

Online Negotiation. Theoretical Proposal

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Abstract- The latest changes due to by the pandemic situation have caused that, on the one hand, audiovisual communication technologies through the Internet have rapidly developed to cover communication needs, allowing not only the participation of several users in a session but also different configurations to adapt to educational, personal and professional needs, such as teleworking. On the other hand, the adaptation of people, due to the need of utilizing these communication tools, both in the personal and professional fields, have resulted in the integration of these technologies very quickly and with a global reach. With the term online negotiation, we refer to any long-distance negotiation process, without physical contact and using audiovisual communication tools, mainly connected to the Internet, which allow immediate and technically fluent communication, but with certain limitations and differences with face-to-face negotiations. Online negotiations are here to stay, and it is therefore, necessary to analyze the changes and define a practical learning methodology with direct application to the professional context.

Keywords: *Online Negotiation, Online Communication, Online learning*

1. INTRODUCTION

The pandemic will pass, but its effects will not. Adapting to new ways of communicating and negotiating is essential to maintaining relationships and achieving satisfactory agreements.

Although online negotiation began many years ago with different technological advances, it is now where it reaches its maximum development and it is difficult to find references other than small articles on the Internet, so we can determine that there is still no definitive state of the art, and it is likely that in the coming years new technological advances will emerge that will further deepen this topic. This work is only intended to be a starting point and establish some useful considerations for learning and subsequent implementation in the business environment.

Throughout history, different events and technological discoveries have taken place and made it possible to improve communication among people and companies, as well as to integrate part of the distance negotiation process. Having the technological needs covered, and although the acceptance of videoconferencing applications in society was already very wide, and with a wide range of possibilities, it is not until 2020, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, when these systems are fully integrated into society.

Due to the long periods of confinement, people and organizations of all kinds must quickly learn and are forced to use these applications to be able to remain "connected" with other people, whether in a personal, educational, or professional environment. Videoconferencing applications, on the other hand, must also develop new functionalities in a short period of time to satisfy the great demand for emerging needs.

Currently, we can say that, although there are surely new improvements to come, we have reached a point of no return, with real communication possibilities that allow us to develop a complete distance negotiation process and therefore we must know it to making the most of it.

2. CONTEXT

Throughout history, from the invention of the telephone by Graham Bell (1876) and the subsequent discoveries and commercialization of devices that allowed remote communication, including faxes and personal computers in the 1970s, to the adoption of the TCP / IP communication standard in 1983, known today as the Internet and which offered the first e-mail service and later, in the 90s, the commercialization of the first videoconferencing systems, provided an important variety, although with limitations, of communication options among people and organizations.

Nowadays, advances in telecommunication networks, adapting to a more global and immediate world, made some of these technologies, such as fax, stop being used and others, such as the pc's and mobile phones, with email services and video applications, to be developed to penetrate the market, existing today, where there are almost as many mobile phones as the world population.

If we also consider the urgency in the use of videoconferencing applications due to the COVID 19 pandemic, we can assure that online communication has not only come to stay, but also that there is a need for everyone to know it, from school and university ages, to develop relationships both personally and professionally.

The above-mentioned discoveries already made it possible to carry out some parts of the negotiation process. The telephone allowed people to have conversations with others, even internationally, and the fax, for example, already let us exchange documents, for comments, revisions and even signing agreements. With the new applications, including email and video, and the possibilities offered by telecommunications

today, a complete negotiation process can be developed, from initial contact to closing the agreement and subsequent follow-up.

Therefore, negotiation, as a subject that encompasses the aspects of communication and relationships (Ertel, 1995), is where this need can best be appreciated and consequently a practical learning methodology, oriented to the integration of university students to the professional field, shall be integrated.

3. DESCRIPTION

A. Negotiation Process

The online negotiation process does not differ much from the face-to-face process, although now we must include in our preparation of the negotiation, the management of tools and systems, which allows us to be agile and focus on the negotiation itself, as well as know the technical and communication limitations as well as the advantages of each application.

All this, put into practice, will generate trust that will benefit the relationship with third parties and allow people to focus on the matter of negotiation to reach a satisfactory agreement.

Therefore, the negotiation process, same as in an international negotiation process, can be divided into four phases (Olegario Llamazares García-Lomas, 2018):

1. Initial contact
2. Preparation of the Negotiation (including means and applications to be used)
3. Development of the Negotiation
4. Closing of agreement or conclusion

It is worth mentioning that the subsequent follow-up of what was agreed in a negotiation, as well as working on the relationship, are also essential, but will not be discussed in this document.

