

CHARTERED MANAGEMENT INSTITUTION
DIPLOMA IN MANAGEMENT

UNIT 5002
INFORMATION BASED DECISION MAKING



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History of the Defence Academy

The Defence Academy is the UK Defence's Higher Educational Institution - and a key component of operational capability. The Academy is comprised of the Royal College of Defence Studies, the Joint Services Command and Staff College, the Defence College of Management and Technology, the Advanced Research and Assessment Group, and the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Centre. The Academy has three strategic partners – King's College London, Serco Defence and Aerospace, and Cranfield University – who provide our academic and facilities support. The Joint Services Command and Staff College (JSCSC) trains the future commanders and staff officers of all three UK Armed Services and those from many countries around the world.

Serco are a facilities management company contracted by the MOD to run various aspects of the JSCSC. They provide support through training services, logistics, estates, finance, travel and Sports and fitness.

I am employed by Serco to run the JSCSC fitness suite and sports fields. My role at the college is Head of Sports and Fitness. I am a lone worker, I have no staff and report to my line manager only.

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Part A Gathering, Selecting and Storing Information

Why gather, select and store information?

Element 1 – explaining information and how I deal with it.

According to Jones in my self study guide, you would not be able to plan, organise, lead or control effectively unless you have access to information. In order to manage information effectively you need to be able to gather, store and use it properly. To manage effectively you need information. within organisations, we are surrounded by lots of information but in order to be efficient and effective we have to concentrate on actually gathering the information we need, making decisions on it, recording it and storing it for retrieval any time.

What is information?

According to your dictionary online (<http://www.yourdictionary.com/data>), data can be defined as facts or figures to be processed; evidence, records, statistics, etc. from which conclusions can be inferred and information in a form suitable for storing and processing by a computer. Data is basically statistics based on information. Data only becomes information when it is processed to be meaningful, processed for a reason and understood by the recipient.

There are many different definitions for information; according to the online dictionary (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/information>), information can be defined as knowledge communicated or received concerning a particular fact or circumstance. Information can only be obtained when data has been analysed.

Information in my job role

Information is important to me within Serco for a number of reasons. I am responsible for running the fitness suite and outside sports areas. In order for me to know who is entitled to use the fitness suite I need to receive nominal roles with individuals information on prior to the induction taking place. Without the nominal roles I will not know who is using the fitness suite and who is insured. I also need pitch reports from my ground staff on every Monday morning so I can get things fixed or sort out any problems that are going on outside. I write a monthly report each month for the sports facilities and I need to be able to report usage statistics and issues that have come up in the area in order to keep the MOD authorities informed on the service that is being provided within JSCSC. Information is therefore important to me not only from a health and safety aspect but also for passing processed data on to be looked over each month. In short, information is important to me so:

- I can monitor progress against agreed targets
- Ensuring I am kept up to date with everything
- It allows me to make better decisions and deal with actual potential issues
- I can plan and allocate work more efficiently
- I can meet the customer's needs or questions they might have.

Types of information

There are two main type of information which are qualitative and quantitative. According to my self study guide quantitative information is normally in figures and asks questions. Quantitative information comes in to me on a daily basis but becomes hard facts at the end of the month when the data collected has been processed. I use quantitative data in my job to produce monthly statistics on the following:

- Individual sports pitch usage
- Equipment usage within the fitness suite
- Timings of individual usage within the fitness suite
- Break down of equipment

I keep record of this information on my hard drive and this is compiled into necessary charts and graphs which go into the monthly report for the authorities to see. The information is also important for the asset renewal and refresh purposes. The information is also useful to monitor patterns and trends of use to make sure there is enough support to cope with demand.

Qualitative information is normally based on information that cannot be expressed in figures and answers. This information could be a detailed report on the inspections of the grounds I receive each week. The information will tell me where the issues are outside and what needs doing however, it will not tell me when the issue came up and what time or how many times the issue has occurred. Qualitative information will be the risk assessments and working procedures for myself and the fitness suite. This information will detail what I do for my job and the risk assessment will detail likely risks within the fitness suite and outdoor facilities. What these pieces of information won't tell me is when and what time I carry out my jobs or how many incidents there have been in the areas of my control.

Primary and Secondary Information

Information can come from two basic sources – primary and secondary. Primary information is that gathered by myself for my own work purposes and could include meetings, customer surveys, focus groups, statistics of usage and networking with other colleagues.

Secondary information is information gathered by other people for their own purposes and I use it for my work. This may include published literature, journals and figures. According to my self study guide, some secondary information may be more accurate than that which I would produce.

