The mechanisms of concessions used in conflict resolution in IT project teams of the Silesian Voivodship

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ABSTRACT

Negotiation is a type of bilateral communication. It is commonly used in conflict resolution, or to reach an agreement between two parties. The paper examines 200 people working in IT departments in the Silesian Voivodship to gauge their knowledge and awareness of the negotiation process. 101 men and 99 women joined the survey. All respondents were adults. 35.5% of respondents were people aged 18-25, 23% aged 26-30, 14% aged 31-35, 7.5% aged 36-40, 3% aged 41-45, 8% aged 46-50, 4% aged 51-55, and 8% were people over 55 years old. The condition for joining the survey was at least a one-time participation in negotiations to resolve a conflict.

Keywords: negotiations, concessions, conflicts, IT department

1. INTRODUCTION

The term negotiation comes from the Latin word negotium meaning interest, business, and has strong connotations in commercial, economic and political terminology. One of the more well-known definitions is: “the process of discussing something with someone in order to reach an agreement with agreement of them, or the discussions themselves” [1]. Negotiations should lead to finding a common position lying in the space of acceptable
solutions for each party. Also, negotiations, or conducting negotiations, can lead to a new, third solution, in place of two that are mutually exclusive.

The history of the process itself began in the primitive people who used barter, i.e. exchange of goods and services for other goods and services, before kings of Lydia introduced the first monetary system (625-610 BC) [2]. An example is the exchange of hunted animals, harvested fruit, animal pelts, stone tools or ornaments, which laid the foundation for negotiations. The process of negotiating began to be discussed more broadly in the 16th century, when frequent wars between city-states and the dynamic development of trade created the basis for the communication process, the purpose of which was to obtain agreement on political or commercial matters. It was not until the 17th and 18th century that a rational approach to the communication processes dominated, resulting in further development of negotiations. The year 1716 is when formal teaching of the art of negotiation began. In this year François de Callières wrote the first book devoted to negotiating "De la maniere de negocier avec les souverains". The author emphasizes that the negotiator should not be arrogant and contemptuous, and people such as gamblers, drunks or the hot-tempered should never become negotiators. Callières emphasizes self-control and discipline, and advises to consider the history and culture of the opponent. [3] Currently, Dale Carnegie, one of the pioneers of coaching, is considered the father of modern negotiations. In 1911 in New York, Dale started vocational courses for business people, during which he taught the art of speaking, self-presentation, effective sales and marketing. He is the author of one of the most frequently read books on negotiations on "How to Win Friends and Influence People", translated into 37 languages. The 20th century initiated a different dimension of negotiations, which became an indispensable element of our lives. This modern approach is influenced by research in the field of neurology, cognitive psychology and multicultural studies.

2. NEGOTIATION AS A METHOD OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Negotiation is an exchange of information between two parties where the goal is defined earlier or depends on the situation. There are different definitions of negotiations, depending on the approach. These include:

1. **Negotiation as a process.** It is a complex action, stretched over time and involving many subprocesses performed cyclically or sequentially. According to this definition, the negotiation process is a sum of events and interactions between parties before the effect is achieved.

2. **Negotiation as a process of decision-making.** In the first phase, the sides independently prepare strategies and set goals. In the next stage, an agreement is reached. According to International Multilateral Negotiation, negotiations are a process during which opposite positions merge into a joint decision. It consists of identifying and defining the problem so that it is acceptable to both parties, understanding the problem and communicating interests and needs, as well as creating a final variant. In this approach, the parties look for solutions to satisfy their goals and at the same time offer some concessions. [4]

3. **Negotiation as a process of mutual exchange.** It is a mutual exchange of both information and relationships. According to this definition, the negotiation involves a partial sacrifice of own goals through mutual agreements and concessions. It is a tool by which one party can
find the conditions for getting what they want from someone who wants something from them. Exchange itself becomes a method of decision-making. [5]

4. Negotiation as a process of creating value. The process of interdependence and exchange allows us to achieve mutual benefits through additional value. They arise when one side has something to offer that is not worth much for them and is of great value to the other party. This type of negotiation is conducted to create something new or to resolve a dispute. [6]

5. Negotiation as a method of reaching an agreement by peaceful means. It consists of both cooperation and competition. Thanks to this form of negotiation, we can avoid escalation of disputes, as well as reach a compromise or find a new solution, giving both parties something more than splitting wins and losses in half. [7].

