

## USING NEGOTIATION EXERCISES TO PROMOTE CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

Diana Page  
University of West Florida  
dpage@uwf.edu

Arup Mukherjee  
University of West Florida  
amukherjee@uwf.edu

### ABSTRACT

*Many writers argue it is necessary to develop critical thinking skills in business students because these skills are needed to deal with the complexities of real life problems. While the goal appears to be laudable, it is not always clear how to go about achieving it. In this article we discuss active learning experiences in a course on Business Negotiations that serve the dual purpose of teaching students to negotiate as well as sharpen their critical thinking skills. In the current atmosphere of resource constraints, it is unlikely that separate courses can be set up for improving critical thinking skills. A course on Business Negotiations, suitably designed to incorporate appropriate active learning experiences, has been found to be a way to promote higher order thinking skills.*

### INTRODUCTION

Students majoring in the field of Management are exposed to a great amount of information pertaining to the different topics in the field. In each subject area the amount of knowledge has grown rapidly and created an expectation on the instructors for communicating this knowledge to students. This greater emphasis on content has resulted in lack of emphasis on critical thinking skills needed to deal with real life complexities. In reality, Management majors need to be able analyze decision making scenarios, understand the needs of the different stakeholders, the interactions between the stakeholders, identify alternatives, identify suitable criteria to evaluate alternatives, evaluate alternatives, and understand the tradeoffs and compromises needed in real decision making scenarios. All these activities demand critical thinking from managers. It has been our observation that while existing courses meet needs for 'content', they generally lack the environment for development of critical thinking skills. We describe two exercises related to negotiation that also satisfy the requirements for being experiences that enhance critical thinking.

This discussion about critical thinking is not new. The debate has been going on for many years. However, the debate has taken on urgency at the University of West Florida (UWF) because of two developments, one internal and another external. The internal development concerns a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), developed by UWF, with the goal of enhancing educational quality directly related to student learning ([https://nautical.uwf.edu/accreditation/main.cfm?fuseaction=uwf\\_qep](https://nautical.uwf.edu/accreditation/main.cfm?fuseaction=uwf_qep)). For the purpose of UWF's QEP, student learning is defined as changes in students' knowledge, skills, behaviors, and/or values that may be attributed to the students' experiences at the University of West Florida. At UWF this definition is applied through six domains of student learning: Content, Critical Thinking, Communication Skills, Project Management, Values and Ethics, and Discipline Specific Outcomes. These domains are described below.

- a. The Content domain includes the concepts, theories, and frameworks of the respective discipline areas.
- b. The Communication domain includes the various modes of communication essential for effective writing, speaking, or otherwise presenting or demonstrating information and ideas.
- c. The Critical Thinking domain includes effective information literacy and management, problem solving, analysis of situations and issues, creativity, and discernment.
- d. The Project Management domain includes development of self-regulatory behavior, collaboration, reflection and self-assessment, and project planning and execution skills consistent with a particular discipline. The Values and Ethics domain includes academic integrity, discipline-specific professional standards, and values-based decision making
- e. The Discipline Specific Outcomes domain includes any special outcomes that distinguish a particular field of study such as professional certification or licensure.

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In other words, critical thinking ability is a very important student learning outcome at this university.

The external development that fuels the discussion about critical thinking is AACSB International, the global accreditation agency for business education. In 2003, AACSB adopted a new set of standards for accreditation/maintenance of accreditation (AACSB, 2003). Under standard 15 (Management of Curriculum), AACSB is quite prescriptive and suggests that “reflective thinking skills” be an important outcome of undergraduate business programs.

In other words, it is important for business students at this university to develop “critical thinking skills” or “reflective thinking skills.” Some authors have referred to this kind of thinking ability as “higher order thinking.”

But what is ‘critical thinking’ or ‘reflective thinking’ or ‘higher order thinking’? Many authors have attempted to answer this question. For extensive coverage of this topic we refer the reader to Bloom (1956), Jenkins (1998), Dalal (1994), and Guillemette (1991). Blooms’ taxonomy has withstood the test of time for over 45 years and we find it quite useful for our discussion about higher order thinking. In this article, the phrases ‘higher order thinking’, ‘critical thinking’, and ‘reflective thinking’ are used interchangeably. Bloom (1956) identifies a category of objectives called ‘cognitive’ objectives. This set of objectives deal with whether a student is able to perform in certain educationally desirable ways after instruction. There are six major sub-categories of cognitive objectives and are summarized below based on the work of Guillemette (1991). The sub-categories are listed in increasing order of complexity.

