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'An error is feedback': the experience of communication error management in crisis negotiations

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ABSTRACT
A range of studies have examined what should be said and done in crisis negotiations. Yet, no study to date has considered what happens when an error is made, how to respond to an error, and what the consequences of errors and responses might be on the negotiation process itself. To develop our understanding of errors, we conducted 11 semi-structured interviews with police crisis negotiators in the Netherlands. Negotiators reported making errors of three types: factual, judgment, or contextual. They also reported making use of four types of response strategy: accept, apologize, attribute, and contradict. Critically, the negotiators did not perceive errors as solely detrimental, but as an opportunity for feedback. They advocated for an error management approach, which focused on what could be learned from another person's errors when looking back at them. Suggestions for improvement of the communication error management experience in crisis negotiations are discussed.

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Introduction

For many police interactions, such as an interrogation or when dispersing a violent crowd, the main objective is to achieve a change in the behavior of the perpetrator (Taylor, 2014). This is particularly true for crisis negotiators, who use dialogue over a protracted interaction to encourage cooperation from a hostage taker, so that the crisis may end peacefully. An array of research has focused on what should be said and done in these type of interactions (Donohue & Roberto, 1993; Giebels, 1999; Taylor, 2002a; Vecchi, Van Hasselt, & Romano, 2005), and more recent work has uncovered some of the individual differences that moderate the effects of these efforts (Giebels, Oostinga, Taylor, & Curtis, 2017; Rogan, 2011). However, perhaps surprisingly, no research has considered what happens if an error is made in crisis communication. That is, there has been no systematic evaluation of the consequences of a message that the perpetrator perceives as wrong or inappropriate. Yet, in the heat of a crisis, it is inevitable that negotiators will mix up information or interpret a perpetrator's behavior incorrectly. Understanding the consequence of such errors is important, since they may undermine the negotiators' focus and compromise his or her relationship with the perpetrator. Moreover, it is important to understand the effects of error making on subsequent communication, since research in other domains suggests that you can repair an error by using the appropriate response (Benoit, 2013).

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Given the centrality of errors to multiple policing tasks and contexts across the world, we examine error making and seek to make three contributions. First, we take an initial step in examining the issue of communication error management by explicating the kinds of errors that occur within crisis negotiations and the responses crisis negotiators use. Second, by doing this it seeks to build an evidence-base for understanding the impact of communication errors and the effectiveness of the different responses. Third, we seek to provide a clearer understanding of the by the negotiator experienced error management process. From an academic perspective, this study provides an initial base that can be used to inspire future studies worldwide in this under researched area. From a practical perspective, the rich understanding of this process can inform the preparation of negotiators through training. That is, they will become more aware of what may happen if they say something in error.

Since there is little published understanding of communication error management in personal interactions, and none in relation to crisis negotiation, this evaluation cannot be achieved through a review of the literature. Rather, the best starting point for understanding the characteristics of errors that occur and how they are managed comes from the expertise of those who work in this field and may or may not have made such errors. As a number of scholars have argued, interviews are a justifiable method of gathering information when a new topic area is under scrutiny, and they are particularly suitable for disentangling the bigger picture (Eisenhardt, 1989; Silvermann, 1993). Consequently, this paper uses the results of 11 in-depth interviews to create an overview of the type of errors that police negotiators encounter, the types of response strategies that they may enact, and the intrapersonal consequences of these errors and responses. To direct our interviews, we searched the literature for features pertaining to these themes. Since no universally accepted definition exists, we define the process of communication error management as follows: the negotiator utters a message; the receiving perpetrator judges the message to contain an error; the perpetrator (in)directly addresses the error; and, the negotiator realizes the error and responds to it in a prompt or delayed fashion. It is important to note that we focus on the process of negotiation itself and not necessarily on the consequences of the errors in terms of the ultimate outcome of the negotiation.

We begin the next section with some background information on what we mean by crisis negotiation and follow this with a discussion of what is known about communication errors in other domains. We then give details of our methodology, the results of our interviews, and a discussion that addresses the limitations and implications of our study.

