

The Impact Of A Collegiate Course In Bargaining And Negotiation On Students’ Perceptions Of Their Own And Others’ Attitudes And Behaviors: An Exploratory Study

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a discussion of the importance of a course in bargaining and negotiation to university-level students in an accredited business school environment. In addition to discussing recommended content, pedagogy, and assessment methods, the results of a study that examines the impact of the course on students’ perceptions of skills, attitudes, and behaviors associated with effective negotiation is presented. The results of the study clearly demonstrate significant shifts in students’ perceptions regarding power, constructive dialogue, and the appropriate role and definition of “winning” in such bargaining and negotiation encounters.

Keywords: Negotiation; bargaining; constructive dialogue

INTRODUCTION

Negotiation is a learned skill employed to secure agreements between two or more individuals or groups in every stage and aspect of human endeavor. It is utilized in businesses and families, between friends and mere acquaintances. It is practiced in corporate office suites and on factory floors, at home, in the marketplace, in court and in the political arena. This elemental skill provides the needed flexibility and adaptability necessary to promote the efficient and effective operation and functioning of modern enterprises.

You can view the negotiation process and its outcomes from several perspectives. In a more traditional game theory perspective, negotiation is seen as a means to achieve a goal. Interdependent choices are being made in many goal-seeking situations and negotiation is but a subset of the problem (Lim, Benbasat 1993). The outcome of the game is the focus or perspective.

Howard (1996) suggests viewing the negotiation process “as a drama” in which game theory is applied to analyze the negotiation process. Traditional game theory would have the disputants changing within the game, whereas Howard suggests, more can be achieved by changing the model of the dispute.

Economic negotiations developed from the perspective of specific types of disputes, such as reaching agreement on prices or wages. Political negotiation begins with the recognition of differing self-interests wherein resolving the conflict between these self-interests becomes the perspective. Bordone and Berkman (2010) recently noted,

“We have devoted our professional lives to helping parties that are seemingly stuck in intractable, zero-sum conflict. By expanding time horizons, encouraging parties to think more deeply about their interests, putting issues that the parties initially overlooked on the table, and working to improve communication and build trust, we can often uncover mutual gains that break the impasse. Sometimes, we can even repair relationships and transform conflicts.”

Most people have acquired or developed negotiation skills sufficiently to enable them to get what they need, and, sometimes, what they want. Advanced development of these skills should be highly valuable to business students as they prepare for professional careers, yet few business schools offer such a course.

A major business school located at a research university in the southeastern United States recognized this need and allowed one of the authors to draw upon his thirty-three (33) years of experience as an attorney specializing in neutral arbitration to create a business elective course called “Bargaining and Negotiation.” The course fosters student recognition, understanding and implementation of basic negotiation skills and dispute resolution fundamentals. Most of the students in the class are seniors, so the knowledge and skills developed in the course are put to immediate use in negotiations for employment, salary, housing, etc. In a three (3) year span, the course has become one of the most popular courses in the business school curriculum with very positive student feedback as to its usefulness and value.

This article will highlight key issues associated with effective course design as well as important learning outcomes discovered as a result of assessing changes in student perspectives as a result of completing this course. As noted by Movius (2008), “little systematic research has been conducted concerning the actual effectiveness of negotiation training.”

PEDAGOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The goals for the new “Bargaining and Negotiation” course described in this article are fairly straightforward:

- Expose students to basic negotiating and dispute resolution skills and concepts;
- Instill an ability to prepare for and analyze negotiation circumstances and situations;
- Help students understand when and why to reach a deal and when and why to walk away; and,
- Help students understand how to negotiate individually, in teams, and with multiple parties.

The course emphasizes the expression of negotiation fundamentals through oral and written communication. Students experience the thrust of each daily reading assignment through role play and participation in class discussions. Students are also asked to record what they learn in a journal using their own words. They learn how to ask good questions, express themselves freely, and hone the skill of active listening (Heames, 2006).

Resources appropriate and available for this course include *Essentials of Negotiation* (Lewicki, et al., 2007), *Negotiating Essentials: Theory, Skills and Practices* (Carrell, et al., 2008) and *The Mind and Heart of the Negotiator* (Thompson, 2005) (“*Heart and Mind*”). Together, they provide an A to Z topical discussion of negotiation and dispute resolution which can easily be adapted to a traditional lecture setting.

Each text provides an explanation of two basic negotiation types: distributive bargaining, sometimes called win-lose or positional bargaining, and integrative bargaining, sometimes called win-win or merit bargaining. In distributive bargaining, the participant’s goals and interests are in direct and fundamental conflict over fixed or limited resources. In integrative bargaining, information exchange and collaboration result in value creation, trade-offs and value claiming.

