

Negotiation

Why Negotiate?

It is inevitable that, from time-to-time, conflict and disagreement will arise as the differing needs, wants, aims and beliefs of people are brought together. Without negotiation, such conflicts may lead to argument and resentment resulting in one or all of the parties feeling dissatisfied. The point of negotiation is to try to reach agreements without causing future barriers to communications.

Stages of Negotiation

In order to achieve a desirable outcome, it may be useful to follow a structured approach to negotiation. For example, in a work situation a meeting may need to be arranged in which all parties involved can come together.

Read on to find out about the stages of negotiation.



1 PREPARATION

Before negotiation, decide when and where a meeting will take place to discuss the problem and who will attend. Setting a limited time-scale can also prevent the disagreement continuing.

Ensure all the pertinent facts of the situation are known in order to clarify your own position. This may include knowing the 'rules' of your organisation, to whom help is given, when help is not felt appropriate and the grounds for such refusals.

Preparation before discussing the disagreement will help to avoid further conflict and unnecessarily wasting time during the meeting.

2 NEGOTIATE TOWARDS A WIN-WIN OUTCOME

Focus on a 'win-win' outcome, where both sides feel they have gained something positive through the process of negotiation and both sides feel their point of view has been taken into consideration. A win-win outcome is usually the best result. Although this may not always be possible, through negotiation, it should be the ultimate goal.

Suggestions of alternative strategies and compromises need to be considered at this point. Compromises are often positive alternatives which can often achieve greater benefit for all concerned compared to holding to the original positions.



3 DISCUSSION

Individuals or members of each side put forward the case as they see it, i.e. their understanding of the situation. Key skills during this stage include questioning, listening and clarifying. Sometimes it is helpful to take notes during the discussion stage to record all points put forward in case there is need for further clarification.

It is extremely important to listen, as when disagreement takes place it is easy to make the mistake of saying too much and listening too little. Each side should have an equal opportunity to present their case.

4 CLARIFYING GOALS

From the discussion, the goals, interests and viewpoints of both sides of the disagreement need to be clarified.

It is helpful to list these factors in order of priority. Through this clarification it is often possible to identify or establish some common ground. Clarification is an essential part of negotiation, without it misunderstandings are likely to occur which may cause problems and barriers to reaching a beneficial outcome.

5 AGREEMENT

Agreement can be achieved once understanding of both sides' viewpoints and interests have been considered.

It is essential for everybody involved to keep an open mind in order to achieve an acceptable solution. Any agreement needs to be made perfectly clear so that both sides know what has been decided.

6 IMPLEMENTING A COURSE OF ACTION

From the agreement, a course of action has to be implemented to carry through the decision.



Failure to Agree

If the process of negotiation breaks down and agreement cannot be reached, then re-scheduling a further meeting is called for. This avoids all parties becoming embroiled in heated discussion or argument, which not only wastes time but can also damage future relationships.

At the subsequent meeting, the stages of negotiation should be repeated. Any new ideas or interests should be taken into account and the situation looked at afresh. At this stage it may also be helpful to look at other alternative solutions and/or bring in another person to mediate.

Informal Negotiation

There are times when there is a need to negotiate more informally. At such times, when a difference of opinion arises, it might not be possible or appropriate to go through the stages set out above in a formal manner. Nevertheless, remembering the key points in the stages of formal negotiation may be very helpful in a variety of informal situations.

In any negotiation, the following three elements are important and likely to affect the ultimate outcome of the negotiation:



- The more knowledge you possess of the issues in question, the greater your participation in the process of negotiation. In other words, good preparation is essential.
- Do your homework and gather as much information about the issues as you can.
- Negotiation is strongly influenced by underlying attitudes to the process itself.
- E.g. attitudes to the issues and personalities involved in the particular case, or attitudes linked to personal needs for recognition.
- Good interpersonal skills are essential for effective communication, both in formal and less formal situations.
- These skills include:
 - Effective verbal communication
 - Listening
 - Rapport building
 - Problem solving
 - Decision making
 - Assertiveness