence outcomes. Research reviewed in these chapters even explores how the brain functions differently when either positive or negative frames are activated! And, of course, this research tradition has been prolific at showing how frames drive outcomes and argues convincingly for the significance and prominence of this impact over time.

Perhaps because of its potential power as a metaphor for understanding negotiation, research exploring the concept of framing in negotiation has blossomed impressively over the last three decades. Scholars from many disciplines appear very interested in understanding how negotiators create and then impose psychological and communicative limits or structures on their bargaining behavior. Evidence of the growth of interest in this framing construct is apparent from the over 162,000 references that pop up on Google Scholar when typing "Framing in Negotiation" into the search line (April 2010). Clearly, the framing effect in negotiation is important in understanding how negotiators reach or fail to reach their desired outcomes.

The value of this construct was apparent when a group of scholars met after the International Association for Conflict Management conference. At this meeting, scholars from several fields met to review and explore the range of interests in framing. After exchanging views, those present suggested that a book outlining the range of the construct and its potential for contributing to our understanding of negotiation processes would be very useful. At that

point, the three authors of this edited volume agreed to assemble a set of chapters and publish a book on framing.

Toward this end, we assembled an inspiring group of contributors, each of whom is recognized as an expert in one or more dimensions of framing theory and conflict/negotiation management. We indicated to the authors that perhaps the best way of exploring the construct of framing is to examine framing theories, provide applications of framing in analyzing or resolving conflicts, and reflect on the theories and applications. Thus, in the first section of the book we provide chapters that seek to capture the breadth of the theoretical framing construct. The second section focuses on the many ways in which the construct has been researched and applied. The reflection section (Section 3) is unique since it provides insights from three prominent negotiation scholars, Daniel Druckman, James Druckman, and Peter Carnevale to comment on the potential of this construct, and its value in understanding negotiation.

For the theory chapters in the first section, we asked authors to reflect on the following questions:

- (a) What organizational framework (theory, model, or schema) guides this chapter?
- (b) What lines of research/practice have been conducted that can be grouped within this organizational framework? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this work?
- (c) What are the implications for this research?
- (d) What are the future directions in research and practice suggested by this chapter?

For the application chapters we asked authors to explore the following questions:

- (a) What organizational framework (theory, model, or schema) guides this chapter?
- (b) What studies and case analyses support or disconfirm key theoretical arguments?
- (c) What are the future directions in research and practice suggested by this chapter?

For the two reflection chapters, we asked Daniel and James Druckman and Peter Carnevale to frame their chapters by responding to these questions:

- (a) Can practice be informed by framing theory? Why (and how) or why not—refer to the theory and case chapters whenever relevant.
- (b) What future directions of research and practice do you suggest based on the theory and application chapters and/or your perspective?

After viewing the chapters, we hope that readers will be impressed with the range of thought that this construct provokes. The contemporary history of the framing construct is quite revealing of this range. From a psychological perspective, research associated with the framing construct began to emerge in the mid-1980s as a result of the development of Kahneman and Tversky's development of Prospect Theory in 1979 and the concept of positive and negative frames. In communication, framing theory focusing on negotiation emerged in the early 1980s through work addressing the idea that communicators created language frames as they interacted. Between those perspectives other work evolved in a diverse set of disciplines that borrow from these traditions.

We hope that these chapters enlighten future research in framing by providing theoretical and applicative foundations from which to derive insights about negotiation behavior. In our view, the construct provides a powerful, yet flexible resource for conducting research.

We want to thank the contributors of this volume for their patience in pulling this project together. It has taken several years to make it happen, but we hope the end result will be viewed as justifying the effort. Our hope is that this book will provoke some very exciting research directions in the future and clearly advance our understanding of this very important construct.