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Negotiation in Workplace Environments

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Negotiation in Workplace Environments

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Abstract

The communication concept of negotiation is prevalent in our world today, and it is especially evident in the workplace. To be successful in navigating relationships within the workplace, employees must possess negotiation skills. Conflict is inevitable, so the ability to see the other party's perspective and loosen your hold of positions is essential in negotiation. Negotiation should be less about argumentation and "winning" and instead it should be more about mutual gain. Trust and power differences in supervisor/subordinate relationships play a role in negotiations and, formality in these managerial relationships does not always mean more productive problem solving. Researchers discovered that even in a part-time job held by college students, negotiation about their role matters. Discussing taking on more responsibilities enriches the students' experiences more than if they would have gone through the motions day to day taking orders. Building relationships clearly helps in that it aids in more streamlined negotiations. Integrative negotiation is a topic investigated in both negotiation literature and the popular professional text, Getting to Yes; however, they do not use the same language surrounding the idea. Integrative negotiation is all about joint gain through what information is shared, what desires are revealed, and what is agreed upon. Workplace flexibility has been a poignant topic since the COVID-19 pandemic, as companies switch over to more remote work formats. Flexibility is something more workers are willing to negotiate with their managers. Negotiation training and reading the text Getting to Yes could serve young professionals landing their first jobs as well as seasoned workers with decades of experience in their industry. Key Words: Negotiation, deliberation, integrative negotiation, elaboration, directness, mutual concessions, workplace flexibility, misunderstanding, conflict, role enrichment, role negotiation

Introduction

Negotiation is commonly used by those in business, government and even in parenting; however, it also occurs daily in workplaces around the globe in ways that may not always be noticed. The workplace is constantly changing, and this is due to negotiation among its members. Negotiation is not always this formal, sit-down meeting, but it can appear when individuals within the organization seek to resolve conflict and issues (Meiners, 2012).

In the realm of communication, negotiation can be defined as a type of decision making where two or more individuals discuss opposing views in the hopes of resolving differences (Meiners, 2004). When negotiation grows to more than just two people, things become a lot more complex, and it will be tougher to come to an agreed upon resolution (Mannix, 2006). In comparison to communication, social psychology scholars view negotiation as a "mutual persuasion process" (Maaravi, 2011).

Negotiation often occurs in organizations whether it is explicit to the employees and managers within it. Frequently, however, the concept of workplace negotiation is framed in the language of nitpicking. Approaching negotiation with such frames might lead parties to lock into distributive patterns of decision making and overlook opportunities to maximize potential joint gains. Adopting a more integrative frame, in which negotiation is seen as a vehicle for collaboration and innovation rather than a tedious chore, could be key to producing high-quality, sustained resolutions (Meiners, 2012).

Negotiation is not to be confused with deliberation. Argumentation literature is not going to be discussed in this paper; however, it is important to know the difference between deliberation and negotiation. Negotiation and deliberation do possess similar features, as they are both decision-making procedures and pose the question 'what to do,' they can be confused when

analyzing discourse. For deliberation to happen, something must be proposed and then the argumentation for or against that proposal must be presented. (Ihnen Jory, 2016).

Academic research and a popular professional text called *Getting to Yes* by Roger Fisher, William Ury, and Bruce Patton will be analyzed and compared in this paper. First, existing literature about negotiation and how it appears in the workplace in its many forms will be analyzed. Getting to Yes, the popular professional text about negotiating agreements will be delved into. The two areas of research will be compared from a communication lens.

Literature Review

There is a wide variety of communication literature about negotiation and specifically about negotiation in the workplace. Power differences within the supervisor and subordinate relationship in the workplace and how it plays into negotiation is an interesting aspect to uncover first. Eric B. Meiners is a scholar active in researching the intricacies of negotiation and in his article written in 2004 much is uncovered. Typically, change at work is not going to come from one meeting between a supervisor and their subordinate. In the workplace, integrative negotiation can come into play.

Integrative negotiation is "the process by which the parties attempt to increase the size of the joint gain without respect to the division of the payoffs." Indicators of integrative negotiation include elaboration, directness, and mutual concessions. Elaboration refers to how much information is shared during the time of negotiation. Directness is the extent parties reveal their desires in a negotiation. Mutual concession is when things are agreed upon in a resolution.

