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Student Preparation to Teach Negotiation Skills

While effective negotiation skills are essential in all positions and at all levels of modern organizations, Within ESP, the training of L2 students in the fine art of negotiation includes laying a foundation of skill sets from a wide range of supporting knowledge from such disciplines as intercultural communication, rhetoric, etiquette, protocol and logic. Introducing students to these elements and teaching them how to use them in formal negotiation settings pose a challenge to any instructor. The article discusses some of the hurdles to teaching negotiation, as well as provides some suggestions for getting one's students to surmount them.

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Within ESP, training of L2 students in the fine art of negotiation includes laying a foundation of skill sets from a wide range of supporting knowledge from such disciplines as intercultural communication, rhetoric, etiquette, protocol and logic. Introducing students to these elements and teaching them how to use them in formal negotiation settings pose a challenge to any instructor. Research indicates that by using practical, real-life simulated negotiation scenarios, learners can develop more effective negotiating skills, but there are substantial hurdles to cross, before students can actually benefit from negotiation training, especially that using an L2 as the means of communication.

Of course, in every organization, employees use negotiating skills on a daily basis. Whether negotiating deadlines and workloads or trying to obtain more favorable prices for supplies, negotiations cover all aspects of business communication, from the small and mundane to the large and exceptional. The fact is: if an organization has employees who possess effective negotiating capabilities, that organization can gain a competitive advantage, reduce its costs, increase its profits and improve relationships (Masters, Albright & Irr, 2003).

The first hurdle to students learning negotiation comes in the form of a mental block: students often lack an understanding of how negotiation training can assist them in their careers (Wiwczaroski, 2011). Over 30 years ago, when identifying the ten managerial roles that leaders perform to accomplish organizational objectives, Mintzberg (1973) classified the role of "Negotiator" as one of the essential decisional roles that must be mastered and used effectively by managers. This view has only strengthened over the decades since (Compare Raiffa, 1982; Fischer & Ury, 1991; Watkins, 2002; Lehrer, 2009). As we know, managers utilize negotiation skills regularly in a wide variety of employee-related and strategic-developmental areas. Whether by explaining to mid-level managers the importance of actively supporting a new employee performance management system or recruiting a promising new job applicant, most management activities require excellent negotiation skills in order to succeed. (Lax & Sebenius, 1986) Students need to be introduced to the complexity of everyday business communication involving negotiation and comprehend how vital negotiation is to handling all levels and areas of their future, professional daily lives (Mocsáriné *et al.*, 2010). In class, I present

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my students with short audiovisual testimonies by business leaders talking about their problems with learning how to negotiate and how these problems might have stifled their successes.

The second hurdle every student faces is a misunderstanding of what negotiation means. Negotiation involves two parties coming together to forge an agreement. It usually involves one or more of three purposes: to reach new agreements or renew expiring ones; to resolve disagreements and prevent conflict from escalating; or to change behavior. Poorly conducted negotiations can lead to very costly problems such as breach-of-contract suits, lost business opportunities, the need to re-do work, and dissatisfied customers and/or employees (Masters, Albright & Irr, 2003). More often than not, the parties to the negotiation process will interact on an ongoing basis. As a result, it is important that the negotiations do not deteriorate into a situation that has a negative impact on the relationship (Raiffa, 1982 and Gensing-Pophal, 2001). When students learn negotiating skills, the result in their later workplaces is better relationships, characterized by improved communication and reduced dysfunctional conflict in the workplace (Gagnon, 2007; compare also Masters, Albright & Irr, 2003).

The third major hurdle is one involving maturity and self-awareness (Wiwczaroski, 2011). One essential characteristic of effective negotiators is their ability to listen to the other party. Good relationships are built on trust and understanding and these are developed through listening. Teaching students to ask probing questions and to listen carefully to the responses helps them to understand the necessity to understand how to gain much needed information about the other side. They must learn that it is this understanding of negotiation as being a series of questions and responses, accompanied by careful listening and thoughtful counter-responses, which will likely lead to more progress than simply pushing one's own agenda (Fischer & Ury, 1991; Gensing-Pophal, 2001). Sebenius (2001) explains that it is important to listen for the difference between one party's position and its interests. His definition of "position" as where a party stands on the issues carefully contrasts his definition of "interests", which are defined as the underlying concerns that determine a party's position. Students should understand that negotiations often reach a stalemate when neither party will budge on its preconceived position (Fischer & Ury, 1991; Gensing-Pophal, 2001). By listening carefully, the effective negotiator can determine the other party's interests and provide a solution to satisfy those interests while allowing the party to amend its position (Fischer & Ury, 1991; Gensing-Pophal, 2001; Sebenius, 2001).

