NEGOTIATING IN THE 21st CENTURY: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN
TECHNOLOGY AND HOSTAGE NEGOTIATION

James Nichols

Faculty Mentor: Brian Richardson
Department of Communication Studies, College of Arts and Sciences

Abstract

Hostage negotiation at its core is a communicative event developed to save lives through interpersonal tactics. The current protocol in hostage negotiation relies primarily on verbal communication through landlines. This protocol severely handicaps negotiators as it only opens up a single channel of communication. The purpose of this study proposal is to promote the inclusion of new technology, specifically cellphones with text, call, and video chat capabilities, into hostage negotiation situations. The injection of new technology, and thus new communicative mediums, allows the negotiator to adapt to the hostage taker's fluctuating level of communication apprehension, communication competency, and levels of trust between them. The impact of new technology on hostage negotiation will be measured using controlled simulations accompanied by a completion questionnaire.

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Introduction

On the night of October 23, 2002 the lives of 979 men, women, and children were put in the hands of authorities. In less than 30 minutes, 53 armed men and woman had complete control of the Dubrovka Theater in Moscow. In just three days communication fell apart which led to a controversial tactical insertion that directly resulted in the death of 128 hostages (Dolnik & Pilch, 2003).

On August 23, 2010, a dishonored cop in the Philippines took a bus of tourists hostage. Within a few hours of negotiation, the perpetrator released nearly half the hostages. A few hours later, upon seeing his brother being forcefully arrested on live television, noticing the encroachment of SWAT, and realizing his demands ignored, he opened fire upon the remaining hostages resulting in the death of eight and injury of the remaining seven (Lai, 2011).

On February 28, 1993 a siege began after a failed ATF raid on a religious sect located near Waco, Texas. In the following weeks the negotiators were unable to understand the religious rhetoric being used by the compound's leader, David Koresh. After 50 days, against the advisement of hostage negotiation leaders, a second assault ensued resulting in an explosion killing 72 men, women, and children residing on the compound (McMurty, 1993).

Each one of the above mentioned tragedies has a myriad of reasons for the horrid outcomes. However, each one has a common leading cause – a breakdown in communication. In the United States alone, the act of taking hostages is higher than it has been in the last four decades (Richardson, Hancerli, & Gordon, n.d.). As a result, the science of hostage negotiation has improved to the point where an estimated 96% of crisis situations are resolved nonviolently

through negotiation (Rogan & Hammer 1995). The most notable progression in hostage negotiation tactics can be seen when analyzing the Behavioral Change (Influence) Stairway Model which lays out a step by step procedure needed to influence the perpetrator (Vecchi, Van Hasselt, & Romano, 2005). As useful as the Behavioral Change (Influence) Stairway Model may be, it still falls short of being able to incorporate the unpredictable nature of communication. As history shows, hostage takers have varying levels of communication competency, communication apprehension, and ability to trust. Each fluctuation in communication during the negotiation process is dangerous as a breakdown in communication can result in tactical insertion. Thus, common sense dictates negotiators should use the best means of stabilizing communication so the process of negotiation may be fully exhausted before resorting to tactical insertion.

The contention of this proposal is that the inclusion of new communicative technology in hostage negotiation situations, specifically cellphones with the ability to text, call, and video chat, opens new pathways for negotiators to utilize. The new pathways of communication then allow hostage negotiators to continue conversing with a hostage taker despite any fluctuating levels of trust, spikes in communication apprehension, or a diminishing level of communication competency. This new technology is not aimed to replace current hostage negotiation strategy. Instead new communicative technology is aimed to be a tool that hostage negotiators may employ in order to strengthen the Behavioral Change (Influence) Stairway Model.

I will begin by examining pertinent literature in the fields of technology and trust as well as that of current hostage negotiation protocol in more detail. After revealing the gap in knowledge between communicative technology and hostage negotiations, I will present my research questions. Finally, a detailed account of proposed methodology will precede the

implications this research study will have in the fields of communication and hostage negotiation.

Review of Literature

Technology

Communication Revolution: Over the last few decades, the invention, creation, and distribution of technology has increased dramatically. Scholars such as Baptist and Allen (2008) promoted the idea that we are living in an advanced age of technology and as a result individuals have a desire to receive information and communicate in a timely manner. The widespread use of advanced technology is likewise pointed out by scholars Cooper and Freiner (2010) who found that children, on average, receive their first cell phone between the ages of eight and ten. As communication technology advances, so increases the multitude of applications. Currently the use of video mediated communication is being implemented in the fields of education, medicine, and everyday business meetings (Sanford, Anderson, & Mullin, 2004). It is clear that technology has and continues to change how individuals communicate with one another. Thus, it only makes sense to apply new communication based technology into various communicative based events – such as hostage negotiations.

