

Getting Off on the Right Foot: The Effects of Initial Email Messages on Negotiation Process and Outcome

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Abstract—This paper examines the role that initial exchanges play in determining subsequent process and outcome in email-based negotiations, an increasingly popular means of conducting domestic and international negotiations. The results of the study suggest considerable symmetry between parties in terms of the quantity (words) and quality of initial messages. However, informal greetings, introductions, and proposal surfacing in these early exchanges played little role in determining the likelihood of an agreement or an integrative (win-win) outcome. In contrast, the parties' stated intentions of pursuing a mutually beneficial outcome and their exaggeration of initial offers significantly related to the likelihood of reaching an agreement. The implications of these findings for practitioners and future research are discussed.

Index Terms—Electronic mail (email), initial messages, negotiation, rapport, reciprocity.

The past 20 years have witnessed a dramatic increase in competition for goods and services around the world. As a consequence, companies have been forced to adopt more creative and economical means of developing and maintaining business relationships [1]–[3]. Not surprisingly, electronic mail (email) has emerged as one of the primary media for conducting business negotiations [4]–[7]. By one estimate, nearly ten billion electronic messages are sent daily [8].

Email has a number of advantages over other communication media, including greater flexibility because of asynchronous exchanges, easy storage and retrieval of messages, and general efficiency [9], [10]. On the other hand, email is primarily text based, lacking nonverbal cues and immediate feedback. Consequently, it is a medium of only moderate information richness, which can create unexpected challenges for its users [11]–[13]. Compared to face-to-face and telephone negotiations, email-based negotiations often involve shorter messages and less information sharing, a greater likelihood of unpleasant exchanges, less cooperation, a more distributive (win-lose) orientation, more unethical behavior (due in part to the inability of parties to read nonverbal cues),

and greater difficulty in reaching an agreement [10], [14]–[16].

The desire for efficiency and the lack of nonverbal cues of email place added importance on the early stages of the negotiation process, particularly for parties that do not know each other well [17]. It is easy for one or both parties to form an unfavorable impression based on the apparent haste induced by the process, an impression that is not easily rectified in the rush toward proposal sharing and closure [18], [19]. Subsequent messages, lacking the amiability that even a handshake can convey, could be misinterpreted as cold or aggressive.

The early stages of the negotiation process generally, and email-based negotiations, in particular, have often been overlooked by researchers and scholars. Far more attention has been given to the strategic and tactical stages of the negotiation process, including the pursuit of distributive outcomes (i.e., zero-sum, or win-lose, outcomes) or integrative outcomes (win-win outcomes, which maximize the parties' overall or joint outcomes) [20]. Yet, the initial stages of many processes (e.g., planning, problem solving, decision making, team/group development) often portend the stages and outcomes that will follow [21]–[23].

This paper reports on a study of the early stages of email-based negotiations, focusing, in particular, on the initial exchanges between parties with limited or no prior encounters. The paper examines the reciprocity found in terms of quantity (length) and quality (introductions, personal information sharing, issue and proposal surfacing) of these initial messages, and their effects on the likelihood of reaching an agreement and the integrative nature of that agreement. The implications of these findings for practitioners as well as for future research are discussed.

Manuscript received August 02, 2010; revised November 14, 2010; accepted January 14, 2011. Date of current version August 24, 2011.

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IEEE 10.1109/TPC.2011.2161804

BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

The negotiation process has been described in whole or part by a variety of scholars and practitioners. Holmes, for example, summarizing early models by Douglas, Gulliver, Putnam, and others, suggests that there are three broad phases in the negotiation process: 1) initiation (introduction, issue identification), 2) problem solving (exploring differences), and 3) resolution (final bargaining, agreement) [24]. Pruitt and Carnevale, in contrast, suggest a five-stage process that contains pre-negotiation and post-negotiation stages [25]. Pre-negotiation consists of the decision to seek negotiation and preliminary issue identification. Schuster and Copeland also have a pre-negotiation stage in their model of global business planning for sales and negotiation, which is followed by establishing effective relationships [26]. Shell's model of the negotiation process begins with preparing a strategy, followed by entry [27]. Similar to Schuster and Copeland, Shell has a stage for exchanging information in order to establish rapport. His exchanging information stage also consists of obtaining information on interests, issues, and positions, as well as signaling expectations and leverage.

While these four models all contain stages that focus on traditional bargaining tactics (e.g., exchange of offers, demands, concessions), they differ in their depiction of the early stages of negotiation. This could be due to several factors, not the least of which is the relatively recent growth in international markets and subsequent awareness of the importance of relational development in non-Western cultures [28], [29]. Schuster and Copeland's model for global sales and negotiation has a specific stage for establishing relationships.

As with many process models (problem-solving, decision-making, group development), however, the early stages are often important in determining the direction of succeeding stages. The way a problem is formulated, for example, will likely determine how it is solved [22]. Similarly, how a group or team comes together and develops collective expectations will likely affect how the group performs its task [21], [23]. The same can be argued for the negotiation process [30].

This is particularly true when negotiating with a medium like email, which limits social cues [13], [31]. In most cases, the first thing that an individual sees in an email message is the length of the message (i.e., the number of words).