The study in the article revealed some noteworthy things. It was discovered that there is a positive relationship between formality in the workplace and both mutual concessions and elaboration. This displays that interactions with a more structured set of topics and an agenda are

more productive in integrative problem solving than spontaneous interactions in the workplace. Employees who interacted with their supervisors in a tone that leaned toward informal and friendly reported being more direct while negotiating than those who had fewer casual interactions. It was shown that managers who do not discourage informal interactions but then fail to communicate in more formal settings such as meetings only frustrate their subordinates and impact their dissatisfaction with their role at work. (Meiners, 2004).

Meiners also researched role negotiation and how it enriches working college students' experiences in their roles. College students who are employed desire two main things that they are willing to negotiate for. Negotiating flexibility in scheduling hours should allow students to coordinate between their roles of work to accommodate the flow of the semester. Different points of the semester are busier than others. Undergraduate student workers can strive to get involved in new tasks and assume more responsibilities in their work roles, which can bring what they are doing more into alignment with career and personal interests.

Role enrichment in the workplace can be achieved. The benefits of role negotiation extends past diminishing incompatible demands a role has. Scholars suggest that member negotiation between supervisors and subordinates alleviates role conflict. This is through the effect on the flexibility of work arrangements and reduction of incompatible work requests given to employees. The benefits of role negotiation go further, as energy generated in one role does not just deplete resources for other roles within the organization, but instead it enhances performance in complementary roles.

The study found that recognizing interdependence and connectedness among employees' life roles shows the negotiation of one role can enrich and enhance performance in other roles in the organization. This study investigates how supervisory negotiation can help improve

conditions within one specific work role and how it can also serve to enrich aspects within multiple roles at the same time. Researchers showed that college students in part-time or temporary work benefit from negotiating with supervisors to come to agreements about taking on more responsibilities and tasks. This enriches the students' role at work (Meiners, 2018).

Mara Olekalns has also contributed to the body of research about power and negotiation. The level of power negotiators have can shift their strategy preferences and in turn, shift their ability to find mutually beneficial solutions. As the level of power within a pair negotiating increases, so does the complexity of creating shared value.

When two individuals negotiating have at least one high-power negotiator in the pair, the researchers showed that it helped to manage the negotiation process on a moment-to-moment basis through strategy sequences. Negotiators within symmetric power dyads, which means that both individuals have the same level of power (high or low power), were revealed to have more certainty about the other's intentions because they negotiate from a similar perspective (Olekalns, 2013).

There are many important facets of negotiation in the workplace. The first facet of teamwork and negotiation has been researched by MJ Tornes. The researcher shows the importance of thinking of socialization and integration within the organization is considered an ongoing negotiation process. This process is not linear but fluid. In the study, the ongoing nature of socialization was clear when employees moved up in the organization to a leadership position. The employees who moved up were faced with new communication challenges. As the leaders formed new relationships and their existing ones shifted, they were negotiating the roles, which is like new employees in an organization (Tornes, 2022).

In the workplace, gender does play a role in negotiation. A study done by Iris Bohnet and Fiona Greig shows that negotiation is the go-to decision-making tool when employees seek solutions, like adjustments to work schedules. Women who participated in the study said they would resign to gain a better work-life balance while men said they would resign to gain an increase in compensation. Female and male employees possess differing preferences in terms of procedures at work. Women desire to negotiate where and how they spend their time at work while men care far less about negotiating about this.

Negotiation training for employees in the workforce is important and often overlooked. Gender differences in the study were small overall; however, women were more likely to prefer negotiation as their method as opposed to other decision-making mechanisms. Clearly, negotiation is something individuals utilize (Bohnet, 2007). It could be helpful for everyone to have some degree of negotiation training no matter thee career or stage of life.

Trust can make or break a negotiation. In a simulation study described by Daniel Druckman and Fieke Harinck shows that trusting negotiators are more likely to make significant progress toward an agreement. They can also increase prospects for a long-lasting agreement. In the experiments conducted, trusting negotiator moved higher up from their assigned positions than distrusting negotiators (Druckman, 2022).

Authors Jennifer Lerner and Katherine Shonk emphasize the importance of accountability of negotiations in the workplace. Individuals must realize before they enter a negotiation that they will need to clearly justify decisions and accept responsibility for them. In most negotiations, accountability systems are best when hostile competition is not promoted. When negotiators are expecting to need to cooperate with the other side in the future, they become less antagonistic and are held accountable. Accountability is effective in helping purify the judgment

and decision making of negotiators, as it forces them to think of the other perspectives at hand. A team of negotiators who are held accountable for a specific goal ensures that no single person has the whole burden of accountability.

