



STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS IN ACTION: A STARCH SUPPLY NEGOTIATION

By:

Rogério Cima

Fundação Getulio Vargas, Brazil

Murillo de Oliveira Dias

Fundação Getulio Vargas, Brazil

Abstract

This case study explores a real-world negotiation challenge faced by a corrugated cardboard packaging company in renewing its annual starch supply contract. Two suppliers have proposed significant price adjustments, citing increased costs and new formulation expenses, as it balances between its need to control costs and the importance of maintaining strong partnerships with its suppliers. With a maximum acceptable price adjustment of 4.3%, the company has explored creative options to manage conflict and achieve a successful outcome. Will the company be able to secure a favorable deal, or will the negotiation break down? The outcome hangs in the balance, as the company works to find a solution that meets the needs of all parties involved.

Keywords:

Business negotiation; Supply Chain Management; Contract negotiation, Brazil.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The complexities of supply chain agreements can have a significant impact on a company's bottom line and strategic alliances. In this descriptive case study (Yin, 2018), we endeavored to closely examine how a Brazilian corrugated cardboard packaging firm attempted to renegotiate its yearly starch supply contract with two key suppliers, who sought to raise prices above the annual inflation rate, as the unit of analysis. We followed Dias (2020)



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regarding the negotiation typology, introducing a Type I negotiation, where two parties engage in negotiations over a single issue. This study elucidates the challenges and opportunities inherent in business-to-business negotiations by conducting a comprehensive analysis of the company's negotiation strategy, including its identification of BATNA and ZOPA. It offers practical insights for managers seeking to improve their negotiation outcomes. Figure 1 depicts the aforementioned type of Negotiation (Dias, 2020), as follows:



Figure 1 The Four-Type Negotiation Matrix
Source: Dias, 2020. Reprinted under permission.

Negotiation is a fluid process of communication that seeks to reach a result that is good for both parties (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1981). To successfully navigate this intricate process, it is essential to comprehend the fundamental interests and motivations of all parties involved. Researchers from various disciplines have thoroughly investigated negotiation, analyzing its multiple facets, including communication (Acuff, 1993; Salacuse, 2003, 2006; Shell, 2006), conflict management (Zartman, 1988), social interaction (Dias, 2016; Schatzki & Coffey, 1981), and decision-making (Bazerman & Moore, 1994).

Recent studies have examined negotiation across various contexts, including software contract negotiations (Cunha & Dias, 2021; Dias, Nascimento et al., 2021), military negotiations (Dias, Toledo, Silva, Santos et al., 2022; Dias, Pires et al., 2022; Dias, Almeida, Silva, Russo, et al., 2022), and retail business negotiations (Valente & Dias, 2023). Past studies have already investigated the complexities of negotiation (Dias, 2023; Dias, 2023a; Dias, 2023b; Lax & Sebenius, 1986; Navarro & Dias, 2024; Pruitt, 1981; Raiffa, Richardson, & Metcalfe, 2002; Rubin & Brown, 1975; Santos & Dias, 2024).

2. METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a qualitative approach, including a descriptive case study (Yin, 2018; Yin, 2004) to examine the negotiation process between a Brazilian corrugated cardboard packaging firm attempted to renegotiate its yearly starch supply contract with two key suppliers. A qualitative research design is employed to attain a comprehensive understanding of the negotiation dynamics, strategies, and outcomes.

2.1. Gathering Data

The information was gathered through a mix of direct participation, and direct observation, following Saunders et al. (2009), and document analysis. The negotiation process was monitored and documented, followed by interviews with key stakeholders to obtain further insights and resolve any uncertainties.

2.2. Analysis of Data

The data analysis method is based on the ideas of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis is also based on what has been written about negotiations, such as the terms BATNA (Dias, 2023; Lax & Sebenius, 1986) and ZOPA (Pruitt, 1981; Raiffa, Richardson, & Metcalfe, 2002).

3. BACKGROUND

If negotiating sales effectively is essential to ensure the financial health of the business, managing inputs and raw materials efficiently is mandatory, allowing us to build a structure that delivers quality and competitiveness in the market. In this context, this article addresses a Starch negotiation, an essential input in the manufacture of paper, the first stage of the process, and the primary raw material of our end product, corrugated cardboard packaging. We will understand and highlight the importance of preparing and using tools learned in the discipline of conflict management, as well as concepts such as BATNA and ZOPA, and analyzing alternatives and options clearly and practically.

4. NEGOTIATION SCENARIO

It all begins in the last month of the year, when we initiate the analysis for renewing an annual starch supply contract for the following year. There were two suppliers at that time, one of which was older and had held 100% of the supply until the middle of that year. We will call it "company A" that had technical problems that bothered our professionals and motivated them to seek an alternative in the market, which we will call "company B". This fact, in turn, led to a solution being found without a price increase, which forced "Company A" to follow its competitor's initiative to avoid losing market share. For the following year, a new contract was presented with a price adjustment in both cases. The justification was that, in addition to the cost impacts of the sector, such as labor and maintenance costs, among others, the new formulation also incurred higher costs. On the one hand, companies sought a price adjustment. On the other hand, we aimed to keep our costs at the lowest possible levels without compromising the quality and performance of our production process.

5. STRUCTURING THE NEGOTIATION

The most important step in this entire process is preparation, which involves defining the ZOPA and identifying the BATNA, as well as planning strategies with alternatives and options that can be put on the table.

BATNA: In this case, the best alternative to a no-deal would be to go to the market to look for lower-priced alternatives, even at the risk of having to go back to living with technical problems that are now solved with a new formulation. It would not be the perfect option, but it would be a way to avoid being dependent on a single alternative with higher prices.