With face-to-face or telephone negotiations, the recipient may not be aware of the impending duration of a counterpart's monologue, and can even take actions to curtail it through questions, interruptions, and counterpoints. This is not so easy with asynchronous email [32].

While a lengthy email message may violate interaction norms for some, the length of an email message can simply be reciprocated at the outset of a negotiation to ensure balance [17]. That is, a long message can be responded to with an equally long message, and a short message with a comparable reply. The reciprocity and balance along with timing can serve to communicate one's respect for and compatibility with the other party early in the relationship, as well as one's general satisfaction with the process [30], [33], [34].

Due to the potential for unpleasant exchanges with email due in part to the relative brevity of email messages, we might expect email-based negotiators to be especially careful in how they approach one another early in a negotiation, particularly if the parties have little or no prior history of interacting [10], [14]. Exchanges that quickly get out of balance can suggest a corresponding imbalance of power, leading one or both parties to think in terms of advantage and a distributive outcome [14], [27]. This risk has long been recognized in many forms of decision making and conflict resolution (e.g., mediation), where structured processes are typically introduced to equalize participation and, ultimately, reduce the chances of impasse or suboptimization [35].

Given these arguments and findings, the following hypotheses are suggested:

H1a. The verbal quantity (number of words) and quality (tactics, behaviors) of the initiating party will be reciprocated by the responding party in the initial messages of an email-based negotiation.

H1b. The greater the disparity in verbal quantity (number of words) between the parties in the initial messages of an email-based negotiation, the greater the likelihood that no agreement will be reached.

H1c. The greater the disparity in verbal quantity (number of words) between the parties in the initial messages of an email-based negotiation, the smaller the joint/integrative outcome (i.e., combined scores) for negotiations reaching agreement.

The likelihood of agreement and the type of agreement also can be affected by the quality of early discourse, beginning with how the parties address each other and the type of information that they exchange [36]. Some individuals are more informal than others, preferring to employ familial greetings as a precursor to sharing personal information [29], [37]. For these individuals, unexpected formality can suggest some initial discomfort or apprehension on the part of one or both parties. By developing rapport through informal exchanges and personal information sharing at the beginning of a negotiation, it is possible to create the type of relationship and trust that supports working through difficult issues to find an agreement: One or both parties wants to see the negotiation consummated, and the relationship flourish [25], [33], [38], [39].

Moore, Kurtzberg, Thompson, and Morris, in fact, found that negotiators who exchanged personal information at some point were more likely to reach agreements [40]. Similarly, Paulson and Naquin found that negotiators who spent time building rapport reported greater levels of trust, and were more confident and satisfied with the outcomes of their negotiations (although the actual outcomes were no better or worse than those of others) [41]. Taylor and Thomas, examining transcripts of hostage negotiations, found that negotiators with matching linguistic styles (e.g., social concern) were more likely to have successful outcomes than were those negotiators whose linguistic styles did not match [42].

Beyond simply reaching an agreement, the integrative quality of the accord is also likely enhanced when an atmosphere of trust can be created. Within a friendly, cooperative climate, the parties feel more comfortable exchanging information about their interests as well as their positions. This, in turn, leads to important tradeoffs that can help each party reach his or her individual objectives while also achieving the greatest joint outcome [43]–[45]. A positive, supportive atmosphere or climate often begins with early introductions and the sharing of personal information. It is easier to open up to someone you “know” than to a stranger [46].

In contrast, negotiations that get off to an incompatible, contradictory, or contentious start can deteriorate into tit-for-tat behavior, creating a conflict spiral. Once these spirals take form, the parties often lack the trust necessary to reach an agreement, let alone an integrative outcome [37],

[47]. Instead, the information shared is likely to lack validity and reliability [48].

Therefore:

H2a. Informal salutations (e.g., Dear or Hi, followed by first name of the other party) in the initial messages of an email-based negotiation will more likely lead to agreements than will formal salutations (e.g., Mr., Ms., Sir), particularly where the informality is reciprocated.

H2b. Informal salutations in the initial messages of an email-based negotiation will lead to greater joint outcomes for negotiations reaching agreement than will formal salutations (e.g., Mr., Ms., Sir), particularly where the informality is reciprocated.

H3a. Personal information sharing in the initial messages of an email-based negotiation will more likely lead to agreements than will no such sharing of information, particularly where the sharing is reciprocated.

H3b. Personal information sharing in the initial messages of an email-based negotiation will lead to greater joint outcomes for negotiations reaching agreement than will no such sharing of information, particularly where the sharing is reciprocated.

Furthermore, the way in which a negotiation is framed can affect the trust, confidence, and determination that the parties have toward reaching a mutually satisfactory agreement [49]. For example, framing situations as challenges or opportunities rather than crises or obstacles can lead to a greater flow of information [50]. And with this flow of information comes an increased likelihood of integrative rather than distributive behavior [51]–[54].

In a study of successful and unsuccessful hostage negotiations, Taylor and Thomas found that negotiators who articulated positive emotion and inclusiveness were more likely to reach successful outcomes than those who did not have such conversations [42]. Broadly interpreted, articulated inclusiveness implies a concern for mutual needs and interests.

