Basic principles of negotiation

Negotiation is the way to get what you want from someone else, usually through verbal communication. We negotiate every day - with a market vendor, with our friends or relatives in deciding what to eat or where and when to travel. American authors Roger Fisher and William Ury developed a model of economic negotiation in 1981 that has become extremely famous. Essentially, they proposed four principles of negotiation (Fisher and Ury, 1981):

1) **Separate people from the problem.** The relationship (the "people") is separate from any conflict (the "problem") one has. By untying the relationship from the problem, the possibility of misunderstandings and negative emotions affecting the negotiation is reduced. Relational problems, if they are present, must be dealt with by separating them from substantive issues.

2) **Focus on interests and not positions.** Interests are the underlying needs, desires, wills, values or fears. Interests motivate people, but individuals often remain in certain positions. Many countries declare that they "do not negotiate with terrorists". This is a position, but the underlying interests are tied to personal security concerns and fears. In conflict, individuals and groups often take only one position and it is difficult to negotiate compromises on various positions. Behind the positions there are multiple interests and focusing on interests allows negotiators to create other possibilities of acceptable solutions.

3) **Inventing possibilities for the parties to benefit from it.** This takes creativity and effort to brainstorm options that will be acceptable to both sides. In brainstorming, negotiators need to separate the option evaluation phase from the creation phase. Both sides need to expand the number of options they can and don't have to look for just one. Both parties must also think about options that would suit the interests of the other party.

4) **Insist on the use of objective criteria.** It is often possible to identify many standards or criteria by which the parties will be able to assess the fairness or acceptability of a negotiated agreement. Negotiators can brainstorm the criteria just as they did the options.

Fisher and Ury also invented the **BATNA concept**. This is a term that refers to the **Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement**. An alternative is different from an option - it refers to a possible course of action if a negotiated agreement is not obtained. The BATNA works as your bottom line as a negotiator and helps determine whether or not trading is the best option. To make BATNA useful, negotiators need to carefully analyze its costs and benefits, and then compare them with those of a negotiated agreement. If individuals or groups think they can adopt another method as a bottom line (e.g., one stroke, violence, legal options) they will resort to it and not use a collaborative method for negotiation.

This trading model has some shortcomings. First, this is a culturally specific model of negotiation. Second, this model does not address issues of power or imbalance.

Source: *Peacebuilding, un manuale formativo Caritas* - Caritas Internationalis - Caritas diocesana di Roma - Servizio Educazione Pace e Mondialità (S.E.P.M.)