

Opposing Preferences: Negotiating Objects with Hidden Value

Carter McPherson

University of Windsor, Canada

Laurie L. Levesque and Regina M. O’Neill

Sawyer Business School, Suffolk University, USA

Abstract. This engaging two-person simulation, *Opposing Preferences: Negotiating Objects with Hidden Value*, enhances student learning in understanding others in decision-making and negotiation. It emphasizes the importance of inquisitiveness in uncovering a counterpart’s underlying motivation and of recognizing the potential powerful influence that emotions and sentiment have in decisions. Students must employ creativity to reach mutually beneficial solutions as their initial positions appear irreconcilable. Debriefing deepens this learning by encouraging critical reflection on the role players’ interpersonal skills (question asking, listening, empathy) and handling of an embedded ethical issue. Insights from the authors are offered in the debrief. This exercise is adaptable for various class sizes or virtual settings and was designed to be run fully within one class period with no outside preparation needed by students. It fosters rich discussion of communication skills, honesty, and the complexities of human interactions in negotiation and decision making.

Keywords: classroom simulation, ethics, creativity, emotions, negotiation, communication, experiential education.

1. Introduction

In the workplace, hidden motives and unexpected emotions can intrude on interpersonal interactions and decision making. Indeed, coming to agreement on a decision can be challenging if one party is influenced by emotions or goals that are not acknowledged or known to others. Asking questions or being willing to share one’s own interests can foster collaborative ideation and creativity in reaching a mutually agreeable decision, behaviors which are helpful to managers in general.

The primary goal of *Opposing Preferences: Negotiating Objects with Hidden Value* is to provide learners with an exercise in which they discuss the potential sale of objects that have no initially obvious overlap in the prices offered/desired and with an unknown rationale behind each. The scenario for this two-person

This shortened version of the article is for promotional purposes on publicly accessible databases.

Readers who wish to obtain the full text version of the article can order it via the url

<https://www.neilsonjournals.com/JOBE/abstractjobe18leveltal.html>

Any enquiries, please contact the Publishing Editor, Peter Neilson pneilson@neilsonjournals.com

© NeilsonJournals Publishing 2025.

exercise centers on items at a yard sale that elicit unexpected emotional significance for the seller in the moment of negotiating a price. It combines elements of emotion, interrogative communication, creativity, and ethics. A core component is that the seller sets a very high price on an object (an unwanted child's art project) due to it having sentimental value that the seller only realized at the time of sale. This sentimentality is anathema to the buyer's (a college art student) desire to paint over the child's paintings to reuse the canvases. The lack of initial overlap triggers the need for participants to ask questions to discern the motivations for buying low or for selling at a high price, which may lead buyers to conceal or lie about their intended use for the objects (i.e., used canvases). The exercise is designed to have no initially obvious solution if the role guidelines are followed, yet we found that student pairs often crafted creative deals that seemingly satisfied both participants. The debrief discussion focuses on emotion, communication, creativity, and trust. It can be tailored to teach introductory negotiation concepts in addition to these OB concepts.

2. Learning Objectives

This simulation offers instructors an opportunity to explore how inquisitiveness, creativity, truthfulness, and emotions such as sentimentality influence decision making and negotiated agreements. The learning objectives for students participating in this exercise are:

1. Understanding the importance of asking questions to discern others' intentions and motivations in an interaction.
2. Recognizing the role emotion and sentiment can have in interactions, as well as their potential effect on decision making.
3. Employing creativity to craft solutions in situations where the possibility of reaching one is perceived to be very small or potentially nonexistent.
4. Identifying and assessing negotiation concepts (e.g., reservation and target points, BATNA, ZOPA) and tactics (e.g., anchoring and initial offers, use of emotion) in a decision situation.

3. Overview

The flow of this exercise consists of a brief initial planning stage to allow students to understand their role and plan a negotiation strategy. The actual negotiation discussion itself is done in pairs (buyers/sellers). A focused debrief explores students' experiences in relation to the learning objectives. There is no minimum or maximum number of negotiation pairs, though a minimum of three pairs may ensure the debrief covers a range of experiences and ideas. In terms of physical