

Blueprints and broken promises: Managing conflict in construction projects

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Abstract: The article addresses a negotiation challenge that occurred at a primary construction site. Two outside design professionals are working on the project: one is responsible for architectural work, and the other for structural design. The project faces delays because key documents remain unavailable, threatening to disrupt both project timing and fieldwork activities. The project team developed increasing conflict with their suppliers because the team members failed to meet their deadlines and maintain their commitments. This study negotiation theory and conflict management principles to analyze how positions and interests affect each other through BATNA-based negotiation power enhancement and ZOPA-based definition of possible agreement ranges. The process of trust restoration and value creation faced obstacles because different proposals failed to establish effective communication, which led to intense emotional reactions. Organizations need to decide their next steps because team collaboration breakdowns have created an unclear path for project success

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1 | INTRODUCTION

This article examines a Type IV negotiation (Dias, 2020), wherein disparities incited a contentious conflict within a civil construction project. The negotiation process was full of major challenges, pitfalls, however, it contained important lessons learned. By looking at this real-life example, we can learn about the complexities of negotiation and how important it is to communicate well in order to reach agreements that benefit both parties. Negotiation has been the subject of considerable scholarly interest over the years (Fisher, Ury & Patton, 1981; Dias, 2023; Dias, 2023a; Dias, 2023b; Dias et al., 2023; Navarro & Dias, 2024; Santos & Dias, 2024; Kissinger, 1969; Lax & Sebenius, 1986; Raiffa, Richardson & Metcalfe, 2002; Rubin & Brown, 1975; Pruitt, 1981). Negotiation is also reported as a communicative process aimed at achieving a mutual decision (Fisher, Ury & Patton, 1981), negotiation has been examined in various contexts, including business (Dias, Toledo, Silva, et al., 2022; Dias, Lafraia, Schmitz et al., 2024; Dias, Pereira, Teles & Lafraia, 2023; Dias, Leitão, Batista & Medeiros, 2022; Santos & Dias, 2024; Dias, 2023; Dias, Pereira, Vieira, et al., 2023), government (Navarro & Dias, 2024), retail business (Valente & Dias, 2024), software contract negotiations (Cunha & Dias, 2021; Dias, Nascimento et al., 2021), and complex military negotiations (Dias, Toledo, Silva, Santos et al., 2022; Dias, 2024).



Figure 1 The Four-Type Negotiation Matrix
Source: Dias, 2020. Reprinted under permission.

2 | METHODOLOGY

This research utilizes a case study methodology to analyze a Type IV negotiation (Dias, 2020) inside a professional environment. The case study technique facilitates a comprehensive examination of the negotiating process and its results (Dias, 2023). Yin (2018) defines a case study as an empirical investigation that examines a current phenomenon comprehensively within its real-world environment. This research analyzes the negotiating process as a singular case study (Yin, 2018). The case study examines a particular workplace endeavor in which intergenerational disparities ignited a bitter

disagreement. The data gathering included watching the negotiating process and recording the interactions among the interested parties. The negotiation was facilitated by one of the writers, who used concepts of effective communication and conflict resolution (Acuff, 1993; Salacuse, 2003, 2006; Shell, 2006). The mediator's function was to facilitate a mutually advantageous agreement, rather than to impose a resolution (Fisher, Ury & Patton, 1981).

3 | BACKGROUND

The process of engineering and construction projects requires ongoing negotiation because their complex nature involves multiple deadlines and contractual obligations and various responsibilities. Big construction projects require multiple outside experts who handle essential project sections including architectural design and structural engineering and installation systems. The actions of these actors produce right away effects which impact project duration and cost management and lead to permanent damage of the organization's professional standing. The project faces major issues because any minor time extension will create substantial problems which impact both procurement activities and financial planning and construction site work progression. The case in this study comes from a well-known construction project that includes residential towers and several annexes, such as leisure and service facilities. The company brought in outside designers to handle architectural and structural work from its first day of operation. The project schedule experienced delays because team members submitted their work at different times which caused the project timeline to become longer. The construction team faced increasing work pressure because they needed approved documents to perform cost estimates which blocked their work progress.