It should be noted that business processes have been affected by digitization and new online collaborative applications. A few years ago, the time invested by a purchasing department in the preparation of request for quotation (RFQ) for suppliers was not as long as the development time for the process of proposals reception and evaluation. Digitization requires investing much more time in preparation and so to reduce evaluation and decision-making periods, since all the criteria must be previously defined and parameterized to be able to be compared quickly.

Currently, with online collaborative tools that include the possibility of exchanging documents and agile communication with the supplier, the process allows the preparation to be interspersed with the development on an ongoing basis, until reaching a point of agreement or final decision. This occurs in almost all business processes and consequently in the negotiation process. Either way, it is clear, in any area, that the better we prepare a specific subject or negotiation, the less time we need to invest in development and completion.



Figure 1. Distribution of preparation and development times in a business process. Own elaboration.

B. Technology

It is clear that the greatest benefit of online negotiation is the reduction of time and economic savings by avoiding travel, allowing to negotiate from anywhere in the world quickly (Shonk, 2019).

The two most important online technologies are mail and videoconferencing, so we must know some considerations and limitations of each one:

eMail

There is no visual perception and consequently aspects of communication are lost, that would help to perceive the emotional state and consequently discern aspects that could give us more information about the other party to generate trust or distrust, for example, positions or movements of arms, hands, legs, body and face expressions.

There is no verbal perception, which would allow, in the same way as in the previous point, to perceive the emotional state, in this case, by the tone of voice or the speed in the way of speaking.

There is no perception of feelings, although some states of mind can be interpreted, what we call “reading between the lines”, which should be evaluated, since they can be erroneous perceived and be just linked to cultural aspects.

It requires being explicit about feelings, indicating our state of mind or frustration with any aspect of the negotiation. There are cultures that use emoticons to do so.

It is necessary to ask directly if we want to receive specific answers, so we must structure aspects of the mail in a schematic way for this objective and be careful with the wording so as not to hurt feelings.

Videoconference

Although there is a visual perception, it is reduced by the camera frame or window used, in most cases, limited to the face, preventing us from perceiving other movements or gestures from the rest of the body.

As they are relatively new applications, it is necessary to be trained on the use and always consider contingency elements in case of technical problems that may cause the interruption or slowdown of the development of the meeting.

Another important aspect that should be also consider is privacy and although this is an element that also affects the email due to the confidentiality conditions of the information

exchanged, in the videoconference there are also aspects of legal compliance with respect to the image protection, especially to consider in recordings and file sharing, which would also affect trust in the relationship.

C. Relationship and subject

Every negotiator has two interests to satisfy, on the one hand, the relationship with the other person and on the other, the subject of negotiation (Ury, 2012)

To close an agreement or establish a relationship, we can use different types of approach or use of different tools that will affect both mentioned aspects. The personal or face-to-face approach is the one that would most affect the relationship since it favors both verbal and non-verbal communication, as well as the perception of all the senses and emotions involved consequently affecting relationship drastically. From here, communication and the senses are limited, from videoconferencing, telephone and e-mail.

Regarding the type of approach that would most favor the closure or conclusion of a matter, leaving emotions or personal affection apart, any type may be valid.

Depending on the complexity of the matter, it is possible to close certain types of agreements. For example, we use the telephone for simple agreements such as closing a date and place of a meeting and the mail, given its immediacy and possibility of attaching documents, can facilitate the closing of more complex agreements, for instance, importing a product from any country globally, but we see that the relationship would go completely to a second position and consequently, it must be worked on, in the long term, based on the trust generated by the fulfillment of the agreement of each party.

According to the table below, we can see that closing an agreement or a satisfactory decision-making would require a combination of two or more types of approach, depending on the importance of the relationship and the subject.

Type of approach	Relationship	Subject
Face to face	★ ★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★ ☆
Videoconferene	★ ★ ★ ☆	★ ★ ☆ ☆
Phone	★ ★ ☆ ☆	★ ☆ ☆ ☆
eMail	★ ☆ ☆ ☆	★ ★ ★ ☆

Figure 2. Influence of different types of approach. Own elaboration.

Knowing this, we can take advantage of each technology to improve personal aspects or conflict situations, for example, knowing that the mail has a greater influence on the matter to be negotiated than on the relationship, we can use it to hide or show emotions, as necessary to achieve our objectives. Of course, emotions still exist and we must be aware of them to guide or correct them as needed. For example, if we have a feeling of anger, it is better to wait until this feeling disappears and thus avoid writing something we may regret later.

D. Methodology

It is essential to train students in all the aspects and requirements involved in any online negotiation and therefore

the teaching methodology must be adapted in a practical way in the classroom.