Consequently, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4a. Positive framing (i.e., statements regarding the importance of seeking a win-win outcome) in the initial messages of an email-based

negotiation will more likely lead to agreements than will no such framing.

H4b. Positive framing (i.e., statements regarding the importance of seeking a win-win outcome) in the initial messages of an email-based negotiation will lead to greater joint outcomes for negotiations reaching agreement than will no such framing.

In contrast to these behaviors, some negotiators will seek to advance the process as quickly as possible to the later stages (i.e., issue or proposal surfacing). Offering a full proposal early in the negotiation process can suggest one or more of several motives: The process and outcome are not that important to the proposing party, who is more interested in efficiency than effectiveness; the proposing party does not see value in building a relationship (either because it is not in his or her nature, or because of no perceived long-term interests); or the proposing party is trying to gain information if not an advantage from his or her counterpart [43], [55].

None of these motives is likely to endear the responding party to the initiating party or his or her offer. As an anchor, an early proposal may begrudgingly draw one's counterpart in a preferential direction [56], [57]. While this may favor the outcome for the initiating party, it is likely to produce an inefficient joint outcome [58].

It is also possible that an immediate proposal will make the responding party suspicious and equally self-serving. Less information will be shared, and the information will be of dubious quality [35]. This is particularly likely with a medium such as email, where the lack of nonverbal cues makes it more difficult to test the veracity of the other party [41]. Thus, if the negotiation does not reach an impasse, the joint outcome will likely be inefficient.

Given this reasoning, the following are hypothesized:

H5a. Proposals offered in the initial messages of an email-based negotiation will be less likely to lead to agreements than will no such proposals.

H5b. Proposals offered in the initial messages of an email-based negotiation will lead to lesser joint outcomes for negotiations reaching agreement than will no such proposals.

While a hasty process can affect the likelihood and quality of an agreement, early proposals that contain exaggerated offers can underscore the self-serving intentions of the proposing party [59]. And the more exaggerated the offer or offers, the more suspicious the other party is likely to become.

This, in turn, can lead to reciprocating behavior or the use of tactics that are even more questionable or unethical (e.g., lying), which often results in a loss of trust and, in many cases, increased conflict [48], [60]. Ultimately, exaggeration and reciprocation will likely produce either no agreement or an agreement that serves one party at the expense of the other party [35], [61].

Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H6a. Proposals offered in the initial messages of an email-based negotiation that contain exaggerated offers will be less likely to lead to agreements than will no such exaggerated offers.

H6b. Proposals offered in the initial messages of an email-based negotiation that contain exaggerated offers will lead to fewer joint outcomes for negotiations reaching agreement than will no such exaggerated offers.

METHOD

Participants The participants in the study were 66 international graduate students from diverse countries and professional backgrounds taking two business negotiation courses. The courses were being taught in two different locations, thus limiting any daily contact that might occur between individuals representing the two different organizations in this study. Further, the students from the two classes did not know one another at the outset of negotiations. The participants ranged in age from 22 to 37 years old (mean = 25.6).

Procedure The negotiation task was a two-party, property-leasing negotiation role play [62]. The students from one class represented a telecommunications company called Logan Telecommunications, which was planning to expand its operations to another location. They were interested in leasing some commercial space for this purpose. The students from the second course represented a property-management company called RJW Properties, Inc., which had suitable properties.

Each party was given written background information, and charged with negotiating seven issues: cost per square meter, duration of lease, advanced payment, cost of utilities, renovations, furnishings, and parking space. Depending upon the outcome negotiated for a particular issue, the individual earned a predetermined number of points (see Table I). The scoring tables were constructed to

allow for distributive (win-lose) and joint/integrative (win-win) outcomes. For example, cost per square meter was a distributive issue, of equal value to both parties and constructed as a zero-sum outcome, whereas renovation of space, length of lease, parking available, and advanced payment were valued considerably more by one party than the other party and, therefore, were candidates for tradeoff in order to maximize joint outcomes. Simulations of this type, involving multiple issues with associated point values, have been used effectively in a number of prior studies [51], [54].

The negotiations took place over a two-week period and entirely by email. This time period was deemed more than sufficient, given prior experience with this simulation and the medium. Although there was a “buyer” and “seller” in this simulation, both parties were instructed to initiate the negotiation (i.e., the sellers were not to wait to be contacted by the buyers, or vice-versa). Negotiating dyads were assigned randomly, and remained the same throughout the study. Participants were instructed to negotiate individually. On the final day of the negotiation, transcripts were collected from the participants. (Since the courses involved prior analyses of role plays/simulations, this procedure of sharing transcripts with instructors was not unusual or unexpected.)

Independent and Dependent Measures

Negotiator tactics and behaviors were determined for the initial exchange of email messages by the two parties. In some cases, the initiating party sent more than one email message before receiving a response, so these messages were combined. For purposes of this study, therefore, the “initial exchanges” of an email-based negotiation were defined as all messages through the first response or reply. These messages represented about 17% of the total number of messages exchanged on average (including negotiations that failed to reach agreements).