I use mostly primary information within my job. I gather the information myself and it is specific to my role. The only real secondary information I use is the manufacturers published guidelines for maintenance and refresh of fitness equipment.

Element 2 – analysing storage and protection of information

Why Store Information

Since the improvements in IT, there has been a huge growth in information activity and it has also become much easier to store. There are a few reasons why we store information and they appear to be:

- Operational needs – such as customer files, personnel files, training records etc.
- Financial needs – such as budgets, stock values, financial reports etc.

Storage Systems

Once information has been collected and used, it must be stored somewhere so that in the situation whereby you need to retrieve it, you can do so easily. Depending on the information you need to retrieve depends on where it may be stored.

Manual – libraries store books, parliamentary debates are printed in full etc. there are some drawbacks to the manual system which include the issue of space. Manual storage can be made more efficient by using:

- High density storage
- Automated systems
- Transfer to less bulky media

Electronic storage – computer based information technology has made entirely new ways of storing and retrieving data and information:

- Magnetic type
- Magnetic disks
- Hard disks
- ROM
- RAM
- USB

What I use

I hold various types of information for various reasons in various ways in my role. I have induction logs that's people sign once they have had their induction to say they are free and safe to use the fitness suite. This information is paper based and held in a filing cabinet in my office for up to a year. Once the year is up the individual must complete another induction. I keep monthly statistics on the number of times and at what times the fitness suite is used and how frequently each piece of kit or sports pitch is used. This information is gathered from booking in sheets which I then transfer onto a specific system I have on the P drive on my computer which is password protected. I keep daily safety check records also locked away in my filing cabinet and these are paper based. I keep electronic copies of all my POR forms (Purchase Order Request Forms) and monthly reports on my H drive which is password protected. My password is protected on my computer by my individual PIC number. In theory I have two passwords to my computer. I also change my password every 60 days. Every time I leave my office I lock my computer and every time I go home I lock my computer, filing cabinet and office. Luckily working in an MOD establishment means that people can only access certain things from others computers. Everyone has restricted access levels based on their needs.

Data Protection

According to Direct Gov (http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/RightsAndResponsibilities/DG_10028507) the Data Protection Act regulates how your personal information is used and protects you from misuse of your personal details. It provides a common-sense set of rules which prohibit the misuse of your personal information without stopping it being used for legitimate or beneficial purposes. The details of the Data Protection Act are quite complex, but at the heart of it are eight common-sense rules known as the Data Protection Principles.

These require personal information to be:

- fairly and lawfully processed
- processed for limited purposes
- adequate, relevant and not excessive
- accurate
- not kept longer than necessary
- processed in accordance with your rights
- kept secure
- not transferred abroad without adequate protection

Protection

All information I keep is held in accordance with the data protection act. My password is protected on my computer my individual PIC number. In theory I have two passwords to my computer. I also change my password every 60 days. Every time I leave my office I lock my computer and every time to go home I lock my computer, filing cabinet and office. Luckily working in an MOD establishment means that people can only access certain things from others computers. Everyone has restricted access levels based on their needs.

Serco

The Director Support Services (DSS), Business Assurance Manager and Line Managers are responsible for identifying records to be retained and to ensure appropriate storage and disposition. Records shall be held in such a way as to facilitate ready retrieval and protection from damage, deterioration or loss and where possible held electronically. A master list containing details of records held, titles, locations, retention periods and disposal shall be maintained by the Business Assurance Manager. Records may be held in paper files or electronically. The retention period and means of disposal for individual records shall be as indicated on the master list. This period shall be determined through consultation between the document owner and the Business Assurance Manager and shall be based upon any statutory or industry best practice where applicable, or according to the needs to satisfy the contract requirements.

Element 3 – analysing specific information

What Information

The information I am going to use is nominal roles which I collate from new courses starting within the college and from individual inductions within the fitness suite.

How I access it

The information from new courses is passed to me on a spreadsheet via e mail from the course leaders. When in the fitness suite the information is filled out in a form which gets put in the filing cabinet.

When I use it

The problem is that not all the information is in the same place. I can access both sets quickly but they are not collated into one document. There are separate documents for each course stored on my system and then there are separate sheets for MOD, Serco and dependants filed in the cabinet.

Improvements

I could collate all the information and input it all in to one database. I could have one document and two spreadsheets within the document. I could use one spreadsheet to input short course information and one for permanent staff or people here for longer than a year. this way I can save space as all the information will be stored on the system, it will save me time just looking in one place and it is easier to read and sort.

