

Promoting Critical-Thinking Skills By Using Negotiation Exercises

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ABSTRACT. Many writers argue that it is necessary to develop critical thinking skills in business students because these skills are needed to deal with the increasing complexities of real-life problems. Although the goal appears to be laudable, it is not always clear how to go about achieving it. In this article, the authors describe active learning experiences in a course on business negotiations that serve the dual purpose of teaching students to negotiate and 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, is one way to promote higher order thinking skills.

Keywords: active learning, critical thinking, negotiation

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Students whose major is 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. It has created an expectation for instructors to communicate this knowledge to students. This greater emphasis on content has resulted in a lack of emphasis on critical thinking skills needed to deal with real problems. In reality, management graduates need to analyze decision-making scenarios, understand the needs of the different stakeholders, manage the interactions between the stakeholders, identify alternatives, and identify suitable criteria to evaluate alternatives. On this basis, students need to recognize and understand the tradeoffs and compromises needed in real decision-making scenarios. All these activities demand critical thinking from them. It has been the authors' observation that although the existing courses meet needs for content, they generally lack the environment to optimize the development of critical-thinking skills.

Emphasis on Critical Thinking

This discussion about critical thinking is not new. The debate has continued for many years. However, the debate has taken on urgency because of the prominence given to it recently by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools

of Business (AACSB; 2003), the global accreditation agency for business education. In 2003, AACSB adopted a new set of standards for accreditation and maintenance of accreditation. Under Standard 15 (management of curriculum), AACSB is prescriptive and suggests that reflective thinking skills should be an important outcome of undergraduate business programs. Some authors have referred to this kind of thinking ability as *higher order thinking*.

The business accreditation agency is quite prescriptive about the need to develop higher order thinking skills in business students. Thus the goal is quite clear. What is not clear (and the researchers are 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. However, for most universities, this is not a practical option because of resource constraints. The technological and subject knowledge required for business managers has greatly increased in the past 20 years. Thus, there is little room in business curricula for such an extra course. The only practical option appears to be to incorporate learning experiences in existing courses that simultaneously promote higher-order thinking.

Critical Thinking Defined

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, see Bloom (1956), Jenkins

(1998), Dalal (1994), and Guillemette (1991). Bloom's taxonomy has withstood the test of time for over 50 years and is quite useful for discussions about higher order thinking. In this article, we use the phrases *higher order thinking*, *critical thinking*, and *reflective thinking* interchangeably.

Bloom (1956) identified 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 subcategories of cognitive objectives that we will summarize later on the basis of the work of Guillemette (1991). The subcategories in increasing order of complexity include (a) knowledge, (b) comprehension, (c) application, (d) analysis, (e) synthesis, and (f) evaluation. *Knowledge* involves recall of information. *Comprehension* involves the lowest level of understanding where the reader knows what is being communicated and can use it in its immediate context. *Application* consists of the use of ideas, principles, and theories in a particular context.

The activities of *analysis*, *synthesis*, and *evaluation* are generally treated as higher order thinking skills. *Analysis* involves the separation of parts of a communication or problem into distinct elements. Some examples of analysis include (a) categorizing items, (b) comparing items, (c) disassembling a product, (d) examining a specimen, (e) distinguishing patterns, and (f) recognizing patterns. *Synthesis* is a process that puts parts together to form a new structure. Some examples of synthesis include (a) writing a new communication, (b) developing a plan, (c) designing a product, (d) proposing a strategy, and assembling a product. *Evaluation* means making a judgment on the basis of explicit and relatively complex criteria as opposed to making a judgment on the basis of inherent likes and dislikes. Judgments may be quantitative or qualitative. Some examples of evaluation include (a) comparing proposals, (b) ranking projects, (c) recommending candidates, and (d) appraising market values of homes.

In this article, we describe negotiation role plays employed in a busi-

ness negotiation course that not only help students learn negotiation tactics and strategies, but also provide them with multiple classroom experiences to enhance critical thinking.

First, we describe the nature of the course; then we discuss active learning negotiating experiences and how specific experiences helped students practice their higher order thinking skills. Finally, we discuss the general applicability of the approach, limitations of the approach, and ideas for future research.

Course Details

The college of business at the University of West Florida at Pensacola, Florida is AACSB accredited and enrolls about 1,700 students in its undergraduate, MBA, and accounting degree programs. The instructors at this school have taught a course on business negotiations since 2004 as an elective course to management majors. The course developers recognize that future managers will have to use many different kinds of negotiation skills. In addition, managers will also have to recognize and select appropriate strategies and tactics to use during negotiations and as necessary recognize and deal with competitive strategies used by other negotiators. To provide students with adequate learning experiences of these complex tasks, the course includes a large number of active learning experiences.