To test Hypothesis 1, the number of words sent and the number of each tactic/behavior employed were counted for each participant, with a disparity in verbal quantity as simply the difference in words employed by the initiator and respondent. Tactics and behaviors were categorized using a variation of the coding scheme suggested by Olekalns, et al., extended to include introductory and relationship-building behaviors [51]. These categories included informal (e.g., Dear, Hi followed by first name) and formal (Mr., Ms., Sir) introductions as well as personal information (e.g., age, gender, background) (Hypotheses 2 and 3).

Sharing of informal salutations (Hypothesis 2) and personal information (Hypothesis 3) were coded 0, 1, or 2 to indicate the number of parties employing the respective behavior, with a coding of 2 signifying reciprocated behavior. Positive framing was indicated by the presence of a statement asserting the importance of seeking a win-win outcome (Hypothesis 4). For Hypothesis 5, both full and partial proposals were measured, and the proposal had to be contained in a single message. A full proposal consisted of numeric offers or demands for each of the seven issues, while a partial proposal consisted of numeric offers for fewer than all seven issues. An exaggerated offer (Hypothesis 6) was deemed to have occurred when the value proposed for an issue went beyond the range specified in the scoring table (see Table I). Categorizations of independent variables were determined by two independent coders, using an estimate-discuss-estimate approach to resolve differences [22]. Ninety-four percent of the coders' initial assessments were in agreement, and the inter-rater reliability for the coders was found to be $Kappa = 0.76 (p < 0.001)$, which is generally considered acceptable [63].

A negotiator's outcome was measured by totaling the point values for each of the seven issues negotiated (Table I). The joint outcome of a negotiating dyad was calculated as the sum of the two negotiators' scores (focusing only on those cases where an agreement was reached).

Analyses Hypothesis 1a was tested by using correlation analyses. All remaining hypotheses were evaluated using regression analysis, with Hypotheses 1b, 2a, 3a, 4a, 5a, and 6a tested by logistic regression and Hypotheses 1c, 2b, 3b, 4b, 5b, and 6b tested using linear regression.

RESULTS

Of the 33 pairs of negotiators, valid transcripts were obtained from 31 dyads. Twenty-two (71.0%) of these 31 dyads were able to reach an agreement. The scores for the negotiators representing Logan Telecommunications that reached an agreement ranged from 2550 to 3000, with a mean of 2777.3 ($SD = 119.3$), while the scores for their RJW Properties counterparts ranged from 2400 to 3050 (mean = 2675.0, $SD = 183.7$). The joint outcomes ranged from 5300 to 5700 (mean = 5452.3, $SD = 122.9$).

Twenty (64.5%) of the 31 negotiations were initiated by Logan Telecommunications representatives. Since Logan Telecommunications was the “buyer” in this negotiation, this was not unexpected. In fact, in several

TABLE I
ISSUES, NEGOTIATED OUTCOMES, AND POINT VALUES

Issue	Negotiated Outcome	Point Value	
		Logan Telecom.	RJW Properties
Cost per square meter	\$500.	900	300
	\$600.	750	450
	\$700.	600	600
	\$800.	450	750
	\$900.	300	900
Renovation of space	No rooms renovated	150	250
	One room	400	200
	Two rooms	500	150
	Three rooms	600	100
Utilities included	None	100	300
	Water/sewer	150	200
	Water/sewer/electricity	200	100
Length of lease	One year	500	200
	Two years	450	500
	Three years	300	700
	Four years	200	900
Parking available	No cars	100	300
	One car	300	250
	Two cars	500	200
	Three cars	600	150
	Four cars	650	100
Furnishings	None	100	100
	Refrigerator/stove	350	150
Advanced payment	One month	500	200
	Six months	350	600
	One year	150	900
Maximum		3700	3700
Minimum		1100	1100

cases, RJW Properties representatives actually requested that the Logan Telecommunications representative make the first proposal or offer. The 31 dyads exchanged between 4 and 36 messages (mean = 11.6 messages, $SD = 6.0$).

The initial messages sent by negotiators varied in terms of the number of words sent, from as few as 11 words to as many as 422 words (mean = 131.4, $SD = 95.5$). For Logan Telecommunications, the mean was 142.4 words ($SD = 93.3$); 112.3 ($SD = 75.0$)

when the Logan representative initiated and 175.7 ($SD = 104.7$) when the Logan representative was the responding party. For RJW Properties, the mean was 120.4 words ($SD = 98.0$); 105.5 ($SD = 56.0$) when the RJW representative went first and 140.3 ($SD = 119.4$) when the RJW representative responded.

Overall, initiating parties wrote less than their responding counterparts (mean = 109.9 words, compared to mean = 152.8 words for responding parties) and there was less variance in the number of words written ($SD = 67.9$ compared to $SD = 113.9$ for responding parties) (Length of Responding Message = $1.03 \times \text{Length of Initiating Message} + 39.3$). For the most part, however, the responding party wrote in proportion to the initiating party ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.001$), as hypothesized (Hypothesis 1a). The correlation between the number of words in initial messages and the total number of messages exchanged was not significant ($r = 0.02$, $p = \text{ns}$).