Many publications (Fischer & Ury, 1991; Gensing-Pophal, 2001; Masters, Albright and Irr, 2003; Wheeler, 2006; Wiwczaroski, 2011) identify many other characteristics of effective negotiators, which I also teach my students. These include the necessity that the student understands what is to be achieved through the negotiation (clear goals), confidence in one's self and in one's negotiating team, confidence in one's negotiation strategy, the ability to disagree when necessary, the ability to continue to press one's points when things are not working out as desired, but to compromise when such action does not render the negotiation aims untenable, communication and persuasion skills, an empathic ear, open-mindedness in listening and accepting other ideas, informed

persistence, tolerance of fair, grounded criticism, a tolerance and understanding of acceptable risk and the ability to be a team player.

Another aspect of negotiation that students must understand is how every business conversation is actually an act of power. Whether speaking or writing, the message always has an effect and this effect can wield or weaken one's position of power in the course of dealing with an opponent. As every negotiation can empower the speaker if it is conducted skillfully and collaboratively, the use of diplomatic language in negotiations is essential in conveying what could be a forceful message, by adding a polite tone to the conversation. Eliciting a willingness to listen in the opponent is the less direct focus and softness of one's language, regardless of its actual content. Some examples of diplomatic language expressions include:

To be honest, this product seems...
We were thinking of, say, something around ...%.
That won't be easy; however, we would be willing to...
Perhaps we should....
Here's an idea we could consider...
Wouldn't it be better/easier to..?
If we bought this product, what would..?
Actually, we were rather hoping...

Despite the need to get the students through the initial hurdles to learning negotiation, negotiating skills can be improved through study and practice (Taylor, Burns & Mesmer-Magnus, 2008; Manwaring, 2006; Wheeler, 2006; Wiwczaroski, 2011). Taylor, Burns and Mesmer-Magnus (2008) provide a list of skills that poor negotiators can be taught to become more proficient:

1. Acknowledge the position of the other party
2. Use active listening techniques
3. Adopt effective questioning techniques
4. Accurately interpret nonverbal communication
5. Use collaborative communications
6. Think creatively to find win-win conflict resolution strategies in lieu of the more common competitive or win-lose tactics

Indeed, the principles of Instructional Design Theory presented by Gagne, Briggs and Wagner (1992) indicate that introducing material, permitting practice and providing feedback to students all boost confidence in the student's self, in the student's use of learned skills and especially in communicating intentions. Gagnon (2007) corroborates how using practical, real-life simulated negotiating scenarios, and learners can develop more effective negotiating skills. Instructors should be mindful when creating a negotiation process through a negotiation model that the latter requires sound knowledge of terminology from the areas of negotiating, marketing, sale, logistics, finance and sometimes law. In other words, as the terminology that is acquired by students through the process of using negotiation models comes from different areas of business, e.g. to be

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able to promote a product and sell it, students should know the terminology from the relevant area of marketing and should become familiar with the applicable marketing mix. In order to additionally be able to negotiate payment terms, students should also learn the appropriate terminology from the areas of finance and accounting. Moreover, if the product in the case is to be delivered, logistics can play an important role when negotiating the time, place and method of delivery. Negotiation usually leads to the contract or agreement being signed. This can be a sales contract. Further, nondisclosure agreements are necessary today and penalties for not fulfilling contract conditions have to be defined. Towards this end, the basics of legal terminology also have to be included. Effective business communication is very important and correspondence – formal letters, orders, offers and/or complaints – has to be practiced.

