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Case on Fertilizer Inputs Negotiation

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates a buyer-seller negotiation about the procurement of fertilizing inputs in the southern region of Brazil. The primary aim of this curriculum is to enhance the negotiation skills of business negotiators, academics, and practitioners. This finding was achieved via a singular case study including two contrasting parties and many topic domains. The primary findings of the study emphasize the need for improving integrative strategies, such as understanding the underlying interests of the opposing party and creating value, to achieve mutually advantageous agreements. The results of the research suggest that the observed consequences have the potential to be reproduced in other organizational settings, with a particular focus on power imbalances. The present investigation culminates in a comprehensive examination and suggestions for further scholarly inquiry.

KEYWORDS:

Negotiation; agro business; fertilizing inputs; buyer-seller negotiation; single case study.

INTRODUCTION: -

This study examines a Type II negotiation (Dias, 2020) using a distinctive case study as the primary framework. The conversation included a commercial debt settlement arrangement between a purchaser and vendor within the context of an agricultural dispute. This article upholds ethical standards and safeguards the confidentiality of persons. The names of individuals have been excluded. The field of negotiation has received considerable scholarly attention in recent years, as evidenced by the works of Dias and Duzert (2017), Duzert and Zerunyan (2015), Cohen (1980), Sebenius (1992), Dias and Lopes (2019), Dias and Teles (2018), Dias and Navarro (2017), Dias et al. (2020), Dias (2018, 2020, 2019), Susskind and Cruikshank (1987), Raiffa (1982), Ury (2015), Fisher et al. (1981), Salacuse (2008), Dias (2020, 2020b, 2019), Moore (2003), and Susskind and Field (1996).

Negotiation is defined as "a process of potentially opportunistic interaction by which two or more parties, with some apparent conflict, seek to do better through jointly decided action than they could otherwise." (Lax and Sebenius, 1986, p.11)

The current study used the Four Type Negotiation Matrix taxonomy (Dias, 2020) for the purpose of categorizing the negotiation process, as seen in Figure 1.

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

Based on the data shown in Figure 1, the current scenario may be categorized as a Type II negotiation situation. This classification is attributed to the presence of two parties engaged in negotiations about many issues. In the subsequent part, we will further expound upon the used research approach and acknowledge the inherent constraints of the study.

METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS:-

The study used an interpretive methodology using an inductive reasoning framework. Based on Yin's (1988) approach, the primary focus of this research is the examination of buyer-seller negotiation as the basic unit of inquiry. Moreover, various research methodologies have been used, including direct observation, active participation, and examination of specific cases. Goffman's (1959, 1961) dramaturgical theory further supports the present concern. The present case study examines buyer-seller discussions in Brazil, including various subjects. Making autonomous inquiries must be considered when examining and resolving misunderstandings that may emerge due to variations in negotiation strategies and procedures other nations use.

FERTILIZER INPUTS NEGOTIATION:-

A negotiation between an agricultural inputs distribution company, active in the B2C sales market is discussed, focused on providing a complete line of products for agricultural production and for rural producers to grow their crops, with industries producing and mixing granular fertilizers that operate in the B2B sales market, This input is essential for agricultural production, which acts on the nutrition of plants, making them perform and express their productive potential, providing a better development of the crop cultivated by the rural producer, focusing mainly on increasing productivity, generating a higher volume of production per hectare.

The buyer is the National Manager of fertilizer purchases at OX Company, which operates in the purchase and sale of agricultural inputs for rural producers and serves the entire national and international market.

On October 23, 2023, in a meeting with the commercial director of the OX Company, the purchase of a volume of 2,000 tons of granular fertilizers was decided, with a value of more than 30 million reais of purchase, for a sales campaign focused on the crop of the second crop (off-season corn) for the eastern and northern regions of Paraná, aiming to serve an area of 35.0 00 hectares and about 70 to 110 rural producers. During the meeting, a compilation of the 20 products that were most sold in the same period of the previous year was presented. After discussions, we opted to acquire 10 of these products, aiming to increase the purchase scale and consequently achieve more fantastic discounts. We also defined that of the six suppliers presented, we would continue with the four best suppliers in cost, product availability, and deadline. From these pre-selected suppliers, Seller X had two exclusive products that were chosen for acquisition.

After the meeting, we were in charge of carrying out the negotiations with the suppliers, and there was the possibility of buying everything with a single supplier or making a purchase division between the four suppliers; this decision was with us; what mattered was to achieve the best possible cost reduction.

IMPORTANT POINTS

1. The buyer needs to guarantee a reduction in past costs in previous weeks, at least a 3% reduction, but the buyer will seek a reduction of 5% to add to profit margin and/or commercial competitiveness.
2. Ensure that the chosen Seller (s) can deliver the products between November 2023 and January 2024.
3. The purchase must be in installments, due on 05/30/2024 and another part on 09/30/24. These steps must be followed because they follow the sales methodologies, and thus, we cross receipt with payment.
4. For installment purchases, the OX Company provides a surety bond, which costs 2% per year.
5. Seller X has two unique products that will necessarily be purchased.
6. An initial price quotation was requested from the four suppliers.