A single initial email message was responded to by the other party in 25 (80.6%) of the negotiations. In four cases (12.9%), two messages were sent before the other party responded, while in two cases (6.5%), three messages were sent before the other party responded. In five of these six cases of multiple first messages, the “buyer” (Logan Telecommunications) was the persistent initiating party. These second and third messages generally took the form of a reminder that a response had not yet been received. The RJW Properties representative who sent a follow-up initiating message, however, employed a unique approach: She sent an advertisement from the *Financial Times* for her company, urging the reader to “contact us, if you need the best solution to your real estate problem.” Eleven individuals (35.5%) apologized for their slow response.

A logistic regression of the state of the outcome (agreement, nonagreement) on the difference in the number of words written by the initiating party and respondent was not significant ($\chi^2(1) = 0.10$, $p = \text{ns}$) (Hypothesis 1b). In addition, regressing the joint outcome for the two parties on this difference also was not significant ($\beta = -0.06$, $t = -0.29$, $p = \text{ns}$) (Hypothesis 1c).

The most common tactic or behavior employed in early messages was an informal greeting or salutation (55 instances), which occurred in 28 (90.3%) of the negotiations (Table II). In 27 cases, both parties began with an informal greeting (e.g., “Hi” or “Dear,” generally followed by the first name

of the other party). In one negotiation, only a single party used an informal greeting, while in three cases (9.7%), both parties employed formal greetings (e.g., “Mr.” or “Ms.”) ($r = 0.85$, $p < 0.001$, consistent with Hypothesis 1a). In one of these three cases of formal salutation, the parties did not reach an agreement. Likewise, in the dyad where one party began with an informal greeting but the other party did not respond in kind, no agreement was reached. Logistic regression analysis found no significant relationship between informal greetings and reaching an agreement ($\chi^2(1) = 0.37$, $p = \text{ns}$) (Hypothesis 2a), while linear regression analysis indicated no significant relationship between informal greetings and joint outcomes ($\beta = 0.07$, $t = 0.32$, $p = \text{ns}$) (Hypothesis 2b).

It is worth noting that a number of other common tactics or behaviors were also employed in initial messages. These tactics or behaviors were reciprocated in many cases, as indicated by the following frequencies and correlations: closing (e.g., “Regards,” “Bye”) (46 instances; $r = 0.27$, $p = \text{ns}$), informal introduction of oneself (31 instances; $r = 0.18$, $p = \text{ns}$), sharing personal information (30 instances; $r = 0.51$, $p < 0.01$), request for an email reply (28 instances; $r = 0.22$, $p = \text{ns}$), request for information about the value of an issue (15 instances; $r = 0.01$, $p = \text{ns}$), introduction of one’s organization (13 instances; $r = 0.32$, $p < 0.10$), and stating or re-stating the overall task (13 instances; $r = 0.14$, $p = \text{ns}$). Thus, the behaviors that were most likely reciprocated in the first email messages were greetings, introductions (organization), and personal information sharing.

More specifically, in 11 cases (35.5%), both parties offered personal information (e.g., gender, age, background); in eight cases (25.8%), only one party offered personal information (six of these being the initiating party); and in 12 negotiations (38.7%), neither party offered personal information. Thus, in 74.2% of the negotiations, the parties behaved similarly in terms of sharing personal information. In those three cases where the parties employed formal greetings, no personal information was shared. Not surprisingly, there was a significant correlation between informality and personal information sharing ($r = 0.41$, $p < 0.05$).

Three of the 11 dyads that shared personal information in their initial messages did not reach an agreement, while 3 of the 12 dyads that did not share personal information in early messages failed to reach an agreement. Logistic regression analysis

revealed no significant relationship between sharing personal information and the likelihood of reaching an agreement ($\chi^2(1) = 0.35$, $p = \text{ns}$) (Hypothesis 3a). Regression analysis, however, found that when the initiating party shared personal information, the joint outcome was lower (mean = 5404.2) than when this party did not share such information (mean = 5510.0) ($\beta = -0.43$, $t = -2.18$, $p < 0.05$). This is contrary to what had been predicted in Hypothesis 3b.

To determine if sharing personal information somehow reduced the amount of information shared, the relationship between sharing personal information and length of initial messages was examined. For each side (Logan Telecommunication, RJW Properties), there was a significant positive correlation between whether or not they shared personal information and the number of words written. When combined for the dyads (i.e., 0, 1, or 2 negotiators sharing personal information), the correlation also was positive and significant ($r = 0.45$, $p < 0.05$). More specifically, if neither shared anything personal, the mean number of words written by the two negotiators in their initial email messages was 80.7; if one shared personal information, the mean was 96.9 words; and if both shared personal information, the mean was 151.2 words. Thus, it seems that sharing personal information did not necessarily reduce the amount of information shared.

In 9 (29.0%) of the 31 negotiations, at least one of the parties mentioned the importance of working toward a win-win outcome. These included statements such as: "I think we both are interested in a win-win situation," "I am sure we will be able to find a great deal for both of our companies," "Obviously we should seek to work out a tradeoff that benefits both of us," and "I look forward to closing a 'good-for-both' agreement." In two cases, both parties mentioned the value of working to benefit both parties. Logan Telecommunications representatives accounted for 7 of the 11 references, while RJW Properties representatives accounted for 4 of the references.