6. Negotiation as a mutual dependence of parties. It is characterized by a strong influence of both cooperation and competition as well as conflicting and convergent goals. None of the parties can achieve their goals on their own and at the same time both sides can help each other. In this aspect, the negotiations are the interactions of several communities striving to determine or transform the conditions of mutual dependence. [8]

7. Negotiation as a tool for shaping relationships. Negotiations are perceived as a method of establishing or maintaining relationships (usually partnerships). This type of negotiations has a significant impact on the previously set goals and issues, because the importance of a good relationship changes the behaviour of people who are trying to negotiate. [9]

8. Negotiation as a manipulation method. It is used to achieve an intended goal, which is impossible or difficult to achieve when using other methods of influence, without coercion and violence. Manipulation is the most adequate for a competitive situation. [10]

9. Negotiation as a conflict management / resolution method. Negotiation is a way to resolve conflicts between parties. It involves resolving or at least preventing an escalation of a conflict. It is a sequence of mutual actions, through which both sides strive to achieve the most favourable solution to the conflict of interests. [11]

Different approaches to negotiation as a method of conflict resolution include:

- **Compromise** (both sides make compromises, and in result neither of them wins or loses) [12]
- **Avoidance** (the parties show low interest in both themselves and the opponent) [13]
- **Cooperation** (the parties are interested in both themselves and the opponent) [14]
- **Yielding** (one side focuses on the problems of the opponent and solves their problems at the expense of themselves) [15]
- **Rivalry** (the parties do not show much interest in each other) [16]

The chosen method of conflict resolution depends on many factors, i.e. the matter of conflict, the power of the opposing party, and nature of the issue. In some cases, avoidance is the best solution, because all attempts to solve the problem can only deteriorate the situation. Some people try to adapt, which initially leads to a better understanding of the problem, although it rarely leads to its resolution. Rivalry, as opposed to avoidance and adaptation, is often quite aggressive and it can increase the conflict severity. According to most authors, a compromise is the best way to resolve conflicts, because both sides must sacrifice something thing for their mutual benefit.
3. MECHANISMS OF CONCESSION

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the word "concession" is “something that is allowed or given up, often in order to end a disagreement, or the act of allowing or giving this.” Concession is a natural element of negotiation and as such the art of conceding is important to master. As conceding deprives us of something, we may feel an intuitive reluctance to make concessions. A necessary skill of a business negotiator is being aware of emotions associated with giving way and rational assessment of every concession. Here the mechanisms of concessions are a helpful tool. Concessions should be made in a way that is consistent with our interests, e.g. conducting talks with a partner, because it can lead to achieving our own goals.

It is important to remember that after some time the situation may prove to be different - one of the signs of such a scenario is the pressure to accept very large concessions. It can also signal that the parties’ interests are more divergent than was originally thought. Awareness of your goal hierarchy is crucial. If a partner demands that you give up the most important thing, it is time to ask for a break and grab the spread sheet. First, check if you have not made a mistake in calculating the expected values, then consider whether this might be a time for looking for another partner, one who respects your interests.

The most known concession mechanisms are:

1. Diminishing steps - each subsequent concession has less and less value. In this way, you can let your partner know that they are approaching the minimum value below which you will not be able to go down. At the same time, instead of making a single concession, a few smaller ones are made. Thanks to this, more stages are created, which means more opportunities to gain something. [17]

2. Leverage - sometimes a small loss on our side can bring a large profit to our partner. Concessions are not made equal. Keeping in mind the importance of different areas, it is worth checking if a small concession on our part can have a disproportionate value for the partner. In this way, we can provide a substantial profit to the partner at a small expense, and vice versa. [18]

3. Packages - concessions in several areas. The combination of value exchange in several areas gives more opportunities because there are more potential combinations.

