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My colleague and I -
Last minute planning for today's negotiation.

Andrew Gottschalk

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Andrew has been working on negotiating issues for longer than he cares to admit. In his twelve years on the Faculty, as a member of the Organisation Behaviour Group, he developed many of his ideas but somehow the "two person negotiating team under time pressure" still does not receive the attention it deserves. This note will serve as a small correction.

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A psychologist, Andrew is bilingual in English and German, he has written extensively on negotiation and has been a visiting professor at INSEAD and at Japan's Institute for International Studies.

We are going to negotiate, probably at short notice and without an opportunity to plan or rehearse except for the half-hour taxi ride from the airport. In this short note I want to set out some ideas and pointers towards good practice that will enhance your chances of surviving to conclude a robust agreement that can be implemented.

That two of you are working together is a major benefit. You can share tasks (in particular communicating and listening), you can compliment your colleague's negotiating style* and jointly represent your company's strategic and tactical objectives throughout the negotiating process.

Often the solo negotiator appears to become detached from the company's business strategy. Ownership and identification with our strategy is essential; it provides the rationale for "Yes" or "No". The two-person team provides at least one member with the responsibility and the opportunity to communicate the linkage between the "bigger picture" and the specific negotiations. In most cases the "more senior" member of the team may have "formulated" the strategy and now "represents and verbalises" the business strategy. The other member of the team owns the integration of the business strategy and the negotiating process between the meetings.

Analysing and effectively representing stakeholder complexity is a two-person task. Unfortunately once we are locked in to the process and "smell a deal" it is too easy to over-estimate our ability to sell our deal internally with disastrous consequences for our credibility. The two-person team is the first and a manifest example of stakeholder complexity. You and I may want similar negotiating goals but we do not "overlap" one hundred percent: there are differences of emphasis. In the two-person team we can and should explicitly identify different stakeholders and "bring your ghosts to the meeting". This is the opportunity to display your political skills as a representative of one or more "factions"!

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We must not confuse commitment and solidarity to colleagues with maintaining silence in a meeting when difficult or complex items are being worked on that do not take into account our complex internal organisational needs. “We did not want to let them know because we would appear divided (weak) or stupid” is the often heard excuse. How can you and your counter-party develop a sound relationship that will underpin implementation if key stakeholder issues are not raised?

Both negotiating parties, if engaged in problem solving, that essential component of negotiating can make more sophisticated and realistic choices. Why rush to a deal only to see it fall apart after signature because complex stakeholder needs have been ignored?

In the little time you have for planning (and hopefully out of earshot of your counter-party) there are a number of specific issues that two-person team scan and must discuss that will increase your effectiveness in the meeting.

Firstly, thinking about power

What is it in these negotiations, where does it come from, how can we build it, what are its dynamics? Talking about power, with a colleague, is often difficult because we may reveal aspects of ourselves. Don’t worry you have a good excuse: the counter-party and how you will cope with their attempts to enhance their negotiating power. If all else fails remember you have something they want, identify and nurture it. You may then realise that you can say “No” with fewer negative consequences for yourselves personally and for the company. During adjournments regularly return to a review of power: review your initial perceptions, try to identify what the counter-party is doing to build their power, what opportunities do you have?

In the meeting there are some simple behaviours that are associated with the effective management of power. Repeat your opening position, ask questions and repeat them until you are satisfied with the answer you have received. Don’t dilute your arguments: only use the key facts / information. Two reasons well made and repeated are better than ten weak ones that are badly made.

Big Issues

Given little time the second preparation task of the two-person team is to identify the four or five “big issues” with the negotiations and not to forget that the ongoing relationship is a, if not **the**, major issue. Jointly identify both the logical and tactical linkages that will allow you to move between issues smoothly and therefore achieve progress within the meetings. Knowing when, why and how to change issues is a hallmark of an effective two-person team unless attrition is the deliberately chosen tactic for that meeting.

Working all the issues, with flexibility, also helps us to manage the inter-party and inter-personal conflict that may be present in negotiations. Be very explicit with your colleague if you feel there are issues that should not be mentioned in the meeting. A "kick under the table" or a hastily written note is no substitute! Successful negotiators identify and seek to expand the common ground between the two parties. Within two-person teams this is the third planning task / activity. Representing different stakeholders with complex, conflicting and inconsistent objectives, you and your colleague have to know the common ground not only within your company but also with the counter-party. In the meeting regular reference to the common ground may prevent a negotiating breakdown triggered by a loss of confidence or the subjective feeling that the gap between the parties is too large and cannot be bridged. References to the common ground are an essential component of phase one of the negotiation process in which the two parties have to identify the gap between their positions. If the gap "sounds too big" it can either de-motivate you or encourage you to make unjustified concessions to close the gap.