Deciding If Information is Necessary

Selecting information is important before you can decide how to use it and what you need from it. My self study guide contains criteria by which I can judge a piece of information I receive on a regular basis. The example I am going to use is new vacancies e mails.

Criteria	Evaluation
Relevant	This information is relevant to most people in Serco can move around the company because they have similar jobs. To me this isn't relevant as my job is too specific. The e mail gets sent round to all Serco staff so I have to just live with receiving them
Current	The e mails are current and hot from HR. everyone can see the e mail at the same time.
Adequate	The information is full of all the essential details and contact information should you wish to move around the company.
Timely	The information is ready available as its right in front of me or on the business management system on the Serco intranet.
Reliable	The information is reliable as it comes from HR.

Part B Using Information to Make Informed Decisions

What is Decision Making?

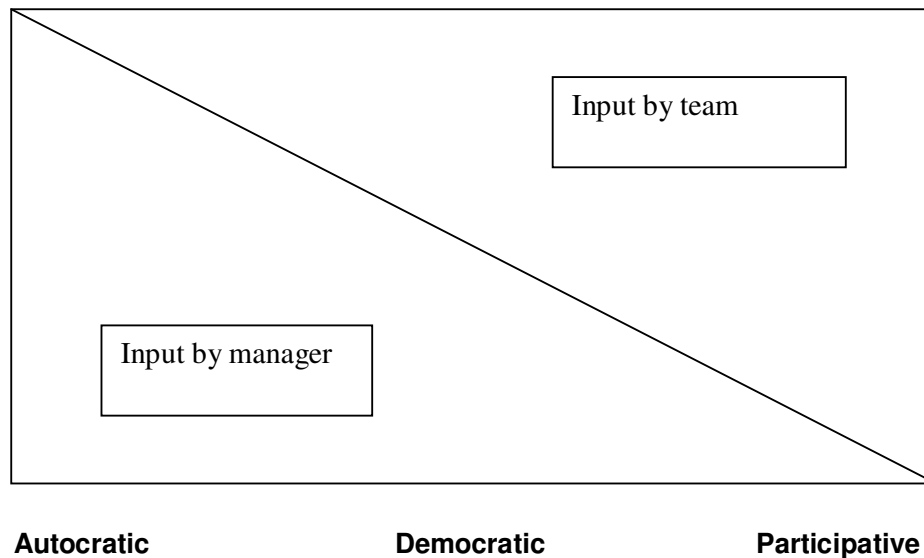
Decision making is the cognitive process leading to the selection of a course of action among variations. Every decision making process produces a final choice (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decision_making). Good decision making is an essential skill for career success generally. If you can learn to make timely and well-considered decisions, then you can often earn well-deserved success. However, if you make poor decisions you are more likely to be in trouble and not asked again.

Decision making styles

There are 3 main decision making styles which include the following:

1. **Autocratic** - decisions made predominantly by the manager
2. **Democratic** – decisions based on discussions by the manager and others involved
3. **Participative** – these are decisions made predominantly by those involved and overseen by the manager.

These decision making styles can best be explained looking at the model below.



My decision making style very much depends on the situation or problem in hand. According to the learning style questionnaire filled out in the induction session I prefer a more autocratic/pragmatic style of learning and thinking. As I am the head of my department, 80% of decisions I make come down to me and me only so I need to take an autocratic approach. If the problem/situation is a little more complicated I tend to have to confer with another party in order to have all the information and facts to make a good decision. A few examples of decisions I have made can be seen in the chart below:

Process of Decision Making

My process for decision making could be a lot better and well structured by not jumping in with two feet using a seven step style approach from my self study guide. Using this tool I will assess a situation:

Steps	Conclusion
1. Recognition or Decision Requirement	Start running new fitness classes in the am
2. Diagnosis and Analysis of Causes	Complaints that current class times don't suit people and they want morning sessions which they can easily attend
3. Development of Alternatives	Change working day routine to offer two early sessions prior to lectures. Hire more staff to sun the sessions
4. Selecting an alternative	Change working day routine to offer two early sessions prior to lectures seems like the best choice given the staff situation
5. Implementing Your Chosen Alternative	Run two early morning sessions a week in six week blocks.
6. Evaluation and Feedback	Gather information on the decision made.