Crisis negotiation and sensemaking

Crisis negotiation is a protracted interaction between the police and a perpetrator in which the outcome is not necessarily a win-win solution, but rather a solution characterized by individual gains with win-lose structures (cf. Giebels & Taylor, 2009). The literature usually distinguishes between expressive and instrumental crises (e.g., Hammer & Rogan, 1997; Vecchi et al., 2005). Expressive negotiations are interactions typically high in emotions in which the negotiator 'helps' with the problem of the perpetrator. This kind of crisis negotiation includes suicide attempts, barricaded persons, and domestic disputes. Examples that have received media attention include the barricade and later suicide of Dr Wanchai in Thailand (Asian Correspondent, 2016) and the hijacking of a Cairo-bound plane in Cyprus (McKenzie, 2016). Instrumental negotiations are interactions typically more rational in character and the negotiator 'bargains' for a transaction. This kind of crisis negotiation includes sieges, kidnappings and extortions (Giebels & Noelanders, 2004). Examples that have received media attention include the Porte de Vincennes siege in France (Witte, 2015) and the kidnapping of Arjan Erkel from the Netherlands (Van Zwol, 2005; see also Giebels & Taylor, 2009). In this study, we focus on both types.

Dependent on the type of incident, crisis negotiators seek to work in teams of 2–4 persons with different roles. The primary negotiator strives to maintain a cooperative dialogue while receiving assistance of others. He or she will often be supported by a second negotiator who feeds advice and information to the primary (Haag & Fresnel, 2015). At larger incidents, additional negotiators take on coaching and coordination roles that support the monitoring and logging of the dynamics of the unfolding

incident. This negotiation cell works for an operational commander who manages the development of negotiation efforts alongside public safety, potential tactical interventions, and so on (Noesner, 1999). Apart from the negotiation and operational team, additional people may be present at the scene. These include a mental health consultant (Mohandie, 2012), an interpreter (Giebels & Taylor, 2012), the media (St-Yves & Michaud, 2012), and relations of the perpetrator (Giebels & Noelanders, 2004). The first two of these may assist the negotiator in negotiating and become part of the team. The presence of the latter two may complicate the communication or place extra time pressure on the negotiation team.

The use of negotiators is viewed as an effective method to respond to crisis incidents, because the use of a tactical intervention is known for placing greater risk on victims (Noesner, 1999). To be effective, the negotiator must make sense of what is going on and engage with the perpetrator's needs perception of what is occurring (Wells, Taylor, & Giebels, 2013). According to Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005, p. 409), this sensemaking can be defined as: …*the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalizes what people are doing.* It is a diligent process used to unwrap what is going on and determine what motivates the other person and, critically, what can motivate them to take a more cooperative position (Donohue & Taylor, 2003). Nonetheless, negotiators face unexpected twists and turns all the time (Weick, 1988) and an error in sensemaking may easily lead to an error in communication.

Communication errors

While there is no research on communication errors in crisis negotiation, the distinctions made in relation to errors and error management in other domains provides a useful background to the current investigation. A large body of literature on communication errors comes from human factors studies that seek to identify the root cause of errors in high consequence settings (Gibson, Megaw, Young, & Lowe, 2006; Lingard et al., 2004). For example, Rabol et al. (2011) identified a range of verbal communication errors that led to poor care implementation within Danish hospitals. They include direct errors in, and misinterpretations of, what was said, but also behavioral failures such as hesitancy in speaking up. While this classification and others within this literature are undoubtedly useful for the setting for which they are undertaken, their focus is on the macro level and so they stop short of identifying subtle communicative differences.

Studies of discourse from a range of areas have proposed frameworks for classifying communication errors (Bohus & Rudnicky, 2005; Halverson et al., 2011; Skantze, 2005; Vignovic & Thompson, 2010). While each again focuses on the errors prevalent in the context being studied, most may be seen to identify three broad types: errors that stem from the *general context* (e.g., occasion, audience); errors related to the *content* of the message (e.g., misremembering facts); and errors related to *judgments* (e.g., etiquette norms, misunderstanding). Of these three types, it is arguably the last two that are most relevant to crisis negotiations because the error is situated on the perpetrator and is most likely to damage the interaction. These two forms of error, then, identify the need to consider both error as it relates to instrumental issues and error as it relates to changing the perpetrators' perceptions of the negotiators intentions or integrity. Consistent with research on the levels at which communication works in crisis negotiation (Taylor, 2002a), errors most likely occur at both the instrumental and relational level.