The authors further explore and explain the negotiation process, its stages, strategies, tactics, ethics, multi-party and cross-cultural negotiations and much more. In addition, *Harvard Business Essentials: Negotiation* (Harvard, 2003) (“*Harvard*”) presents negotiation and dispute resolution in a straightforward, businesslike manner. It is a comprehensive, understandable read.

Also, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In* (Fisher et al., 1991) (“*Yes*”), first published in 1981, provides an excellent discussion of the benefits and detriments of employing positional [distributive] versus integrative [merit] negotiation in a variety of illuminating situations. It presents a pragmatic approach to dispute resolution the authors call “principled negotiation” which is simple, understandable, and versatile. This was the primary text eventually selected for the course described in this article, with supplemental material being drawn from *Harvard* and *Mind and Heart*.

Synthesizing the material from the works cited above into a university-quality elective course the average business student could grasp in a traditional lecture setting is certainly achievable, but it leaves something to be desired. *Negotiation: Readings, Exercises and Cases* (Lewicki et al., 2007) (“*Negotiation*”) provides the missing link. This text contains negotiation case studies, introspective questionnaires, and role play exercises. The case studies allow students to observe various real life negotiations from beginning to end. The questionnaires allow students to explore their personal negotiation views and tendencies. The role play exercises allow students to practice what they read, hear and observe.

Many of the exercises are practical and relevant applications of skills focused upon during the course, including salary and job offer negotiations, purchasing a car or house or negotiating price and quantity of personal or business goods or services. The “interactive” element that role play exercises and associated case studies add to the course provide the important experiential aspect of the students’ learning experience, which makes the course truly effective. These exercises encourage student involvement and foster a deeper understanding of negotiation concepts by catalyzing learning and class discussion.

Because the course is highly experiential, attendance is a basic requirement. Students must recognize that their absence denies other students the opportunity to play their roles and learn. Students spend a good deal of class time in simulated negotiation settings and are encouraged to experiment with negotiation strategies, styles, and approaches. In practical business settings, the ability to verbally communicate and to write expressively is a critical success factor. Therefore, a significant portion of each student’s grade is dependent upon their demonstrated writing skills.

Traditional course activities include lectures on the text and other course materials as well as debriefings focused on the lessons of the role play exercises. This leads students to gain personal insight, ask thoughtful questions, and engage in commentary. Non-traditional course activities include participation in role play exercises which provides the essential experiential aspect of the course.

Students are assigned written negotiating roles for a variety of situations in advance. It is their responsibility to prepare for the exercise and to provide feedback about the outcome of the exercise in their personal journal. One exercise in *Negotiation* (Lewicki, 2007), “Planning for Negotiation,” contains ten steps for efficient and comprehensive negotiation planning and organization in what is titled a “Planning Guide”.

Thorough preparation is essential to the students’ learning experience. The better a student prepares to play his or her role in a two-person negotiation exercise, the better the experience for both participants. Those who are best prepared usually achieve the greatest success and satisfaction. In addition, case studies are used to allow students to observe what was done by participants in real-life negotiations, what preparation was needed, what strategies were employed and what behavior influenced the process (Heames, 2006).

As an example of a typical role-playing exercise used in the course, consider “Pakistani Prunes” (Lewicki, 2007), which covers the negotiation topic of discovering a party’s underlying interest, which is the topic of the corresponding text assignment, *Yes*, Chapter 3. In “Pakistani Prunes”, two parties have reason and need to purchase the entire bi-yearly harvest of prunes owned, grown, and being auctioned by the Pakistani government to the highest bidder between them. The exercise is designed to show how competitive negotiation and failure to disclose or share information can result in a party, or both parties, failing to accomplish their goal.

The exercise further shows that through incremental information sharing and discovering each party’s underlying interest, the parties can discover they actually have complimentary interests and both can achieve their

goals while forming a coalition to keep the price of the prunes low. The difference between a party's position and their underlying interests is crucial. A party argues their concrete and explicit position, although the position is motivated by something unexpressed, intangible and perhaps inconsistent – their underlying interests. Agreements are reached as a result of satisfying differing, shared, or complimentary interests.