- a. Knowledge: This involves recall of information.
- b. Comprehension: This involves the lowest level of understanding where the reader knows what is being communicated and can use it in its immediate context.
- c. Application: This consists of the application of ideas, principles, generalized methods and theories to particular concrete situations.
- d. Analysis: This involves breaking down a communication into its organization, constituent elements and their interrelationships.
- e. Synthesis: This involves developing an innovative pattern or structure from elements.
- f. Evaluation: This involves the qualitative or quantitative judgments about the value of ideas, methods, and solutions.

We believe that current pedagogical methods do justice to the first three sub-categories. Hence, our interest in this article is focused on the higher order skills of ‘analysis’, ‘synthesis’, and ‘evaluation’. The business accreditation agency is quite clear about the need to impart higher order thinking skills to business students. UWF has specified a clear mandate for all students (including business students) to achieve critical thinking skills. Thus the goal is quite clear. What is not clear (and the literature is silent on this important aspect) is how to achieve this goal. One option may be to set up a new course to help students learn this

complex skill. Unfortunately, for most universities this is not a practical option because of resource constraints. The only practical option appears to be to incorporate learning experiences in existing courses that simultaneously promote higher order thinking.

Cases and exercises have been adapted from Negotiation courses taught at other institutions, and used in a Business Negotiation class that includes not only undergraduate Management majors, but also includes a variety of graduate students. The exercises developed negotiation skills and also provided students with a structured and guided opportunity to practice their higher order thinking skills. These exercises have been used with success in class sizes of up to 35 students.

First, we present a discussion about the nature of the course. This is followed by a discussion about active learning negotiating experiences. A discussion about how a specific experience helped students practice their higher order thinking skills is also included. This is followed by a discussion about benefits and drawbacks found in using these exercises. Finally, we discuss limitations of this approach and explore ideas about future research.

### COURSE DETAILS

A course on Business Negotiations has been taught for over two years as an elective course to Management majors at this AACSB accredited regional university.

The course recognizes that future managers will need to utilize many different kinds of negotiation skills. For example, they may have to negotiate equitable outcomes where the participant responsibility exceeds authority, recognize and manage difficult tactics in a positive way, recognize and manage the effects of cultural differences on business negotiations and also practice ethical negotiations. Managers are also likely to be required to recognize and select appropriate strategies and tactics to use during negotiations and if needed, recognize and deal with competitive strategies used by some negotiators. To provide students with adequate learning experiences of these complex tasks, the course utilizes a large number of active learning experiences.

The course requires students to read and be tested on relevant negotiations material, complete homework assignments, negotiate regularly, participate in classroom negotiation role play exercises, and successfully demonstrate they have completed a one on one negotiation that is significant to them. The textbook used is Lewicki, Saunders, Barry and Minton (2004), *Essentials of Negotiation* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition). A copy of the syllabus may be obtained by emailing to the first author at [dpape@uwf.edu](mailto:dpape@uwf.edu).

In the next two sections we will present details about the negotiation role-play exercises and the one on one negotiation.

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### CLASS EXERCISE ON NEGOTIATION ROLE-PLAY (NRP)

Each student is required to participate in three negotiation role-play (NRP) exercises. Each negotiation role-play counts for 10 percent of the course grade (30 percent total). The exercises from Lewicki, Saunders, Minton and Barry (2004), Instructor's Resource CD-ROM, provided the negotiation role-plays for participants.

The process for NRPs during class sessions follows a structured format whereby students read, plan and analyze a specific negotiation role; then, students act out their role and write out their observations. The first step of this exercise is to prepare for the negotiation role-play (NRP). One week before the exam students receive their specific role. Once they read and analyze their role students plan their negotiation using a specific planning form provided by the instructor. See Appendix 1, Form 1. This form, which guides their NRP behavior, is a modified version of the negotiation planning guide suggested in Essentials (Lewicki et al, 2004, p. 44). The planning form asks students to: identify the issue, their goals, their needs, opening, resistance point, Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement, (BATNA), the type and description of frame they will use and finally, the strategy they will use. The graduate students who are enrolled in the course complete the planning form for both roles in the negotiation. However, graduates act as observers for undergraduate students only during the NRP.

In the second step of this exercise, undergraduates, sitting face to face, engage in the actual role-play. Upon completion of the NRP but during class time undergraduates complete an observation form. See Appendix 2, Form 2. The observation form asks: what was the final outcome, who was more defensive, what was the other party's resistance point, who had the better BATNA, were frames changed, what strategies did you use that worked well, what strategies did you use that didn't work well, what strategies did the other party use that worked well, what strategies did the other party use that didn't work well? Responding to these questions, students evaluate their and the other parties' negotiation. The result is a self and other party evaluation of each NRP. So, although the instructor cannot hear everything that is said within each pair, the instructor reads and evaluates each student's planned and self-evaluation along with the other party's observation of that student. The three forms provide the basis for a future evaluation rubric to measure individual student critical thinking skills.

