

Review of Psychological Study on Crisis Negotiation

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Abstract

The crisis negotiation is a law enforcement action to remove the threat of hijackers and rescue hostages in a peaceful way. The essence of successful crisis negotiation is effective communication. About forty years of practical experience and empirical research on crisis intervention show that the way of communication is better than that of the tactical attack; the personality traits of a negotiator, such as emotional stability, empathic ability, divergent thinking mode, etc., have an important influence; the hijackers are characterized with emotionality, criminality and spirituality in diversified motivations, and paranoid type and abnormalism in personality and behavioral characteristics; the hostages may appear specific subconscious self-defense reaction of Stockholm syndrome during the crisis; and the successful negotiator shall be the combination of police and clinical psychologist with rich practical experience, and be the “psychologist with gun” with an effective confrontation to the hijackers and crisis events.

Based on early practice and theoretical model of crisis negotiation, this article focuses on reviewing and analyzing the communication techniques such as active listening, self-exposure and role playing in crisis negotiation, characteristics and psychological reactions of hijackers and hostages, and personalities and behavioral characteristics of negotiators and selection and training programs of negotiators.

Key words: Crisis negotiation; Negotiation skill; Negotiation expert; Stockholm Syndrome

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INTRODUCTION

Crisis negotiation is a technique for law enforcement officers to communicate with people who are threatening the life of hostage. With the development of about forty years, procedures and techniques of the crisis negotiation have been widely used in dealing with crisis events by the law enforcement agency. The practice of crisis negotiation originated in 1970s, for dealing with crime and political events with distinctive features of hostage-taking. For example, the massacre of Olympic athletes caused by the terrorists in Munich in 1972 and the prevalent aircraft hijacking event in the 1970s quickly promoted the technical development of crisis negotiation (Getz, McCann, 1998). Therein, positive activities of the New York Police Department (NYPD) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) played an important pioneering role. These pioneers not only have developed specific crisis negotiation techniques and theoretical models, but also promoted the transformation from “the first generation of crisis negotiation” to “the second generation of crisis negotiation”, that is, the technique of crisis negotiation is transformed from coping with terrorism and political events to coping to unexpected crimes. For example, the Hostage Negotiation Team (HNT) was renamed the Crisis Negotiation Team (CNT). (Call, 2003) Currently, the crisis negotiation has become a routine technique to respond to crisis events by Western law enforcement agency (police force) from occasional use to standard procedures. Accordingly, the psychological study of crisis negotiation involves in the strategies and techniques in crisis negotiation, as well as personality and behavioral characteristics of the hijackers, negotiators and hostages.

1. EARLY PRACTICE AND THEORETICAL MODEL OF CRISIS NEGOTIATION

The crisis negotiation appeared as an auxiliary scheme to respond to crisis crimes. That is, the crisis negotiation is an auxiliary technique rather than a major or dominant technique to tactical offensive strategy. As the crisis negotiator plays an increasingly significant positive role in dealing with crisis events, crisis negotiation has gradually become a standard procedure and preferred solution to deal with crisis events. A crisis negotiator is also visually described as “a psychologist with gun”.

In the initial application period of crisis negotiation, the law enforcement officers had a simple dialogue with the criminal suspect if tactical offense was not suitable, so as to avoid direct force confrontation and resolve the crisis. However, the practice has proved that the effect of negotiation is better than the previous tactical offense, especially when innocent hostages are in danger. Therefore, the initial strategy of crisis negotiation is “isolation-containment-negotiation” mode. Early theoretical model of crisis negotiation puts much emphasis on dealing with crimes. Due to the failure of realizing that the communication technology is an essence of crisis negotiation, and too much emphasis being put on criminals surrendering or pleading guilty unconditionally or conditionally, the results are in relatively low efficiency or at even places of passive situation in response to a number of complex crisis events (such as terrorism events, psychopathic events, orchestrated crisis events, career criminals crisis events and so on). Therefore, in the 1990s, a more comprehensive and integrated framework for crisis negotiations has been proposed: under the background of social forces, environmental forces, law enforcement agencies and political forces, with a critical dimension of time, and core personnel of criminals, negotiators and hostages involved, the crisis psychology and risk behaviors can be resolved by the dynamic negotiation based on the criminal motivation and psychology analyzed by the negotiators. The core elements are the follows: factors of criminals, such as motivation and purpose; factors of hostages, such as psychological health condition; factors of negotiators, such as negotiation skills, personality traits, etc.; process of negotiation, such as tension control; tactical attack, such as presentation of urgency; forces of police agencies, such as organization and coordination; forces of external support, such as coordination of media, and coordination of family and friends.