Error reconciliation

A number of studies from the management literature suggest that there exist a range of possible ways in which a communicator could reconcile an error (Reb, Goldman, Kray, & Cropanzano, 2006; Roschk & Kaiser, 2013; Smith, Bolton, & Wagner, 1999). Bohus and Rudnicky (2005) propose an instrumental, task-focused framework that identifies four forms of response: repeat, rephrase, change and contradict. In their work on organizational justice violations, Reb et al. (2006) examine responses such as providing an explanation, apologizing, and giving monetary compensation. Although each of these classifications highlight possible forms of error responses, they are largely tailored to the setting in which they occur, which makes them difficult to apply to a crisis negotiation context.

Consequently, we consider the five broad categories of Benoit (1997) as a solid basis for classification, as he provides an overview of possible message options rather than specific types. The five broad categories are: denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness of event, corrective action and mortification. The first two responses focus primarily on diminishing responsibility, the second two responses aim to reduce the perceived offensiveness of the act and the last focuses on forgiveness (cf. Benoit, 1997, 2013). An experimental line of enquiry (e.g., Dutta & Pullig, 2011) that built on this work support his argument that different error response strategies may seek to address different facets of the error effect, depending on the error makers' priority and understanding of the impact of their error.

Intrapersonal consequences

The possibility of different strategies for handling errors raises the possibility that negotiators may interpret the making of errors differently. Cognitive research (Bell & Kozlowski, 2008; Dimitrova, Van Dyck, van Hooft, & Groenewegen, 2014; Keith & Frese, 2005) suggests that error making disrupts the allocation of the available cognitive resources. This is likely to be particularly true when a person makes an error, the attention seems to divert from the task at hand towards the error. It may induce internal questions, such as why the error occurred, or what the consequences are and whether or not it was preventable. The literature suggests two main strategies to dealing with the cognitive impact of errors (e.g., Frese et al., 1991; Van Dyck, Frese, Baer, & Sonnentag, 2005). One is error prevention, which embraces the notion of bypassing errors altogether to overcome the negative consequences. The second is error management, which determines errors to be inevitable and focuses on the reduction of negative consequences and the increase of potentially positive aspects (e.g., learning). Research from Dimitrova et al. (2014) indicates that the extent to which this attention diverges from the task, depends on the adhered error handling strategy. Specifically, error management seems to lead to more on-task thoughts and better analogical and adaptive transfer performance than error prevention. Especially this focus and flexibility may be crucial in the management of communication errors in crisis negotiation, as in training the negotiators cannot be exposed to all situations that they are likely to encounter since every case is different.

Method

Procedure and respondents

Eleven in-depth interviews with police negotiators were conducted between December 2014 and June 2015. The negotiators were selected to represent the seven different negotiation regions in the Netherlands and they encompassed a variety of different backgrounds and experiences. The personal network of the second author was used to approach the first respondents, after which the snowball-technique was used to recruit others. Preceding the interview, the respondents received an email explaining the goal of the interview and the expected duration (approx. 60 min). The interviewees were assured that the information would be treated confidentially. All the police negotiators that were approached for an interview were willing to participate.

The respondents (6 males; 5 females) had a varying fulltime job ranging from police detective to team chief and from lecturer at the police academy to operational specialist. The respondents had over ten years' experience with the police (Range: 13–40 years) and varied in the years of experience as a negotiator (Range: 3–20 years). To assure the anonymity of the respondents, no further background details will be provided.

The interviews

The interviews were performed by the first author and took a semi-structured form. They were conducted face-to-face at a quiet venue, and lasted between 32 and 75 min (M = 57 min). Before conducting

the interviews, the literature was studied and a general list of theory-driven themes to discuss, was created. The interviews focused on three different themes: the making of communication errors, the use of response strategies and the intrapersonal consequences of errors. These were complemented with some suggestions for how the error handling within crisis negotiation can be improved (the entire interview scheme is outlined in the Appendix 1). It is important to note that the interviewer did not ask for errors specifically, but used more value-neutral words. The interviewer referred, for example, to 'a mismatch in communication', 'difficult communication' or 'slips of the tongue'. The ethical committee of the University of Twente approved the research design and method. Before the starting of the interview, all interviewees provided informed consent.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The first author (i.e., the first coder) then used a grounded theory approach (Glaser, 2002) to examine the content of participants' answers, identifying salient features (i.e., viewpoints, working practices, expectations) and examples of errors and response strategies across the transcripts. An answer was considered salient if it clarified an important concept and/or if more than one interviewee mentioned it. Where features complemented each other, they were combined into a broader category. A second independent coder followed an identical procedure. Once highlighting and coding was completed, the two coders' analysis were compared and differences discussed. This comparison and discussion led to a single, data-driven list of features that provided a test of the themes identified in the literature.