NEGOTIATION

First, we put into practice Plan A, which was to purchase all products from Seller X, given the history of a good relationship between the companies, but it has the highest price compared to the other 3. It is, on average, 3% more expensive than the cheapest Seller, and We need to look for an additional 5% discount compared to the cheapest price.

Be aware that Seller X had a rupture with an extensive client and competitor and needed to sell, mainly for revenue within the year, to compensate for this rupture.

We proposed the purchase of 100% of the purchase volume, 12,000 tons, with a reduction of 10% of the cost that he initially informed us, with 40% of the payment for 05/30/24 and 60% on 09/30/24, provision of a surety bond and shipment within the year. Moreover, this point of shipment is essential for SellerX because of the revenue target he has within the year.

The commercial manager of Seller X was excited. However, they asked us about the proposal being too heavily discounted, so we argued that the discount was high because they were poorly positioned against the competitors. We realized they thought we were bluffing, but they offered to internalize this proposal with their board of directors and would get back to us within 24 hours.

The deadline given by SellerX was 10:00 a.m. on Thursday; when the deadline was given, they requested another hour because the board was finalizing the analysis and would deal with the feedback. At 11:00 a.m., the manager of FSeller X called us, arguing that they worked hard and did their best to bring the best condition (while the manager was talking, we were already in mind that the discount would be unsatisfactory) and that it was for us to consider our partnership and analyze it carefully to close. After the end of the call, we received their feedback, and as we imagined, the discount came very low, with only a 1.8% improvement in the two exclusive products and 1% in the others.

With that, Plan B has already come into play; since the proposal to purchase the entire volume with SupplyX did not work out with the desired discount, we will work with the other three suppliers who are also interested in participating in the negotiation, seeking to buy the best cost products from each one, and finally, renegotiate the two exclusive products of Seller X, in an attempt to lower the costs.

We started updating the prices with the other three suppliers, where two stood out with slight differences between them (SellersY and W). With these suppliers, we would only need to take 5% off the costs. In this update, we told them they were more expensive than the competitors and that we would close at the latest the next day. As a result, the feedback has already been better, the Seller Y better or 1%, leaving a difference of 4% to be worked, and the Seller W took 1.5%, leaving a difference of 3.5% to be worked. Meanwhile, SellerX kept calling us asking about the proposal. As we had already updated the other sellers, we told him that, unfortunately, his proposal was what was expected and that we were working with other suppliers; we reinforced that he had the opportunity and let it go. After that, he tried to talk to us thrice on purpose. We did not answer him or answer his messages. Going back to Plan B and now with the updated costs of Sellers Y and W, we prepared a proposal to reduce 5% of SellerY and 4.5% for SellerW in the products that they were better at. We finished the preparation at the end of Thursday and had it ready to ship early Friday to make the sellers thoughtful and anxious.

Then came the closing day; on Friday, we would have to close the volume since the commercial campaign was already ready, the commercial department was waiting for the return, and the internal team and related teams anxiously awaited the definition.

When we arrived at the office at 8:00 a.m. on Friday, Seller W sent us a message saying he had arranged a negotiation opportunity on payment terms to pass on to us. If we change the payment deadline of the 60% from 09/30/2024 to 07/30/2024, we would not need to provide surety bonds. This detail would change the negotiation because now, with this Seller, we already have an additional gain of 1.83% (11 months of a surety bond) for not having to provide the surety bond that costs us 2% p.a.

Next steps:

1. Align the maturity change with the treasury team.
2. If the maturity change is approved, get another discount of 1.67% with the Provider.

We met with the treasury team, exposed the case, and proposed to pay 100% of the purchase due on 07/30/24 with a mismatch of the volume on 05/30/24, being at the discretion of the treasury to anticipate some payment volume to Seller W or use this resource in another way, and in the case of sales due on 09/30/24 authorize the mismatch and put this advance payment in the cash flow, which will bring us a better margin because the payment is occurring in advance. Seller W charges us 1.5% interest per month.

With the treasury's approval, instead of sending a proposal to suppliers Y and W with two due dates, we will now send only one proposal to Supply W with a single due date.
Of the volume of 12,000 tons, discounting the two specific products of SellerX, there is a volume of 10,000 tons to be worked with SellerW.

We sent the proposal for the purchase of 10,000 tons, 83.3% of the volume we were working on, with a reduction of 4% of the cost he informed us, being 100% of the payment on 07/30/24, without the need to provide surety bonds and shipment of 70% within the year 2023 and 30% in January 2024.

Seller W quickly returned and made the counter-proposal for a 2.5% reduction, asking us to ship 90% of the volume within 2023. With this, we managed to get 83.3% of the volume below the desired cost and closed with Seller W.

