
Literature Review

Brian C. Gunia: The Bartering Mindset

The insights of modern negotiation research have exploded in recent years. Even though “Getting to Yes” (ger. “The Harvard Concept”) still seems to be the measure of all things in this country, empirical social psychology and game theory have been drawing a much more nuanced picture. However, it is difficult for researchers to get their hands on the data of real-world transactions- which is why new insights are often generated experimentally. Most experiments take place under laboratory conditions at American Universities. This can sometimes call into question the generalizability of their findings. Importantly, it also has the consequence of ever more detailed research questions. One counts words, measures times, and records phrases - and sometimes gets lost in detail. The academic imperative to “publish or perish” makes this unavoidable. But sometimes, it seems, sight of the big picture is lost.

Not at all in the new book of a young Johns Hopkins professor: In “The Bartering Mindset”, *Brian C. Gunia* takes a helicopter view of the field - and has created something extraordinary. By reminding us of an all too often forgotten mental framework – bartering – he provides nothing less than the “missing link” of negotiation theory.

Gunia first invites us to consider how often we think about money, at least implicitly, every day. Our transactions are primarily monetary, and for good reason: They form the basis of economic development and allow for the satisfaction of many needs. Which says nothing about the psychological consequences of a monetary economy. This is where *Gunia* positions the lever. His work is based on the argument that our constant thinking in monetary terms leads to the unconscious yet erroneous assumption that our needs are diametrically opposed to the needs of others: The buyer wants to spend as little money as possible, the seller wants to make as much money as possible.

This “monetary mindset” is helpful for simple transactions, but often makes it impossible to adequately address complex negotiations. Thinking in limited monetary terms often forces us to merely distribute value. Which is precisely the reason why, as *Gunia* holds, the research of the last five decades encourages us to create value. But in all these years human negotiation behavior has not changed substantially. Why?

Because we often do not have the necessary mindset. The “monetary mindset” leads to distributive (win-lose) behavior. Yet the mindset that facilitates the creation of value (win-win) is precisely the “bartering mindset” that *Gunia* describes: Instead of considering the other side’s needs in monetary terms, in bartering we directly look at both party’s needs. This perspective permits us to look at mutual interests, and thus to negotiate win-win outcomes. Instead of “satisfying needs in exchange for money” we are focused on “mutually satisfying needs.”

Gunia draws this simple and charming idea from a broad empirical basis. Even more importantly: In best American fashion he offers a practical plan to cultivate the bartering mindset and thus achieve better negotiation results. In its clarity the book is reminiscent of “Getting to Yes”. And that is true, in my opinion, also for its potential impact. It is a must for researchers and practitioners.

Attorney Prof. Dr. Georg Berkel, MBA, Freising