Regarding the classification of the errors, the first coder identified three categories which correspond with: factual errors, judgment errors and contextual errors. The second coder identified six categories of which three had more than one example. These categories overlapped the categories of the first coder. The three categories that contained only one example were re-categorized after discussion in the judgment error category (see Table 1). For the response strategies, the first coder found three categories: apologize, contradict and accept. The second coder found four categories, of which the first three categories overlapped the categories of the first coder. After discussion was decided to include a fourth category: attribute (see Table 2).

Results

Types of communication errors and occurrence

All interviewees provided examples of mostly verbal communication errors from their own experience. These examples varied from happening in the beginning of their career to more recent examples (i.e., in the past year). Most of these examples could be placed into three categories: factual errors, judgment errors and contextual errors. Table 1 illustrates these three types with examples.

Table 1. Examples of communication errors in crisis negotiations.

Type of error	Examples
Factual	When the police officer uses the wrong name of the offender or victim
Objective	When the police officer mixes up the time and day of an event
	When the police officer addresses the two sons of a person and he/she only has one son and one daughter
	When the police officer assigns someone to be a fan of one football group, while he/she supports the other
	When the police officer says 'I have the ransom here', whereas 'here' is meant only symbolically
Judgment *Subjective*	When the police officer says 'I understand how you feel', while the situation is not understandable for the police officer
	When the police officer is in the problem-solving phase, whereas the relationship is not well-established yet
	When the police officer uses a filler like 'ok' after the message 'I want dead' of the perpetrator
	When the police officer tries to address a certain topic more than once and the perpetrator does not want to talk about that
	When the police officer is too direct in accepting or turning down the demands of the perpetrator
Contextual *Police setting*	When the police officer mentions the arrest team that is approaching the scene, whereas the opposing party should not know this
	When the police officer uses police terms, language, or procedures
	When the police officer asks too openly what can be done to help

The example was classified as a factual error when the negotiator's message contained an error of fact. It was classified as a judgement error when the negotiator failed to behave in a way that recognized the thoughts and feelings of the opposing party adequately. This usually reflects the (improper) use of listening skills and thus poor alignment with the personal experience of the perpetrator. Finally, the error was classified as a contextual error when it related to a failure to adhere to police practices or procedures.

Most interviewees believed that communication errors take place in every crisis negotiation. Or as an interviewee said: *Nobody is capable of performing a 100% perfect interaction. There is always something that goes wrong.* They believed that the risk of making errors increased however when (1) the stakes were higher, (2) when the negotiator was struggling for power and (3) when there was a lot of information available. Altogether, these factors magnify the amount of possible distraction, being either internal or external, from the job at hand.

It is important to note here that we emphasized that we did not solely focus on the relationship between a communication error and the ultimate outcome of the negotiation. Some negotiators thought for example, that we were only interested in messages that led the other party to commit suicide or use violence against hostages. We clarified our concept and explained that we were interested in messages that disrupted the communication during the process as well. Moreover, we have received many examples in where the negotiator had to respond to something that was caused by the actions of someone else or was the result of their own behavior which was not related to the communication. In retrospect this was likely to happen, as crisis negotiators have to manage the unexpected all the time (Weick, 1988). Yet, this was not what we meant by a communication error and consequently left out of the analysis.

How bad are errors?

A few interviewees reported that the negative consequences of making an error depended on the type of error made. For example, simple factual errors such as using the wrong name were considered less problematic than relationally-focused errors, such as turning down the demands of the perpetrator in a dominative manner (i.e., a judgment error). This is in line with the findings of an organizational study from Vignovic and Thompson (2010) who found the same effects for errors in email contact, yet from a receivers' perspective. A few interviewees reported that errors made in the initial phase of a negotiation were more problematic. They argued that at this phase the relationship is already in tension and that, by making an error, the other side may become more emotional and less trusting. By contrast, later in the interaction the relationship is usually more stable and the negotiator can more easily explain why the error has been made (e.g., by suggesting that he or she is also becoming tired). Their experiences are consistent with the negotiation literature's distinction between the *crisis stage* and the *accommodation/negotiation stage* (Vecchi et al., 2005). An explanation for this experience may be found in the notion that errors tend to snowball. Once an error occurs, the chances of making another increases (Clark & Brennan, 1991). Finally, some interviewees mentioned the mental and physical state of the opposing party. They argued that the making of errors may have a more detrimental effect when a suspect is anti-social, depressed or under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