An agreement was reached in every case where at least one party mentioned the importance of working toward a win-win outcome. Based on a logistic regression analysis, the overall model for predicting the probability of an agreement based on the number of parties mentioning the importance of reaching a win-win outcome showed a significant fit with $-2 \text{ Log Likelihood} = 29.77$ and $\chi^2(1) = 7.58$, $p < 0.01$, supporting Hypothesis 4a. However, linear regression analysis found no significant results

for a relationship between the mention of working towards a win-win outcome and joint outcomes ($\beta = -0.25$, $t = -1.13$, $p = \text{ns}$) (Hypothesis 4b).

In seven negotiations (22.6%), proposals regarding one or more issues were offered (but not for all seven issues). Two of these were by the initiating party alone, four were by the responding party alone, and in one case both parties offered partial proposals. Overall, full proposals (values for all seven issues) were offered in the initial messages in six negotiations (19.4%). In one of those cases, both parties offered full proposals. That negotiation ended in failure to reach an agreement. However, of the six negotiations where at least one party offered a full proposal, an agreement was reached in four cases.

No significant relationship was found between offering a proposal in the early stages of a negotiation and the number of email messages exchanged. Logistic regression analyses revealed that offering a partial or full proposal in the first messages did not predict whether or not an agreement would be reached ($\chi^2(1) = 0.07$, $p = \text{ns}$ and $\chi^2(1) = 0.58$, $p = \text{ns}$, respectively) (Hypothesis 5a). In addition, linear regression analyses found no significant relationship between partial- or full-proposal offers and joint outcomes ($\beta = -0.26$, $t = -1.18$, $p = \text{ns}$ and $\beta = 0.14$, $t = 0.62$, $p = \text{ns}$, respectively) (Hypothesis 5b).

Finally, nine individuals exaggerated at least one offer in the initial messages of their negotiations. Two of those nine individuals were negotiating partners. Three individuals were the initiating party, and six individuals were the responding party. The number of exaggerations ranged from one to seven.

Logistic regression analysis for predicting the probability of an agreement based on exaggeration by the initiating party showed a significant fit with $-2 \text{ Log Likelihood} = 29.10$ and $\chi^2(1) = 8.25$, $p < 0.01$. In fact, none of the negotiations in which the initiating party exaggerated an initial offer reached an agreement. This was consistent with Hypothesis 6a. Linear regression analysis, however, found no significant relationship between exaggerated offers and joint outcomes ($\beta = -0.14$, $t = -0.65$, $p = \text{ns}$) (Hypothesis 6b).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In the past decade, email has become a popular medium for use in many business negotiations,

TABLE II
FREQUENCIES OF TACTICS/BEHAVIORS IN EARLY STAGES OF EMAIL NEGOTIATIONS

Category	Tactic/Behavior	Initiating Party	Responding Party
Introductions/ relationship building	Greeting/hello (informal salutation)	28	27
	(formal salutation—e.g., Mr.)	3	4
	Introduces self (name) (informal)	21	10
	(formal—e.g., Mr., Sir)	1	0
	Offers personal info (e.g., age, gender, nationality)	17	13
	Introduces organization	7	6
	Offers organization information	2	1
	Asks about or refers to other party	3	3
	Apologizes for slow response	2	9
	Closing (e.g., Regards, Bye)	22	24
Clarifications	States (or re-states) overall task	8	5
	Requests clarification on an issue	0	2
	Clarification of email address	8	2
Framing			
	Asserts importance of win-win outcome	5	6
	Comments on desire to negotiate	3	5
Priority information			
	Requests information about the value of issue(s)	6	9
	Provides information about the value of issue(s)	2	4
	Suggests a range of options or tradeoffs across issues	0	0
Restructuring			
	Proposes a new way of proceeding	0	1
	Makes an open-ended, non- directional statement	0	1
	Requests additional information about the other party's position	0	1
Positional information			
	Makes or repeats an initial offer (one or a few issues)	3	5
	(all issues)	3	4

(Continued on the following page.)

	Exaggerates an offer or demand	3	6
	Requests an initial offer	1	1
	Denies relevance of other's position	0	1
	Argues in support of own position	1	7
	Uses threats or promises to change other's position	0	2
	Attributes bad faith to other party	0	0
	Suggests an advantage	0	1
	Sends an ad	1	0
Concessions	Proposes modifications to other party's offer	0	3
	Makes an offer that has a lower value to self than the immediately preceding offer	0	0
Process/procedure	Asks about the process	1	5
	Proposes a process or procedure (e.g., ICQ)	4	7
	Responds to process proposal	0	2
	Informs about time of next message	2	6
	Reassures about progress/process	0	1
	Asks about availability	1	0
Response request	Requests reply to email message	19	9
Agreement	Agrees to some of the other party's positions	0	1

^a Counts are based on at least one occurrence per negotiator per message. Multiple initial email messages are treated as one message for purposes of this count.

offering some obvious efficiencies over other media. However, the modest information richness of the medium also can create challenges for even the most skilled negotiator [10], [14], [16]. The brevity of messages and lack of nonverbal cues places particular importance on the early stages of a negotiation to create the right climate for sustaining the level of information sharing that can produce satisfactory agreements.

