

The Principled Project Manager - *Negotiating Strategies*

by Dr. Bill Moylan, PMP

My PM Musings article from September 2021 addressed one of the most important skills of the savvy Project Manager -- the ability to *negotiate* the best outcome that satisfies the needs of all stakeholders for Win-Win-Win. As noted in this article, reaching consensus requires compromises between the parties to meet or exceed the necessary project goals while building and maintaining important relationships among the project stakeholders.

Further, the Principled Project Manager follows the twelve principles detailed in PMI's recently updated *Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge* (PMBOK Guide - 7th edition, 2021) in preparing, executing, and controlling their negotiation scenarios. In particular, the first four principles guide the PM in choosing the appropriate negotiation style.

This month's offering will discuss *negotiation strategies* for the Principled Project Manager to consider. The Project Principles to be followed are the next four of the 12:

- Principal # 5 – Recognize, evaluate, and respond to system interactions
- Principal # 6 – Demonstrate leadership behaviors
- Principal # 7 – Tailor based on context
- Principal # 8 – Build quality into processes and deliverables

[The complete list of the 12 Project Principles is included at the end of this article.]

Negotiation Strategies

Defined strategies can foster successful negotiations. Consider developing and applying these strategies to increase the productivity of your negotiation.

Opening Salvo

The initiating remarks by both sides of the negotiation establish the tenor for the discussion. During the opening remarks, each party should state succinctly their position. Disclosing appropriate information creates a positive environment that is conducive to reaching an agreement. The information shared can include data, research, or any general statements of fact that relate to the negotiation.

For the negotiation to succeed, the goal is to move all parties to a state of agreement, which will likely require both sides to alter their initial positions. Listen intently at the outset to understand the other side's goals. The savvy PM will identify where to change and/or adjust their positions to accommodate without sacrificing their primary goals. The opening salvo requires the PM to recognize, evaluate, and respond appropriately to the interactions of the human forces at work [Principal # 5].

Put on Your Stoic, Objective PM Face

A true test of the Principled Project Manager's leadership metal is remaining respectful of all parties throughout the negotiation, especially when the opinions of others vary greatly from their own. The PM demonstrates their true leadership ability when they remain professional, objective, and calm, while not being swayed by their biases. The Principled Project Manager must maintain an open mind in assessing the other parties' proposals fairly while remaining empathetic to their perspective and positions.

The PM must engage in positive, meaningful dialogue with the intention to reach the desired outcome of the negotiation. This requires listening intently to all parties involved while searching for a mutually beneficial solution; that is, demonstrating the leadership behavior of the Principled Project Manager [Principle #6].

Have the Courage to Let Your Feelings Show

The alpha-fe/male PM disdains letting their feelings show. Conversely, the Principled Project Manager courageously exhibits personal feelings during a negotiation. The PM re-focusing on their own feelings will encourage a positive conversation, regardless of the intensity of the negotiation or the other party's behavior.

The PM can recenter the focus on themselves and how they feel by employing "I" statements. Statements such as "I need your help..." or "I am frustrated we haven't been able to reach an agreement..." humanize the PM. Whenever possible, the PM should recognize any positive steps that their counterparts have already taken. For example, expressing one's thanks for the time commitment and effort required to negotiate. Exhibit an attitude of gratitude; be genuine in expressing one's thanks. The Principled Project Manager tailors their behavior based on the context through self-expression without provoking the other party [Principle #7].

Target the Right Bull's Eye

Planning and scheduling the negotiation is *mission critical*. The negotiation meeting should be at a time and location that is as convenient as possible for everyone involved. It is preferred to meet at a neutral location and/or a mutually agreed place and time. In some instances, morning meetings are preferable when many people may be more energetic and open to new ideas. Avoid meeting after lunch or late in the day when energy levels tend to drop.

As noted, the Principled Project Manager is clear about their goals for the negotiation and can state their understanding of their counterparts' goals. The negotiation should allow everyone with the opportunity to express their goals and desired outcomes. The Principled Project Manager engages in openly discussing options for mutual gain that are acceptable for both sides. They take the time to rank order the acceptability of the options, ensuring that all parties have equal opportunity to input in the process. This ranking approach helps all sides understand which options are the most important to them. It can identify commonalities among negotiating parties, facilitate dialogue, and ensure understanding. The Principled Project Manager follows these techniques to build quality into the negotiation processes and deliverables, which will help ensure favorable outcomes [Principle #8].

My next article will discuss *negotiation tactics* for the Principled Project Management to consider.

As always, your questions, comments and criticisms are welcome. Feel free to contact me in care of email: William.moylan@emich.edu

Best regards,

Dr. Bill

William A Moylan, PhD, PMP, FESD, DTM
Professor Emeritus, Eastern Michigan University / Principal, WA Moylan & Associates

12 Project Principles

1. Be a diligent, respectful, and caring steward
2. Create a collaborative project team environment
3. Effectively engage with stakeholders
4. Focus on value
5. Recognize, evaluate, and respond to system interactions
6. Demonstrate leadership behaviors
7. Tailor based on context
8. Build quality into processes and deliverables
9. Navigate complexity
10. Optimize risk responses
11. Embrace adaptability and resiliency
12. Enable change to achieve the envisioned future state

12 Project Management Principles

PMBOK Guide 7th Edition