Instructors ask students to read and they test students on relevant negotiation materials. The instructors also ask students to (a) complete homework assignments, (b) participate in classroom negotiation role play exercises, and (c) successfully demonstrate that they have completed a one-on-one negotiation that is significant to them. For the course, the instructors use a textbook by Lewicki, Saunders, Barry, and Minton (2004a). From spring 2004 to fall 2006, the course was taught nine times. A total of 149 students were taught in the nine sections. About 46% were male students and 54% were female students. The course was dual listed as a senior and graduate course. About 9% were graduate students ($n = 149$). The maximum number of students

in a particular offering was 28. In other words, the approach works with about 25–30 students, but not more. The first author can provide a copy of the syllabus of this course upon request.

Negotiation Role Play (NRP)

The instructors of the management negotiations course require each student to participate in 13 negotiation role plays (NRP). They grade three of the NRPs, which account for 30% of the total grade (i.e., 10% for each NRP). For the other 10 role plays, 7 are performed in pairs and 3 are performed in small groups. The instructor's resource CD-ROM from Lewicki, Saunders, Barry, and Minton (2004b) provided most of the negotiation role plays for the participants.

The process for NRPs during class session follows a structured format where students (a) plan the negotiation, (b) execute the negotiation, and (c) debrief the negotiation. For the first step of this exercise, students plan the negotiation. One week before the NRP, students receive their specific role; they read and analyze their role using a specific planning form that is provided by the instructor (see Appendix A). Negotiation experts (Fisher & Ury, 1986; Lewicki et al., 2004a) have suggested that the specific elements outlined in the appendix are key to planning and implementation of a successful negotiation. The planning process requires students to distinguish specific negotiation elements such as issues, goals, interests, bargaining mix, frames, and strategies for their role in a given negotiation. A description of each of these negotiation elements is presented in Appendix B.

In the second step of this exercise, students engage in the actual NRP face to face. During the third and final step of the NRP, students complete an observation form during class time (see Appendix C). On the observation form, students answer several questions about issues dealing with the final outcome, and it provides a structured approach to evaluating the negotiation. Thus, although the instructor cannot hear everything that is said among each pair, the instructor reads and evaluates each student's plan and self-evaluation along

TABLE 1. Higher Order Thinking Activities Used in the Planning Process

Negotiation elements (see Appendix B for details)	Example of application of negotiation elements from car buying case for newly married couple	Actions needed to be taken by students	Category of higher order thinking
Identify issues	Buy the first car as a couple	Disassemble statements to determine the issue	Analysis
Identify goals and interests	Goal: Kathy wants to buy a van with a good safety record. Interest: Kathy wants a car that will hold a child seat, groceries, and family members	Compare and differentiate the different statements of the parties to distinguish goals from interests	Analysis
Identify bargaining mix Identify opening	Buy a new safe van by April	Students prioritize needs of parties in case.	Analysis
Identify target Identify resistance point Identify BATNA	Purchase a safe van Purchase a safe new car Return to work 6 months after the baby is born	To formulate BATNA, negotiators need to rearrange facts and issues to produce something new.	Synthesis
Develop frames (e.g., outcome frame)	Bill says, "Let's go look at trucks." (Bill has a predisposition to buy a truck.)	Students create multiple frames to draw upon during the negotiation.	Synthesis
Identify strategy (e.g., principled collaboration)	Bill and Kathy agree on principles that will guide the negotiation	Rate strength of desires and level of concerns to develop strategy.	Evaluation

Note. BATNA = Best alternative to a negotiated agreement.

with the other party's observation of that student.

Higher Order Thinking Skills Used in Negotiation Role Plays

Students experience a total of 13 NRPs during the course. Three of the NRPs are graded. In this section, we describe how the preparation, execution, and debriefing of the negotiation role plays help students practice the higher order thinking skills of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

Higher Order Thinking Skills Used in the Planning Process

Appendix D presents a simple case that describes a young couple who negotiate the purchase of a car.

Table 1 shows the various higher order thinking activities that are used to complete the planning process. We have included the simplified illustrations applicable to the car-buying case in Table 1 to make it easier for the reader to understand the technical terms involved.

A study of Table 1 indicates that identification of issues, goals, interests, opening, target, and resistance point primarily involves analysis. Synthesis is the dominant higher order thinking involved

in development of the best alternative to negotiated agreement (BATNA) and frames. Strategy identification makes intense use of evaluation.