These areas of ESP should ideally be taught prior to the negotiation course, but may also be taught parallel to the negotiation preparation weeks. Below, I have assembled a checklist for beginners, to allow learners of negotiation to run a self-assessment of their level of preparation before meeting the other side, once they have received copies of the case on which their negotiation training exercise will be based:

1. When is the negotiation taking place? Are there fluctuations in the business cycle, demands on cash flow or other factors that will affect the deal?
2. How much time do you have? Progress accelerates when either party approaches a deadline.
3. What are the issues to be negotiated? An issue is anything that has value to either party. The more experienced you are, the more issues you'll see.
4. What issues should be avoided? While you must be ready to discuss issues you'd rather not, never bring up any issue in which you have a weak position.
5. How should issues be ranked? Rate the importance of your issues by dividing them into three categories:
Need to Have (you won't consider a deal without them), Nice to Have (you'll go to lengths to get them), and Tradeoff (something you can use to bargain with).
6. What are your limits? Do you have the authority to make the deal? Enter a negotiation with the highest level of authority possible—it'll give you confidence. Don't, however, admit to absolute authority. You'll want to be able to say you need to consult with "others."
7. What are the facts? The more you know about the other side and the deal itself, the more effective you'll be. Ask questions constantly.
8. What is the other side's point of view? Spend time trying to see the deal through the other side's eyes. How do their negotiators view you? What issues will they raise? What's important to them? How badly do they need the deal? Can they walk away from it?
9. What do you know about the other negotiators? What are their attitudes, beliefs, and styles? How do their characteristics differ from yours? Are they effective?
10. What outside influences will affect the negotiation? Be sure you know how these things will concern the deal: current market conditions, laws and regulations, actions by competitors, shortages of materials or supplies, actions by a foreign nation, the stock market, politics, unions, or personal problems of the negotiators.

11. What will you accept? Lay out your best possible deal and what you need, at minimum, to come to an agreement.
12. What's your plan of action? Develop an ideal agenda that encompasses what you'd like to discuss first, second, and last. Avoid settling minor issues at the outset; their value can shift as the negotiation proceeds.

The explanation of any remaining unclear business terminology applicable to the case is then reviewed, usually through discussions and exercises with a lexical approach. Preparation and writing of the negotiating dialogue should be used only as a preparatory exercise, as students should be drilled in providing fluid, spontaneous responses, as well as when *not* to respond immediately. Prefabricated dialogues inhibit the injection of real-like learning of negotiation skills and should be avoided, wherever possible. Finally, the students role-play the case negotiation.

Yet another hurdle is to make students understand that once the negotiation is over, there is still vital work to be done: At the conclusion of any negotiation, each member of the negotiation team should write and present an own version of what happened during the negotiation, i.e. how the team prepared, why it prepared the way it did, how it attempted to realize its strategic objectives, where in the negotiation and how it did or did not meet its stated objectives and especially how future negotiations with the same opponent should be improved, as well as how to improve the individual's own role in the team. This analysis and self-evaluation is perhaps the most important learning tool in the classroom, as it never fails to generate discussion and can be used to more subtly correct errors by the instructor. Issues to consider in this discussion include:

1. Were both parties satisfied with the agreement? If not, why?
2. Do you feel that the other team negotiated fairly and in good faith?
3. Did they attempt to come to an agreement?
4. Which issue was the hardest to negotiate?
5. Did you get stuck on an issue? Did it help if you moved on and come back later?
6. Do you perceive that one team, or one member of a team, was an obstacle to an effective agreement?
7. Did you have a negotiating plan and did you follow it?
8. Did your team members work well together? Where/when was there conflict and why?
9. Were you able to maintain a constructive relationship with the other team?
10. Do you believe that either team gave in too quickly? If so, why?
11. Who made the first offer? How did this occur?
12. Who took the leadership role in the negotiations? Was this person you expected would do so and, if not, why/how did this happen?

In order to ensure that students commit to the exercise of negotiation, it is important that they are evaluated on their participation (Taylor, K.A. *et al.*, 2008) Assessment should take place on three levels: First, the teams should perform peer evaluations to indicate the quality and quantity of the participation of each team member. Second, instructors should evaluate teams on the creativity, practicality and reasonableness of the agreement that was reached. Finally, instructors must be sure to actively take notes during the exercise,

so that they can monitor how the teams are functioning and interacting - both internally and with their opposing team - and to assess individual contributions. It is also useful to collect feedback from the students on their reaction to the negotiation exercise. This feedback helps the instructor to perfect both the information provided in the case used as the basis for the negotiation and the process used in the simulation.

In closing, the use of negotiating skills is all-encompassing: every position and every level of every modern organization is required to utilize negotiation in its communication activities with professionalism and competency every day. Moreover, because the cost of a negotiating mistake can be very high, this is not a skill which lends itself to on-the-job training: M.B.A. students must receive special purpose language courses as an enhancement to their business degree studies. Otherwise, their employability is realistically questionable.

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