The thrust of the text and the role play is to teach students to explore a party's underlying interests through questioning and examining their responses. If at first you don't succeed or understand, continue appropriate questioning until you get a full and complete understanding of what motivates the other party. By coordinating the text and the role play exercise, students eventually realize the parties have shared and complimentary interests that can be satisfied. Both parties want to buy the Pakistani Prunes for a very good reason, but one wants the prune pit while the other wants the prune meat. Class discussion revolves around asking questions to understand your opponent's position, interests, and motivation while the written journal entry reinforces what the student has just experienced.

The students' personal journals are an integral part of the learning experience. The journals encourage self-reflection and self-expression concerning their role-play experiences while providing the instructor with insights into the students' thoughts and progress in understanding key concepts. Students are encouraged to write about their own negotiation strengths and weaknesses and to propose possible methods through which they could increase their effectiveness in future negotiation exercises (Heames, 2006).

For added learning benefit, questionnaires are used to provide students with immediate feedback concerning self-identification of beliefs, values, ethics, reactions and tendencies before, during and after a negotiation. Students also discover how similar or dissimilar they are to other classmates through class and small group discussions. (Lewicki, 2007).

The course's final examination revolves around a high-conflict negotiation scenario. During the design process for the course, a review of *Negotiation and Conflict Resolution* (Shalley, 2005) produced a reference to a classic American movie, *Twelve Angry Men* (Orion-Nova, 1957), which dramatizes a jury's deliberations in a capital murder case. The movie effectively portrays numerous negotiation and conflict resolution situations, and therefore can be used to test a student's ability to identify and analyze negotiation scenarios covered in the class.

At the end of the course, students view *Twelve Angry Men* as many times as they want. They then answer a number of essay questions as their final examination. Providing students the ability to see the movie multiple times generates a better opportunity for them to understand and analyze the numerous negotiation scenarios presented in the film and does not appear to affect the effectiveness of the testing format. This examination format has proven to be a very effective capstone to the course, reinforcing all of the key concepts in an interesting and memorable manner.

While the Bargaining and Negotiation course has evolved over time based on the experiences of the instructor and student feedback, changes have been made with an eye toward course evaluation based on the six Skill Levels set forth in *Blooms Taxonomy* (Bloom et al., 1956): knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Students acquire knowledge of the subject through the lectures, various written course materials and role play exercises. The exercises serve as a platform to apply what they learn, augmented by class and group discussions. The journals, questionnaires, exercises and required written test apply students' comprehension, analysis and synthesis of the subject matter.

STUDENT REACTIONS TO THE COURSE

This course is highly adaptable to different time frames and locations. At the university described in this article, the course has been taught in a normal fifteen-week semester with classes once per week for 2.5 hr/day and two times a week for 1.25 hr/day, in four-week summer sessions with 1.75 hr/day classes five days per week, and in short intensive two-week sessions with 3.5 hr/day classes five days per week. It has even been taught as a two-week study-abroad course in Prague, Czech Republic. All adaptations seem equally effective based on student feedback and outcome.

Student demand and interest in the course has been excellent with enrollment as high as fifty-five (55) students and as few as twenty-six (26) students depending on the size and shape of the classroom and the session of the offering (semester, summer, intensive). Student feedback concerning the course, both immediately following its conclusion and occasionally months after graduation, has been highly positive. The wide range of negotiation activities students often cite as particularly valuable includes job offers and raises, buying or leasing a car, renting an apartment, handling customer and consumer complaints, planning a wedding or vacation, convincing parents to do a variety of things, and deciding where to eat or what movie to see.

Student evaluations for the course have been consistently positive. Student comments include the following:

- “I learned tools that will help me in the real world.”
- ”I could instantly apply what I was learning to my life.”
- “This class teaches real-life strategies that are not only required in the business world (I am a Business major) but are actually crucial for everyone.”
- ”The strategies taught in this class will touch every aspect of your life after you leave college, and teach you more about how to negotiate for yourself, in one course, rather than a pod of other courses that give a high-level view of a subject. We all have to negotiate in life--cars, jobs, houses. This course gives you a template and strategies to be successful.”

RESEARCH MODEL

Dispute resolution can take the form of negotiation, litigation, mediation, arbitration, or conciliation. It is difficult for individuals to see past the psychological barriers and biases they bring to any dispute. Although disputes might be seen from many perspectives, it is often helpful to have an impartial third party who can offer an unbiased view. Unfortunately, having a trained neutral third party present for all of our day-to-day negotiations is impossible. Therefore, the knowledge and training imparted to students in a Bargaining and Negotiation course should give students a valuable conceptual framework and skill set that will serve them throughout their lives.

