

Positioning for a Position Paper

Teaching Guide

DURATION

15 mins prep
15 mins simulation
20-30 mins debrief

CONTEXT

Simulated role play, 2 roles

BEST FOR

Participants and practitioners new to multi-issue negotiations

TEACHING

Short role play exercise followed by debrief

TOPIC(S)

Value creation, logrolling, multi-issue negotiations

CONTENT

The exercise introduces the topic of creating joint value in multi-issue negotiations by linking issues, dealing in packages and exploring their importance to the negotiating parties

1) One page overview

“Positioning for a position paper” is a short simulation to introduce basic techniques of preparation and negotiation to effectively trade across issues. Participants practice managing the complexity that arises by negotiating several issues. They first need to understand how important various issues are to the different negotiators and then practice making mutually beneficial trades by leveraging the fact that different parties want things with different importance.

In the short exercise, participants play the role of either Andrea or Brianna. Brianna, the lead negotiator for a small country delegation, has asked Andrea, a former climate delegate and a current activist, to draft a paper on a technical issue. They have to negotiate three issues: 1) whether or how much Andrea will be paid, 2) whether there is a commitment to involve Andrea in future work, and 3) whether Andrea will receive support from a Research Assistant.

For each issue, they can only choose between three pre-agreed options. Andrea and Brianna give different priorities to the three issues ranging from “very important” to “not important”.

Despite the fact that the parties have very different priorities—one cares much more about pay, than about involvement in future projects and vice versa—many participants in this exercise will end up negotiating for a middle ground solution on each issue. However, by focusing on how important different issues are, participants could do better for themselves and for the other by conceding fully on the issue that is the least important to them, and in return getting their preferred outcome on the issue that is most important to them.

The exercise can be used to introduce basic techniques of such value creating negotiating like making package offers or making contingent offers. The exercise also invites reflections on how to manage value creation across issues in complex settings, such as international climate

negotiations, where different issues are frequently negotiated by different people in different rooms, with another person overseeing the coordinated effort across the entire team.

2) Summary of the exercise

A. Content & Logistics overview

Content overview

Brianna is the lead negotiator of a small country delegation. She has asked Andrea, a former climate delegate and current activist, to support the delegation by developing a position paper on a very technical issue. Brianna and Andrea have worked together before.

Brianna and Andrea need to negotiate three issues:

- **Pay:** Will Andrea be paid and if so, how much?
- **Future Work:** Will Andrea receive a commitment to be involved in future projects?
- **Support:** Will Andrea receive the support of a research assistant?

For each issue there are three options:

	Issue 1: Pay	Issue 2: Future work	Issue 3: RA Support
Option 1	Salary that covers basic expenses	No commitment for future involvement	No support
Option 2	Salary in line with prior engagement	Lose commitment to keep A in mind	Part time support
Option 3	Salary at higher rate	Firm commitment to work with A in the future	Full time support

Main interests and priorities of the protagonists

	1) Pay: Will Andrea be paid and if so, how much?	2) Future work: Will Andrea get a commitment to be involved in future projects?	3) Support: Will Andrea get the support of an assistant?
Andrea	<i>Not important;</i> Wants to be paid as high as possible but money isn't of great concern.	<i>Very important;</i> Knows that delegation is about to undertake significant work and wants to be involved	<i>Very important;</i> NOTE: Aligned priority with Brianna Is convinced that good work is only possible with support of full time RA
Brianna	<i>Very important;</i> Has a tightly limited budget and can only afford a good salary if no Research Assistant is funded, which she believes is critical.	<i>Not important;</i> Prefers to keep all options open and not to make a commitment, but can concede here if needed.	<i>Very Important</i> Is convinced that good work is only possible with support of full time RA

Overview over priorities

Taking all of the information together and denoting “Very Important” as 3 and “Not Important” as 1 with a “+” or “-” denoting the directionality, the following view emerges.

	1) Pay	2) Future work	3) Support
Andrea	-1	+3	+3
Brianna	+3	-1	+3

The table above simplifies complex information showing that both have an aligned interest regarding the RA support, and opposed interests regarding Pay and Future work, but at different priorities. It becomes clear that value maximizing solution would be the following agreement.

	1) Pay	2) Future work	3) Support
Option 1	Salary that covers basic expenses	No commitment for future involvement	No support
Option 2	Salary in line with prior engagement	Loose commitment to keep Andrea in mind	Part-time support
Option 3	Salary at higher rate	Firm commitment to work with Andrea in the future	Full-time support

However, many participants instead will end up compromising on each issue to choose Option 2 for each one. By negotiating every issue individually, the participants miss that there is a “package” that **maximizes shared value**. That package is reached through a trade-off between Pay and Future Work, since pay is very important to Brianna and not to Andrea, whereas commitments are not important to Brianna but a key priority for Andrea.

Logistics overview

The exercise has very low logistical needs. It takes about 5-15 minutes to prepare. Instructions are on a single sheet of paper or can be shown on a slide. In the negotiation, participants have 15-20 minutes to agree on terms for Andrea’s involvement with the delegation, followed by a debrief.

B. Learning objectives

Analytical learning objectives

After concluding the exercise participants will:

- Understand that issues can be traded off to maximize value by leveraging differences in assessment.
- Appreciate that “compromising” or “splitting the difference” on each issue often results in value left at the table.

- See how joint value can be created by linking issues together and treating them as packages rather than negotiating each individual issue separately.
- Start to think about how adding issues to a negotiation can open up new creative solutions.

