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From Positions to Interests: Strategic Negotiation in a Soy Processing Plant Project

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a descriptive case study of a negotiation surrounding the construction of a soybean crushing plant in Mato Grosso do Sul, center western Brazil. The engineering firm needed to handle an intricate communication process with their international contractor who operated through a joint venture that used a package segregation approach for electrical and mechanical and structural work. The company started with a complete electrical project which included design work and material supply and panel installation and labor costs and automation systems but the following discussions brought the project down to basic labor work while the client wanted to buy all materials from foreign suppliers. The transition brought essential problems which included following regulations and obtaining technical approval and dealing with supply chain disruptions and delivery complexities. The company took two steps to solve the problem through customer disclosure of hidden costs and creating new solutions which united process integration with risk management to deliver the highest possible value. The negotiation remains unresolved because it is unknown whether financial limitations or joint solutions will determine the final outcome.

Keywords:

Negotiation; supplier management; product risk mitigation; Brazil.

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1. Introduction

The management of complex industrial projects depends heavily on negotiation because different stakeholders need to find common ground between their conflicting demands for project costs and regulatory requirements and system operational needs. The basic research by Fisher and Ury (1981) and Lax and Sebenius (1986) shows how positional bargaining differs from interest-based negotiation because interest-based negotiation enables parties to discover new possibilities which increase the Zone of Possible Agreement (ZOPA). Raiffa Richardson and Metcalfe (2002) explain that negotiation functions as a two-part system which uses analytical techniques together with team-based efforts to produce exact results and create original solutions. The negotiation process faces obstacles because decision-making biases create problems which affect the negotiation process. Bazerman and Moore (1994) show that managers select wrong solutions because they depend on anchoring and their restricted rational capabilities when making decisions. The final results of bargaining negotiations get affected by both behavioral and tactical elements according to Pruitt (1981) and Shell (2006). Zartman (1988) identifies common structural elements across negotiation processes and Salacuse (2003, 2006) emphasizes the need for leaders to understand cultural differences when negotiating globally. The research on applied negotiation conducted in Brazil has produced important findings through the work of Dias who created systematic models and forecasting methods and Dias and Navarro who used multiple negotiation strategies to study government negotiations. Research findings demonstrate that negotiation results emerge from both financial distribution analysis and maintenance of relationships and fulfillment of legal requirements.

Against this theoretical backdrop, this article presents a descriptive single case study of a negotiation in the construction of a soybean crushing plant. The negotiation outlined takes place in Mato Grosso do Sul, a state located in the Center-Western region of Brazil. The region continues to be essential for agricultural business operations because it offers suitable land for soybean farming and processing through its current cooperative infrastructure and its export-focused market access. The case becomes more detailed because soybean-crushing plants affect the local economy and shows how worldwide supply systems affect the area through its regulatory and logistical systems. The engineering firm-maintained communication with the international contractor who worked through a joint venture that used a package segregation approach for electrical and mechanical and structural work. The company started with a complete electrical project that included design work and material supply and panel installation and labor costs and automation systems but the following discussions brought the project down to basic labor work while the client wanted to purchase all materials from foreign countries. The transition brought essential problems which included following regulations and obtaining technical approval and dealing with supply chain disruptions and delivery complexities. The engineering firm addressed the situation through two new proposals which offered direct material invoicing and a full Revit project at no additional cost and presented the client with different pricing options than their original proposal. These moves sought to reposition the discussion from rigid positions to underlying interests, expanding the ZOPA and weakening the client's BATNA.

The two positions continue their disagreement through ongoing negotiations because they support different approaches to finish the project. The situation shows how positions block

people from understanding actual interests while BATNA analysis reveals hidden threats and new option development methods allow parties to move from competitive dialogue to collaborative value creation. Moreover, the research adopted Dias (2020) typology on the negotiation classification, illustrated in Figure 1:

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

2. Methodology

The research uses qualitative methods which follow Saunders et al. (2009). Their framework provides a systematic approach to define philosophical assumptions and research strategies and data collection techniques which maintains methodological consistency. The research employs qualitative inquiry as its main approach to study negotiation processes by examining participants' meaning systems and their perception and strategic behavior instead of searching for statistical patterns.