Further, concerning evaluation of the NRP, graduate students, assigned to specific undergraduate pairs face, observe and complete observation forms for each participant in the selected undergraduate pairs. All student pairs negotiate at the same time, while the instructor walks around the classroom listening to each pair once or twice during the negotiation. Graduates observe selected pairs and complete an observation form that mirrors the

undergraduate observation form. This observation form also provides an excellent reinforcement or check on what undergraduate students say about each other.

### Discussion

The direct objective was to improve students' negotiating skills. However, these exercises also provided opportunities to students to practice the three higher order thinking skills of *analysis*, *synthesis*, and *evaluation*. Recall that *analysis* involves breaking down a communication into its organization, constituent elements and their interrelationships. *Synthesis* involves developing an innovative pattern or structure from elements. *Evaluation* involves judgments about the values of ideas, methods and solutions.

In the first step of the exercise, students examine and evaluate components of the negotiation role-plays. Students complete Form 1. See Appendix 1. They identify important facts and issues. They develop goals, interests, and strategies thus engaging in *analysis*.

In the second step of the exercise, students engage in the process of negotiation and attempt to find win-win solutions. Students conduct a negotiation in pairs. They have to put all their ideas to work in a practical scenario thus engaging in *synthesis*.

In the third step of the exercise, students complete a formal evaluation of the role-play--Form 2 (See Appendix 2). They evaluate themselves and the other party. They evaluate the strategies used by themselves and the other party. In other words they have engaged in *evaluation* in a relevant and meaningful way.

### ONE ON ONE INDIVIDUAL NEGOTIATION EXERCISE

In this exercise students individually negotiate for something that is important and describe that negotiation in a report. This negotiation gives students an opportunity to *demonstrate what they have learned in this class*. Students must negotiate something of personal value, and then write a paper on it. The negotiation is required to be planned and executed over the length of the fifteen-week semester in which the student is enrolled in the course. The issue should be real and be of importance to the student, such as a salary or job negotiation, a major purchase, negotiation in a critical relationship such as family, romantic, friendship, or an important work-related relationship. See Appendix 4 for details of the requirements of this negotiation. This exercise was adapted from the syllabus of Deborah M. Kolb's, Simmons College, and available through the Program on Negotiation (PON) at Harvard. The exercise and its presentation are worth 15% of the course grade and are usually taken very seriously by the students.

In the previous four semesters, student negotiation ranged from salary increases and promotions to the purchase of automobiles from respected friends. One student

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negotiated with family members so she could move to another state upon graduation and gain work experience rather than return home as expected to work in the family business. In general students are more confident of their ability to negotiate. For some this is a significant difference since they enter the course anxious because they describe their negotiation style as avoidance, or passive.

### Discussion

The exercises in this course have the direct objective to improve students' negotiating skills. However, this one on one-negotiation exercise also provided opportunities to students to practice the three higher order thinking skills of *analysis*, *synthesis*, and *evaluation*.

In preparing for the negotiation, students are required to articulate their goals, strategy and expectations. To do this, they need to understand the scenario and their own interests. In addition, they must examine the scenario from the other party's perspective. This gives them a good opportunity to practice *analysis*.

In addition, students are required to develop a strategy. This process requires them to blend their personal negotiation styles with approaches that have worked in other scenarios to develop a comprehensive strategy that may work in this particular situation. This gives them a great opportunity to practice *synthesis*. Further, they have to evaluate strategies to determine their appropriateness for this scenario. This gives them practice in *evaluation*.

After the negotiation has been completed, students write a report. In this report they are required to describe the negotiation and provide a discussion of the results. This step requires students to *analyze* the negotiation to understand the reasons for the outcome. They also have to develop a report that integrates theories and models to the actions taken by them. Again, they participate in a process of *synthesis*. Their explanation includes a discussion about interdependencies, the other party's resistance point, and an *evaluation* of strategies that the student used that worked/ did not work, and strategies used by the other party that worked/ did not work.

Thus this exercise and its reporting gave students multiple opportunities to practice the higher order thinking skills of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

### BENEFITS

The direct objective of this course is to teach negotiating skills to students. However, the exercises also provide many other benefits to the students and the institution.

First, the students get multiple opportunities to exercise higher order thinking skills. At this stage of the research, we are unable to present documentation of precise degrees of improvement due to use of the exercises. However, we note that critical thinking and other higher order thinking skills improve through experience and these negotiation exercises

gave the students more experience in practicing the skills.

Most of the negotiation scenarios pertained to situations in which students could relate. This helped in increasing student interest in the content of the course as they found the subject matter to be of practical relevance.

As discussed earlier, this and other institutions are struggling with the issue of enhancing higher order thinking skills of students. Setting up a separate course for meeting this goal is financially unrealistic for most institutions. The approach discussed in this article uses an existing course to achieve this important goal and is hence a practically viable one.

