

Navigating Negotiation

When good process delivers good outcomes

Luke Monahan

In the school leadership context with so little room for manoeuvre and so much dependence on goodwill and collaboration, developing the skills of constructive negotiation are more and more crucial.

'What's the family and friends discount?' or even better if the request is for the... 'farmer's discount' ... as I'm a farmer's son I know this is going to cost me! We are negotiating all the time in the personal and professional dimensions of our lives – how can we do it more effectively?

Interest based not position focused

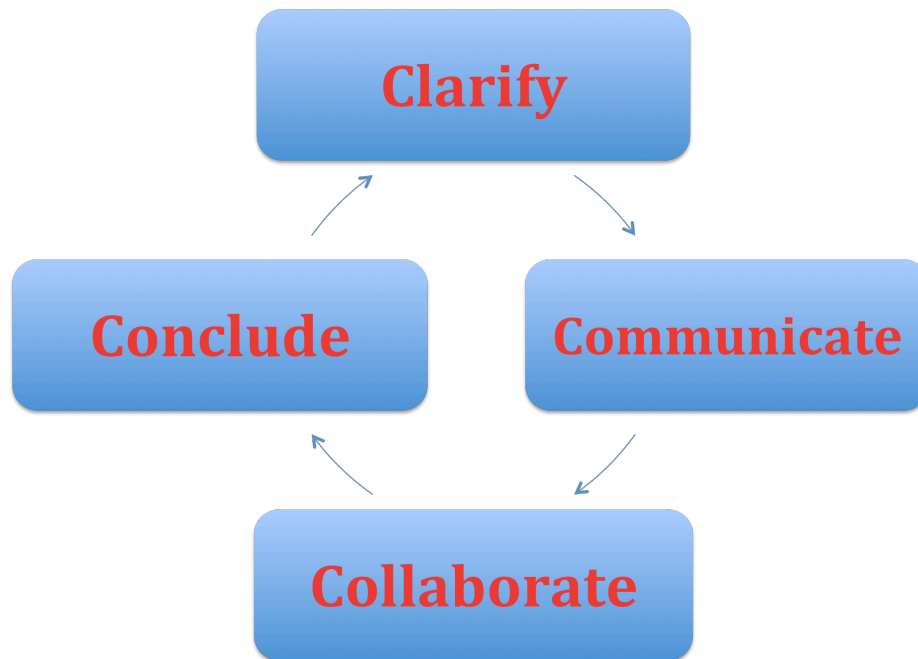
This short piece explores a model that derives from the most effective negotiation approach – ***interest based negotiation***. When we negotiate from an interest context we are more likely to come to some form of mutually agreeable outcome. In practice what most often occurs is that we negotiate from positions – I want that last class off, I want you to take the Year Head role for fifth years... Interest based negotiation is about going behind and beneath the position to explore what are the interests of the participants in the negotiation. Interests are such things as a good working environment, mutual respect, justice and fairness. It is in the area of interests that we can draw on people's values - what is really important to them. Behind every position you will find a more palatable interest. It has also been found that when interests are explored it is often the case that these can be shared by those involved in the negotiation. Then a

collaboration can occur to ensure the negotiation issues in an agreement that satisfies both sides much more than was thought possible at the outset.

Constructive engagement

In a facilitated negotiation I was carrying out in a workplace recently – five members of a project work team – it wasn't until I got the participants to focus on their interests that I made any progress. They spent a good while telling each other what position they were defending and emphasising how apart they were. Having allowed them exhaust their dearly held positions then I moved to explore the interests that were behind these presenting positions. Slowly they begun to see some common interests as well as some diverse ones that could be managed a lot more constructively than their positions. For example, they all wanted good communication but had not understood that this meant different things to each of them – so a little piece of work on the communication model VARK (*'google it' – a great tool for exploring how different people give and receive information*) not only resolved their communication issue but in fact served to deepen mutual understanding and respect. The key is how to get to this constructive place of exploring interests and away from the destructive zone of limiting positions. In my work both negotiating and training negotiators, I have developed a model under the auspices of our conflict resolution and training company – Mediation Foundation of Ireland – www.mfi.ie - it's called the **Navigating Negotiation**© Model. There are four core dimensions to it:

Navigating Negotiation©



Clarify It – the importance of gathering information – knowing what your position and what your interests are – also as far as possible knowing the position and interests of the other party before the formal negotiation and if not ascertaining these as soon as possible.

Communicate It – recognise the vital aspect of the relationship in the exchange. The aim is to get both parties on the same side against the problem, to separate the person from the problem. Of course it sounds easier than it is, but it will be always worth the effort.

Collaborate It – this is where both sides are now developing criteria for a constructive outcome, building options in response to the problem so as to meet the interests of all sides.

Conclude It – recognising that negotiation is a process between people to deal with a problem that needs resolving – it is essential that conclusion, where possible, is reached where both sides feel their interests have been met and a realistic and sustainable agreement is put in place. This is all the more important where the parties have to continue to work together.

While each dimension could be explored in depth, I want to here just look somewhat more closely at that first dimension – **Clarify It** – some points to consider:

Goals – what do I want – my/their position and interests

Trades – what are yours and their bottom lines, where is the room for exchange

Alternatives – what if there is no agreement, what then, who needs this agreement more – what is your BATNA (Best alternative to a negotiated agreement)

Relationships – what is the state of the current relationship – how will this help or hinder at all stages of the negotiation

Expected Outcomes – what do you reasonably expect will occur, what do you imagine the other expects will be the outcome

Consequences – what happens if there is a win or lose...for either side...

Power – who has it, how much of it is there, what will happen to it during and after the negotiation

Solutions – given this preparation, what might be a 'good' process to undertake to get the optimum constructive solution.

There is of course a lot more to be said about negotiation. This taster article is merely to introduce some key concepts in the area of constructive negotiation. In the equivalent of the nature/nurture debate in negotiation – known as the process/product debate - I am firmly on the process side but only so as to get the most constructive product outcome that will be sustainable and not unnecessarily harm relationships.

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Further Reading: Getting To Yes – negotiating an agreement without giving in Fisher R., Patton B., & Ury W. (2011)

Let us never negotiate out of fear but let us never fear to negotiate

- John F. Kennedy

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This article was first published in **Leader**, the journal of the National Association of Principals and Deputies (www.napd.ie), February 2013