
FILM ADAPTATIONS ON INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMACY AND KEY NEGOTIATION

LESSONS: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

Introductory negotiation courses, in addition to being taught in law and business schools, are taught to undergraduates and in all types of corporate settings. The basic elements of a negotiation exercise remain fairly similar. The paper seeks to use film adaptations as a model for teaching and applying key negotiation lessons in international diplomacy. The paper analyses an episode of a US television series, named 'Madame Secretary' created by Barbara Hall. The reason for choosing this particular script is its close resemblance to reality in the episode presented. The research methodology uses mainly two sources as references: articles published by the Harvard Law School on its daily blog on the 'Program on Negotiation' and scripts from the series have been used as a primary source.

Keywords: Film adaptations on diplomacy, Celebrity Diplomacy, Navigating Inter-Cultural Barriers

“Be the change that you wish to see in the world.”

Mahatma Gandhi

**Film Adaptations On International Diplomacy and Key Negotiation Lessons:
A Case Study**

Madam Secretary (subtitled Madam President for its sixth and final season) is an American political drama television series created by Barbara Hall with Morgan Freeman and Lori McCreary as executive producers. It stars Téa Leoni as Elizabeth McCord, a former CIA analyst and political science professor who becomes the United States Secretary of State. It ran on CBS from September 21, 2014 to December 8, 2019, for a total of 120 aired episodes. (Hall, 2014 to 2019)

Background of Case

We choose Season 1 Episode 11, titled “Game On.” Elizabeth decides to visit Venezuela to uncover former Secretary of State Vincent Marsh’s bank account after learning that one of Elizabeth’s staff members has access to it. The President of Venezuela, President Suarez hates the US and has declined the request to visit. His exact words are “your imperialist propaganda is not welcome here.”

Close Resemblance to Actual Political Situation of Venezuela

Venezuela: Political Landscape

The crisis in Venezuela has deepened under the authoritarian rule of Nicolás Maduro, who has consolidated power despite presiding over a dire economic and humanitarian crisis. (Congressional Research Service, 2021)

In Venezuela, the government of President Nicolás Maduro and the opposition are engaged in a bitter power struggle. Leader of the opposition, Juan Guaidó declared himself as acting president on 23 January 2019. The move was a direct challenge to the power of President Maduro, who had been sworn in to a second six-year term in office just two weeks previously. (BBC News, 2021)

Why is the presidency disputed?

Nicolás Maduro was first elected in April 2013 after the death of his socialist mentor and predecessor in office, Hugo Chávez. At the time, he won by just 1.6 percentage points. During his first term, the economy went into freefall and many Venezuelans blame him and his socialist government for the country's decline. Mr Maduro was re-elected to a second six-year term in May 2018 in highly controversial polls, which most opposition parties boycotted.

Many candidates had been barred from running while others had been jailed or fled the country for fear of being imprisoned, and the opposition parties argued that the poll was neither free nor fair. Mr Maduro's re-election was not recognized by the opposition-controlled National Assembly, which labelled Mr Maduro a "usurper" and argued that the presidency was vacant.

Citing articles in the constitution, which in such cases call for the leader of the National Assembly to step in, Juan Guaidó declared himself acting president. More than 50 countries recognized Mr Guaidó as the legitimate president, among them the US and many nations in Latin America. But Russia and China, among others, stood by President Maduro. Not surprisingly, President Maduro did not take kindly to his rival's move, which he condemned as a ploy by the US to oust him. (BBC News, 2021)

Venezuela - Economic Landscape

The South American country has been caught in a downward spiral for years with growing political discontent further fuelled by skyrocketing hyperinflation, power cuts, and shortages of food and medicine. When Mr Chávez became president in 1999, he promised, among other things, to drive down Venezuela's huge levels of inequality. While he managed to reduce inequality during his time in power, some of the socialist policies he brought in backfired. Take price controls, for example, which were aimed at making basic goods more affordable to the poor by capping the price of flour, cooking oil and toiletries. The controls meant that many Venezuelan businesses stopped production because they no longer made a profit, eventually resulting in shortages. A loosening of foreign currency controls originally brought in by

President Chávez in 2003 eased those shortages as traders can sell goods in dollars, but that meant they again became largely unaffordable to the poor or those without access to the US currency.

Years of lack of investment in infrastructure further exacerbated by the more recent US sanctions on Venezuela's oil sector crippled this key industry, which provides almost all of Venezuela's government revenue. (BBC News, 2021)

The Trump administration extended sanctions to the Central Bank of Venezuela, cutting off the bank's access to United States currency and limiting its ability to conduct international financial transactions in order to further squeeze the finances of the government led by President Nicolás Maduro. (Krauss, 2019)

Venezuela has been in the grip of an economic crisis for years now with hyperinflation being one of the main problems. Business news website Bloomberg has been tracking the price of a cup of coffee in the Venezuelan capital, Caracas, to show how prices have increased. It measured an increase of 2,597% in the 12 months leading to 1 August 2021 with a cup of coffee costing 7.8 million bolivares. More than 5.6 million Venezuelans have left the country in recent years. (BBC News, 2021)

Table 1: Actual case of Venezuela in comparison to Simulated Case of Venezuela presented in the adaptation

Actual Case of Venezuela	Simulated Case of Venezuela presented in the adaptation
Anti-government protests with members of the opposition fleeing	Anti-government protests, 15 opposition leaders placed under house arrest
President Maduro prevails at the presidential palace despite resistance	President Suarez talks of cancelling upcoming elections
The Economy is in crises with Venezuelan firms holding US dollars to shield themselves from hyper-inflation are paying as much as 7% to move those funds overseas. Venezuelans are increasingly using Dollars and Euros in cash for day-to-day transactions	Economy in crises