The methodology to be used is based on the Case Method (Hammond, 2002). The class is divided into two teams, each adopting the profile or role of the person or team defined in the case to be treated and these in turn into several work teams (2 to 4 people). Initially, an individual reading time is allowed to understand and highlight the information that the students believe is relevant or useful and then a teamwork time to prepare the negotiation based on the information of each role. In this team preparation, it is established in a way that a certain creativity and imagination is allowed within the limits of the context of the case.

The leaders of each team are appointed who will carry out the development of the negotiation in front of the rest of the class. Once the team preparation time is over, the negotiations are carried out. Depending on the time available in class, there should be at least two negotiations that last between 10 and 15 minutes each one.

The reason for separating into small teams has two essential reasons, on one hand it is intended to get all team members involved in the case, who are also asked to deliver their negotiation preparation sheet at the end of class and on the other hand propose different negotiation strategies and objectives for each team, ensuring that, although it is true that with the first negotiation a lot of information from the other part is disclosed, the fact of having different approaches and objectives ensures that each negotiation is completely different from the previous one.

Both in the individual reading phase and in teamwork phase, the teacher is aware of the participation of all students in addition to providing support and answers to any doubts that may arise.

Apart from the leaders of each team, observers from each group, are also appointed for each negotiation, who will present their constructive comments on what has been done and what could be improved taking into account what was previously learned in class.

Then, the teacher evaluates each negotiation and complements the comments of the observers, landing explanations and presenting practical examples, as well as opening other possibilities of action that could have changed the course and result of the negotiation.

It should be noted that, following this methodology during the course, it is required to control the participation of all students both as negotiator or as observer, as well as mixing different characters of personalities and nationalities (in classes with students from various countries), which will enrich each negotiation and will serve to take notice on the influence of cultural and language aspects.

At the end of class, students also answer a short questionnaire about the case and the negotiation to consolidate lessons learned, make them think about the points that each one would have changed and acknowledge their concerns when putting into practice new aspects or considerations in the following negotiation practices. This questionnaire, which is valued with a positive point, serves to ensure that students are acquiring knowledge and as an information base (feedback) for the teacher to adapt the next classes according to the different

motivations. See Table 1 as a summary of the steps explained here.

Table 1. Negotiation Practice class Steps

Steps	
1	Facilitate documents for reading and explaining the case
2	Individual reading of the case
3	Preparation of the negotiation. Putting in common, definition of strategy and objectives in group.
4	Negotiation Development
5	Evaluation by Observers
6	Teacher evaluation and summary of aspects learned and considerations for future negotiations.
7	Completion of a questionnaire on the negotiation carried out and lessons learned. Delivery of negotiation preparation sheet.

In the online negotiation process, the same previous procedure is followed, but integrating the corresponding online applications. Currently there are many collaborative and communication tools on the market, which without pretending to be exhaustive and thus show neutrality on the preferences for any application, it would be integrated as explained below.

As indicated above, the most important thing when integrating online tools is that it requires much more detailed preparation and planning, which, although it seems like a major work, the time for next steps, of negotiation and closing, is greatly reduced.

In the same way as in the professional environment, in which documents are prepared and shared, for example a draft agreement, there are three important aspects:

1. Document preparation and sharing
2. Configuration of the application or communication tool (videoconference).
3. Availability of proper means of communication in the classroom.

For the first item, once the documents are fully reviewed and finalized to be able to distribute them, preferably in PDF format to prevent changes and manipulation, they will be made available to the students by mail or "hanging" on the collaborative platform defined by the center or university, with detailed explanation of content, purpose and instructions.

The second item, configuring the communication application, requires doing it in a meticulous way, setting access criteria, profiles, as well as the participation preferences for the users. In this sense, it is worth highlighting compliance with the relevant legal aspects regarding image and data protection, especially if the session is to be recorded and in which all participants must be informed about it for their consent. In this section we must always have a contingency plan in case a technical problem arises that prevents communication with a student, highlighting the following points:

1. Know instructions for using the communication media installed in the classroom, as well as the applicable software.
2. Establish instructions in case of communication errors or failures, known by all participants in the session. This way, it

will reassure them, in case any circumstance occurs and allows us to act naturally, as we are all aware that this could happen. Lack of information can cause nervousness and chaos in the classroom.

3. Plan to use other means of communication and software, such as mail or other instant messaging applications
4. Have the IT Support contact numbers at hand.

Once in the class session, which can be in a face-to-face environment, complete online or even in a "bimodal" way (with students in class and students connected remotely), we would start the class as we have indicated in the previous paragraphs. The classrooms must be prepared with the facilities and adequate equipment for both, voice and image allowing communication and participation fluently during the class.