Workplace flexibility is something more employees are negotiating for and has been a timely issue ever since the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. According to an article published by Apollo Technical, 16% of companies globally are fully remote today. In a 2016 study, two Finnish firms were evaluated as they changed over to a more flexible teleworking schedule. Researchers discovered that policies within an organization shape employees' perception of work (Nordbäck, 2017).

Personal and professional boundaries are important. With the telework flexibility at one of the Finnish firms called NTOP, there were employees who utilized telework. At NTOP, negotiation was wide ranging, which increased it. There was increased activity coordination because the workers faced the issue of aligning their schedules for meetings and collaboration on projects. Conflict could typically arise more frequently in this type of situation because of the varied personal practices, but in this study, there was no evidence of this. It was found that more individualized and more work group customized practices were accepted (Nordbäck, 2017).

Workplace flexibility is attractive, but it can come with some downsides. Workplace flexibility does not just contribute to feelings of exclusion and isolation. It also inhibits the ability for employees to do things beyond their role like helping others. The relational aspect of work is compromised by physical distance between colleagues. Teleworking can remove the ability for individuals to work out face to face daily negotiations.

Face to face is the richest form of communication. This is true no matter what the status of the relationship is. Whether it is your fellow employee or family member, communication will

flow better in-person. There is the added benefit of being able to see each other's nonverbal communication. On top of that, there is not a risk of the signal dropping out and comments are missed on a video call. Negotiations cannot flow with the same fluidity or sometimes even occur at all when employees are spread out due to workplace flexibility (Ter Hoeven, 2023).

Being recruited for a position at an organization as well as becoming a new employee have aspects of negotiation tied into them. In a sense, interviews are negotiations. In a 2008 article by George Mavunga, research was carried out to investigate how human resource managers, credit managers, and chief executive officers from a few selected organizations view the relationship between negotiation and interviews and if there is a relationship at all.

Negotiations involve an immense amount of persuasion meant to achieve one of the sides' goals.

During a job interview, the individual being interviewed has to persuade the prospective employer that they are the right choice for the position. A way to persuade is through laying out strengths and qualifications. In an interview, both the prospective employee and the prospective employer need to be aware of the purpose from the beginning of the relationship. This is in alignment with a qualification of successful negotiation. Both parties must have an awareness of mutual interdependence. Job interviews can classify as a type of negotiation because in order to be deemed successful from a neutral observer's point of view, there must be effective communication (Mayunga, 2008).

Negotiation is present in all careers to some degree; however, a job in which negotiation is used frequently is in Public Relations. Public Relations professionals negotiate with their clients and through these negotiations, relationships can be fostered or broken. The client, their strategic publics and the relationship between the PR professional will not go without negotiations. Interest-based negotiation is prevalent. Interest-based negotiation frequently

uncovers what the stakeholders view as important. It allows individuals to agree on creative solutions that overcome previously impossible differences. An interest-based approach alters the dialogue's context and places the different parties on the same side of the table seeking to satisfy mutual interests.

There is an action plan PR professionals can take to follow interest-based negotiation. First, PR professionals should get down to the ground level and define the problem that is being negotiated. Then, the interests of the parties will be discussed by both sides. Next, groups should create options to negotiate to ensure productive conversation. At that point, both parties should carefully evaluate the options together. Finally, decide on a solution and create a plan of action to move forward and past the negotiation stage (Katz, 2008).

Getting to Yes Analysis

Much of the academic research goes into why and where negotiation happens in the workplace, but *Getting to Yes* goes many steps further and walks readers through how they can successfully negotiate. The book is a quick read that is full of practical wisdom detailing how to best go about negotiation. Roger Fisher, William L. Ury and Bruce Patton do a wonderful job of communicating specificity and accessibility in their writing.

Getting to Yes is laid out as follows: The authors go over what negotiation is and stresses how important it is to not argue over positions. The method of how to negotiate successfully is discussed. The third section talks about what to do if negotiators come across issues during the process. The authors conclude with three points: negotiation involves common sense, continuing to learn through experience, and negotiation is not about winning.

Getting to Yes says a lot about negotiation. Negotiation is a means of getting what you want from the other side. It requires back and forth communication. As more conflict arises and

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continues to be a growth industry, more negotiation is needed. Though it happens in workplaces every day, people do not negotiate well. People often choose between being a soft or hard negotiator. However, negotiation should be hard and soft and that is principled negotiation. It is not a process of haggling but a time for seeking mutual gain and finding a solution.

