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# Tactical Breaks: Deal Killers or Deal Makers?



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*Obwohl die meisten Verhandlungen durch Unterbrechungen gekennzeichnet sind, gibt es in der Forschung nur eine geringe Anzahl von Erkenntnissen in Hinblick auf die Auswirkung von Pausen auf den Verhandlungsprozess. Wenngleich erste Ergebnisse vorheriger Studien in diesem Themenfeld existieren, befassen sich diese nahezu ausschließlich mit beidseitig vorgegebenen Pausen und deren Einfluss auf das gemeinsame Verhandlungsergebnis – dem hingegen fasst sich dieser Beitrag mit dem individuellen Verhandlungsergebnis und unilateralen Verhandlungspausen. Auf Basis des zugrundeliegenden Experiments ist zu schlussfolgern, dass unilaterale Verhandlungspausen eine positive Auswirkung auf die Wahrscheinlichkeit eines Vertragsabschlusses haben. Da die durchgeführte Studie weiterhin aufzeigt, dass die Pausen-setzende Partei signifikant bessere Ergebnisse als die Pausen-empfangende Partei erzielt, kann ferner darauf verwiesen werden, dass der Einsatz von unilateralen Pausen unter bestimmten Umständen zu einer Win-Lose-Situation führt.*



Although the majority of negotiations are characterized by interruptions, surprisingly little research has been conducted thus far on the breaks in the negotiation process. Despite the fact that former studies focus almost exclusively on how breaks impact on joint outcome and consensual breaks, ours is the first study to focus on individual outcome and unilateral negotiation breaks. Our experiment shows that unilateral breaks affect contract formation positively. Furthermore, since our study reveals significantly better results for break initiators than for break recipients, it also shows that unilateral breaks create a win-lose situation in certain instances.



## 1. Introduction

Negotiations often stretch over long time periods, which are temporarily interrupted by breaks. During these interruptions both negotiation parties draw back before reaching an agreement and, therefore, the social interaction process is disrupted (Harinck/De Dreu 2008). Breaks occur for different reasons: Sometimes negotia-

tions, which are cognitively complex and emotionally taxing (*De Dreu et al.* 2006), can lead to a deadlock (*Harinck/De Dreu* 2004). Stepping away from such negotiations can refresh the mind, as *Ury* (1991) emphasizes with his idea of “going to the balcony” when he refers to the Camp David talks. Negotiations can also simply be disrupted due to external incidents, such as important phone calls or business meetings, which do not necessarily have any bearing on the negotiation (*Xia/Sudharshan* 2002). Moreover, a party can interrupt a negotiation for strategic and tactical reasons to immediately influence the negotiation process (*Harinck/De Dreu* 2011).

Although many negotiations are characterized by interruptions, empirical studies on breaks in negotiations are scarce. Certain scholars state the important role of breaks in negotiations (e.g. *Olekalns et al.* 2003; *Kolb* 2004; *Olekalns/Smith* 2005; *Druckman/Olekalns* 2013). Only *Harinck/De Dreu* (2004, 2008, 2011), to our best knowledge, investigated their impact on negotiations, but only by focusing on how breaks influence the joint outcome. The question thus remains: Do breaks also influence the individual negotiation outcome, which is a central issue in primarily profit-oriented business negotiations? Interdisciplinary studies on individual outcomes in the fields of psychology, work, and sports already show a positive effect for the break initiator and a negative effect for the break recipient who tends to suffer from the break (e.g. *Mace et al.* 1992; *Gómez et al.* 2011; *Sampaio et al.* 2013; *Gutiérrez-Aguilar et al.* 2016). This beneficial impact can also apply to negotiations. To illustrate the point: In sports, such as handball or football, two opposing parties meet—as is the case in many negotiations—and try to push their preferences and influence the outcome according to their agenda. Negotiation teams can, therefore, use several negotiation tactics that are similar to those used in sports (e.g. *Hakansson et al.* 1977; *Bacharach/Lawler* 1981). These tactics can be categorized as result- or process-related. Result-related negotiation tactics focus on the implementation of negotiation strategies while process-related tactics refer to the process flow and more specifically to the order of communication- and interaction-based events in negotiations (*Voeth/Herbst* 2015). The principal objective of our paper is to examine whether unilateral breaks lead to a better individual negotiation performance and to analyze to what extent they influence the negotiation process. More concretely, we want to determine whether breaks qualify as a suitable negotiation tactic.