We also noticed that most interviewees were cautious with classifying messages as errors. They explained that this term has a negative connotation which was inconsistent with their view that sending an erroneous message does not necessarily have to be detrimental. In particular, some interviewees mentioned that errors could have a positive effect on the interaction, largely because it would make them appear more human. For example, one interviewee argued: *We should be cautious with becoming small talkers, who do not want to say anything wrong.* A second suggested: *Negotiating cannot be considered rocket science in anyway.* An interesting point that was raised by several negotiators was that some errors are even made on purpose. For example, when the perpetrator does not respond at all to the attempts of a police negotiator to start a conversation, errors can be used intentionally to

trigger certain emotions with the other party so that they start to talk (cf. Taylor & Donald, 2004). As one interviewee commented: *An error is feedback.*

Types of error responses

All interviewees provided examples of response sentences. These 'response strategies' could be placed in four broad categories: accept, apologize, attribute and contradict. Table 2 outlines these four forms of response with examples. The strategy 'accept' refers to a response when the police negotiator agrees that the message was wrong. The strategy 'apologize' refers to a response when the respondent apologizes for the error and provides an explanation for why this error occurred. The strategy 'attribute' refers to a response when the responsibility is shifted to a third party. The strategy 'contradict' refers to a response when the police negotiator denies the error and/or shifts the blame to the conversation partner. Three of the four strategies matched the classification of Benoit (1997). The attribute and contradict were similar to the two denial subcategories (i.e., shift the blame and simple denial) and apologize matched the mortification category. The category accept, however, did not fit any specific category.

The interviewees agreed that the use of a contradicting response is only worthwhile if it is necessary to set a boundary or condition. This may occur, for example, when the perpetrator is misinterpreting the words of the negotiator and holding the negotiator responsible for this. Otherwise, contradicting may only cause a – possibly negative – emotional response. As one interviewee commented: *You're not creating a bond by picking a fight all the time.* The use of apologies was most frequently mentioned as a response strategy by the interviewees, with the remark that apologizing is not something police officers normally do easily. As one interviewee remarked: *Sorry seems to be the hardest word. Or at least, for some of us.* A prominent reason for this difficulty was made clear by a second interviewee, who suggested that negotiators fear that an apology will give the interaction 'lead' back to the perpetrator. For example, the perpetrator may use the apology to rekindle his attack of the police's competence and integrity, moving the interaction back to conflict and away from a discussion of substantive issues. Discussion of substantive issues is the main goal in crisis negotiation, to move toward the problem-solving phase and end the situation in a peaceful manner (Pruitt, 1981; Vecchi et al., 2005).

Finally, several interviewees mentioned that, if they sensed that the response strategy did not work, they would explicitly refer back to that moment. They felt that doing so showed that they genuinely cared and empathized with the perpetrator (e.g., *I have the feeling that it is still hurting you*). That this concern is genuine is very important, or as an interviewee said: *It should not be a trick in a stress situation like that, because the other* [perpetrator] *will notice.* According to Christophe Caupenne, former chief of the French RAID Unit, the voice can be seen as an 'instrument' of which you can modify the tone to influence how the messages come across (Haag & Fresnel, 2015).

Table 2. Examples of response strategies in crisis negotiations.

Response strategy	Examples
Accept	You are right, my error I did not say that in a tactful manner That was a stupid remark of me, let's go back to where we were
Apologize	I am sorry, this is also thrilling for me, as it is a matter of life and death I am sorry, I think I did not hear it correctly. Can you explain that to me again? I am sorry, we have been standing here for so long, I sometimes make errors too
Attribute	I misunderstood this from a colleague That is what they passed on to me
Contradict	No, that is not what I said I think you understood me wrong I may have been unclear

Foreseeing and avoiding errors

Some interviewees mentioned the possibility of preventing errors before they occur by changing the original form of a message. A negotiator may use some form of ambiguity in the message to afford the other party the opportunity to address the issue in his or her own way. They may also use active listening skills after an utterance to determine whether and how the message was understood. As an interviewee commented: *The magic word is still listening and taking the other seriously.* In a different vain, some negotiators questioned whether or not it was always necessary to address errors. For example, some indicated that, when realizing that they had made an error, they instantaneously tried to distract the perpetrator before a reaction could be given, in the hope that they may not realize an error had been made. However, there was consensus that, if the negotiator's error did elicit a response, there was an obligation on the negotiator to respond to it in some way. This is in line with research from Williams (1999) who argues that this feature characterizes skilled communicators, who choose their battles and know what to 'let pass'.