Levels of Technological Communication: Communication via technology occurs on various levels. People talk on the phone, video chat, email, text message, send picture message, tweet, Facebook chat, and more. Due to the inability to feasibly test all the various different technology based communicative means, this research study will focus on text messages and video mediated communication and how they relate to building interpersonal trust in hostage situations.

Text: Text messaging, in many circles, has replaced talking on the phone or even face to face interaction for children, teenagers, and young adults (Cooper & Freiner, 2010). One reason

for the increased use of texting is because texting acts as a social barrier, allowing both parties to communicate openly with a minimal communication apprehension. The reason for this social barrier being present is because texting, an impersonal means of communication, removes nonverbal cues. As such, communicative via text requires a minimal amount of cognitive application to carry on a conversation.

Video: Video mediated communication, once confined to computers and plagued by poor quality, is now mobile as it is possible to video chat through certain cellular devices. Superb picture quality is crucial in building trust through this medium as video messages allow for the opportunity to identify non-verbal gestures and cues which reveal relational information (Paulson & Naquin, 2004). Without nonverbal cues, communicators may begin to feel distant from one another, thus hindering the development of an interpersonal relationship (McQuillen, 2003). As such, communicating via video chat is more cognitively demanding and thus may cause an increase of communication apprehension.

Trust: Communicating through these two different technological mediums impacts the building of trust in various ways. Fortunately, scholars Paulson and Naquin (2004) found that positive relationships built around trust can be formed in an on-line setting. Though various studies have been conducted in relation to technology and trust, these studies peaked in the 1970's and 1980's (Muhlfelder, Klein, Simon, & Luczak, 1999). Over the years, technology has expanded and evolved, and as technology expanded, society began to accept technological mediums as a legitimate pathway of communication (Vielhaber & Waltman, 2008). In summation, relationships can be created through text messaging and trust enhanced through video mediated communication.

Hostage Negotiation

A Brief History: Prior to 1973, when hostage negotiation was non-existent, police practiced tactical insertion as the common means of hostage retrieval. Tactical insertion, however, statistically increases the odds that hostages will be killed (Dolnik & Pilch, 2003; Giebels, Noelanders, & Vervaeke, 2005). After a number of hostage fatalities, the study of hostage negotiation was created in 1973 (Vecchi et al., 2005). Over the decades, since the implementation of hostage negotiation strategies, the number of hostage incidents has increased (McClain, Callaghan, Madrigal, Unwin, & Castoreno, 2006).

An Interpersonal Approach: Hostage negotiation, at its core, is a communicative event. The main objective of hostage negotiators is to build a relationship with the hostage taker in order to influence her/him to peacefully end the conflict (McClain et al., 2006; Vecchi, 2009; Vecchi et al., 2005). To achieve this goal, negotiators utilize the Behavioral Change (Influence) Stairway Model created by the FBI Crisis Negotiation Unit (Vecchi et al., 2005).

Fig. 1. Behavioral Change (Influence) Stairway Model

This step by step process incorporates a number of interpersonal communication skills such as active listening, empathy, and rapport building in order to influence the hostage taker (Vecchi, 2009; Vecchi et al., 2005). As such, there has been an increasing amount of studies on hostage negotiation patterns and strategies.

Broadening the Lens: It was not until recently that scholars have started to examine hostage negotiations from new perspectives. Such examples include examining hostage situations from the hostage perspective (Giebels et al., 2005) or the investigation of stakeholders on the negotiation process (Richardson et al., n.d.). The primary focus of research in the field hostage negotiation and communication has been limited to patterns, relationships, and strategies used within authentic and simulated hostage situations. It seems scholars have overlooked the impact that new communicative based technology may have on hostage situations.