Our paper is structured as follows: We first refer to existing literature on breaks and interruptions in negotiation science and we also introduce, on an interdisciplinary level, insights from the psychology of learning, work, sports, and behavior science. We derive our hypotheses by focusing on the strategic use of unilateral breaks as a process-related negotiation tactic. We then present our experiment, discuss the results, and conclude by focusing on theoretical and practical implications.

## 2. Research background

### 2.1 Breaks in negotiations

Negotiations rarely consist of one single interaction during which parties meet and try to reach an agreement. They are, instead, often divided into several negotiation episodes that are built on each other (*Harinck/De Dreu* 2008). The negotiation process is, therefore, characterized by breaks (*Harinck/De Dreu* 2011).

*Miyata/Norman* (1986) distinguish between internal and external interruptions. External interruptions are introduced by sudden events, such as a ringing phone or a colleague asking a question (e.g. *Coraggio* 1990; *Mark et al.* 2005). This category of interruptions particularly stands out, due to its random point of entry (*Xia/Sudharshan* 2002). Internal interruptions, on the other hand, are referred to as breaks or pauses (*Jett/George* 2003) and are consciously used to reflect on a topic or recover from exhaustion (*Mark et al.* 2005). Breaks can also be divided into consensual breaks, which both parties agree to, and unilateral breaks, that are introduced by a single interlocutor (*Combalbert* 2010). Unilateral breaks are, therefore, internal interruptions for the parties who introduce them and, simultaneously, external interruptions for the opposite parties. This is so, because one negotiation partner controls the interruption, while the other party is confronted with a probably unexpected situation and could react with anger (*Combalbert* 2010). Unilateral breaks can, therefore, be categorized as a process-related negotiation tactic.

*Harinck/De Dreu* (2004, 2008, 2011) conducted three studies, which premised on each other, thereby shaping the research on negotiation breaks. Their first study is based on the differentiation-before-integration topic, which focuses on the change in negotiation styles during a negotiation. In this context, deadlocks are regarded as a cause for (preset) breaks: Competitive behavior, which supposedly occurs at the beginning of a negotiation process, leads to a deadlock that, since the climate becomes favorable for a break, changes towards a cooperative negotiation style. This change becomes possible as a result of the reflection time provided by the break during which negotiators have an opportunity to realize that competitive negotiating may not be the correct style for achieving an agreement (*Harinck/De Dreu* 2004). *Olekals et al.* (2003) also refer to the differentiation-before-integration scheme and reach a similar conclusion: Starting a negotiation with a competitive style can lead to a deadlock, which, in turn, brings about an interruption and a change to a (necessary) integrative or cooperative negotiation style.

*Harinck/De Dreu* (2008) build on their findings in a second study and investigate the impact of reflection within the framework of breaks. In contrast to the findings of their first study, they reveal that, in the case of competitive thoughts, reflection breaks lead to worse joint outcomes. They, therefore, conclude that breaks do not benefit negotiations and, in the worst case, decrease the joint outcome. In this second study, participants had to initiate breaks for no obvious reason, since the deadlock situation no longer played a role. Despite that, the findings, at least partly, contradict the insights of *De Dreu et al.* (2006) who discovered that cooperative thought patterns or a prosocial motivation combined with time and a willingness to reflect, promote integrative potential.

In a third study, *Harinck/De Dreu* (2011) examine how the motivation of negotiators affect breaks by integrating the Motivation Information Processing Model (MIP). In contrast to their previous studies, they noticed that breaks have a positive effect on joint outcome, if participants had a high social (prosocial), as well as high epistemic, motivation. Other authors (*De Dreu et al.* 2006; *Balliet et al.* 2009) also highlight the importance of prosocial motivation concerning a change towards a more cooperative or integrative negotiation style. Generally, it is evident that scholars focus their main research exclusively on mandatory pre-set breaks and the joint outcome, and that there is no discussion of how tactical breaks influence individual outcomes.