A few interviewees touched upon the effect of using a response strategy more than once. When a negotiator apologizes more than once in an interaction, the other person may feel exalted above the negotiator and the genuineness of the negotiator may be taken into question. As one interviewee identified: *You're not working on a positive relationship by saying sorry five times in five minutes.* So the effectiveness of a response strategy may be dependent on the frequency of using it.

Finally, negotiators unanimously agreed that lying should be prevented at all costs. One interviewee stressed that they are not allowed to promise the perpetrators anything, so the only thing that they can offer the other party is honesty. They commented:

> We need something from the other party, but the other one does not necessarily need something from me. The only thing I can really give them is my honesty and truthfulness. It is something I cannot repair after that it is taken away.

This suggests that a diplomatic, indirect form of trying to talk things right may not be appropriate when both parties know that an error has been made.

Intrapersonal consequences of error management

Most interviewees mentioned that they experienced an adrenaline rush when making a communication error. This seems to decrease somewhat when the police officer gains more experience, but most of them agreed that this physiological response will never be absent, since the interaction is usually a matter of life and death. Most of the interviewees also agreed that the making of an error does not necessarily distract from the job at hand. In contrast, some interviewees argued that it intensified their focus and that they experienced some sort of cognitive 'internal switch' from a rational to intuitional mode. In this intuitional mode, the effect of certain messages is not calculated beforehand but is made in direct response to the messages of the opposing party. As one interviewee put it: *It is like we are in some sort of new bubble. I have uttered the wrong words. Saying sorry about that is very easy.* This statement on the internal switch is in line with the findings of Dimitrova et al. (2014), who showed that this focus (on-task thoughts) may be the result of seeing errors as something you can learn from (i.e., an error management approach).

When the interviewees had to rate on a ten-point scale the extent to which they perceived the making of an error as problematic, they nearly all agreed that it depended on the situation. In a crisis negotiation where someone wants to commit suicide, it was the context that was leading. For example, the making of an error was considered to be less detrimental if the other party was inside a building (scored around 2–4) compared to when the other party stood on the edge of a roof (scored around 8–10). Apparently, do the consequences of the making of the error (i.e., context) influence to what extent the negotiators are adhering to an error management or error prevention approach.

A few interviewees indicated that they usually did not have the time to concentrate on the error within the conversation. If, however, they did experience some sort of distraction, it was the second negotiator that drew them back to the conversation directly. After the interaction, most negotiators

did take the time to disentangle the conversation to some further extent and reflect on what happened. Whether they did this reflection with their complete team or just with the negotiators on the job varied per region. They all recognized the importance of reflection, but it was frequently not carried out, simply because they did not have the time to do so. Most interviewees reported that, when they found the time to discuss the negotiation, the atmosphere within the team and between team members was open and relaxed. They did not seek to attribute blame but rather focused on what everyone could learn from the error to improve their skills. As two interviewees commented: *Everything is a good choice, the question is whether we could have done it differently* and *You are allowed to make errors in practice.* This focus aligns again with the error management approach that can be found within an organization. Errors are then seen as something they can learn from, rather than characterized as something negative only (i.e., the error prevention focus; Van Dyck et al., 2005).