Bargaining over a position can be harmful. Your ego can become associated with your position and getting your way. It becomes less about reconciling and more about saving face.

Arguing over a position takes more time and is inefficient. People become stubborn and progress gets stalled. Sticking to your position can danger the ongoing relationship. Valuing the position that you hold to over the person can create relational strife. The method of principled negotiation is a far better strategy than taking a position and holding onto it for dear life. Number one is "separate the people from the positions." A common occurrence in communication that creates issues is misunderstanding.

Misunderstandings can happen in negotiations, especially when parties come from different cultures. An example of this is discussed on page 36 where the two parties within a negotiation speak different languages. In Persian, "compromise" does not mean what it means to us in the United States. Instead, it has a negative connotation in the context of one's integrity being compromised. Another word that has a negative connotation in Persian is "mediator," as in their language someone who is a mediating is instead meddling. In 1980, the U.N. Secretary General went to Iran to negotiate the release of American hostages. Secretary General Kurt Waldheim made a serious mistake when he uttered the sentence "I have come as a mediator to work out a compromise." You can imagine how the Iranians responded to this as two words in that sentence had negative connotations. In negotiations we must be conscious of the words we are using and the meanings they hold.

Arguing over positions gets in the way of negotiations. An example of when this almost resulted in the death of many is detailed on page 5 and 6. In Iraq, there were disagreements over land between an oil company and farmers. The farmers worked heartily to tend to the land and plant crops, but then the oil company told them to get off the land because it belonged to them. The farmers stayed on their land refusing to leave as the oil company continued to threaten legal action and they eventually told the farmers they were brining an army to apprehend them. Undeterred, the farmers stayed on their land up until the point where troops showed up where a sensible negotiator asked the farmers questions. It ended up where the oil company did not actually plan on drilling for oil for months, so the farmers were able to keep their land for longer and in turn, many were hired to work for the company's construction activities.

The authors remind readers that negotiators are humans with emotions. Deal with others in a sensitive manner as humans are prone to react, which can be harmful to the negotiations. Talk with the other side about their emotions and share yours openly. This will encourage more proactivity and less reactivity during discussion. If emotional outbursts occur, do not react to them. It is harmful for the other party. Do not harm yourself in the process. Be attentive to "core concerns" the other party has. Emotions in negotiation are driven by autonomy, appreciation, affiliation, role, and status.

Negotiations typically take place between individuals who are in an ongoing relationship. Negotiate in a way that helps the relationship continue positively. Do not be quick to blame them for the problem at hand. Perception does play a role. Conflict is not just in reality but also inside people's heads. Put yourself in the other person's shoes. Discuss where you lie and your perceptions of the situation. Communicate clearly and listen actively. Speak with purpose. Speak about your point of view and not about what the other side says.

Number two is "focus on interests, not positions." The problem in negotiations is not in the positions and how they conflict but the disagreement between either side's fears and desires. The interests with the most power and weight are the basic human needs. There are shared opinions even under the discrepancies. Seek to find those.

Negotiation does not mean you are completely closed off the ideas of the other side. Ask the other side the simple question of 'why' during a negotiation. Consider their answer and ask yourself 'why not.' Be firm but also flexible while negotiating. Display your interests in a specific way utilizing concrete details. Remember to be hard on the problem at hand but soft on the people involved.

Number three is "invent options for mutual gain." In negotiations, there are ways of thinking or obstacles that can stop parties from inventing options and coming to a solution. Premature judgment will cause you to be more critical. Judgment is going to hinder imagination and will potentially hold parties back from a solid consensus. Searching for a single answer is not always the most productive thing to do in negotiation. Narrowing the bridge between differences is typically seen as the correct thing to do and not broadening it. Coming up with more solutions and ideas will only delay the process more since the goal is a single resolution. The assumption of a fixed pie is that negotiators see the problem as a win or lose scenario. Either you get what I want, and I am unsatisfied, or I do, and I am happy. Thinking that "solving their problem is their problem" is a shortsighted way of looking at the negotiation. This causes people to only look for one-sided solutions.

Separate the act of inventing ideas from deciding. Brainstorm and allow yourself to be creative. Define the purpose of the brainstorming. Choose the participants that will be involved. Hold the brainstorming session in an informal environment outside of a typical meeting. Select

someone to help keep the brainstorming session on track. Look over and evaluate the ideas once the brainstorming is done. Strive to look for mutual gain. Be intentional about asking what the other side's preferences are. Honor those preferences to the best of your ability.