2.2 Interdisciplinary literature analysis on breaks

As stated, breaks also play an important role in other scientific areas (Table 1). Interdisciplinary findings attribute positive, as well as negative, effects to breaks: The psychology of learning mostly focuses on cognitive efforts, attention, and information processing, but also on motivation and social interaction (e.g. *Bloom/Shuell* 1981; *Evans/Pellegrini* 1997; *Wehr* 2006; *Bachhel/Thaman* 2014), and exclusively identifies the positive effects of breaks. *Wehr* (2006) shows that, during a learning process, breaks can help to restore much-needed attention after cognitive exhaustion. Work science outlines positive and negative effects (e.g. *Norman/Bobrow* 1975; *Bailey/Konstan* 2006, *Beef tink et al.* 2008). As a representative of work science, *Beef tink et al.* (2008) conclude that, in case of complex problems, interruptions are beneficial to prevent negative emotions and mental blockades. Sports science focuses on the dynamics of the one-sided (tactical) interruption and how interruptions can be used to analyze the opponent and to adjust strategies (e.g. *Gomez et al.* 2011; *Siegle/Lames* 2012; *Gutiérrez-Aguilar et al.* 2016). These tactical measures have, at the same time, positive effects for the initiating party and negative effects for the receiving party. Behavioral science emphasizes downtime as the adverse component of interruptions and shows that it leads to negative consequences for the interruption-receiving person (e.g. *Kaufman/Baron* 1968; *Burchard/Barrera* 1972).

Scientific discipline	Authors
Psychology of learning	Wehr (2006); Rowe (1986); Bloom and Shuell (1981); Cepeda et al. (2006); Bachhel and Thaman (2014); Di Vesta and Smith (1979); Ruhl et al. (1987); Evans and Pellegrini (1997); Blatchford (1998); Jarrett et al. (1998)
Work science	Kahneman (1973); Norman and Bobrow (1975); Speier et al. (1999); O'Reilly (1980); Speier et al. (1999); Sanders and Baron (1975); Bailey and Constan (2006); Eyrolle and Cellier (2000); Beef tink et al. (2008); Balci and Aghazadeh (2004); Henning et al. (1997); Tucker (2003)
Sports science	Siegle and Lames (2012); Gomes et al. (2014); Gómez et al. (2011); Gutiérrez-Aguilar et al. (2016); Mace et al. (1992); Sampaio et al. (2013); Zetou et al. (2008); Wang et al. (2010)
Behavior science	Bostow and Bailey (1969); Burchard and Barrera (1972); Hobbs et al. (1978); White et al. (1972); Kaufman and Baron (1968)

Table 1: Interdisciplinary literature analysis

2.3 Unilateral breaks as deal killers

Although research, particularly in sports, describes the beneficial effect of breaks as a physical and psychological recreation time, it also emphasizes the adverse effects. According to work science, interruptions increase the time needed for decision making and decrease the quality of the decisions (*Eyrolle/Cellier* 2000). Breaks during negotiations also have enormous potential for conflict, particularly because they may give rise to competitive thoughts (*Harinck/De Dreu* 2008, 2011). Sports science also refers to unilateral breaks that lead to uncertainty and distrust (*Wang et al.* 2010). This effect can be associated with external interruptions in negotiations (*Mahieu* 2007). With reference to *Kimmel et*

*al.* (1980), we can define distrust as the belief that the other negotiator is competitively motivated, thereby resulting in self-conscious distributive behavior. Trust is widely considered as critical for negotiation success and contract formation – consequently, low levels of trust inhibit negotiation success and contract closing (Bazerman/Neale, 1992; Kong *et al.* 2014). Moreover, uncertainty also generally diminishes the probability of reaching an agreement (Dekker 2008; Krishnan *et al.* 2011; Moon *et al.* 2011). The following statement can, therefore, possibly be true: The tactical use of unilateral breaks can make agreements and contract closing less likely.