2. COMMUNICATION AND SPECIAL TECHNIQUE

The nature of negotiation is a kind of communication. Upon gaining lessons from ineffective communication in many crisis situations, the negotiation is reexamined, and

then its importance is realized. Its importance can be seen as a cornerstone principle in the process of negotiation.

Early crisis negotiation is a strategy of containment and isolation, which hopes that the hijackers can succumb to the pressure and release hostages through the urgency of time under the role of powerful containment force (on the basis of force deterrence). Early researchers and judicial executors have realized that the negotiation is really better than force attack in resolving crisis, but ineffective communication and urgency of time often lead to execution of a fatal “tactical attack” (the vast majority of results are counterproductive and tragic), and give up the possibility of resolving crisis in a peaceful way.

In communication techniques of crisis negotiation, active listening, self-exposure and role playing are common techniques.

The inspiration of importance of active listening role in crisis negotiation comes from the clinical effect of psychological counseling. As the confrontation of negotiators (judicial officers or symbolic representatives) and hijackers, the hijackers do not believe the sincerity of the negotiators, and accumulate a very heavy psychological pressure, having a great need for others to understand their pressure and pain, and having a great need to have objects and space to release pressure and vent painful emotions. After the hijackers venting emotions, a few possible ways can be put forward to help analyze ways to resolve crisis, so as to see the pros and cons of various possibilities, and lead to a specific way. Therefore, the active listening is a communication strategy and technique to manifest that the negotiators can help sincerely and effectively gain information, and make the best use to vent pressure.

Self-exposure technique is one of strategic techniques to gain a sense of trust and empathy. After preliminary approval by hijackers is obtained in crisis negotiations, there are still a lot of communication impedances. At this time, the negotiators should expose themselves to the hijackers with similar and related ideas and experience as average person at the right moment and in an appropriate way, so as to let the hijackers feel the sincerity and sympathy, and sometimes generate empathy on the hostages (reduce the risk of hostages). The authenticity of the event and experience, and prevention of untimely self-exposure and excessive self-exposure should be particularly noted in the self-exposure technique.

Role playing technique associated with self-exposure: based on the role playing, the negotiator and hijacker experience and analyze plight and stakes of various roles in a particular situation, and find out a favorable and reasonable solution together. Another positive effect of role playing is that the hijackers will invest more interest and energy in the specific roles and relationships, thereby greatly reducing the threat to the hostages, and the likelihood of suicide. Therefore, role playing is called a

means of “disarmament” by a way of communication in the crisis negotiation (Charles, 1999, 2007; Slakin, 2005).

3. CHARACTERISTICS OF HIJACKERS

Behind the hijacking actions in crisis events, there are motivations of the actor, and the hijacking actions are guided to a specific purpose under the support of motivation. Dynamic factors of each crisis event are different. Different kinds of motivations for different types of hijackers can be divided into individual (emotional), criminal (instrumental), social-political (ideological) categories. Different crime motivations of hijacking crimes require negotiators to adopt different negotiation strategies and methods. Individual or emotional motivation are mainly from frustrating experiences in individual life, failure in working relationship, family and marriage relationship, and interpersonal relationship, or threat to self-safety; these failures or threats may be objective or subjective, but the actor may feel its authenticity. Criminal (instrumental) motivation is driven mainly by its criminal purpose. Hostage-taking or threats to endanger public safety is just a means of achieving criminal purposes.