Higher Order Thinking Skills Used During the Negotiation

During the planning process, negotiators have time to investigate facts and information and reflect upon ideas and concepts relative to the negotiation. In contrast, during the negotiation, negotiators must respond on the go. Negotiation partners must actively listen to each other and must respond in a way that lets their partner know they have been heard. Negotiators must respond to words and concepts they hear from the other party; they must understand the issue(s) from the other party's perspective. Even though this thought process was part of the planning process, the exchange of words and thoughts may not be exactly as the negotiator planned. Therefore, the negotiation is like a game of chess; each party must try to (a) see several steps ahead, (b) remain flexible, and (c) think on the go. The negotiation is not only a test of the negotiator's skill in planning, but also a test of the negotiator's skill in creating new outcomes that result in win-win solutions.

The bargaining mix (opening, target, interests, BATNA) typically evolves over the course of the negotiation. This engages each party in discerning and responding to opening statements, developing and asking questions to determine reasons for the other party's opening statement, figuring out how the other side is thinking, and comparing and contrasting the needs of the two parties. These activities engage each side in analysis.

During the negotiation, each party constructs and proposes alternative solutions in an attempt to achieve an outcome to satisfy both parties. Thus, the role play is a dynamic interaction of continuous changes in plans and strategies. The parties have to use pre-defined frames or construct new ones on a dynamic basis thus engaging in synthesis. While developing frames, students engage in synthesis. However, when choosing which frame to use at a particular point in the negotiation, they engage in evaluation.

Higher Order Thinking Skills Used in the Debriefing Process

During the third step of the exercise, students complete a formal evaluation of the role play. Student pairs evaluate

TABLE 2. Higher Order Thinking Used in the Debriefing Process

Task (from negotiation role play observation form)	Actions needed to be taken by students	Category of higher order thinking
Identify party more dependent on deal; state reasons.	Compare what they said with what the other party said and critique these statements.	Analysis
Identify other party's target point.	Use other party's statements to infer target point.	Analysis
Identify party who had the better BATNA; identify what it was.	Extrapolate from information not stated by other party; compare two BATNAs.	Synthesis and evaluation
Describe new frame if you changed it during negotiation; if you did not change it, explain reasons for its effectiveness.	Explain why own frame was effective; requires judgment about effectiveness of frames.	Evaluation
Identify strategies used by you that worked well or did not work well.	Select and decide which negotiation elements student performed well.	Evaluation
Identify strategies used by other party that worked well or did not work well.	Select and decide which negotiation element the other party performed well.	Evaluation

Note. BATNA = Best alternative to a negotiated agreement.

themselves and their partners using the negotiation role play observation form shown in Appendix C. Table 2 shows an analysis of the activities performed to complete the distinct tasks. Analysis is the predominant higher order thinking skill used in identifying the party that was more dependent on the deal and in identifying the target point of the other party. Identifying the party with better BATNA involves synthesis and evaluation. It requires evaluation to identify and describe strategies that worked well or did not work well for both the parties.

DISCUSSION

When students engage in negotiation role plays, they learn contextual and practical aspects of negotiation along with three aspects of critical thinking: (a) analysis, (b) synthesis, and (c) evaluation. In preparation for each negotiation, students have 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. Doing so gives them a good opportunity to practice analysis.

In addition, students have to develop a strategy. This process encourages students to blend their personal negotiation styles with approaches that have worked in other scenarios. This gives them a good opportunity to practice synthesis. In addition, the students have to evalu-

ate strategies to determine their appropriateness for this scenario. This gives them practice in evaluation.

After the negotiation is complete, students answer several questions. By answering these questions, students 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. Their explanation includes a discussion about interdependencies and an evaluation of strategies that the student used that worked or did not work, and strategies used by the other party that worked or did not work. Therefore, these exercises give students multiple opportunities to practice higher order thinking skills.

General Applicability of Approach

Can students of other majors also use this approach in their courses? The answer appears to be a qualified "yes." For example, in a business ethics course (typically taken by all business majors), student pairs may debate both sides of an ethical issue (e.g., firing workers at will). In a business law course (typically taken by all business majors), instructors may ask student pairs to debate the legal ramifications of university policies (e.g., affirmative action policies pertaining to student admissions). In a course on corporate finance (for finance majors), instructors may ask student

pairs to debate the best financial course to follow (e.g., best debt or equity option to follow in a specific company). In a corporate tax class for accounting majors, student pairs may be asked to debate best ways to treat specific business expenses (e.g., stock option grants to employees). In a systems analysis and design class for management information systems (MIS) majors, student pairs may be asked to debate different options for meeting customer needs (e.g., best user interface design in a particular context). This list is not exhaustive. We can present similar examples for other disciplines in business.

The biggest weakness of the approach is that such exercises may take too much of the classroom time. It may also need careful planning by the instructor. One of the options to consider may be to have groups debate the issues with a requirement that each member of the group has to make a meaningful contribution to the debate. Another weakness is that it may be difficult to incorporate such exercises in courses that have a large number of students. One option may be to use such approaches in advanced courses of a discipline that are typically taken by majors of that discipline. Such courses are likely to have fewer students.