Skills

Through the exercise participants practice the skills of:

- Using the party-issue matrix as a tool in preparation of negotiations.
- Asking probing questions to identify the priorities of other parties.
- Making contingent offers and/or making package offers.

C. Where does this fit in a negotiation syllabus?

This exercise is relevant early in a negotiation curriculum for participants familiar with the basics of interest-based negotiations.

3) How to run and debrief the exercise

A. Draft schedule for exercise

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|---|---------------|
| • Case introduction and individual preparation:
(can be done before class) | 5-15 minutes |
| • Negotiating | 10-20 minutes |
| • Debrief | 20-30 minutes |

B. Suggested detailed lesson plan for debriefing

Draft schedule for debrief

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|--|---------------|
| • Case introduction and individual preparation:
Instructor briefly introduces the scenario. Participants can then prep individually or with other people in the same role. It is up to the instructor how much to guide people by priming them to seek opportunities for value creation or whether to just let them negotiate and debrief the various strategies that participants chose based on their results. | 5-15 minutes |
| • Negotiations in pairs
Participants disperse in pairs to negotiate. Results can be collected in a Google Form. | 10-20 minutes |
| • Debrief | 20-30 minutes |

Detailed lesson plan

Sharing of results

After negotiations conclude, participants to share the results of their negotiations. Based on multiple runnings of the exercise, it is the experience that many groups will have arrived at option 2 as a “compromise” or “even split” solution. The instructor may wish to turn attention to how the group negotiated, i.e., what process they followed to arrive at this result.

Discuss different results and why they emerged

The instructor then may wish to turn attention to groups that came to the value maximizing solutions and inquire about their process to arrive at the better outcome.

To highlight why the value maximizing solution is preferable, the instructor may turn attention to how important the issues were for Andrea and Brianna.

Identify the basic structure of priorities and mutually beneficial trades

In prior exercises it turned out to be helpful to introduce a simplified technique to map the importance by assigning numerical values, going through each issue, asking participants what each person preferred and how important that issue was (see below):

With Very important=3, Not important=1 and +/- denoting whether the issues are aligned or opposed.

	1) Pay	2) Future Work	3) Support
Andrea	What did Andrea prefer? How important was it? <i>Note down: +1</i>	What did Andrea prefer? How important was it? <i>Note down: +3</i>	What did Andrea prefer? How important was it? <i>Note down: +3</i>
Brianna	What did Brianna prefer? How important was it? <i>Note down: -3</i>	What did Brianna prefer? How important was it? <i>Note down: -1</i>	What did Brianna prefer? How important was it? <i>Note down: +3</i>

The simple table can be used to show where value creating trades across issues are possible by looking at opposed interests of varying importance.

It is clear that it is very important for Brianna to pay Andrea a salary that covers only basic expenses, but conversely, that salary is not very important for Andrea. Giving a firm commitment to involve Andrea in future projects is not very important for Brianna but is a significant priority for Andrea. This issue can then be **traded off** in exchange for Andrea compromising on salary. By not looking at issues individually, but examining the **relative importance** of the issues to the negotiating parties, they are able to construct a solution that maximizes value.

Cementing the learning

All of the ideas below are suggestions. Which specific discussion yields the most value depends on the specific group.

- The instructor may wish to discuss what participants could have done during their preparation and during the negotiation to get to such results. Suggestions might include preparing using such a simplified tool and forming hypotheses over the assigned importance of the counterparts to test them. During the negotiation, asking probing questions, or making package offers to identify trade-offs, or contingent offers along the lines of "If I were to concede on Issue A, what would you need on Issue B, can be helpful.

- The instructor might also discuss the difficulties of establishing a process that invites people to share such information, as often this requires reciprocity rather than one-side sharing or informal settings where people feel more comfortable sharing.
- Consider asking participants how transparent they were about the assigned priorities in the negotiation. This is a helpful way of highlighting the importance of transparency of interests in negotiations. Without knowing the relative importance of the issues, it is not possible to end up at a deal that maximizes value.
- The instructor might also wish to turn to the idea of “adding issues” to a negotiation. The instructor can ask what would have happened to the negotiation if it only consisted of “Pay” and “Support of Assistant”. By adding the issue of “involvement in future projects”, it becomes possible to overcome gridlock.
- Lastly, the instructor may wish to explore how these concepts can be applied in complex settings where negotiations are split up into different tracks and negotiated by different people. Very often, value creation across issues means widening the scope of a negotiation to combine it with one that is happening in a different room. It is usually the job of a specific person to watch over such tradeoffs. Good negotiating in teams can mean that one needs to understand how important the issue they are responsible for is in the broader set of priorities for the organization and whether trade-offs across other issues might be overall beneficial.

C. Typical Challenges and/or discussion points

Many participants tend to reach the compromise solution and during the discussion will get somewhat defensive arguing that their approach was right. Fairly frequently, some follow-up questions about what their strategy and desired result was, yields some insight that they wanted to maximize their share but failed to abandon their strategy of asking for the most on each issue, rather than shifting strategy towards looking at concessions across issues.

4) Additional Resources

- Thompson, L. L. (2020). Win-Win Negotiation: Expanding the Pie. In *The Mind and Heart of the Negotiator* (7th ed., Chapter 4, pp. 97–122). Pearson.
- Malhotra, D., & Bazerman, M. H. (2007). Creating value in negotiation. In *Negotiation genius: How to overcome obstacles and achieve brilliant results at the bargaining table and beyond* (pp. 43-58). Bantam Books.