(Source: Author’s summary)

Simulated Problems At Hand In The Episode

1. Elicit an invite from the President
2. To convince holding of free elections
3. To navigate the dilemma of the Chief of Staff being an unauthorised signatory
4. To counteract the threat at the negotiation table

Solutions For Navigating Inter-Cultural Barriers At The Negotiation Table

1. **Research your counterpart’s background and experience** (PON STAFF, 2022)
2. **Enlist a mediator/advisor from the counterpart’s culture** (PON STAFF, 2022)
3. **Changing the narrative**
4. **Responding to a threat** (PON STAFF, 2021)

Solution 1- Research your counterpart's background and experience

NEGOTIATION PRINCIPLE	SITUATION AT HAND	SOLUTION
Research your counterpart's background and experience		
Research your counterpart's background and experience - For help in overcoming cultural barriers in business, a little homework to learn who your negotiation partner will be and finding out some details about his/her background and experience will help.	In this context, President Suarez is a baseball fan and craves fame and adoration. He's a fanatic and coaches the Venezuelan National team.	Celebrity Diplomacy - The team assisting the Secretary decides to use baseball as a bridge between nations. In this case, Manny Azucco, Venezuelan - American is asked to help out in the diplomatic mission.

Achieved Outcome: To elicit an invite from the counterpart.

Solution 2- Enlist a mediator from the counterpart’s culture

NEGOTIATION PRINCIPLE	SITUATION AT HAND	SOLUTION
Enlist a mediator from the counterpart's culture		
<p>Enlist a mediator from the counterpart's culture - If you discover that the person with whom you are likely to be negotiating has little or no international or cross-cultural experience, consider enlisting someone from his culture to serve as your "second" in negotiations. Plan out signals in advance to indicate when you should take a break for additional advice. In this manner, your cultural "guide" can help you size up the situation, coach you as needed, and even interject if he feels you have made an egregious error or misinterpretation. (PON STAFF, 2022)</p>	<p>Hostile reception by President Suarez</p>	<p>Interjection by Manny Azucco, on signals received from the Secretary.</p>

Achieved Outcome: To navigate hostile treatment by counterpart at negotiation-table.

Solution 3 – Changing the Narrative & Responding to a threat

NEGOTIATION PRINCIPLE	SITUATION AT HAND	SOLUTION
Changing the Narrative & Responding to a threat		
Changing the Narrative & Responding to a threat - Ignoring a threat and changing the narrative can be one way to respond to a threat.	Manny Azucco's statement to the press goes otherwise. President Suarez cancels the visit and disavows everything agreed upon. In addition he threatens to get the Chief of Staff, Nadine arrested on grounds of suspicion for dealing with a suspicious account.	Given the dilemma of the involvement of the Chief of staff. Elizabeth responds by changing the narrative into the context of lax security procedures at Venezuelan banks.

Achieved Outcome: Navigating the dilemma of Chief of Staff being an unauthorised signatory & thereby responding to a threat at negotiation table.

Facing the Threats and Focusing On Common Interests

Direct counterattacks are rarely said to be the answer to threats. Threats may not be as powerful or credible as the other side's, or they could launch an uncontrollable spiral of conflict. Alternatively, being tempted to immediately concede to your opponent's demands, would only reinforce his domineering tactics. (PON STAFF, 2021)

The DEAL approach allows you to respond to threats without conveying weakness or escalating the conflict, redirecting talks toward a focus on each other's interests.

D – Diagnose the threat

E – Express Understanding

A – Ask questions

L – Label the negotiation threat

When All Else Fails

Despite your best efforts, sometimes an aggressor will respond only to aggression. In this case, issue a counter threat to establish your credibility and then immediately shift the focus to identifying each other's interests, thereby preventing an entrenched battle.

A mix of contentious and conciliatory communication can be extremely effective in negotiation. (PON STAFF, 2021)

NEGOTIATION PRINCIPLE	SITUATION AT HAND	SOLUTION
Counter threat - When all else fails		
Counter threat - When all else fails	Elizabeth changes the narrative saying she's here to indict President Suarez on grounds pertaining to Venezuelan banks and is gathering information for a broader investigation.	Given Venezuela's dependence on USD, she phone's treasury department on measures relating to currency conversion. Thereby, persuading him to hold elections.

Achieved Outcome: Counterpart agrees to hold elections.

NEGOTIATION PRINCIPLE	SITUATION AT HAND	SOLUTION
Shifting Focus to Identifying Common Interests		
Shifting Focus to Identifying Common Interests - Immediately shifting the focus to identifying each other's interests, thereby preventing an entrenched battle.	Elizabeth assures the President, to advocate on his behalf to the Justice Department and focuses the attention on Manny Azucco playing for the national team of Venezuela.	Elizabeth's team focuses on using damage control after the press conference and leverages the publicity gained by Manny Azucco and him being a national pride.

Achieved Outcome: Leveraging celebrity diplomacy, thereby focusing on common interest and maintaining relationships.

Conclusions

As members of organisations and families, we all know from experience that even people with identical backgrounds can have vastly differing negotiating styles and values. Nonetheless, we continue to be intrigued by the idea that distinct patterns emerge between negotiators from different cultures. Researchers do confirm a relationship between national culture and negotiation style and success. Even with a common language and the best of intentions, negotiators from different cultures face special challenges. In the simulated model discussed, an instance of using, 'Celebrity Diplomacy' to elicit an invite and overcome barriers in hostile situations have been discussed. Despite best efforts, when all else fails, sometimes an aggressor will respond only to aggression. In this case, issuing a counter threat to establish credibility and then immediately shifting the focus to identifying each other's interests, thereby preventing an entrenched battle. A mix of contentious and conciliatory communication can be extremely effective in negotiation.

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