Even so, the benefits of negotiation training have received little attention from researchers. This may be due in part to a common stance of many mental health professionals who have viewed negotiation training as anathema to their profession. It was seen as “exploitative and consequently unethical and unhealthy” (Miller 1982). But as Miller points out,

“Negotiation is an everyday part of many interactions and interpersonal relationships... The majority of these relationships require negotiations regarding referrals, policies, regulations, purchase of services, financial arrangements, workforce supply, and beds. The need to negotiate is obvious; yet mental health values that stress helping and disdain manipulation appear in conflict with the negotiation process and techniques. “

The authors felt it important to go beyond this limited view of negotiation and embrace the modern concept of negotiation as a vital skill necessary for economic bargaining and organizational effectiveness. Unfortunately, as noted by Movius (2008), “little systematic research has been carried out concerning the effectiveness of negotiation training.”

It has long been recognized that education and training can significantly impact an individual’s knowledge of, and attitudes toward, certain behaviors and the values commonly associated with such behaviors. This study attempted to discover key attitudinal shifts that resulted from students’ exposure to the modern theory and effective practice of negotiation as a result of their learning experiences in this course. These shifts under consideration were in two primary areas, as shown in Figure 1 below: (1) the students’ perceptions of their own behaviors and attitudes, and (2) their perceptions of others’ behaviors and attitudes.

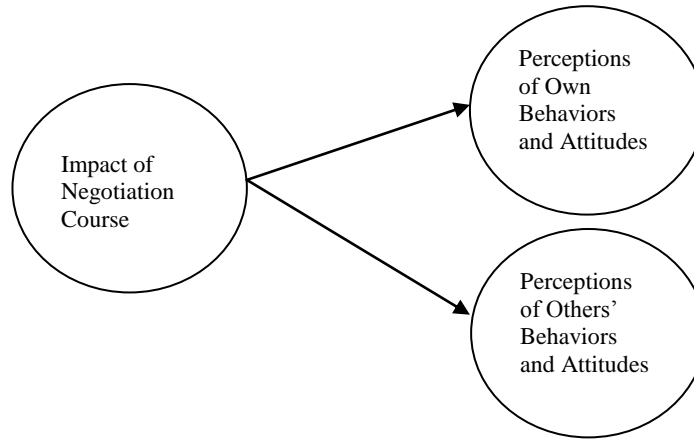


Figure 1. Negotiation Training Impact Model

MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENT AND DATA COLLECTION METHODOLOGY

Lewicki (2007) provides a fifty (50)-item assessment survey called the Personal Bargaining Inventory, which collects students’ perceptions of their own behavior and the behavior of others during negotiations. This survey was administered to all students at the beginning and end of two recent “Bargaining and Negotiation” classes at an AACSB-accredited business school that is part of a comprehensive research university located in the southeastern United States. The responses to the before-and-after surveys were used to conduct 2-tailed t-tests (n = 110) to determine if a significant change occurred in students’ behavioral and attitudinal perceptions as a result of their participation in the class.

Analyses indicated the students changed their perceptions about their own bargaining behavior and assumptions about the behavior of others in bargaining situations in several different areas. These results are summarized below for items that showed a statistically significant change.

Results of *t*-tests for Changes in Ratings From Time 1 to Time 2

Part I: Rating Your Own Behavior: How much is this characteristic of your behavior in situations of bargaining and negotiation?	Direction of Change and Significance (n=110, two-tailed)
I enjoy trying to persuade others to my point of view.	Increased, p < .05
I am a patient person. As long as an agreement is finally reached, I do not mind slow-moving arguments.	Increased, p < .05
I can look at emotional issues in a dispassionate way. I can argue strenuously for my point of view, but I put the dispute aside when the argument is over.	Increased, p < .05
I like power. I want it for myself, to do with what I want. In situations where I must share power I strive to increase my power base, and lessen that of my co-power holder.	Increased, p < .05
I like to share power. The balance of shared power is important to effective functioning of any organization.	Decreased, p < .10

Part II: Rating People’s Behavior in General: What do you believe makes people effective negotiators?	Direction of Change and Significance (n=110, two-tailed)
The best outcome in bargaining is one that is fair to all parties.	Increased, p < .05
Most results in bargaining can be achieved through cooperation.	Increased, p < .05
Make an early minor concession; the other side may reciprocate on something you want later on.	Increased, p < .05
Silence is golden-it's the best reply to a totally unacceptable offer.	Increased, p < .05
It is important to understand one's values prior to bargaining.	Increased, p < .05
Fear is a stronger persuader than trust.	Decreased, p < .05
In bargaining, winning is the most important consideration.	Decreased, p < .05
Be the aggressor. You must take the initiative if you are going to accomplish your objectives.	Decreased, p < .10

After taking the course, student perceptions about their own bargaining behavior exhibited greater enjoyment in persuading others and more patience in bargaining. Students also reported greater ability to be dispassionate when negotiating. There was an increase, however, in their need for power or to control the sharing of power.