The report on the one on one negotiation exercise gave the students an opportunity to practice describing their experiences and thoughts in their own language. In addition the report gave them an opportunity to practice their written communication skills.

### DRAWBACKS

Every active learning course has an important drawback because classroom time has to be provided for these experiences. This usually means that less content and theory can be covered.

Another drawback found was that there was no standard way for the instructor to grade the actual role-plays. It is a goal of the instructor to develop a rubric for this purpose.

### LIMITATIONS/ FUTURE RESEARCH

This article has many limitations. First, no attempt has been made to measure higher order thinking skills. Second, no attempt has been made to provide evidence of improvements in these skills on the basis of pre and posttests.

At the same time, we believe that higher order thinking skills are not easy to measure. These skills appear to be among those skills that improve with experience and appear to be hard to teach. Hence, our focus has been on providing students with multiple opportunities practice these skills. Future research should measure improvements in critical thinking, if any exist, that may be attributed to participating in these negotiation exercises.

### CONCLUSION

Students majoring in business are likely to face complex problems in their jobs. In order to develop appropriate solutions for these problems, it will be necessary to use critical thinking skills. As the total amount of content has increased in required courses, instructors have had to focus more on content than on development of critical thinking skills. This is unsatisfactory because students are less likely to be able to rise to the challenges of the complexities that they will encounter in the real world. Further, AACSB, the accreditation agency for business schools has instituted new standards that appear to prescribe

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the need to graduate business students with higher order thinking skills. Institutions are required to rise to this challenge when at the same time they are under great financial pressures. In other words, developing and teaching new courses that enhance critical thinking skills is unlikely to be a viable alternative for most institutions.

We believe that a better alternative is available and may be used successfully. This approach requires instructors to employ integrative active learning experiences in suitable courses. In the College of Business at UWF, a course on Business Negotiations is taught as an elective to Management majors. This course requires students to engage in several negotiation exercises. Such exercises have the dual advantage of engaging students in analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (the three pillars of higher order thinking skills). Thus critical thinking skills are practiced while engaging in negotiation exercises. We believe that this approach is a viable one for most institutions.

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## Appendix 1 Form 1: Planning for Negotiation

Negotiation Title \_\_\_\_\_ Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

Your Role \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Instructions:** Place your response next to or immediately below the question; single space responses and double space between questions. For credit do type.

1. Briefly State the issue
2. What is your goal?
3. What is/are your:
  - a. Opening/Target?
  - b. Interests? (List in priority order)
  - c. Resistance point?
  - d. BATNA?
4. What is the other party's goal?
5. What are your needs /interests (in priority order)?
6. What are the other party's needs/interests?
7. What type of frame will you use?
  - a. Briefly describe the frame.
8. What strategy will you use?
  - a. Briefly describe your strategy?
  - b. Why did you choose this strategy?

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## Appendix 2

### Form 2: Negotiation Role Play Observation Form

Negotiation Title \_\_\_\_\_

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

Your Role \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

#### Part I: With your Partner

Develop a statement of the outcome of the negotiation

#### Part II: Individually

1. Who was more dependent on the deal? Who was in a more reactive or defensive position? Why
2. What was the other party's target point?
  - a. Specifically, what did you do that influenced the other party's target point?
3. Who had the better BATNA & what was it?
4. Did you change your frame?  Yes  No (check one)
  - a. If Yes, what was the new frame?
  - b. If Yes, what type of frame was it?
  - c. If NO, why was your frame effective?
5. What strategies did you use that worked well?
6. What strategies did you use that did not work well?
7. What strategies did they use that worked well?
8. What strategies did they use that did not work well?

Appendix 3  
One on One Negotiation Exercise

Negotiate for something that is important to you and describe that negotiation.

The purpose of the one on one negotiation is to give you an opportunity to *demonstrate what you have learned in this class*. Negotiate something of personal value, and then write a paper on it. Plan and execute the negotiation during the span of this course. This should be a real issue of importance to you, such as a salary or job negotiation, a major purchase, negotiation in a critical relationship such as family, romantic, friendship, or an important work-related relationship.

Write a six to seven page –no more, description and analysis of the negotiation using the following guidelines.

- Negotiate for something non-trivial
- The other parties cannot be associated with this course (e.g. students or faculty member) or be aware that this is a class exercise.
- You should articulate your goals, strategy and expectations prior to the negotiation;
- Demonstrate your understanding of the negotiation process by using an appropriate model/outline and terminology. Describe the execution of the negotiation, report of results, analysis, integrating theory, models, etc.
- If they are willing (and available), you should interview the other party (ies) or observers after the negotiation to supplement and corroborate your perceptions. Add this portion as an Appendix.