Ways to improve

At the end of the interview, we asked negotiators to reflect on how errors could be best addressed within negotiation teams. The interviewees offered four solutions. The first had to do with practicing and training. All interviewees agreed that this should be done more often. They suggested that negotiators should observe each other and reflect on what happens, so that everyone can learn from each other's errors. Research (Heimbeck, Frese, Sonnentag, & Keith, 2003) shows that this approach towards errors within training sessions indeed has a positive effect on – adaptive transfer – performance. Second, they mentioned ensuring that the negotiator's role and their associated equipment was set up in an optimal way to, for example, ensure that they had sufficient time and resources to effectively debrief on errors (cf. Spence & Millott, 2016). Third, they suggested a yearly check-up with a psychologist, to ensure that any emotional sequela of prior service is identified and managed. As one interviewee described: *If someone decides to jump it is not because of what you said, it is because that person decides to jump. Otherwise you will go mad.* This recommendation is consistent with Bohl (1992), who suggests a debriefing session with a psychologist to accompany each unsuccessful negotiation, in the same way that police officers receive support following incidents where death or serious injury occurred. Fourth, the interviewees acknowledged that the available knowledge in science should be used in a better way, for example, by discussing the newest scientific insights in training days. They recognized that already available knowledge within a team could be used to some further extent, like inserting an available psychologist on the team on a job where needed.

Discussion

So far the focus of communication research within a crisis negotiation has been on messages that improve interaction and gain cooperation. This study focused on the other side of the coin, emphasizing situations where something is said in error and how this could be responded to. Our results offer six conclusions that can be used as a starting point for follow-up research: (1) communication errors as experienced by police negotiators can be classified as factual, judgment and contextual errors. Judgment errors are generally considered to have a more detrimental effect than factual errors; (2) when making a communication error, police negotiators are usually concerned but they also report that it makes them more focused on the interaction and the other side; (3) messages to respond to errors fall into four categories: accept, apologize, attribute and contradict. Apologize is mentioned as the strategy most often used; (4) for both errors and response strategies, negotiators have a contingency perspective emphasizing both positive and negative consequences of all utterances. Generally, errors are considered more detrimental when the relationship or the other side is 'unstable'; (5) using a response strategy more than once may diminish the effectiveness of the message, since it may influence the extent to which the police negotiator is viewed as credible and genuine; (6) notably, errors are sometimes made on purpose to increase or deepen the rapport with the perpetrator. This conclusion draws attention to the positive side of erring, which may be counterintuitive due to the stakes

involved in these crises. Yet, the negotiators argue that it is a form of (negative) feedback, which has the potential to open up a conversation.

The types of errors identified by the negotiators in our study are, to some extent, particular to crisis negotiation. However, when construed broadly, they likely align with what occurs in other forms of police interaction with suspects and members of the public. This suggests that areas of policing that depend on public interaction may benefit from recognizing the different types of error and from considering the factors that underlie why such errors occur. Our interviewees identified the 'magnitude of distractions', either internal or external, as being responsible for the making of errors. They pointed to both the multitude of people that are present at the scene with different interests and information (e.g., tactical team, media, relatives of perpetrator; Giebels & Noelanders, 2004; St-Yves & Michaud, 2012) and the struggle for control that occurs when the motivations are likely behaviors of the perpetrator cannot be predicted (Donohue & Taylor, 2003). These factors mirror the 'negative impact of timeframe' and 'complex influence of expertise' factors that have been shown to predict mistakes in other organizational contexts (Hunter, Tate, Dzieweczynski, & Bedell-Avers, 2011).

While equivalent factors may be responsible for errors observed across multiple contexts, we do not yet know whether the primary impact of these factors is on cognitive load, stress, or fatigue. For example, given the protracted nature of crisis negotiations (Giebels & Noelanders, 2004), it may be the case that errors occur over time as negotiators become fatigued. Consistent with this possibility, though not sufficient to rule out other explanations, is the recognition from our interviewees that saying something in error triggered them to refocus. Conversely, our interviewees identified errors as a form of feedback, suggesting that they may also reduce the cognitive demands of the interaction. Finally, by viewing errors as something to be managed, the erroneous messages begin to be something that can be overcome positively. This may be an advantage as it diffuses the fear and stress associated with errors, which likely has a negative effect on negotiators' communication. However, as Weick and Sutcliffe (2007) argue, this approach comes at a risk, since it may decrease negotiators' sensitivity to errors. If negotiators get to a point where reducing cognitive load and stress comes at the cost of not recognizing when errors occur, this puts their sensemaking at jeopardy, and ultimately the likely success of the negotiation.