In crisis negotiations, there are two aspects in the research and concern about the personality of hijackers, namely, analysis of normal personality and judgment of personality disorders or psychopathy. In dealing with crisis events caused by psychological disorders, a grasp of adequate knowledge of clinical psychology is one of important conditions for negotiators to control the situation of negotiation (Hacker, 1976; Lanceley, 1981).

In the crisis events, one aspect needs to be emphasized in the research and practical application of personality and psychological state of the hijackers is that the classification of dogmatic personality disorder or psychological disorder could not explain the actual situation of the actors in the crisis events well. Now, the lesson summed up from decades of resolving crisis events is that, for crisis events caused by person with personality disorder or psychological disorder, a more appropriate measure is to be more concerned about the explicit behavioral characteristics and intrinsic motivation of the hijackers, rather than rigidly adhering to the types of disorder in clinical taxonomy and standard characteristics.

4. CHARACTERISTICS, SELECTION AND TRAINING OF NEGOTIATORS

Negotiators have a decisive role in the crisis events. Between the hijackers and the hostages, the negotiations are the “wedge” of armed conflict (forces of obstruction and regulation) to resolve crisis in a peaceful way. In the crisis events, without the negotiators, the results are often tragic; negotiators play a vital role in promoting the process of peaceful settlement of the crisis. The study

of the characteristics of negotiators and corresponding selection and training naturally becomes a necessary topic because the negotiators hold an important position.

Negotiation is a kind of communication, and verbal communication ranks the first. Accordingly, the language expression of negotiators is very important. However, research and practical experience have proved that, significantly different from subjective imagination of the public, successful negotiators are not eloquent; language features are embodied in the logical persuasiveness and fluency of thinking. In other words, the successful negotiators are not eloquent, but must be good at persuasion and infectious in language.

For a long time, the study of the characteristics of negotiators has been focused on the personality trait. Early study has summarized the necessary motivation level and personality trait of successful negotiators by a way of experience and factor analysis. For example, highly related personality traits of successful negotiators are mainly in the emotional stability, high extraversion, inner self-satisfaction and orientation of freedom consciousness (Tatar, 1982). The research over the past decade has further revealed personality and multi-dimensional physical and psychological variables of the successful negotiators by the method of more precise use of personality inventory and case, as well as the demonstration. For example, in the use of personality inventory scale (16PF, CPI), the research shows that, efficient negotiators usually have a high level of applicability, social skills and communication skills, a high level of self-confidence, social performance, smart control, intuitive reaction, divergent thinking ability and compassion (a high level of empathy), as well as a broad range of knowledge, versatility and so on (Strentz, 2006).

Based on the research of outstanding personality traits of successful negotiators, researchers and the actual sector cooperate to carry out a series of fruitful “negotiators selection and training programs”. The selection of negotiators mainly involves in the following aspects: psychological health examination of negotiation candidates; assessment of personality traits of effective communication; evaluation of professional knowledge and experience. The research shows that the best negotiator is a combination of experienced criminal police and psychologist (Romano, 2004; Van Hasselt, 2008).

Common specific ways of training negotiators are case teaching, role playing and simulation teaching and so on, in which, teaching by personal example as well as verbal instruction by the person with rich experienced has a good effect. For example, the case teaching of the Federal Bureau of Investigation-Crisis Negotiation Team (FBI-CNT) based on real events is evaluated as a standard teaching method for training negotiators. Meanwhile, questioning discussion, evaluation and assessment of a variety of teaching

methods participated by the expert group are effective ways to improve negotiation skills.

5. CHARACTERISTICS OF HOSTAGES

The hostage is the center of crisis negotiation. The whole process of crisis negotiation is committed to the safety and rescue of hostages; the physical and psychological state of hostages has become a concerned topic by negotiators. Meanwhile, the hostage is also the negotiation coin, thus becoming the focus of the whole crisis event.