4. Gifts - if we give something and we do not take anything in return, two things can happen. First, in the case of a small gift, we can create a desire to reciprocate or increase the partner’s vigilance, depending on the experience of the other party. Secondly, by giving a gift, we teach the recipient that we are the kind of people who give away gifts. In the future, they may demand it. [19]

Using different negotiation techniques and mechanisms of concessions a compromise can be achieved. (“Compromise: an agreement in an argument in which the people involved reduce their demands or change their opinion in order to agree or use mechanisms of concessions” [20]).
4. NEGOTIATION STYLES

In source literature, styles of negotiation are grouped into hard and soft styles. “Many people recognize the high costs of hard positional bargaining, particularly on the parties and their relationship. They hope to avoid them by following a more gentle style of negotiation. Instead of seeing the other side as adversaries, they prefer to see them as friends. Rather than emphasizing a goal of victory, they emphasize the necessity of reaching agreement. In a soft negotiating game, the standard moves are to make offers and concessions, to trust the other side, to be friendly, and to yield as necessary to avoid confrontation. The following table illustrates two styles of positional bargaining, soft and hard. Most people see their choice of negotiating strategies as between these two styles. Looking at the table as presenting a choice, should you be a soft or a hard positional bargainer? Or should you perhaps follow a strategy somewhere in between? The soft negotiating game emphasizes the importance of building and maintaining a relationship. Within families and among friends much negotiation takes place in this way. The process tends to be efficient, at least to the extent of producing results quickly. As each party competes with the other in being more generous and more forthcoming, an agreement becomes highly likely.” [21]

**Table 1.** Soft and hard style of negotiations [21]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>SOFT</strong></th>
<th><strong>HARD</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants are friends</td>
<td>Participants are adversaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The goal is agreement</td>
<td>The goal is victory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make concessions to cultivate the relationship</td>
<td>Demand concessions as a condition of the relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be soft on the people and the problem</td>
<td>Be hard on the problem and the people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust others</td>
<td>Distrust others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change your position easily</td>
<td>Dig in your position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make offers</td>
<td>Make threats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclose your bottom line</td>
<td>Mislead as to your bottom line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept one-sided losses to reach agreement</td>
<td>Demand one-sided gains as the practice of agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search for the single answer: the one they will accept</td>
<td>Search for the single answer: the only you will accept</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen, the style filled with a lot of variability is the cooperative (soft) style. A person using this technique can make the other party feel like they are being looked after, and creates an atmosphere of acceptance for shortcomings. The hard style is characterized by manipulation and reaching one’s goal at all costs.
Another, often quoted division of negotiation styles, was created by Mastenbroek. Mastenbroek describes four initial styles: passive - active and co-operative – “fighting”. The styles: ethical-persuasive style, analytical-aggressive style, flexible-compromising style and flexible-aggressive style are the result of a combination of previous ones. Figure 1 shows the dependencies between these styles.

![Diagram of Mastenbroek's styles of negotiation](image)

**Figure 1.** Mastenbroek’s styles of negotiation [22]

Further specifics of each style have been presented in Table 2. Each style is described in sub-sections: main elements, tendencies under pressure and how to deal with.

**Table 2.** Mixed styles [22]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ethical-persuasive style</th>
<th>Analytical-aggressive style</th>
<th>Flexible-compromising style</th>
<th>Flexible-aggressive style</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main elements</td>
<td>Trust and belief in common values. Sets high standards. Independent thinking, sticks to principles. Develops proposals in the common interest. Considerate, helpful,</td>
<td>Careful analysis. Thorough attention to detail. Preference for hard facts and sound logic. Weighs all alternatives ahead of time. Reliance on</td>
<td>Able to sense how people are feeling and thinking. Socially skilled, personal charm, diplomatic. Eager to try things out, sensitive to integrative solutions. Tries to influence the climate positively.</td>
<td>Wants to get things done, likes accomplishment. Likes to organise and energise others. Takes advantage of opportunities. Quick to act, likes challenges. Ability to stand high tension,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is worth noting that style of negotiation depends on personality and importance of the pursued goal. An additional factor is what the negotiations are used for. Approaching negotiations as a conflict-resolution method, styles can be distinguished, i.e.:

- Compromise (both sides decide on compromises, resulting in neither winning nor losing)
- Avoidance (the parties show low interest in both themselves and the opponent)
- Cooperation (the parties are interested in both themselves and the opponent)
• Submission (one side focuses on the problems of the opponent and solves its problems at own expense)
• Rivalry (the parties do not show much interest in each other).

