

Foreword

Individualization in service design and production has also prompted more individualized ways of marketing those services. The sales process has thus become more and more of a negotiation situation, in business-to-business (B2B) settings anyway, but more and more in business-to-consumer (B2C) settings, too. In contrast to a pre-structured sales process in which the salesperson may follow a certain persuasion and closing-the-deal routine, a real negotiation situation is characterized by a greater diversity in terms of the twists and turns the process may take and in terms of outcomes, too.

Over the last 60 years, negotiation research in various disciplines such as game theory, social psychology, communication studies or marketing research has done a great deal to better understand negotiation processes and outcomes. Structural (e.g. power, media) and personality-specific (e.g. gender, culture, personality traits) determinants of negotiation as well as communication and cognitive processes in negotiation have received a lot of attention. Interestingly, this is not true for the tangible issues in negotiation: Only very few works have touched questions like the number of issues in a negotiation or the agenda into which they assemble.

In her master thesis, which is part of a larger research project on issue management and agenda setting at Freie Universität Berlin, Mireia Prat focuses on the service sector and a cross-cultural comparison between Spain and Germany. Using an exploration oriented, qualitative method based on in-depth interviews with salespeople in various service industries (banking, financial services, management consulting) she tries to shed light on various questions concerning the issues in negotiation. Specifically, she analyzes the following questions:

- (1) Which are the issues that are negotiated during a sale in professional service firms?
- (2) When and how are these issues introduced and why?
- (3) How are these issues negotiated and why?
- (4) Which factors (including culture) influence the negotiation of these issues?

Her most noticeable results include a finding that is contrary to prior conceptual works: Agenda setting in professional service sales negotiation in practice is not driven by negotiation strategic considerations that would advocate simultaneous treatment of the issues, but rather by industry standards. Before talking about and eventually agreeing on price and other commercial conditions, an understanding about the service scope is reached. Consequently, sales negotiations in this industry can be characterized by a division of issues and issue packages. A second interesting finding of the present study pertains to the influence of culture: Despite differences in cultural values and communication context between Germany and Spain, the only noticeable differences in negotiation conduct come from different legislations in both countries.

Overall, Mireia Prat makes a fine contribution to both sales and negotiation research. I wish her master thesis the kind of appreciation among practitioners and scholars that it certainly deserves.

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Prof. Dr. Ingmar Geiger

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Prat, M.

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