Number four is "insist on using objective criteria." No matter how hard negotiators try, to a certain extent, there will be conflicting interests. Attempting to settle upon a common interest based on will has a high cost, then the solution is to negotiate based on something independent of that will that either side holds to. Any negotiation that is you pitting your will against the other side forcing them to back down is not going to end amicably or be conducted efficiently.

Focus on reaching a consensus in negotiation based on principle and not pressure. Be open to reasoning with people but not to any threats presented. Objective criteria need to be independent of each side of the negotiation's desires. The criteria should apply to both sides. Utilize fair standards.

There are three basic points to remember while negotiating with objective criteria. Frame each issue as a search for objective criteria. Look at what the shared goals between parties are, setting aside the interests. Figure out what objective standards are most important. Use reason and be open to reasoning about which standards are appropriate and how they can be applied. Behave as a judge would and look at points objectively. Evaluate the legitimacy of the standards. Do not yield to any pressure. In negotiation, pressure can take many forms. There can be a refusal to shift from an opinion, a threat, or a manipulation.

At a certain point, negotiations must cease. If the other side will not agree on a principle or shift their position, you have the choice to take or leave the persuasion. The authors encourage holding firm to the nonnegotiable principles you have set.

Comparison

Now, it is time to compare the literature about negotiation to the popular professional text as there are noteworthy differences. The popular professional text, *Getting to Yes* is practical and accessible. The book includes helpful examples throughout the text. The authors discuss the principles of integrative negotiation, but they use different language. Things are broken down into more digestible, simpler terms for readers. The articles talk about elaboration, directness, and mutual concessions whereas the book simply states things like "consider both parties" and "look for mutual gain."

Getting to Yes gets at more of the "humanness" of negotiation. The book talks about emotion a lot and how it is an important aspect to consider during negotiation. The literature out there sticks to academic concepts and steers clear of discussing things like emotion.

Getting to Yes expands beyond the workforce. Of course, I did look specifically at sources that talked about the workplace, but the book has a lot of good variety to it. You could apply the concepts in the book to any relationship and vocation.

In the research and studies that I looked into, it is helpful to read, and they display distinct aspects of workplace negotiation; however, that does not necessarily assist the worker in solving conflict. Neil Katz, like the authors of *Getting to Yes* emphasizes moving from the actual position in a negotiation to the interest. Katz mentions *Getting to Yes* in the article as one of the leading negotiation texts.

The research studies are far more academic and intended for an audience at a higher education level. The articles are complex and not the easiest to read. Many different studies were conducted but the average audience is going to skip to look for what is in it for them. Some of the studies were simulations and not necessarily real-life moment by moment negotiations that the book gets at.

Things like gender and topics like elaboration are talked about in the literature where the book stays away from that. The book gets to the point and for the most part uses plain English.

The authors of *Getting to Yes* did a solid job of defining anything that the average reader would not be well-versed in.

I think *Getting to Yes* should be a required text in school or a book that new employees should read once joining an organization. As discussed above, there are many helpful tips within the book. There are also good reminders about how to be less self-focused. Selfishness is a pervasive issue in our world, and it is a sin. Selfishness leads to more conflict and then negotiation does not go as smoothly. It is a cycle that continues as conflict only grows.

Conclusion

Through evaluating academic literature and the exploration of *Getting to Yes*, the popular professional text I selected, it is clear that negotiation is a broad topic that is prevalent in our daily lives, especially in the workplace. Negotiation goes deeper than the surface; it goes deeper than working out the stipulations of a contract. Negotiation is about relationships. In the workplace, we encounter people from all types of backgrounds. In our conversations, it is important to know how to negotiate while remembering that these are real people with souls and hearts.

As Christians, while negotiating we should take the approach of 1 Corinthians 10:24, which says "Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor." This does not mean we let people walk all over us, but we remember that in whatever we do we are to consider others. If things are done out of selfish ambition, it will only lead to ruin. In Proverbs 16:2, it says "All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit." We may think our intentions are pure in negotiations; however, it is important to check your heart posture.

The Lord knows our hearts and the Holy Spirit can be a helpful guide letting us know when our plans may not be of God. Negotiating in the workplace requires strength, discernment, and good communication skills. It also takes practice and experience. Making mistakes in negotiation is how learning can come, but I am hoping *Getting to Yes* and the information from the studies will help me in future negotiations.

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