The method of resolving conflicts depends on many factors, i.e. the area of conflict, the power of the opposing party or the nature of the problem. It happens that avoidance is the best solution, because all attempts to solve the problem can only exacerbate the situation. Some people try to adapt, which initially leads to better understanding of the problem, although it rarely leads to its resolution. Rivalry, as opposed to avoidance and adaptation, is often quite aggressive and it may lead to deepening the conflict. According to most authors, the compromise is the best way to resolve conflicts, because both sides must give up something for mutual benefit.

Munduate, Ganaza, Peiró, Euwema in their 1999 article "Patterns of styles in conflict management and effectiveness" conducted a survey of 258 managers. The aim of the survey was to determine their conflict resolution styles. Among their results were: Integrating, Obliging, Dominating, Avoiding and Compromising.

Table 3. Styles of handling conflict [23]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patterns</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Integrating</th>
<th>Obliging</th>
<th>Dominating</th>
<th>Avoiding</th>
<th>Compromising</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>2.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>1.46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"The first pattern is characterized by a fairly low use of the five styles, although relative prevalence of the dominating style is observed. These are subjects who infrequently encounter episodes that they categorize as conflict situation. The group is made up of 59 managers (22.9% of the total).

The second pattern is characterized by a frequent and predominant use of the dominating style and little use of the remaining four styles: integrating, obliging, avoiding, and compromising. It encompasses 63 managers (24.4% of the total).

The third pattern contains those individuals who prefer to use the styles of compromising, integrating and dominating, showing less use of the obliging and avoiding styles. The group is made up of 32 managers (8.5% of the total).

The fourth pattern has as a differentiating feature, with a high use of the styles of dominating and integrating and low use of the styles of obliging, avoiding and compromising. This pattern includes 93 managers (36% of the total). The fifth and final pattern identified in the sample presents a high use of the integrating style together with a reduced use of the other four styles. It is made up of 21 managers (8.1% of the total)." [23]
5. SURVEY RESULTS

A survey aimed at identifying the most popular mechanisms of concessions during conflict resolution in project teams in IT departments in the Silesian Voivodeship have been conducted on 200 respondents. The single-answer question was: "Which mechanisms of concessions do you usually use during negotiations?", The replies were:

- **Diminishing steps** (each subsequent concession is of lesser value)
- **Leverage** (my small loss can bring a big profit to my partner)
- **Package** (concessions regarding several areas)
- **Gifts** (giving something without taking anything in return)

The selection of possible answers was selected based on the analysis of the most popular mechanisms of concessions.

![MECHANISMS OF CONCESSIONS](image)

**Figure 2.** Mechanisms of concessions used by respondents

In Figure 2, the highest percentage of respondents use the mechanism of diminishing steps (40%). A similar percentage (34%) uses the leverage mechanism. Subsequent packages are, or concessions from several different areas at once, which constitute 17%. The least-used mechanism by the respondents are gifts, i.e. giving something from each other, not expecting anything in return, which is only 9%.
In addition to examining the frequency of use of all mechanisms, it was checked which combinations were the most commonly used. There are six possible combinations, i.e.: diminishing steps + leverage, descending steps + gifts, diminishing steps + package, leverage + gifts, leverage + package, gifts + packages. The combinations selected by the respondents were in order of occurrence: diminishing steps + leverage, diminishing steps + package, leverage + package, leverage + gifts.