There are three additional planning tasks that use the same simple matrix to display our thinking. We need to explore the assumptions within which both parties operate, we need to agree on the management of information (a source of power or more frequently a persistent source of weakness) and develop a concession matrix that allows us to move systematically towards agreement without panic and/or capitulation.

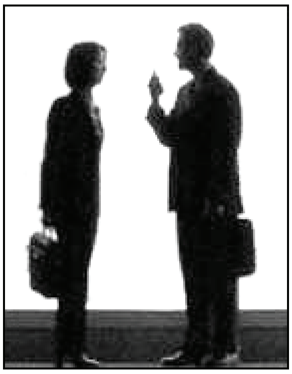
When working as solo negotiators we are often unaware of the assumptions that govern our behaviour. If two of us are in the same position the risks have increased dramatically. By drawing a simple 2 x 2 matrix we can reduce our vulnerability to the nightmare of basing our negotiating strategy and behaviour on the quicksand of assumptions.

Party	Our Counter-Party
Our *Public* assumptions *(we can and will refer to)*	Their *Public* assumptions *(they can and will talk about)*
Our *Private* assumptions *(we cannot talk about)*	Their *Private* assumptions *(they will not talk about, but we must listen for)*

At the start of the meeting we have the opportunity to clearly state the assumptions we are making to avoid subsequent mistakes and conflict. Ask your counter-party to reciprocate. To the extent that two sets of ears are better than one, adjournments and breaks offer the two person team the opportunity to monitor the explicit and implicit assumptions that underlie behaviour at the table.

We are all aware that information management plays a critical role in the negotiating process. A two person team is always vulnerable to mistakes: who says what, when is it said etc. etc. The same simple 2 x 2 matrix is a vital self-preservation tool! We all remember, to our costs, the vital and sensitive piece of information that was released because of our failure to plan.

Our Party	Our Counter-Party
Information we will give *(who, when, how)*	Information we will get *(questions to ask)*
Information we will keep *(we cannot disclose)*	Surprise information *(know how to react to)*



Many solo negotiators have a bias, either towards effective communication of their position or towards establishing the position and demands of their counter-party. In the two-person team we should be able to achieve a balance through the explicit allocation of tasks. We must however avoid basing the division of labour on our internal hierarchy. The senior person may not have the same command of the details and on being questioned may lose credibility which the junior colleague might enhance through good answers. If the negotiations continue over a longer period of time and away from the office I would recommend that internal stakeholders know the content / shape of the matrix. This should reduce their anxiety that the negotiations are being conducted without reference to their concerns.

If we cannot make concessions we cannot negotiate. We are engaged in a struggle to impose our view. For the two-person team thinking through what to concede and when is a critical task but it is all too easy to overlook the demands that we should be making. A negotiation is a “balance” of give and get, get and give. If we have not thought about our demands the negotiations will conclude with a one-sided agreement. The 2 x 2 matrix below should structure your thinking.

Our Party	Our Counter-Party
Concessions we will give / trade *(what and when)*	Concessions we will get / demand *(what and when)*
Concessions we will keep *(we cannot make)*	Surprise concessions *(know how to react to i.e. accept/leave)*

In this short note I have set out the six strands of the planning lifeline: power, the issues, the common ground, the assumptions, information and concession management.

Space does not, however, allow a lengthy discussion of negotiating strategy : the critical choice between win-win and win-lose. Suffice it to say that most negotiations are a "mixed game" in which we have an opportunity, as a two-person team, to avoid a drift towards win-lose bargaining behaviour. As individuals we know that as individuals we have different concerns. Working in a team may make easier for us to attend to the counter-party's concerns and as a result meet our own divergent outcomes though the adoption of problem solving behaviours.

Given the environment in which we work it would be wonderful if we had time to plan systematically for negotiations. Reality is far from perfect. Under pressure, or in a crisis, don't negotiate alone, send a two-person team and use the techniques we have suggested. The first steps towards survival and eventual success !

Note from the Author :

On re-reading this note, I have concluded that perhaps you should extend your taxi ride for another thirty minutes!

The Negotiating Style Inventory

- The Negotiating Style Inventory can be obtained by contacting Andrew Gottschalk

  Should you want to talk through the points in this note or any other negotiating issue you can contact him at :

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