Using email as their medium, the participants in this study preferred informal greetings over formal greetings (90.3% of initiating messages using an informal salutation, and both parties using informal salutations in 87.1% of the negotiations),

with a slight majority of initial messages (54.8%) containing personal information. The high degree of informality might be attributed to several factors, including the fact that participants were by-and-large peers (i.e., in a nonhierarchical relationship, although some individuals represented buyers and others were sellers). The informality and sharing of personal information in initial messages was consistent with the negotiation models suggested by Holmes and by Schuster and Copeland [24], [25].

The initial exchanges in these email-based negotiations demonstrated a fair amount of symmetry, beginning with a high correlation

between the number of words in their initial messages. In addition, the degree of formality, organizational introductions, and personal information sharing were reciprocated at statistically significant levels. The negotiations ranged from as few as 4 messages to as many as 36 messages, with agreements reached in as few as four messages and, in one case, requiring 36 messages. One dyad exchanged 18 messages, only to fail in reaching an agreement. Another dyad exchanged 14 messages without reaching an agreement, with one party finally offering some personal information in a postscript to the final message. There was no significant correlation, however, between the number of messages exchanged and reaching an agreement.

Two other factors, however, were found to be significantly related to success—mention of the importance of reaching a win-win outcome, and exaggeration of offers in partial or full proposals. In all seven negotiations where one or both parties mentioned the importance of finding a mutually beneficial agreement, an agreement was reached. (Interestingly, there was no significant correlation between mentioning the importance of finding a win-win outcome and the number of messages exchanged.) Alternatively, in none of the negotiations where the initiating party exaggerated an initial offer was an agreement reached. These two behaviors represent indicators of intentions (i.e., desire for a win-win outcome) and actual behavior (i.e., exaggerated offer). Further analysis revealed that none of the parties who mentioned the importance of working toward a mutually beneficial (win-win) outcome exaggerated an initial offer, at least in their initial email messages. Negotiators often are looking for validation of words early in a relationship, and such behavior provides a solid indicator that words and deeds will be consistent [18], [19], [64].

In contrast, cordial behavior (e.g., informal salutations, personal information sharing) did not predict negotiation outcomes. This lack of significance may have been because of minimal variance in the use of informal greetings: In 27 of 31 cases (87.1%), both parties employed an informal greeting. It is also possible that such behaviors may not create a sense of either assurance or doubt about the other party, which can affect process and outcome. And unlike intentions to pursue a win-win outcome, they are difficult sentiments to validate early in a negotiation.

There was only one significant finding linking the independent variables in this study to a joint or integrative outcome, and this was contrary to what had been hypothesized (H3b). There are several possible explanations for the lack of significant findings, including the relatively narrow range of joint outcomes produced by dyads (5300 to 5700 points). It is also possible that email might not be sufficient to establish a bond strong enough to thwart distributive behavior and promote integrative action [38], [41]. Since the essence of this technology is efficiency, the general haste of the participants may have limited their opportunities for teasing out tradeoffs that would be mutually beneficial. Participants' concerns with the medium are evident in the fact that 11 individuals proposed a process or procedure such as ICQ or Yahoo Messenger (i.e., electronic chat rooms), although none actually employed these tools (see Table II). However, it is worth noting that Curhan and Pentland, in face-to-face negotiations, also found no significant effect of conversational dynamics on joint outcomes [30].

The contrary finding regarding joint outcomes, that initiating parties who shared personal information actually ended up with significantly lower joint outcomes than did parties who did not share personal information, is interesting. It is quite possible that the sharing of personal information sent a signal to the other party that this individual would subsequently offer valuable information that could be used to gain an advantage in the negotiation, causing the other party to seek a distributive (win-lose) outcome rather than an integrative (win-win) outcome [65]. Further analysis, in fact, revealed that Logan Telecommunications representatives who were first to offer personal information ended up with a mean score of 2743.8, below the mean for all "buyers" of 2777.3, while RJW representatives who were first to offer personal information ended up with mean scores of 2537.5, below the mean for all property representatives of 2675.0 points.

As noted previously, full proposals were offered in an initial email message in six negotiations (seven proposals total, since in one of those negotiations both parties offered full proposals). One or more exaggerated offers were made in five of the seven proposals. In two cases, no agreement was reached, both cases involved exaggerated offers. These results suggest that offering full proposals early in an email negotiation does not necessarily doom the negotiation or adversely affect the chances of reaching an agreement that benefits both parties

[66]. The more important factor appears to be the nature of the proposal (e.g., exaggerated offers).

Implications for Professional Communicators

Overall, the results of this study offer some insights for professionals choosing to employ email for their negotiations. Despite the fact that a number of books and articles have been written offering stylistic suggestions for email users, most organizations have not adopted guidelines for email protocol or etiquette [15], [67]. Instead, organizations have focused on developing policies regarding email/internet usage, principally to control employee efficiency and limit organizational liabilities [68]. As a consequence, email users generally have adopted the customs associated with typical letter writing in constructing email messages, or followed the conventions of the email messages that they have received [67].