The research design uses descriptive methods to study a single case which follows Yin (2004) guidelines for case study research. According to Yin (2004) case studies serve best for studying present-day events which occur in actual settings. In this article, the unit of analysis is the negotiation process itself, specifically the dialogue between an engineering firm and an international contractor operating under a joint venture in the construction of a soybean crushing plant in Mato Grosso do Sul, Center-Western Brazil.

The research data came from three sources which included documentation and meeting records and descriptive accounts of the negotiation process. The research demonstrates how positions and interests and alternatives (BATNA) developed while showing how new options emerged through creative thinking which increased the Zone of Possible Agreement (ZOPA). Finally, due to ethical and compliance reasons, this work maintains ethical standards by completely removing all participant and company identities from the gathered data. The researchers protected participant confidentiality through identity anonymization while following all research integrity guidelines. Finally, the research matches the Type IV negotiation criteria (Dias, 2020).

3. Negotiation Background

The negotiation examined in this study took place in Mato Grosso do Sul, located in the Center-Western region of Brazil. The area now functions as a vital business center which supports agricultural operations and soybean processing activities. The state's fertile lands and logistical corridors have attracted significant investment in industrial plants, making it a natural setting for projects that combine local production with international supply chains. The construction of a soybean crushing plant required an engineering firm to work under international contractor guidance through their joint venture operation.

The contractor used a strategy which distributed project packages between three different suppliers who handled mechanical work and structural work and electrical work. The method implementation distributed project risks among multiple suppliers but it resulted in higher-than-expected costs for mechanical and structural work. The project encountered multiple delays which led to financial difficulties for the electrical work so the client asked for less expensive alternatives. The engineering firm presented an extensive electrical package which would cover design work and material supply and panel construction and labor expenses and automation system implementation. The negotiation process went through different stages until the parties settled on labor-only services but the client insisted on buying materials from international suppliers.

The transition brought multiple major difficulties to the system. The main regulatory challenge emerged from Brazil's requirement for INMETRO[1] certification which applied to all electrical materials. The project encountered technical oversight issues because the client did not have a licensed professional who could perform local project sign-offs. The company needed to handle product storage and inventory management because it faced possible supply chain interruptions because of imported materials becoming scarce. The negotiation process became more complex because different supply chains brought operational difficulties which created problems for system integration and operational velocity.

The engineering firm showed to the client that their proposed solution contained concealed expenses together with security vulnerabilities. The presentation revealed three main project risks which result from prolonged project timelines and failure to meet legal requirements and insufficient management of supply chain operations. The presentation presented two innovative solutions which offered direct material payment and certification assurance and complete Revit project delivery at no extra expense. The established context shows how the negotiation process will face opposition between price-based division and unified value-based approaches because it demonstrates how positions and interests affect each other and how the client loses their best alternative and how value creation can increase the ZOPA.

4. Challenges

The strategy of package segregation adopted by the international contractor revealed itself to be a significant challenge in the development of the industrial project in Mato Grosso do Sul. For the mechanical and structural packages, the contractor chose not to engage the Brazilian partner that

[1] The Brazilian federal autarchy (under the Ministry of Economy) INMETRO (*Instituto Nacional de Metrologia Qualidade e Tecnologia*) responsible for metrology, quality, and conformity assessment, which sets technical standards and performs product and service certification and conformity evaluation. The organization exists to defend consumers through safety protocols which check product reliability and meet all necessary domestic and international standards. The certification process from INMETRO becomes necessary for all industrial projects because it ensures both legal compliance and operational security.

had previously collaborated successfully in another agribusiness project. The contractor needed to prevent themselves from depending on one supplier for their needs. The company encountered unexpected financial problems because they wanted to provide multiple service options which created challenges for their ability to manage electrical work scope negotiations. The contractor started making multiple changes to their electrical proposal because their other construction sites had already developed unexpected expense issues. The project started with a complete scope which contained design work and all materials and panels and labor costs and automation systems but the team made continuous reductions to the scope. The contractor asked to perform an assessment of project labor costs only. The following round brought back materials but removed panels and automation from the testing process. The contractor made his last request by asking for labor-only services while revealing his plan to buy materials directly from foreign suppliers.

The engineering firm showed different solutions which would help them maintain their original project boundaries. The company had two possible solutions which included sending material invoices to customers for direct payment while taking full control of supply chain operations. The proposal included a free Revit project detail which would maintain cross-discipline compatibility when the client accepted the complete package.