Zopa: When we analyzed the proposals, we identified that the suppliers indicated adjustments of 9% and 12%, respectively, while our company could grant a maximum of 4.3% to avoid impacting our financial indicators. The next step was to adjust expectations so that the solution would fall within this range, between 4.3% and 9%.

Options: We understood that we should leave the price focus and offer other negotiation fronts such as an annual supply contract, but with quarterly adjustment triggers, in this way in the face of market instabilities they could offer us the best price at that time, since the review every quarter would preserve the margin even if important fluctuations happened, And in return, our company would not pay for the cost of the "provisioned risk", allowing them to look at the conditions in a very short-term scenario.

Conflict management: Purposefully studying and discussing this negotiation process, inserting our partners into the real context of our needs, and allowing them to have more security in price formation, would be essential to avoid turning this negotiation into an exhausting conflict without an outcome that serves both sides.

6. FOLLOWING THROUGH

After a few rounds of negotiation, we reached an agreement of 5% that allowed us to be a little above our initial plan, but well below the initial claim initially proposed by companies "A" and "B", we managed to secure the volume without the need to submit it to the market, which would bring them the risk of losing volume and us the risk of returning technical problems already solved, The quarterly adjustment triggers brought greater security to all sides, since they would fluctuate more fairly, without compromising the suppliers' margins and allowing us the opportunity of not having to cost, in advance and linearly, the "provisioned risk", since the market is unstable. Suppliers would have to be conservative to minimize the risks of a supply with negative margins, which would compromise the health of the operation and the quality of supply.

7. DISCUSSION

The outcome of the negotiation in this case study demonstrates the significance of effective communication and innovative problem-solving in achieving a mutually beneficial agreement. The parties were able to agree on a 5% price change. This was more than what was planned but less than what companies' "A" and "B" had asked for. According to Fisher, Ury, and Patton (1981), the most important part of negotiation is to focus on interests instead

of positions. This finding is consistent with that notion. The agreement also shows how important it is to find and use the Zone of Possible Agreement (ZOPA) (Pruitt, 1981; Raiffa, Richardson, & Metcalfe, 2002). The negotiators were able to find a solution that worked for both sides by knowing what each side wanted and what they could and couldn't do. This solution met the need for cost control while also allowing suppliers to keep healthy margins. One important part of the negotiation outcome is that the agreement has quarterly adjustment triggers. This method made both sides feel safer and freer because it let them respond to changes in the market in a more flexible and quick way. Evidence suggests that Lax and Sebenius (1986) findings are applicable to this scenario, where, which is that coming up with new ideas and working together to solve problems is important for making negotiations valuable (Dias, 2023).

8. IMPLICATIONS AND RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Evidence suggests important effects on how we understand how negotiations work in different situations. Research shows that it's important to build strong relationships and communicate well when buyers and sellers are negotiating (Dias, Toledo, Silva, et al., 2022; Dias, Pereira, Teles, & Lafraia, 2023; Dias, Leitão, Batista, & Medeiros, 2022). By working together more, the parties can find solutions that work for everyone. The study highlights the complexities of business contract negotiations, emphasizing the importance of innovative problem-solving and collaborative value creation, supported by previous studies (Cunha & Dias, 2021; Dias, Nascimento, et al., 2021; Dias, Toledo, Silva, Santos et al., 2022; Dias, Pires, et al., 2022; Dias, Almeida, Silva, Russo, et al., 2022). Parties can build trust and achieve better results by collaborating and generating new ideas. Effective negotiation strategies are also determinant for achieving favorable outcomes in government trade (Navarro & Dias, 2024). The study highlights the importance of flexibility and adaptability in asynchronous negotiations, emphasizing the need for parties to remain responsive to changing circumstances (Santos & Dias, 2024).

The study's findings highlight the importance of understanding the complex relationship between familial dynamics and business interactions in the context of family business negotiations (Dias, Pereira, et al., 2023; Dias, 2023; Dias, Pereira, Vieira, et al., 2023; Valente & Dias, 2023).

9. FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could build on the findings of this study by examining the complexities of negotiations in greater detail. We encourage future researchers to investigate other types of contract business negotiations, such as Types II, III, and IV negotiations, as outlined by Dias (2020). Research in other countries or industries is also recommended, as well as quantitative studies to investigate the extent to which the negotiation process affects the outcome of the deal.

10. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study offers significant insights into the complex nature of negotiation dynamics, emphasizing the necessity of effective communication, innovative problem-solving, and collaborative relationships. Ultimately, negotiators, business parties can find solutions that work for everyone. The findings of this research are helpful to other business negotiations, such as business deals, government trade, family business deals, and contract negotiations. The study's results highlight the importance of maintaining good relationships, communicating effectively, and adapting to change. Ultimately, this study offers negotiators and business leaders valuable insights into how negotiations work. Negotiators, mediators, and other practitioners can enhance their negotiation skills and achieve more effective outcomes by applying the concepts presented in this study. As the business world evolves, the need for practical negotiation skills will continue to grow. This study contributes to the field.

The negotiation was not simple, but it highlighted the importance of being well-prepared. By planning this negotiation and identifying the BATNA, we were able to present alternatives that enabled the closing to align with the needs of both sides, allowing the commercial relationship between all parties to remain healthy and sustainable.

By analyzing the ZOPA, we were able to identify the real space for this negotiation clearly. Without this step, the risk of not reaching an agreement - we understand the initial proposal as impractical, could lead us to unlikely requirements and a non-agreement, bringing to all parties involved a bad scenario since we would have to develop new suppliers with all the risks of this process involved for a highly critical input and our suppliers would have to look for alternatives in the market that could incur the need to practice lower prices for advance in a volume of the competitors.

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