H1: *A unilateral negotiation break has a negative effect on the probability of reaching an agreement.*

## 2.4 Breaks as instruments of power

In the context of negotiations concerning matters of the law, unilateral breaks can also be considered as a one-sided demonstration of power (Krieger 2001). By understanding unilateral breaks as a negotiation tactic, they can be assigned to a process-related perspective of economic negotiating, essentially in the style of using time to create pressure (Pruitt/Drews 1969; Carnevale/Lawler 1986; Voeth/Herbst 2015). If a negotiation party consciously decides to interrupt the negotiation at a particular point with the ulterior motive of using pressure, and without prior notice to the opposing party, the party on the receiving-end of the break could interpret this critical event as an (surprising and unforeseen) interruption (Jett/George 2003; Druckman/Olekalns 2013). This notion is supported by Harinck/De Dreu's (2008) conception of breaks, viewing them as critical moments in negotiations, which can be used in order to influence the ongoing negotiation process.

Breaks as unilateral interruptions at an adverse point of time can have negative effects for the break recipient (Rusting/Nolen-Hoeksema 1998; Harinck/De Dreu 2008; Wang *et al.* 2010). In this context, also the science of labor suggests that people should decide independently when to take a break, in order to maximize the effects of regeneration (Tucker 2003). With reference to sports science, Gomes *et al.* (2014) outline that a forced interruption of the opposing party's gambit can supposedly cut short a negative run of play on the side of the break initiator and, at the same time, enable the break initiator to make tactical adjustments. For example, a time-out interrupts the opponent's dynamics and the course of play, thereby deteriorating his performance while simultaneously improving the time-out initiator's performance (Gutiérrez-Aguilar *et al.* 2016; Prieto *et al.* 2016). The interruption of an opponent's good run of play, reinforces the interruption initiator's psychological power and can diminish the opponent's psychological power – the “momentum” lies, thus, in the simultaneous downfall and the rise of the two opposite sides (Iso-Ahola/Mobily 1980; Burke *et al.* 2003; Roane *et al.* 2004). Transferring these insights to the negotiation field, the break initiator could benefit from the break by achieving a better outcome, while the break recipient could experience negative effects.

H2: *A unilateral negotiation break has a positive effect on the break initiator's outcome, but a negative effect on the break recipient's outcome.*



## 2.5 Breaks as mood killers

According to *Harinck/De Dreu* (2008), (preset) breaks could increase the competitive character of negotiations, because reflection during the break can give rise to competitive thoughts. This can possibly be especially true for unilateral breaks: Based on the MIP model used by *Harinck/De Dreu* (2011), it can be argued that unforeseen and non-influenceable unilateral breaks—specifically as a demonstration of power or even as a lack of interest—increase socially self-involved and epistemic motivation, thereby leading to higher levels of competitive thoughts. In behavioral science, one-sided interruptions in the form of downtime are supposed to have a similar effect as financial penalties (*Buchard/Barrera* 1972), thereby shaping, due to their context, the adverse character of the penalty (*Kaufman/Baron* 1968). They, therefore, lead to negative reactions and negative emotions on the side of the interruption recipient. Interruptions can also lead to increased frustration in decision-making processes, and therefore also in negotiations (*Baron et al.* 1973). As a result, interruptions lead to a higher degree of uncertainty and distrust (*Mahieu* 2007; *Wang et al.* 2010; *Druckman/Olekals* 2013). In competitive environments, it is also likely that the break initiator will chose a time of interruption that is disadvantageous for the break recipient and this can, according to behavioral science, lead to negative reactions (*Buchard/Barrera* 1972).

H3: *A tactical unilateral negotiation break leads, immediately after the interruption, to negative reactions on the part of the break recipient.*

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Procedures and tasks

We developed an accommodation-related negotiation case, which takes place between the current and the subsequent tenant. Most participants are familiar with this situation and, therefore, this allows for significant role identification. Four days prior to their negotiations, all the participants received extensive role descriptions and specific instructions about the negotiation task.