**COMBINATIONS OF TWO MECHANISMS OF CONCESSIONS**

![Graph showing combinations of two mechanisms of concessions used by respondents]

**Figure 3.** Combinations of two mechanisms of concessions used by respondents

When presented as a graph in the Figure 3, the data reveals that the combinations of two mechanisms account for 23% of all responses. The most often chosen combinations are: leverage + gifts (33%) and leverage + package (32%). Descending steps + packages represent 20% of responses. The least popular combination of concession mechanisms is diminishing steps + leverage, which was voted on by 15% of respondents.

In addition, the frequency of choosing a combination of two mechanisms of concessions was compared with the results of the use of individual mechanisms, as shown in Figure 3.

Chart 4 shows how many respondents use a single mechanism of concessions, and how many use a combination of two. Only 23% of the respondents chose combinations of two concessions, the remaining people declared that they usually only use one. Further, the mechanism of diminishing steps is the most frequently chosen answer (31%), and the leverage once again is ranked second (26%).
**Figure 4.** All combinations of concession mechanisms used by respondents

In a survey conducted on 200 respondents which aimed at verifying the most popular styles of negotiation in conflicts resolution in project teams in IT departments of the Silesian Voivodeship. The single-answer question was: "Which of the styles of negotiation do you use most often in conflict resolution?", The answers were:

- Compromise
- Domination
- Avoidance
- Integrative negotiation (win-win)
- Cooperation

The possible answers were selected based on the analysis of the most popular negotiation styles. They are not completely identical to any one particular style but constitute a variation. This is because people in IT usually try to act out of the box, and the answers to the question should be clear and simple.

Compromise is a style in which each party achieves some benefits but also suffers certain losses. Such an agreement does not fully meet the expectations and needs of either party, it only ensures maintaining correct relations.
Domination is an attempt to achieve personal goals in a way that limits the satisfaction of the other party's needs. This style is used mainly by those with strong personalities, who like competition, who have a tendency to lead and seek power.

Avoidance is characterized by passivity, avoidance of action or withdrawal. Is also called isolation, indifference or escape. This style results from the conviction that conducting negotiations is unprofitable, and the benefits of the agreement will probably be lower than the costs incurred during the negotiations. Integration negotiation (win-win) is based on creating an agreement beneficial for both parties. Cooperation results from the conviction that joint decisions outweigh the feeling of victory. Such interaction makes the parties aware of both common and different interests, and the agreement is an end in itself.

![Negotiation styles](image)

**Figure 5.** Negotiation styles in survey responses

None of the respondents indicated avoidance as their style of negotiation, and compromise was the most popular with the result of 49%. The next frequently used style was cooperation with 24%, followed by integrative negotiation. The least popular was dominance with the result of 6%. It is worth noting that people working in IT departments in the Silesian Voivodship act quite rationally and the results coincide with the research conducted over the years on other groups. As previously mentioned, compromise is one of the most common methods of conflict resolution. Cooperation as the second most frequently used negotiation style shows what features characterize people answering this question. Several years of observations show that people in IT departments try to help each other.
6. CONCLUSIONS

The definition of negotiation is quite broad and covers various fields. Depending on the current definition, it can be interpreted differently. Furthermore, there are many styles in which one can negotiate or mechanisms that can be used during concessions. They are often dependent on the temperament, knowledge, and motivation of the negotiator. In addition, the environment, history and culture also have their influence. Based on the survey conducted on 200 people working in IT departments in the Silesian Voivodship, it can be concluded that the most frequent mechanism of concessions during negotiations is the mechanism of diminishing steps, where each subsequent concession is smaller than the previous one. Another often-used mechanism is the leverage, in which a small concession on one side can bring a huge profit to the other. Few respondents marked the answer packages and gifts. It is worth noting that 23% of respondents declared that they use two different mechanisms of concessions. Additionally, based on the study conducted on 200 people working in IT departments in the Silesian Voivodship, it can be noted that the most common method of conflict resolution is compromise. Other popular styles are cooperation and integrative negotiation. Few respondents marked the answer "dominance" as a method of resolving conflicts. It is worth noting that no one chose the answer "avoidance". Thanks to these observations, it can be stated that people working in IT departments are confident in their own worth, courageous, but also helpful and know that "nothing is free". Every favour is also associated with certain costs.

References