The Stockholm syndrome has become a sensitive topic, which has been discussed since the hostage incident has happened. It is a phenomenon that in the process of being hijacked, the hostage gradually agrees with the views of hijackers and generates negative or confrontation emotion towards the police. The hostage gradually agrees with the views of hijackers because of unconscious motivation of self-defense; the hostage generates negative or confrontation emotion towards the police because they perceive the threats of life from the urgent tactical attack by the police. On the basis of an empirical research of psychopathology of hostages after the crisis event, the researcher shows that the Stockholm syndrome does exist, which is more likely to occur when the hijacker treats hostages passively (even viciously) (Hillman, 1981; Solomon, 1982). On the other hand, some researchers show that, the Stockholm syndrome is avoidable on the condition that the police force (including negotiators and tactical forces) can play a role of control in time, and reduce the possibility of treating or threatening hostages violently to a large extent. The likelihood of occurrence of the Stockholm syndrome can be greatly reduced as long as the hostages fail to feel the impending threat to life (Olin; Born, 1983).

A further systematic explanation of the Stockholm syndrome is that, its occurrence is essentially related to the close interpersonal interaction between hostages and hijackers: under the survival pressure, the frail psychological quality and too strong defensive psychology, sensitive interaction between hostages and hijackers can easily induce the Stockholm syndrome. Based on the empirical investigation and theoretical reasoning, in the hostages of crisis events, the likelihood of occurrence of the Stockholm syndrome is below 30%, which does not exclude the likelihood of occurrence of emotion and behavior infections in the case of occurrence of the Stockholm syndrome and closing to the threat of armed attack (Fuselier, 1988).

6. SUMMARY AND OUTLOOK

The crisis negotiation is a law enforcement behavior to remove the threat of hijackers and rescue hostages in a peaceful way. The essence of successful crisis negotiation

is an effective communication. In the meantime, the personality traits of a professional negotiator have an important influence. The traits of the negotiator, such as open mind, emotional stability, extraversion, good interpersonal and communication skills, empathic ability, divergent thinking mode and rich life experience have a key role in resolving the crisis; selection and training of negotiators are also carried out based on these traits. The key communication skills are listening, self-exposure and role playing.

The judgment on hijackers is mainly focused on the analysis of the sources of motivation of hijacking (emotional, criminal and spiritual motivations) and paranoid and abnormal personality and behavioral characteristics. Antisocial personality disorder and schizophrenia are only constituted by a small part in a crisis event, but its instability becomes a key object of crisis intervention.

The hostage is the concerned center in the crisis event. The supreme goal is to save the life of hostage and guarantee the safety of hostage. In the crisis events, some hostages may have an abnormal psychological reaction psychologically. The Stockholm syndrome is one of the most prominent syndromes. Its prevention and psychological counseling and treatment in the later period are worthy of attention of crisis intervention.

The knowledge and skills of the clinical psychologist play an increasingly important role in the whole process of resolving crisis, which have an indispensable position and role in the crisis negotiation and crisis intervention. The “psychologist with gun”—the crisis negotiator with an effective confrontation to the crisis event can be created through the combined training of the police and clinical psychologist with rich practical experience.

Recalling more than 40 years of history, prospecting solutions to the crisis events, and facing unexpected crisis events in modern society, there are challenges in negotiation strategies. In resolving crisis events, awareness of the key role of communication: completely abandon old views of “not to negotiate with terrorists or criminals”, because the practice has proven that the way of communication is better than that of the tactical attack in resolving crisis. “There is a need of time to rescue the life of hostages by a way of communication” should be the supreme concept of crisis settlement. The relationship between the negotiating group and the tactical attack group: the negotiating group does not compete with tactical attack group; they should face the common task in cooperation to guarantee the safety of hostages. In addition, in the future, there is a need to further explore the structure and functions maximization of the negotiating group, and coordination between various branches of the overall system in crisis settlement, which requires a more effective regulatory body or regulatory mechanism. Thus, in these crisis challenges, to join the professional

knowledge and skills in clinical psychology and behavioral sciences in the crisis settlement group is a wisdom choice for the human beings to overcome the crisis crimes in a scientific and rational way in modern society.

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