Critical-thinking ability is an important outcome for business students. Therefore, it is necessary to figure out cost-effective approaches to achieve this outcome. It appears reasonable to incorporate active learning experiences

in multiple courses with the goal of helping students develop and improve this skill.

Limitations and Future Research

This article has some limitations. First, we made no attempt to measure the level or extent to which higher order thinking skills were used during the negotiation role plays. Second, we made no attempt to provide evidence of improvements in these skills on the basis of pre- and posttests.

At the same time, the authors 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. Therefore, the focus of this work was to provide students with multiple opportunities to practice these skills using real-life negotiation exercises. In the future, researchers should measure improvements in critical thinking that may be attributed to participating in these negotiation exercises.

Conclusion

Students majoring in business are likely to face complex problems in their careers. 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 to focus more on content than on devel-

opment 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. In addition, AACSB authorities have instituted new standards that require the business graduates to think critically.

Institutions are required to rise to this challenge while 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 many institutions.

We believe a better alternative is available and has been used successfully. This approach requires instructors to employ integrative active learning experiences in suitable courses. For management majors, a course on business negotiations is a prime area for this purpose. This course requires students to engage in several negotiation exercises. Such exercises have the advantage of teaching negotiation skills and engaging students in analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (the three pillars of higher-order thinking). Therefore, students can practice critical-thinking skills while engaging in negotiation exercises. We believe that this approach is the most viable for many institutions.

NOTE

Dr. Diana Page teaches courses in the areas of organization behavior, management of diversity,

and business negotiations. **Dr. Arup Mukherjee** teaches courses in the areas of project management, operations management, and management science. The authors' research interests are effectiveness of teaching strategies and critical thinking.

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APPENDIX A Planning Form for Negotiation Role Playing

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? The other party's goal?
3. What are your needs or interests (in priority order)? The other party's interests?
4. What is your bargaining range or mix? The other party's?
 - a. Opening or target?
 - b. Interests? (List in priority order)
 - c. Resistance point?
 - d. Best alternative to a negotiated agreement (BATNA)?
5. What type of frame will you use?
 - a. Briefly describe the frame.
6. What strategy will you use?
 - a. Briefly describe your strategy.
 - b. Why did you choose this strategy?

APPENDIX B
A Description of the Negotiation Elements

A. *Issues* describe the major problem, or reason for the negotiation.

B. *Goals* are statements that state specific, measurable outcomes, with time requirements as appropriate. *Interests* describe the underlying needs, or why the negotiator wants certain outcomes.

C. *Bargaining mix* is an explanation of negotiator priorities. It includes the opening, target, resistance point, and the best alternative to a negotiated agreement (BATNA).

- a. The opening includes the maximum outcome the negotiator wants.
- b. The target is what the negotiator would like to get or what they would be satisfied with.
- c. The resistance point is minimum acceptable outcome the negotiator will accept.
- d. BATNA. A description of what the negotiators will do if they do not achieve their resistance point.

D. *Frames* are specific ways of focusing, shaping, and describing the issue. Frames guide the dialogue by helping negotiator focus on what is most important to her or him. Some frames include: *substantive* (what the negotiation is about), *outcome* (predisposition to achieving a specific result), *aspiration* (predisposition toward satisfying a broader set of interests), *conflict management process* (how the parties will resolve the issue), *identity* (how the parties define who they are), *characterization* (how the parties define the other party), *loss-gain* (how the parties view the risk associated with particular outcomes).

E. *Strategy* is an overall approach that considers the importance of the substance of the negotiation to the negotiator, the importance of the other party's relationship to the negotiator, the importance of substance to the other party and the importance of the relationship to the other party. Some strategies include principled collaboration, focused subordination, soft competition, and passive avoidance (see Savage, Blair, & Sorenson, 2003).

APPENDIX C
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 (best alternative to a negotiated agreement) and 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 your partner use that worked well?
8. What strategies did your partner use that did not work well?

APPENDIX D
A Case of a Newly Married Couple Negotiating the Purchase of a Car

A young married couple is buying their first car together. They can only afford to buy one new or reasonably new car at this time. Kathy is pregnant and she and her husband agreed that she will stay at home until the baby is 4 or 5 years of age. Kathy drives a 1997 Ford Taurus that has some major engine problems. She wants to buy a van with a good safety record by the time the baby is born in April so she can easily accommodate a child's carseat, groceries, and other family-type things.

Kathy's husband, Bill, drives a 2003 Ford Thunderbird he purchased when he graduated from college. He plans to do some light carpentry work on their home and wants to buy a pickup truck so he can easily transport building materials. He suggests that there is even a possibility he can earn extra money by doing light construction for a couple of his friends.

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