In a between-subjects design, participants were randomly assigned to one of three groups in order to avoid carryover effects. While the negotiations in groups 1 and 2 were interrupted by a unilateral negotiation break, there was no interruption in group 3, which functioned as the control group. In group 1, the current tenant had to initiate the negotiation break, and in group 2 this had to be done by the opposite negotiation party, namely the next tenant. Participants had to reach an agreement on eight issues, including the move-in date and takeover, as well as the price of the furniture. The participants also received information on a best alternative offer (BATNA) to motivate and prevent them from agreeing immediately. All in all, the participants were allowed forty-five minutes negotiation time.

The participants had to negotiate via an online chat tool in randomly paired dyads. The experimenters accompanied every negotiation in the role of a chat room administrator. In the unilateral break situation, one participant used a break to interrupt the negotiation for fifteen minutes at any time he preferred. It was, therefore, possible to integrate the interruption into the natural process of the negotiation. During these fifteen minutes they were left alone in the chat room, but were not allowed to communicate with each other. After

the interruption, the negotiation continued. In the no break situation, the participants negotiated without interruption. The experimenters stopped the negotiation after forty-five minutes of negotiation time or when an agreement was reached. If no agreement was reached in the regular time period, the negotiation was aborted and the result was regarded as equal to the BATNA. After the negotiation, the participants were debriefed and asked to fill out a questionnaire. This post-experiment questionnaire was principally used as a manipulation check.

### 3.2 Participants

A total of 268 German-speaking students participated, which resulted in 134 negotiation dyads. The participants were kept motivated by creating an official competition character, including cash prizes, certificates, trophies, as well as taking part in an exclusive final round to be broadcasted by a television channel. All participants were invited to voluntarily participate in this chat-based online negotiation simulation.

### 3.3 Analysis

We applied a mixed-method design in the following manner: Qualitative data was gathered and transformed by qualitative analyses into quantitative data and, based on this quantitative data, we were able to make theoretical and empirical findings. At the core of this process, we conducted a content analysis on the chat protocols in order to analyze, systematically and according to rules, how the break recipient responded to the breaks and also to the negotiation process. As part of the content analysis, we used recent studies on communication in negotiations to extend the given system of categories concerning break-specific items (O'Connor/Adams 1999, Adair/Loewenstein 2013). Finally, we used several items and counted statements that included them. Our analysis clearly emphasized the importance of six items: As a point of departure, the break recipients' type of reaction at varying times when faced with a tactical break and next, the communicational patterns, such as the information exchange concerning preferences and positions, the use of rejections, as well as the willingness to compromise.

### 3.4 Measures

Two researchers analyzed the content of every chat and beyond that, it was randomly counterchecked by a third scholar. Inter-coder reliability was measured with *Guetzkow's*  $U=.01$ , which represents a good to a very good fit (*Guetzkow*, 1950). Furthermore, the index of coterminability also reached a 71% response rate, which can be considered as a good result (*Angelmar/Stern* 1978). Overall reliability was measured according to coder-reliability  $C.R.=.78$ , which represents a satisfactory result (*Holsti* 1969; *Früh* 2007). Since only marginal variance was detected, we were able to assume inter-rater, as well as inter-coder, reliability.

Negotiation research has already used the foundation of the above mentioned coding scheme on several occasions. Since the majority of the items have been validated in the past, we can assume their validity (O'Connor/Adams 1999; *Pesic* 2009; *Adair/Loewenstein* 2013). We added several items associated with interruption-specific statements, because this topic was extremely relevant to our examinations. We pre-tested those items in advance to maintain validity under analysis extension. Since the researchers coded every

transcript by themselves and the reliability measures were consistently good, we could infer face validity (Früh 2007; Sandstede 2009).

#### 4. Empirical results

In total, 120 negotiation dyads and 240 negotiation results could be used for further analysis, while others had to be excluded for reasons such as a disregard of instructions or technical issues.