It is important, in the preparation of the class, by the teacher to establish some "control points" and communication with the students connected remotely to make them feel fully integrated in the class. This is achieved through direct participation questions, that of course, include face-to-face students and even causing interaction between them. These control and communication points will be included at least at the beginning and end of each part defined in the structure of the class, which will also serve to review concepts, provide clarification on how to proceed, as well as to recapitulate and provide evaluations about what happened.

The key to learning negotiation is practice and therefore a constant interaction between the teacher and the students, as well as among themselves is necessary, valuing their contributions and directing them towards the learning of concepts and the negotiation process.

Tabla 2. Checkpoints

	Steps	Checkpoints
1	Provide documents for reading and explaining the case (previously sent). Short explanation.	Confirmation of publication and reception of documents.
2	Individual reading of the case.	Open questions about the case to be dealt with.
3	Preparation of the negotiation. Putting in common, definition of strategy and objectives in group.	Open questions about the case and roles.
4	Development of the Negotiation.	Verification of correct operation of the online system.
5	Evaluation by Observers.	Verification of correct operation of the online system.
6	Evaluation by Professor and Summary of aspects learned and considerations for future negotiations.	Open questions about the case and concepts previously studied.
7	Completion of a questionnaire (previously sent) on the	Confirmation of delivery and receipt of documents.

Depending on whether the class is face-to-face, online or bimodal, time periods must be adjusted according to the total time established for the class. According to different studies, the ability to maintain attention in online mode drops considerably, therefore, if a face-to-face class lasts two hours, the online or bimodal class should be reduced to a maximum of an hour and a half, and each class section must be also adjusted.

Once the entire process has been internalized, after repeating it several times, and being aware about observations made about the use of online media, it is possible to add somewhat more elaborate and complicated classes in the management itself. In this sense, it is worth mentioning a practice that, as an interpretive game and for didactic purposes and improving communication, can be included in some of the negotiation practices, through the role interpretation of a main emotion or feeling, for example, anger, joy, sadness, etc. that will require a greater concentration on the part of the students, since apart from the negotiation itself, they must prepare their interpretive role.

This is one of the best ways to learn and see how feelings influence negotiations, being very dynamic and fun classes, being unforgettable for the student. At the end of this session, apart from the corresponding recapitulation of what has been learned, a "prize" is awarded for the best performance and interpretation, chosen by all the students, which increase motivation and active participation of whole group.

4. RESULTS

During the school year, there have been several classes using this methodology with great success and acceptance by the students, who are much more predisposed to the use of these new technologies and their technical knowledge is usually deeper than those of previous generations, so that culture shock is almost non-existent for the new generations.

Being a eminently practical type of negotiation, knowledge of online negotiation would be done in the same way; by evaluating the participation and involvement of students in the practices carried out in class and by taking an exam that includes the concepts and considerations learned regarding online negotiation and preparation.

Here is the testimony of 2 4th year Business Administration students.

Testimony 1: "Having practice about online negotiation, I consider my experience very enriching and useful. I believe that having learned this methodology at the Negotiation Techniques class, many doors have opened for me such as selection processes, invitations to seminars, job interviews ... since I was trained to promote synergy with the listener.

For this, from my point of view, the preparation of the case is decisive since during the negotiation you will not be able to have key information that would occur in another situation, since it is difficult to observe the non-verbal communication of the other person. In addition, it is essential to have sufficient knowledge about the use of the tool to know how to act in the event of any unforeseen event.

To conclude, I consider this learning methodology necessary for students in the final years of their studies. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic we are immersed in numerous selection processes in which the interviews are carried out electronically and we must be prepared for them."

Testimony 2: "... Finally, at the end of the exercise, both parties were satisfied with the negotiation, information about each other was better understood, and both were committed to making clear decisions that benefit both personally and professionally. I think this exercise helped us a lot to understand the different elements present in a current negotiation and how to prepare it before starting ourselves directly into communication, managing the emotions of both parties and previously elaborating alternatives according to our interests and priorities".

5. CONCLUSIONS

Online negotiation is totally possible today due to the advancement of technologies, allowing a reduction in time, as well as significant economic savings.

Online negotiation allows you to carry out a complete negotiation process with anyone around the world, which in the current situation of globalization is key to know its advantages and limitations to help us achieve satisfactory results, both at a relational level and at the level of business objectives.

Familiarizing with all these aspects, as well as ensuring a correct and agile use of these online tools are key in the way of relating for both, personal and professionally.

For all the above, online negotiation should be considered not only in the negotiation class but also in any class in which communication aspects are included, such as professional or managerial skills.

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