Although our research raised some important themes for consideration, there are also some limitations that need attention. First, the number of interviews is limited. These may be representative for Dutch practices (every region was represented) but they may not be representative for crisis negotiation practices worldwide. Second, some respondents indicated it to be difficult to come up with examples, because they did not consider errors to be critical incidents so that they did not stand out in their memories. It would be interesting to validate this perspective with a coding of errors in real negotiation transcripts. The analysis of the real transcripts would also provide us with the opportunity to test what occurs and whether the classification of errors as non-critical events is the right one. In terms of the outcome of the negotiation this may be true, but this does not necessarily have to account for the communication process itself. Third, it is worth noting explicitly that the error and response categories we identified were constructed from the perspective of the police negotiators themselves. It may well be that what negotiators label as errors, based on their police background, are experienced by perpetrators in a different way (cf. Clark & Brennan, 1991). For example, to a perpetrator, it may be the case that all errors are essentially relational because they do not align with the perpetrator's frame of reference. Future research should therefore focus on the perpetrator's perspective.

Conclusion

This is the first study to examine communication error management in crisis negotiations. The study's results served our objective of demonstrating the value of existing research on errors for thinking about high-risk interactions, while also highlighting how the unique features of the crisis context are key to understanding negotiators' approaches to erring. In particular, we provided a framework of possible communication errors that a negotiator may make and the responses he or she may give. This framework is valuable for both raising awareness of error making and for structuring future studies

that seek to determine the relative effects and consequences of error response strategies. Importantly, however, while our findings identify what typifies current practice, it does not consider the receiver's perspective. It helps us understand how police personnel experience errors but it does not explicate what the effects of errors and responses are on the recipient's point of view. As a result, we stopped short of showing what consequences errors and response strategies can have on the broader success of negotiation – although arguably it is unlikely that any one event, such as a particular error, could be attributed as the sole cause of an incident outcome (cf. Taylor, 2002b). A focus for the future, then, is better understanding the various roles errors can play in relation to recipient's perceptions and behavior, since this will help negotiators in their efforts to develop their error management strategies.

From a practical perspective, the framework we present in this study highlights errors as something that occur during negotiations and something that happens to everyone. It strengthens the argument to maintain the existing error management approach within the organization for both training and evaluation, and suggests that identifying ways to consolidate this approach in the future may be valuable. However, one note of caution is needed: it is possible that an inverse effect occurs when error management is adhered to rigidly. That is, if negotiators reach a point whereby they experience no stress when erring, this may decrease their focus and result in weaker performance (cf. Gutshall, Hampton, Sebetan, Stein, & Broxtermann, 2017). How to get the balance right is an important question for researchers and for practitioners moving forward.

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Appendix 1. Interview questions.

1. Background (main goal: record the interviewees' background)

- What is your current job and position?
- For which team do you work?
- How much working experience do you have with the police?
- Can you give me an estimation of how many hours you speak to citizens per week/month/year?
- What type of conversations are this?

2. Communication errors (main goal: get some examples of communication errors)

- Our research focuses on the situations within a crisis negotiation in where the communication is not so fluent, did you ever come across such an incident?
- What happened from A to Z?
    - How did the suspect respond to that?
- What was your reaction on that?
- Did it have any influence on your emotions?
    - What did you feel?
- Did you get distracted from the job at hand?
- Did it influence your relationship with the opposing party?
- If I hear it is more of a … misunderstanding. Do you have any other examples?

3. Reflection (main goal: unravel the repair strategies)

- If you look back at this situation, would you give a different reaction?
- You said you .. Do you think that < other strategy>> would have given another response?

4. Attitude (main goal: determine the respondent's error orientation)

- If you had to rate, on a scale from 1 to 10, how terrible would you find these situations, in which 1 is not a problem and 10 is disastrous, where would you score?
- Should errors be prevented at all costs?
- Can you learn from errors?
- Do you think that the making of errors also influences the suspect?
    - If so, in what way?
    - Is this dependent on the type of error?

5. General (main goal: determine the frequency of errors and education)

- How often do you think that errors are made within crisis negotiation?
- Are there certain aspects of the interaction that makes you err more?
- If you compare a crisis negotiation with a police interview, in which situation do you think that it happens more?
    - Why is that?
    - How often do you think that it happens within a police interview?
- Is error handling something that is touched-upon during your training?
    - If so, in what way do they do this?
    - Do you think that it gives you enough guidance to repair your errors?
- Do you have ideas on how the making of errors can be diminished?

6. Ending

- Do you have anything to add or do you have any other questions?
- If not, thank you for your collaboration!