An individual outcome was analyzed as a dependent variable by using ANOVA, with the break as a between-dyad factor. In order to compare the results of the current tenants with those of the next tenants, the results were standardized. No statistically significant differences associated with results ( $n=240$ ,  $p<.1$ ) or contract closing ( $n=240$ ,  $p<.1$ ) were attributed to the role allocation (current tenant and next tenant) of the break calling party. As a result, it can be deduced that a certain role allocation did not play any role in the result scores or the formation of a contract.

<i>Break condition</i>	<i>Contract closing?</i>		
	<i>No contract (in %)</i>	<i>Contract (in %)</i>	<i>Total (in %)</i>
No break	42 (17,50)	44 (18,33)	86 (35,83)
Break	60 (25,00)	94 (39,17)	154 (64,17)
Total	102 (42,50)	138 (57,50)	240 (100,00)

Notes. N=240

Table 2: Contingency table for break condition x contract closing

Table 2 shows that the sample can generally be divided into two groups: one belonging to the break condition ( $n=154$ , resulting from the experimental groups 1 and 2) and the other one belonging to the no-break condition ( $n=86$ , equivalent to experimental group 3). We found that marginally more participants belonging to the break condition group reached an agreement ( $n=94$  (61%),  $p<.09$ ; Fisher's test, one sided), as opposed to those belonging to the no-break condition-group ( $n=44$  (51%)). This result contradicts Hypothesis 1, which suggested a negative effect on contract closing.

<i>Groups</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>Control group</i>	<i>Break initiator</i>	<i>Break recipient</i>
Control group	.45 (.19)		.05	.06
Break initiator	.50 (.20)			.11**
Break recipient	.39 (.18)			

Notes: N's range from 44 to 47 due to occasional missing data. \*\*  $p < .05$ .

Table 3: Descriptive statistics and Scheffe's post hoc test for key study groups

Next, we took a closer look at the dyads in which participants successfully reached an agreement ( $n=138$ ). The individual results were standardized from 0 to 1. In dyads where participants did not agree on a contract ( $n=102$ ), both partners were assigned to the BAT-



NA score (according to our case study). In order to examine how unilateral breaks affect individual outcomes, the individual results of the control group ( $n=44$ ) were compared with the results of the break initiators ( $n=47$ ) and break recipients ( $n=47$ ). Data was analyzed by using the analysis of variance (ANOVA) and it showed an essential significant coherence for an inter-group comparison,  $F(2,135)=3.638$ ,  $p<.029$ . Table 3 shows a further analysis in the form of Scheffe's post hoc test. While the individual results of the break condition groups showed no difference between the break initiators ( $M=.50$ ,  $SD=.20$ ), the break recipients ( $M=.39$ ,  $SD=.18$ ), or the no-break control group ( $M=.45$ ,  $SD=.19$ ), there was a significant difference within the break condition group: Break initiators achieved significantly better individual outcomes than break recipients ( $p<.03$ ), thereby supporting Hypothesis 2.