Students’ reported perceptions about the behavior of others in bargaining situations showed they were much more likely to relate effective negotiators with fairness and cooperation along with the belief that making early concessions could lead to mutually beneficial reciprocation. Also, their belief in the value of silence (rather than confrontation, for example) as well as their recognition of the need to keep one’s own values in mind during negotiation also increased. Assumptions about the value of the use of fear, winning at all costs, and being aggressive were all significantly lower after taking the class.

These changes appear to be associated with students learning to become more comfortable with constructive conflict. As noted by Infante and Wigley (1986), those individuals who are to become capable at effective arguments and conversations need to learn to distinguish between “arguments” and “verbal aggression”. According to them, “Argument involves presenting and defending positions on controversial issues while attacking the positions taken by others on the issue. Verbal aggression, on the other hand, denotes attacking the self-concept of another person instead of, or in addition to, the person’s position on a topic of communication”. As can be seen in the results reported above, it is clear that the course in “Bargaining and Negotiation” helped students learn to make this important distinction. In other words, such a course can help overcome what Infante and Wigley referred to as an *argumentative skill deficiency* in which “individuals resort to verbal aggression because they lack the verbal skills for dealing with social conflict constructively.”

Furthermore, it is clear that the students became more comfortable with aggressiveness in verbal communication when it is seen as being more constructive, rather than destructive. Infante and Wigley (1986) noted that “Constructive types produce satisfaction and enhance an interpersonal relationship, while destructive types lead to interpersonal dissatisfaction and relationship deterioration.” A pattern of students becoming aware of the distinction between constructive arguments versus blatant verbal aggression is evident in the results of the current study.

It can also be seen that students learned to become more comfortable with dissent as a result of the materials and experiences included in this course. This can be particularly important in the modern participatory workplace, as noted by Kassig and Avtgis 1999 article in which they state “Researchers have suggested that [an] individuals’ sense of powerlessness, preferences for avoiding conflict, and senses of right and wrong influenced [an] employees’ willingness to dissent.” Clearly, students who have become more comfortable with constructive dissent would also demonstrate the pattern of results presented earlier with regard to their feelings toward power, persuasion, and aggression. Also, given the fact that “Business and civic leaders are calling for the more effective

use of alternative dispute resolution processes, and the greater visibility of these processes and effective techniques” (Lewicki, Weiss, and Lewin, 1992), it is clear that students who have experienced the perceptual shifts toward behaviors and attitudes presented earlier will be far better equipped to enter the modern business environment.

CONCLUSION

A negotiation and dispute resolution course is both practical and universally applicable. Some students may have successfully negotiated in situations before they entered the course, but they probably didn’t know what they were doing or why. Negotiation and dispute resolution is a skill that can be honed in every student, no matter their discipline. Idealistically, negotiating is a life skill in which everyone should have training and familiarity. The better the average person can handle a dispute through negotiation, the better for all concerned. It does not matter where or when, it is a matter of how.

It seems there are few limits to the ways these skills can be taught and presented in terms of the course format. While many contemporary business schools do not offer such a course, those that do typically deliver it as a semester class in a management curriculum, even though it is relevant to a variety of disciplines both in and out of the traditional business school curriculum. Based on the authors’ observations and experiences, it can be taught in multiple formats including short seminars to students or professionals. A practical negotiation and dispute resolution course that meets the criteria of a highly regarded business school or other college programs can be easily developed and delivered, providing a meaningful, interesting, interactive, refreshing and practical course that fits the needs for any number of students or persons in an unlimited number of curricula and circumstances.

It is clear, from the results of the study reported in this article, that such a course can introduce meaningful perceptual shifts regarding both behaviors and attitudes associated with constructive conflict. Such a course could be tremendously valuable to modern business professionals as they embark upon their careers in today’s global and litigious business environment.

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Additional Recommended Resources not Mentioned Elsewhere in the Article

1. Budjac Corvette, B. (2007). *Conflict Management: A Practical Guide to Developing Negotiation Strategies*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.
2. Heames, J.T. (2007). *Management: Negotiation Skills*. New York: McGraw-Hill/Irwin.

NOTES