The Bridge

The current protocol in hostage negotiation aims to prevent any face to face interaction and primarily relies on verbal communication through landlines (Cooper & Freiner, 2010; Dolnik & Pilch, 2003; McClain et al., 2006). This protocol severely handicaps negotiators as it removes face to face interaction, a pillar in trust building, and only opens up a single channel of communication (Bekmeier-Fuehrhah & Eichenlaub, 2010). Scholars Cooper and Freiner (2010) tried to address the latter in their research by promoting the use of text messaging as a tool for hostage negotiators to employ. This study, while being unique to its field, failed to test the hypothesis presented nor identified what ramifications the new technology may have on the Behavioral Change (Influence) Stairway Model. However, Cooper and Freiner's (2010) research opens up the possibilities of injecting a new piece of communicative technology into hostage situations. Through the use of a modern cell phone, a hostage negotiator may text, call, and

video chat with the hostage taker. Thus, through the injection of a cellular device, the hostage negotiator is able to adapt to the hostage taker's fluctuating level of communication apprehension, communication competency, and levels of trust between them. In essence, it is time for hostage negotiators to begin to use new communicative technology in order to keep up with an evolving world. Thus, this research proposal investigates the following research questions:

RQ1: How would the use of texting as a means of conversing with a hostage taker impact the progress of negotiation in relation to the Behavioral Change (Influence) Stairway Model?

RQ2: How would the use of video chatting as a means of conversing with a hostage taker impact the progress of negotiation in relation to the Behavioral Change (Influence) Stairway Model?

Method

Design: Teams of hostage negotiation responders will be divided into three groups during a currently unspecified hostage negotiation training seminar and/or competition. Each hostage negotiation squad will engage in a duplicate simulated hostage negotiation. Participants (hostage taker and perpetrator) in group one will be informed to complete the simulation using current protocol and technology. Group two participants will receive a smartphone with no further instructions. Group three participants will receive a smartphone and be told to initiate conversation through text, build empathy and rapport through phone calls, and to conclude the simulation through video chat. Upon completion all participants will receive a completion survey.

Participants: The number of participants will be dependent on the size of the competition. The experiment can function with three teams of negotiators, but this study aims to potentially identify any possible variations in successful use of technology in relation to age. Thus, the hope is to have multiple teams in each section with varying ages. All participants will be trained hostage negotiators.

Simulation: Simulations in general are shorter as they tend to be less varied in length than actual hostage situations (Holmes, 1997). The simulation in this research study will be written with the assistance of former FBI agent and current crisis responder, Pat LeMaire. LeMaire's experience in actual crisis negotiation situations as well as personal training will ensure the simulation will be as similar to an actual hostage situation as possible, but able to be resolved in minimal time (1-2 hours). The current details of the simulation (location, situation, hostage taker) are all undecided and under development.

Transcribing: The negotiation process will be carefully followed and recorded in chronological order. While this data will not be coded, each negotiator involved will be evaluated in the same manner that hostage negotiation competitions are judged. This portion of the experiment is aimed to immerse negotiators in new technology before having participants fill out a completion survey.

Survey: The completion survey will be Likert based in order to be quantified. The survey will measure both the hostage negotiator and hostage taker's perception of the simulation.

Measurements will include comfort, accessibility, levels of communication apprehension, level of trust, and feeling of success for each channel of communication taken. The survey will also collect demographic information as well as professional experience of each participant.

Materials: Two Iphone 4S's will be provided which contain the ability to text, call, and video chat. Wireless internet will also be provided in order to guarantee high picture quality.

Negotiators will receive a brief instructional demo on how to text, call, and video chat with an Iphone. Recording devices will also be present.

Conclusion

Scholars (Richardson et al., n.d.) determined the rate of hostage situations is increasing. As such, the number of lives in the hands of negotiators is increasing as well. Additionally, scholars determined that unsuccessful negotiations, such the Waco incident (McMurty, 1993), the Philippines incident (Lai, 2011), and the Moscow theater incident (Dolnik & Pilch, 2003), are a direct result of breakdowns in communication. Thus, preventing breakdowns in communication during hostage negotiations will save lives. Yet, scholars in the field of hostage negotiation have not examined the technological mediums in which negotiations take place. Seeing as texting is now common and video chatting enhances trust, it only makes sense to identify how texting and video chatting may stabilize a hostage negotiation (Cooper & Freiner, 2010; McQuillen, 2003).

The scholars Cooper and Freiner (2010) noted an increasing gap between hostage negotiation protocol and communicative based technology. This research proposal aims to bring hostage negotiation into the 21st century through the implementation of new communicative based technology. I seek to not only build off the idea of texting in hostage negotiations presented by Cooper and Freiner (2010) but to incorporate video chatting as well. This research study will be the first of its kind. Thus, the data that this research study will produce is significant as the knowledge may save lives as well increase our understanding of technologies impact on trust in crisis situations. Furthermore, this proposal opens a new field of study in

relation to various forms of communicative technologies impact in currently technologically lacking contexts. Therefore my research study will increase the pool of knowledge in technological communication, interpersonal communication, hostage negotiation, and has the potential to save lives.

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