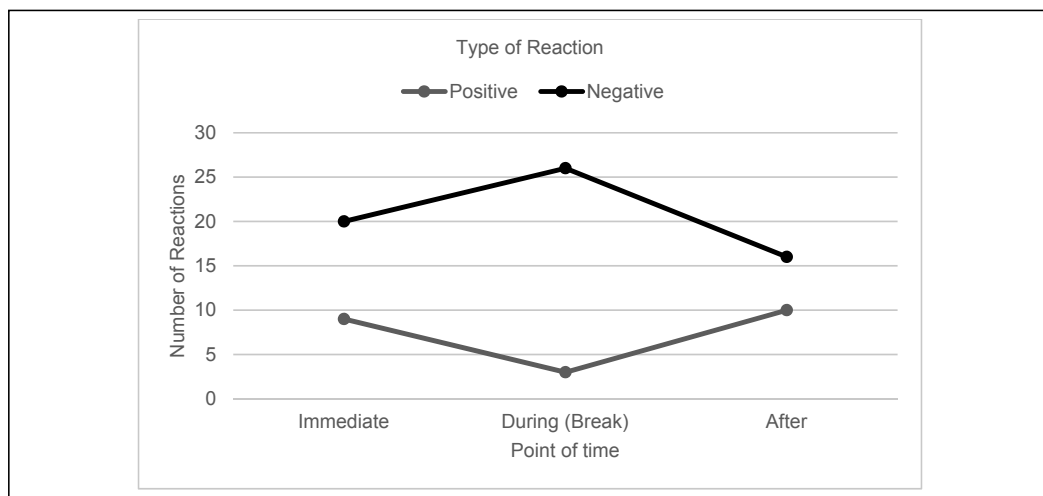


Figure 1: Frequencies of break recipient's reactions on breaks

A closer look at the break recipient's reactions on a break (Figure 1), reveals that, in the majority of all dyads ( $N=120$ ), the break receiving party reacted negatively ( $n=62$  (52%)). Only twenty-two participants (19%) showed a positive reaction, while the rest ( $n=38$  (29%)) showed neutral, indifferent, or no reaction at all. An example of a negative reaction was an expressed lack of understanding (e.g. "What? Are you kidding me? Why? Come back and let's find a solution."), while an example of a positive reaction was an expressed positive affirmation (e.g. "Yes, that's a good idea. Let's take some time and reconsider our thoughts on this."). The difference in reactions becomes particularly obvious when considering the duration of the negotiation break: There were only three positive reactions, while twenty-six break recipients reacted in a negative way. These results support Hypothesis 3.

Variables	No break (n=86)		Break (n=154)	
	M	(SD)	M	SD
Information exchange (preferences and positions)	8.31***	(4.44)	14.90***	(8.32)
Rejections	4.33**	(3.86)	5.55**	(4.29)
Willingness to compromise	2.53***	(2.31)	3.69***	(2.50)

Notes: N=240. \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 4: Descriptive statistics for communicational categories (content analysis)

In order to better understand the key insights, we deepened our analysis of the communicational patterns that were used in different break conditions. We found that, in dyads with unilateral breaks, participants exchanged significantly ( $p < .01$ ) more information about their preferences and positions. This item refers to the constructive communication between the negotiating parties, during which they offered well-structured insights into their preferences and positions concerning the negotiation objects. (e.g. “*What do you think of [...]? I’m not able to [...]. This is way more important to me. On the other hand, I would offer you [...] What about the following package offer: [...]?*”). Apart from that, the results illustrate that participants who were influenced by the break condition, used significantly more rejections ( $p < .02$ ). In this context, rejections do not necessarily have a negative association, but can have a much more neutral connotation by merely indicating disagreement with a certain offer (e.g. “*No, I’m sorry, but this is not possible for me. I’m already paying for [...], so that I simply can’t afford this.*”). Finally, the subjects in the dyads affected by unilateral breaks, are significantly ( $p < .00$ ) more willing to compromise. The willingness to compromise indicates to what extent the participants are comfortable to show clear interest in a counterparty’s offer (e.g. “*Ok, I understand your position. I can offer you to [...], to some degree I can also comply with [...].*”).

## 5. Discussion

Although breaks have been extensively investigated in several scientific disciplines, there is only marginal research on this topic in negotiation science – particularly research about both-sided, consensual breaks and their impact on the joint outcome. The purpose of this study was, thus, to determine how unilateral negotiation breaks affect negotiation performance and outcome. This is particularly important for business negotiations, due to the profit orientation and competitive environment of corporations. In this context, we primarily analyzed how unilateral breaks affected contract formation, the individual outcome, and, secondarily, the communication styles in the negotiation process, particularly how the counterpart reacted on the break.

Overall, our results suggest that unilateral breaks tend to have a marginally positive effect on contract formation in general. Even more interesting, is that unilateral breaks show a positive effect on the break initiator’s individual outcomes, while it simultaneously decreases the break recipient’s individual results, which is congruent with break-related findings in sports. As a result, it is possible to conclude that the use of a unilateral break leads to a significant individual outcome difference to the disadvantage of the break recipient

and that it creates, in certain respects, a win-lose situation. Although there is no significant difference between the break initiator's outcome and a participant belonging to a no-break condition setting, unilateral breaks are still recommendable for the executing party, since they show a marginally positive effect on contract closing.

