
MESOPOTAMIAN MYSTERY

NEGOTIATION

Teaching Note

This is a two-party, multi-issue negotiation between an author and the acquisitions editor for a publisher. Neither party has a great BATNA; they very much want to reach an agreement. Both parties anticipate the negotiations will involve royalty rates (likely separate rates for print books and e-books) and a possible cash advance to the author, facilitating the earlier completion of the manuscript. For each issue, the parties' confidential information as to acceptable ranges creates a ZOPA. In addition, each party will (or should) raise an issue the other had not anticipated: the acquisitions editor wants flexibility as to pricing and timing for making an e-book version available; the author wants a reversion of the copyright/right to republish if annual sales drop below-specified levels. Both roles provide that if the other party raises an issue they hadn't anticipated, they are free to consider and even tentatively agree without committing if it makes sense.

The distinctive aspect of this simulation is that it's designed to explore whether multi-issue negotiations are better undertaken with a strategy to offer alternative equivalent packages, to begin with, an initial package that includes favorable anchor points on each issue, or to negotiate each issue separately. Literature in the field suggests working with "multiple equivalent simultaneous offers." See G. Leonardell, J. Gu, G. McRuer, V. Husted Medvac, and A. Galinsky, "Multiple equivalent simultaneous offers (MESOs) reduce the negotiator dilemma: How a choice of first offers increases economic and relational outcomes," *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, Volume 152, May 2019, Pages 64-83,

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S074959781630557X>

or a synthesis at:

<https://www.pon.harvard.edu/daily/conflict-resolution/dealing-with-an-uncooperative-counterpart/>. There is even a Wikipedia article on MESOs!

Certainly, classic wisdom is to negotiate multi-issue problems by trading off between issues in ways that reflect the parties' different priorities, predictions, valuations, etc. Treating each issue as a separate distributive negotiation is frowned upon. In this simulation, the author is asked to consider and choose between three process strategies:

1) start by putting two or three alternative packages on the table (different packages including the various terms, but all of equivalent high value to you);

Or

2) start with one strong package (high for you on all three terms), with room to negotiate down from there;

or

3) negotiate term by term and arrive at a package at the end."



Though it's not written into the simulation, one teaching option would be for the professor to override the author's choice of strategy and assign a third of them to each one.

A classic debriefing would explore the difference between results, and the negotiation process leading to them. Of course, I would suggest focusing on which strategy was adopted and how that affected the negotiations. I hereby confess that I originally developed this simulation in approximately 2005 for a "Negotiation Master Class" in New Zealand, to a group of professionals who had previously taken my three-day negotiation workshop. The additional confession is that I have absolutely no memory of how it played. Having said that, I offer it as an interesting experiment for a negotiation course or extended workshop.

I hope that users will share results on the simulation site or negotiation/dispute resolution listservs.