The organization needed to determine its most essential risks because they originated from the client's operational business practices. The contractor would need to handle all responsibilities related to storage and security and inventory management and loss protection when materials enter the country through direct importation. The project needed Portuguese language implementation for delivery but the project encountered a regulatory problem because it did not have a local technical expert who could execute signature tasks. The engineering firm needs to establish a separate payment system for technical responsibility which includes complete project verification of client work until all discrepancies get resolved before they can approve the project. The supply chain faced an essential problem because it lacked essential materials while dealing with problems related to inventory accuracy. In projects of this scale, a lack of supply could lead to incompatibility between initial and replacement materials, jeopardizing performance and safety. The last essential element which decided the results was regulatory compliance. The Brazilian government demands INMETRO certification for electrical materials which get used in explosive environments that need classification and for all cabling systems. The use of un-certified imported materials would create major legal issues while endangering the safety of the public. The negotiation theory shows how this sequence demonstrates the conflict between negotiation positions and actual interests which Fisher and Ury (1981) first described in their book Getting to Yes. The contractor based its cost reduction approach on risk management and project sustainability and regulatory compliance. The engineering firm used its strategy to reveal these concealed interests which would shift the negotiation process from distributive bargaining toward integrative problem-solving according to Lax and Sebenius (1986) and Raiffa et al. (2002).

5. Negotiation rounds and ZOPA

In the first round of negotiation, the scope was the supply of the entire electrical package, including engineering, materials, electrical panels (CCM format 2B and PLC with Siemens WinCC), and automation services - Value: R$24,500,000.00 (approximately $4,5 million).
In the Second Round, only labor was requested, without the supply of materials - Amount R$9,500,000.00. There was an intermediate round, but it was not officially dealt with; only a consultation on how the values of the electrical panels in 4B format with fixed drawers, PLC with Siemens PC7, and automation service would be R$12,890,000.00 (approximately $ 2.3 million)
In the next round of the Labor Only proposal, however, given the outstanding amounts and the removal of the electrical panel and automation service package, two options were presented: the modality of buying everything through Contractor and the Direct Billing modality. In the modality in which Contractor acquires everything, the value was R$13. 964,000.00 and in the direct billing modality R$ 12,890,000.00 (approximately $ 2.3 million).
The ZOPA considered in this scope by Contractor is in the direct billing modality, in which it assumes some risks; however, there is no disbursement and consequently does not require a high cash flow, with the expected value for closing of R$11,500,000.00 (approximately $ 2.1 million) to R$12,890,000.00 (approximately $ 2.3 million). It is worth noting that, as an option in the direct billing modality, Contractor proposed managing all supplies and logistics for the materials. In this way, what is achieved as a discount with suppliers will be a profit for the Contractor. Likewise, if it exceeds the stipulated materials value, the Contractor bears the cost.

6. Case status

Based on the case narrative as outlined, the negotiation remained unresolved at the time of analysis. The international contractor maintained its demand for price decreases and foreign procurement of materials while the engineering firm attempted to shift the conversation by revealing concealed project dangers and presenting two alternative solutions which included direct payment and a complimentary Revit project. The international contractor maintained its demand for price decreases while it wanted to acquire all necessary materials from foreign suppliers but the engineering firm tried to shift the conversation by revealing concealed project dangers and providing two new proposal options which included direct payment and a complete Revit project without any price increase. The deadlock between these two parties demonstrated how their bargaining approach between positional bargaining and interest-based negotiation created a conflict because the contractor focused on short-term cost reduction yet its actual needs for project success and risk management and regulatory compliance required the engineering firm's collaborative approach. The situation exists as an ongoing dialogue because the parties had not reached a final agreement which makes the unfinished state of the case important for studying how negotiations progress in complicated industrial construction projects.

7. Discussion and Implications

The negotiation process in this case study shows how industrial projects become difficult to negotiate because financial constraints interact with regulatory needs and operational difficulties. The present negotiation status demonstrates how bargaining procedures evolve through time which requires parties to focus on interest-based approaches instead of defending their current

positions. The authors Fisher and Ury (1981) explain that successful negotiation involves distinguishing between positions and interests while this situation shows how fixed cost-based positions hide the actual issues which include following rules and handling risks and sustaining the project.