Analyzing the negotiations with Seller W, initially, it was 5% above the desired; in the update, it took 1.5%, and at the closing, it took another 2.5%, giving a 4% discount plus 1.83% referring to the surety bond, thus achieving a difference of 5.83%, a gain of 0.83% above the desired.
We returned to the Commercial Board and asked how much they were willing to go with the two exclusive products of the Seller. We analyzed and decided that if Seller X reduced another 1.2% on top of the 1.8%, totaling a 3% discount, we could close the deal.

Therefore, we called Seller X, who asked us about his proposal. We told him that we had closed most of it with other suppliers and by the end of the day, we would close the rest and that what was missing was because we were deciding what the products would be; at that moment, he entered the game and asked what he would need to do to take at least some volume. After all, we are critical to them, and it would not be pleasant for their board to lose 100% of this business. Now is the time to get more discount. We said that we could negotiate the two exclusive products we had yet to buy but would have little time and would be unable to document a proposal. If one can take 3% of the last price and get back to us in 15 minutes, we can close a deal on the 2000 tons of exclusive products. In 10 minutes, the manager got back to us saying that he argued with the board and defended the business; he said that the round 3% would not be enough but that he had achieved 2.6%. We asked him for a break, saying that we would return to the commercial team (we came back with nothing). We went to have a coffee, and after 40 minutes, we returned to him.

Finally, we closed the deal with the discount and followed the metrics of expiration, shipment, and guarantee. Thus, out of the two exclusive products of Seller X, 2000 tons, we got a discount of 1.8% in the first return plus 2.6% in the final negotiation, obtaining a total discount of 4.4%, a gain of 1.4% above the desired, as depicted in Table 1:

Table 1 *Operations summary*

			ZOPA				
Purchase of fertilizers	Initial value	Variation	Minimal	Maximum	Final value	Total Discount	Margin
Conventional Product	R$ 24.633.095,75	3 a 5%	R$ 23.894.102,88	R$ 23.401.440,96	R$ 23.276.099,17	R$ 1.356.996,58	5,8%
Exclusive Product	R$ 4.871.718,29	3 a 5%	R$ 4.725.566,74	R$ 4.628.132,38	R$ 4.666.396,83	R$ 205.321,46	4,4%
Total	R$ 29.504.814,04	2%	R$ 28.619.669,62	R$ 28.029.573,34	R$ 27.942.496,00	R$ 1.562.318,04	5,6%

IMPLICATIONS AND DISCUSSION: -

The buyer-seller negotiation is configured as a Type II Negotiation (Dias, 2020). The case has implications in the following fields of study, such as (i) Military buyer-seller negotiations (Dias et. Al, 2022); (ii) negotiations with agents (Araujo, C.; Dias, M., 2022; Correa, Teles, Dias, M., 2022; Dias & Navarro, 2018); (iii) NGOs negotiations (Paradela, V.; Dias, M.; Assis; Oliveira, J.; Fonseca, R. (2019); (iv) generational interactions negotiations (Aylmer & Dias, M., 2018); (v) Brewery industry (Dias, M. and Falconi, 2018; Dias, M., 2018); (vi) business mediation (Dias, M., 2018); (vii) civil aviation industry (Dias, M., Teles, and Duzert, 2018; Dias, M. and Duzert, 2018); (viii) buyer-seller, retail business (Dias, M. et al., 2015; Dias, M. et al., 2015, 2014, 2012); (ix) carmaker industry (Dias, M., Navarro and Valle, 2013, Dias, M. , et al., 2014; Dias, M. , et al., 2013); (x) streaming video industry (Dias, M., & Navarro, 2018); (xi) mining industry (Dias, M., & Davila, 2018); (xii) two-party debt collection negotiations (Dias, M., 2019, 2019b; Dias, M. and Lopes, 2019); (xiii) civil construction negotiations (Dias, M., 2016); (xiv) internal negotiations (Dias, M., Pereira, L; Vieira, P., Pan, J., 2022); (xv) interbank negotiations (Dias, M.; Pereira, L; Vieira, P., 2022); (xvi) corporate business negotiations (Silva. G.B., Dias, M., 2022; Silva. G.B., Melo, R.C, Dias, M., 2022); (xvi) Vieira, P., Dias, M., 2022; Vieira, S.; Dias, M.; Silva, G.B.; Dias, M., 2022); (xv) teaching materials (Dias, M., 2023; Dias, M., 2023a; Dias, M., 2023b; Dias, M., 2023c; Dias, M., 2023d; Dias et al., 2023), for instance.

FUTURE RESEARCH

In order to further scholarly inquiry, it is recommended that future research endeavors focus on the analysis of negotiation Types I, III, and IV. It is advisable to explore a range of discourse practices conducted in different nations, including both public and private discussions, as an illustrative example.

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