The negotiation functions as a communicative method which helps parties achieve mutual agreement (Fisher, Ury & Patton, 1981). The research of Kissinger (1969) and Rubin & Brown (1975) and Pruitt (1981) and Lax & Sebenius (1986) and Raiffa, Richardson & Metcalfe (2002) established negotiation as a strategic process which also requires relationship building. Research from previous years demonstrates business operations now function as new domains which use their acquired knowledge (Dias, 2023; Dias, 2023a; Dias, 2023b; Dias et al., 2023; Dias, Toledo, Silva et al., 2022; Dias, Lafraia, Schmitz et al., 2024; Dias, Pereira, Teles & Lafraia, 2023; Dias, Leitão, Batista & Medeiros, 2022; Dias, Pereira, Vieira et al., 2023; Santos & Dias, 2024), government (Navarro & Dias, 2024), retail (Valente & Dias, 2023), and software contract negotiations (Cunha & Dias, 2021; Dias, Nascimento). The research shows that negotiation serves purposes which extend past its fundamental exchange functions because it enables people to build trust-based relationships and establish credibility and resolve conflicts.

Organizations need to achieve their operational targets and handle their relationship management duties based on the current situation. The example demonstrates why organizations need to understand negotiation frameworks which include BATNA (Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement) and ZOPA (Zone of Possible Agreement). These frameworks

assist individuals to make choices during times of extreme mental pressure. The research demonstrates that project success depends on technical competencies as well as effective communication methods and trust development and conflict resolution approaches to sustain ongoing work and enduring business relationships.

4 | NEGOTIATION SCENARIO

The negotiation scenario depicts a construction company executing a large project which depends on two outside designers for architectural and structural work. The architectural designer failed to meet his deadlines which resulted in major project schedule delays and damaged the trust between all project stakeholders. The structural designer kept the project moving through his continuous communication and delivery of essential components which maintained the professional relationship. For compliance and ethical reasons, all real names and identities were preserved. The company needed to get project documentation on time because this would stop cost growth and allow field operations to continue without interruption. The architect sought to protect his professional reputation while avoiding financial losses. The two parties maintained opposing positions because the architect needed additional time along with complete payment, but the company needed his work right away at a lower price. The company established its BATNA through evaluation of an alternative architect who achieved quick project completion at reduced expenses. The alternative negotiation process created defined limits which determined a ZOPA that spanned between R\$ 28,000 and R\$ 35,000 and established a 20-day deadline for finishing the project. The architect denied all attempts to generate value through scope division and milestone payments and shared credit which made the dispute between them more severe. The team lost their ability to work together because defensive behaviors took over their collaborative approach which caused team members to lose trust in each other. The situation shows that negotiation frameworks which include BATNA and ZOPA and conflict management strategies need to exist for guiding decisions when team collaboration fails and the project faces discontinuation.

5 | DISCUSSION

The research examined the negotiating process via a framework that accounts for the interests and requirements of the relevant parties (Fisher, Ury & Patton, 1981). The study focused on determining the Zone of Possible Agreement (ZOPA) and exploring innovative alternatives that could meet the requirements of both parties (Raiffa, Richardson, & Metcalfe, 2002). The study's conclusions are derived from a qualitative investigation of the negotiating process and its outcomes. The negotiation process used in this case study shows how well principled negotiation can work to settle conflicts between generations at work. Even though there were some problems and resistance at first, the agreement worked out well and made the group feel better, which helped the project get done on time. The negotiation theoretically satisfied the standards of efficiency, relationship preservation, and value generation for both parties (Fisher, Ury & Patton, 1981). A critical examination of the negotiation process reveals that identifying the Zone of Possible Agreement (ZOPA) was instrumental in finding a mutually beneficial solution. The mediator helped devise a creative solution that combined the best of both sides by understanding what each side wanted and needed. The use of active listening skills and empathy were also crucial in affirming both parties' concerns and creating a safe environment where they could openly talk about anything.