Our results also show that unilateral breaks tend to cause negative, rather than positive, reactions for the break recipient. This is reasonable, considering that unilateral breaks are a power-based negotiation tactic, which subtly exerts pressure on the opposite party. In this context, it is important to mention that they do not cause an escalation of events, which is the case when a negotiator clearly threatens his counterpart with aborting the negotiation. In contrast, unilateral breaks should be categorized as a more subtle and implied technique. Although unilateral breaks lead to more rejections, this aspect needs to be considered in a wider context. As a point of departure, rejections per se are regarded as value-neutral in this context and therefore a higher amount simply suggests a more vivid exchange of communicational elements. This perspective is supported by the fact that unilateral breaks also stimulate the exchange of information about positions and preferences, thereby providing a more constructive negotiation environment. Eventually, tactical breaks also increase the willingness to compromise. In summary, these aspects also show that the use of tactical breaks leads to a more constructive and forthcoming negotiation process in favor of the break initiator.

Although our study led to fascinating insights about tactical negotiating in competitive environments, it has certain limitations that should be addressed by future research. The simulation has a one-shot character in the sense that it has only one negotiation (episode) and does not consider the prevalence and importance of past and future negotiations in present-day business relationships. We were also not able to control the negotiation parties' (mental) activities during the break time, since the negotiations took place in an on-line chat environment. We cannot finally assess to what extent the negotiators were focused on the underlying negotiation. Although certain scholars criticize student samples, due to the participants' relative lack of (practical) experience compared to that of professionals, we know from past negotiation-related research that trained student samples give the same results as professionals (*Herbst/Schwarz* 2011). As a result, we are entitled to apply our findings to negotiation practice.

The participants who belonged to the break condition group were forced to use a break, because they were instructed to do so – even if they did not want or need to. This compulsory condition could have distorted the natural negotiation pattern leading to the case that breaks were merely taken for their own sake or at suboptimal time points. We were not able to control the participants' activities during the break, i.e. whether they reflected or became distracted.

## 6. Implications, future research, and conclusion

Results prove that the use of unilateral negotiation breaks has a significant impact on negotiation performance. In one-shot negotiations, professionals are well advised to create a win-lose situation by using this process-related tactic, particularly in a business context with no past or future business relationship that can be damaged. Then, the introduction of a break can be used as a demonstration of power, which results in an advantage for the break initiator. Negotiators who are confronted with a break should try to regain power

by applying dominating tactics to reduce the effect of the break. However, it is questionable whether this tactic can be applied twice or even several times.

Future research can build on our study, but with two changes: The study, which should be conducted on a face-to-face basis with trained research dummies in the role of break initiators, should only focus on descriptive components (contract formation and individual outcome), as well as reactions on breaks, without analyzing overall communication in the negotiation process. The latter is aimed at screening and influencing what participants do during the break. The former is aimed at providing a standardized interruption pattern in the negotiation process. In this context, it is also possible to design a study that contains a non-compulsory break condition group. Participants who belong to such a test group would be free to use a unilateral break and it is possible that they would only use this tactic when it appears to be reasonable. The break manipulation itself should also be changed: First, one can vary the duration of breaks within one negotiation episode and second, one can also investigate a unilateral break as a temporary termination of the entire negotiation, thereby resulting in two negotiation episodes and unilateral inter-episodic interruptions. Another interesting variation would be to retry the tactic several times within one negotiation to investigate the repeatability of this negotiation tactic.

In closing: We can conclude that unilateral negotiation breaks, which are used as a process-related tactic, are useful deal makers. Breaks are also instruments of power, which have the potential to create a win-lose situation in favor of the break initiator. Therefore, it is also understandable that they negatively affect the overall mood in the negotiation process by simply creating an unequal power balance.

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