The Brazilian academic community has developed negotiation research which provides essential knowledge for this particular situation. Dias (2020b) developed predictive models which enable organizations to handle their intangible assets during negotiations and Dias Leitão Batista and Medeiros (2022) applied statistical techniques to analyze Brazilian business negotiations which showed how data analysis exposes negotiation patterns. The research conducted by Cunha and Dias (2021) demonstrated that contractors who observe their negotiations with precision will achieve vital outcomes which lead to successful negotiations. The research conducted by Delgado and Dias (2025) analyzed technology market negotiations between buyers and sellers to validate that successful negotiations need sellers to adjust their approach according to the particular circumstances of each situation. These studies provide a robust foundation for interpreting the engineering firm's strategy in this case, which blended distributive transparency with integrative creativity.

The case study matches findings from research about value creation and destruction which scientists have studied in negotiation and its connected disciplines. The research by Carvalho and Dias (2025) determined which organizational elements drive companies to select serious games for their corporate training initiatives. The authors Carvalho, Dias and Schmitz (2025) analyzed digital solution value creation through their investigation of opposing systems. Their research indicates that industrial negotiation patterns exist between their study and industrial negotiations because strategies which seem to save money can actually damage both employee adherence and workplace performance. The research by Chacur and Dias (2025) about luxury market value perception demonstrated that customer views determine what happens during negotiation processes. The research findings about risk perception and compliance and technical responsibility apply to industrial settings which affect how parties negotiate and maintain their agreements.

Dias (2021) analyzed how COVID-19 pandemic conditions made internal negotiations more powerful because staff members developed greater empathy which proved that organizational bargaining success relies on employee empathy levels and their workplace connections. The organization needs to adopt this method because the engineering firm must address client issues directly instead of engaging in power struggles between staff members. Côrrea Santana and Dias (2025) studied private equity deal-making to show that financial market negotiation principles help industrial projects obtain short-term cost reductions which generate long-term value. The results from this situation create effects which reach past the field of negotiation research. The research shows that package segregation methods generate risks for project management yet suppliers who function as a single entity will achieve superior results. The study demonstrates how INMETRO functions as a certification body which determines negotiation results through its regulatory authority in legal and regulatory studies according to Cavalieri Filho (2011) who studied consumer law and compliance. International business needs organizations to understand how their global sourcing operations must follow both local market laws and cultural norms of

each region. The framework allows organizational behavior researchers to study how strategic choices under urgent circumstances impact both individual prejudices and planned strategic decisions.

The research adds value to negotiation studies because it demonstrates how positions and interests and BATNA and ZOPA affect each other during negotiations in an industrial setting. The research extends Dias and his team's work by showing how negotiation models and predictive methods and value-creation frameworks operate for industrial projects that must adhere to rigid regulatory requirements. Research should investigate how these frameworks function in different business sectors including energy and telecommunications and infrastructure because these industries experience similar negotiation challenges because of compliance requirements and logistical needs and cultural elements. The research provides essential information which helps negotiation scientists and engineering specialists and legal professionals and international business executives who need to manage complex projects that involve multiple stakeholders.

8. Lessons Learned

The negotiation process delivered multiple essential lessons which apply to both current situations and future cases to help negotiation theory and industrial practice. The most important lesson teaches us to measure all expenses which exist beneath the surface. The engineering firm showed that the client's initial choice of labor-only services with Chinese material procurement presented major security threats. The expenses for translation and redesign work together with the costs of obtaining technical responsibility and INMETRO certification non-compliance risks and on-site management of imported materials and supply chain delays and disciplinary work separation costs all exceeded the initial cost benefits. The company proved that monetary risks would result in major financial damage through their complete risk assessment procedure.

Another lesson lies in the strategic positioning of the supplier. The engineering firm took on a risk reduction and compliance guardian role instead of following the standard vendor model. The company repositioned its services to show that customers who select the complete package would obtain Portuguese project execution and proper technical oversight and INMETRO-approved materials and site-based material control and a complete Revit project with complete compatibility. The organization developed a partnership-based negotiation system through this method which applied integrative negotiation techniques to expand the number of possible agreements.

The case also highlighted the value of precedent and empathy in negotiation. The company proved its operational efficiency through its successful merger in the project. The presentation showed the client how mechanical and structural packages had become more costly while demonstrating to him how electrical work expenses would rise when the company divided its projects into smaller sections. The combination of empathetic understanding with strategic negotiation methods made a stronger argument for integration and local collaboration.