It has evidence to back flexibility and responsiveness in the workplace. The interest of the parties to consider alternative solutions, compromise, and adopt other methods of resolving issues eventually paid off with a successful transaction. Implementation of the agreement, however, was challenging, and some of the professionals were slow to adopt digital tools. This case is an example of the importance of continuously monitoring and advising individuals who are adhering to negotiated agreements. Mapping interests, options, alternatives and ZOPA of each party before the negotiation may have resulted in more optimal alternatives. The use of Mediation in such a case may have made the process more legitimate and less emotionally charged (Salacuse, 2003). The success of the negotiation in this case study indicates that principled negotiation may serve as an effective method for resolving intergenerational conflicts in the workplace. The insights obtained through this case study highlights more effective conflict resolution strategies in similar situations. Organizations can address the problems resulting from employing workers from diverse generations more effectively if they understand the intergenerational conflict nuance and the effectiveness of principled negotiation. What one can learn from this case study can be used to develop effective conflict resolution techniques in such scenarios. Organizations can address the problems resulting from having employees from different generations more effectively if they understand the intergenerational conflict nuances and the application of principled negotiation.

6 | IMPLICATIONS AND RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Evidence suggests the following implications for workplace negotiations related to intergenerational conflicts. The significance of comprehensive interest mapping and innovative option generation is emphasized, as these methodologies can promote efficient conflict resolution and mutually advantageous agreements (Dias, 2020; Dias, Waltz, & Oliveira, 2021; Fisher, Ury & Patton, 1981). Moreover, the utilization of third parties, such as mediators, can facilitate the enhancement of the legitimacy of the negotiation process and reduce emotional burdens, particularly in conducting intricate and sensitive negotiations (Salacuse, 2003; Dias & Lopes, 2020). The study emphasizes the importance of monitoring and adapting to the execution of negotiation agreements, as well as their long-term efficacy and sustainability (Dias & Navarro, 2020; Dias, Lopes, & Duzert, 2020). This is especially crucial in family businesses, where power differences and familial relationships can significantly impact how negotiations are conducted (Dias, 2021; Dias & Lopes, 2020, 2021). The restrictions of this case study are that it has a unique setting and may have limited generalizability to other contexts (Yin, 2018). The study is single case-study in scope, and additional studies would have to be performed to validate the findings and establish other best practices (Dias, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). The study also highlights some of the pitfalls of enforcing agreements and demands ongoing support and supervision in order to greet success (Dias, Lopes, Cavalcanti, & Golfetto, 2020; Dias & Silva, 2021).

7 | CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This negotiation in the workplace clearly showed how the concepts of the discipline are applicable in practice. Identifying ZOPA, building alternatives (BATNA), generating creative options, and focusing on interests rather than positions were crucial steps in turning conflict into cooperation. The case also showed that negotiation isn't just a one-time thing; it's an ongoing process that requires patience, flexibility, and a willingness to learn new things. If it could renegotiate, it would make changes like more structured planning ahead of time, formal mediation, more creative solutions, and regular reviews of the agreement. These changes could make the outcome even more effective and long-lasting. In the end, the experience was very useful because it taught me that negotiating is more than just giving in or winning. It's about finding common ground, creating value together, and, most importantly, keeping relationships strong at work.

8 | FUTURE RESEARCH

The research should focus on multiple areas which become evident from this case study. Future researchers should investigate the application of principled negotiation in different contexts which include international diplomatic talks and negotiations involving multiple parties. The research requires investigators to study how mediation affects negotiation outcomes and they need to identify the core elements which lead to successful mediation. In the end, future research could look into how technology can be used in negotiations, like online dispute resolution platforms or negotiation tools that use artificial intelligence. This could mean looking into how well these technologies help with negotiation and getting better results, as well as the possible risks and problems that come with using them.

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