The latter certainly appeared to be the case in this study, as there was considerable symmetry regarding the quantity and quality of initial messages. Since controlling the pace and agenda of a negotiation is generally advisable, professionals would be wise to think carefully about taking the lead with a moderately lean medium such as email, particularly where the parties are “meeting” for the first time [20], [27]. A negotiating counterpart is likely to respond in kind to your initial email message, so think carefully about the climate that the quantity and quality of your words will set when taking the lead.

Since information is the lifeblood of a negotiation, framing the negotiation in a positive way at the outset is of utmost importance, even if the other party does not reciprocate [54], [62]. In this study, an agreement was reached in every case where at least one party mentioned the importance of working toward a win-win outcome. While “win-win” terminology appears to have made its way into the general lexicon, any number of comparable phrases can be employed. These include: creating a deal that is good for both of us, working hard to find a mutually beneficial outcome, looking forward to closing a “good-for-both” agreement, and identifying tradeoffs that will help make both our companies winners [44], [45].

In some industries and cultures, spending time developing relationships is an important precursor to exploring positions and interests, not to mention proposal surfacing [28]. Fortunately, individuals often are forgiving if their counterparts fail to follow a preferred protocol or script. In this study, partial

or full proposals were offered in the first email messages of a number of the negotiations, but these had no ill-effects on reaching an agreement. Thus, if the negotiating parties recognize the limited time that they have to complete their transaction, making a proposal that involves one or more issues early in a negotiation (perhaps in combination with the sharing of personal and professional information) will not necessarily be detrimental to the negotiation.

The nature of a proposal, however, is critical. None of the parties exaggerating an offer in an initial email message was able to reach an agreement. Particularly where the parties have no prior history of working successfully together, as was the case in this study, questionable or unethical behavior early in the process can be difficult to overcome. Again, commenting on the value of seeking a win-win outcome is important at the outset of a negotiation, but behavior that is inconsistent with that message can produce a negotiating impasse.

In this study, exaggerated offers were numbers that fell outside the range of values shown in Table I, so there was little doubt about the behavior. A negotiator might also want to think twice before employing other questionable or unethical tactics that he or she perceives to be more difficult to detect (e.g., a negotiator pretending that he or she has a better offer from a competing company, or lying about the cost basis for a product). Computer databases and search engines now make such information readily accessible in many cases, and email itself is a means of detecting a counterpart's inconsistency. Therefore, a negotiator might be wise to avoid engaging in such behavior.

Future Research Opportunities As with most empirical research, this study has some potential limitations which could form the basis for future research. First, the individuals who participated in this study represent a singular group—ranging in age from 22 to 37 (mean = 25.6), yet somewhat diverse culturally. Since email lacks the media richness and social presence found in face-to-face negotiations, it may or may not be the medium of choice for individuals of certain other age groups or cultures (industries, countries) [10], [31], [69]. In addition, variations in what is considered appropriate behavior during discourse and negotiation can vary by culture [28]. Low-context cultures are noted for being more precise, direct, and verbal in their communications than are high-context cultures, where communication often is more implicit than explicit (i.e., based on context,

relational development, and nonverbal cues) [70], [71]. Since the participants in this study were international students representing a range of cultural contexts (high, medium, and low), it might be worthwhile to examine singular contexts in future studies [72], [73].

As noted, the negotiators in this simulation had no prior encounters with each other, nor little potential for future business or social encounters. Limited experience with an individual can generate caution or even trepidation, particularly if the negotiation is important, there are time constraints, or the other party has a reputation for being skilled [46], [74]. Future research might seek to vary relational development (past, present, and future) to determine its effects on process and outcome.

One's role in a negotiation and relative dependence on the other party also can influence the negotiation process and outcome. In this study, for example, it was the "buyer" who more often initiated the negotiation, despite the fact that both parties were instructed to initiate contact. While neither party was given an advantage with respect to relative dependency or power, this could influence initiation, mirroring, and persistence (even when a counterpart fails to employ positive framing or chooses to use questionable tactics early in a negotiation). Thus, application of the findings from this study might best be restricted to negotiations between parties with comparable leverage or power, although leverage can change during an encounter

as new information is introduced and perceptions are altered.

Finally, asynchronous email was the medium employed during these negotiations. While email has become increasingly popular for all types of business communication, there are other media that also are employed during negotiations (e.g., telephones, synchronous emails/instant messaging, videoconferencing). And although a study of combinations of media would be complicated, researchers should be encouraged to examine those combinations that are employed most frequently.

Final Comments The continued expansion of world markets means that organizations will likely rely more on technologies such as email to negotiate agreements, particularly during difficult economic times when travel is limited. Since intentions can be difficult to discern with a medium of moderate information richness that lacks nonverbal cues and immediate feedback, individuals must rely on internal consistencies/inconsistencies to make judgments about their counterparts' claims and offers. This study suggests that initial messages in a negotiation can affect not only this process but the likelihood of reaching agreements as well. The better we understand the nuances of these relationships, the more effective negotiators can become employing this medium as well as other media of moderate information richness.

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