

Press release

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Negotiation is a routine part of daily life, not a rare high-stakes event, finds new study at ESMT Berlin

Many people think of negotiation as something reserved for salary talks, car purchases, or business deals: infrequent, high-stake encounters most people would rather avoid. A new study shows that this assumption is misleading. Negotiation is, in fact, a routine part of everyday life, occurring in roughly one in three social interactions, and it is more often collaborative than adversarial.

The study [Daily Negotiation and Its Effects on Short-term Pleasantness and Longer-term Well-being](#), led by [Katherine Qianwen Sun](#) (UCLA Anderson School of Management), along with [Martin Schweinsberg](#) (ESMT Berlin), [Matteo Di Stasi](#) (CUNEF Universidad), and [Jordi Quoidbach](#) (ESADE Business School), was published in the peer-reviewed journal *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research*. Using an app-based experience-sampling method, the researchers tracked 302 participants over the course of a week, prompting them at random moments throughout the day to report their mood and whether their most recent interaction involved any element of negotiation, resulting in 5,286 data points.

The findings challenge three assumptions that have long shaped how negotiation is studied and taught:

First, negotiation is far more frequent than existing research assumed. More than 30 percent of everyday social interactions involved at least one negotiation process, such as reaching an agreement, making a joint decision, resolving a disagreement, persuading someone, bargaining, or mediating between others.

Second, negotiation also looks different from how it is typically portrayed. Classic bargaining or the exchange of offers and concessions most closely associated with the term “negotiation” accounted for just 2.7 percent of interactions. The most common process was trying to reach an agreement (almost four times as common: 10.4 percent of interactions). Everyday negotiation appears to involve agreement-seeking and joint decision-making more than the zero-sum exchange it is often assumed to be.

Third, negotiation is not confined to the workplace. While it was most prevalent in interactions with coworkers, present in 54 percent of such interactions, it was also common in personal relationships. Around 30 percent of interactions with friends, family members, and romantic partners involved some form of negotiation.

The researchers find that interactions involving negotiation were associated with a measurable negative dip in momentary mood, comparable in size to the mood boost typically associated with interacting with coworkers or relatives, but in the opposite direction. Despite this, participants who negotiated more frequently also reported higher general well-being, pointing to a possible link between the willingness to negotiate and longer-term well-being. The study additionally finds no

significant differences in negotiation frequency by gender or age, contradicting commonly held stereotypes, such as the assumption that women negotiate less often than men.

“Negotiation has a reputation as something confined to boardrooms and big-ticket purchases,” says Martin Schweinsberg, professor at ESMT. “But our data shows that people are negotiating constantly. Negotiation is woven into the ordinary give-and-take of daily life.”

The authors caution that the association between negotiation frequency and well-being is correlational, not causal: individuals with higher baseline well-being may simply be more inclined to negotiate. They call for longitudinal and interventional research to establish causality, as well as further studies into what people negotiate over and what outcomes they achieve.

About ESMT Berlin

ESMT Berlin is a leading global business school with its campus in the heart of Berlin. Founded by 25 global companies, ESMT offers master, MBA, and PhD programs, as well as executive education on its campus in Berlin, in locations around the world, online, and in online blended format. Focusing on leadership, innovation, and analytics, its diverse faculty publishes outstanding research in top academic journals. Additionally, the international business school provides an interdisciplinary platform for discourse between politics, business, and academia. ESMT is a non-profit private institution of higher education with the right to grant PhDs and is accredited by AACSB, AMBA, EQUIS, and ZEvA. It is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion across all its activities and communities. [esmt.berlin](https://www.esmt.berlin)

Press contacts

Deepti Gahrotra
Interim Deputy Director of Corporate Communications
Phone: +49 175 3741829
Deepti.Gahrotra@esmt.org

Martha Ihlbrock
Director of Corporate Communications
Phone: +49 175 9390728
Martha.Ihlbrock@esmt.org