The organization discovered that organizations need to maintain complete openness as their core requirement. The client could perform a complete and fair price comparison because the business displayed prices in an open and itemized format. The company revealed its pricing system to the parties who then abandoned their discussion about material costs because they needed to see the entire service package which included protection systems against upcoming expenses.

The case study shows that organizations need to establish immediate action through risk exposure according to the case study. The electrical scope decision brought permanent changes which affected safety protocols and system operation but kept all required legal standards. The selection of wrong materials together with assigning technical work to wrong personnel will cause project delays which will trigger financial penalties that damage the contractor's reputation in Brazil. The engineering firm transformed the negotiation process through its proposal which it presented as a financial investment that would stop losses while providing customers with peace of mind.

Industrial negotiations need more than cost reduction because they must deal with complicated systems and follow established rules and combine various components. The authors demonstrate to suppliers how they can apply transparency and precedent and empathy and risk quantification to convert standard bargaining into interest-based negotiation which generates value while safeguarding their future commercial opportunities.

9. Conclusion

The negotiation analysis in this case study shows how cost optimization strategies need to be balanced with the essential requirements of project compliance and integration and risk management in industrial construction. The international contractor tried to achieve diversification and cost reduction through fragmented sourcing but this approach brought unexpected risks which threatened the long-term sustainability of the electrical scope. The engineering firm showed how negotiation should progress from starting with initial positions to solving problems based on interests through their method which combined cost evaluation with risk management and complete system optimization. The unresolved status of the negotiation is itself analytically significant. The process shows that parties do not always close negotiations right away because negotiations serve as an active space which enables them to adjust their positions while they disclose their true interests and discover new possible solutions. The engineering firm demonstrated its role as a protector of compliance and risk reduction to show that successful negotiations depend on building trust through open communication between partners. The research study adds value to negotiation science through its validation of BATNA and ZOPA and integrative bargaining methods while it builds upon Brazilian research about structured negotiation models and predictive methods. The process demonstrates that industrial negotiations involve more than financial transactions because they depend on both legal systems and workplace conditions and social traditions. The case shows that negotiation produces its best results through future protection of results instead of obtaining short-term budget reductions. The research helps practitioners learn about risk identification methods through open dialogue which enables them to conduct negotiations based on personal needs instead of sticking to fixed positions. The research enables scholars to study how negotiation theory interacts with compliance and logistics and cultural adaptation which creates new opportunities for academic and professional development.

10. Limitations and Future research

The research study contains detailed information which demonstrates how negotiations function in industrial construction projects but it contains specific restrictions. The negotiation failed to reach a resolution when analysts conducted their assessment which prevented them from assessing the complete results and extended effects of the process. The financial comparison results and risk assessment calculations produce less accurate results because of this limitation.

Research should focus on studying negotiations which achieve their goals to enable scientists to study both successful and unsuccessful negotiation results. The research would gain more value from studies which track negotiation method evolution across time while analyzing how parties adjust their initial positions and desires because of external factors. The research should analyze negotiation results from different business sectors including energy and telecommunications and infrastructure development to understand how compliance requirements and logistics management and cultural differences affect negotiation results.

The research combines quantitative models which Dias (2020, 2020b, 2020c) and Dias et al. (The research by (2022) provides a method to enhance negotiation analysis predictive strength which enables better identification of concealed expenses and potential risks. Research that combines different fields shows great potential as a new approach. The research conducted by Carvalho and Dias (2025) and Carvalho and his colleagues (2025) about digital environment value creation and destruction and luxury market consumer perceptions (Chacur & Dias, 2025) shows that negotiation results stem from how parties view value and their trust levels and their level of integration. The research results demonstrate how industrial negotiations function when reputation and empathy and transparency interact with physical elements which consist of cost and compliance. Research studies which examine different cultural environments and regulatory frameworks would demonstrate how organizations must adjust their negotiation methods according to their institutional structure. The research case shows how to negotiate effectively for industrial project development but future studies should broaden their investigation scope and improve their research methods and create connections between different academic disciplines. The research will enhance negotiation theory while delivering operational advice which helps experts handle complex negotiations that involve multiple parties across different environments.

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