Group Decision Making

The benefits and problems with group decision making below:

Benefits	Problems
Pooling ideas together	Conflict could arise through disagreement
Covering all eventualities	Too many options on offer
Improving the likelihood of acceptance at high levels as the whole team have agreed	Decisions could be slowed down
Ability to build on various suggestions	Accountability as no one person is responsible
Prevent rushing into decisions that may be regretted later	
Give more scope for creativity	

An example of a group decision would be whether or not to procure a sun bed in the fitness suite. This is something that happened very recently. The group consisted of myself, the President of the Mess Committee (PMC), the pools and plans officer and the budget officer. We all sat down together and threw some ideas down in a brain storm of various sun bed types, room allocations, costing, feasibility and problems. Everyone put there suggestions forward and we all discussed until we came to a conclusion. The only problem really was the cost and whether or not the hire costs could be made by the usage. We all agreed that whether or not usage would be enough to pay the hire cost, we would still go ahead as money has been set aside to aid the project.

Risks to Group Decision Making

Some managers find it difficult to make decisions, especially if there is a high level of risk involved in them. Some risks are as follows:

- Making unpopular decisions or getting it wrong can leave you open to criticism by others
- Getting it wrong causes other problems for some people because they like to be liked by their colleagues.
- Some decisions will have a financial penalty such as going over budget or losing money.

To minimise risk you need to gather information that may give you some indication of what might go wrong. The riskier the decisions the more information required.

Main Risk	Minimising Risks
Something will prevent you implementing your decision	Get quality information on which to base your decision
The risk that your decision will not produce the effects you expect	Be rigorous with your decisions making
	Always have a contingency plan
	Don't introduce risks by delaying the implementation of your decision

Decision making tools

In order to make effective decisions there are some tools and techniques that may help. Some decisions making tools I use include the following:

- Brainstorming – this helps generate lots of ideas. I usually do this when I have a sports afternoon to plan. I try to come up with options and ideas for sports, scoring and prizes etc.
- Mind Mapping – this is a tool I use after I have carried out a brain storm. It is on the mind map I can organise my ideas better and allow structure to decision.

I find these tools work best for me when I am planning an event to run as I like to throw my ideas down right away and look and plan the essentials later. When I am running an event, to start of with there are lots of possibilities about what event to run, what will be needed and what needs to be done. Initially a brainstorm is good to come up with the event theme/idea like the Concept 2 challenge I ran in January. Once I had used the brainstorm to come up with the idea, I then used a mind map to finely tune the event. I was able to break aspects down and plan what needed doing for each aspect such as health and safety and IT requirements.

Other decision making tools include, criteria lists, decision trees and quantified interpersonal decision making.

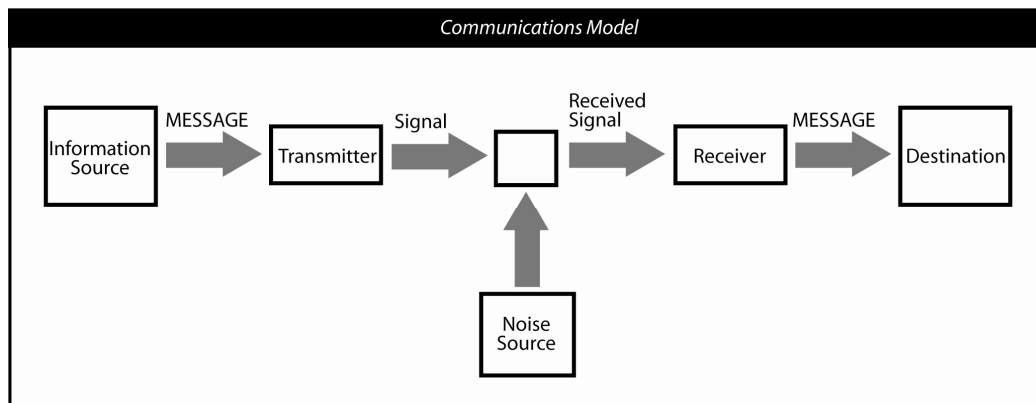
Part C Effective Communication

In business no matter how hard people try there are always barriers that can prevent us from communicating effectively. Organisations that fail to do well often suggest that their failure is due to the inability to working around the barriers. Communication is so important in business and all barriers should try to be worked around to ensure an effective, efficient business. To communicate affectively the language should be understandable to the receiver and in a format that is easy to translate. Information should only be transmitted to those who really need in and at a time that would be most useful. According to Jones from my self study guide, communication is the sharing between groups of two or more people to reach a common understanding. Communication involves making sure you communicate clearly so others understand your ideas, suggestions, instructions and requests. Communication allows the following:

- Understanding your work situation
- Quickly making decisions and solving problems
- Respond to situations as they change
- Improve relationships between others

The model shown below is taken from my self study guide and illustrates effective communication:

- **Sender** – this is the person or group wishing to share information
- **Message** – the information that a sender wants to share
- **Encoding** – translating a message into understandable symbols or language
- **Noise** – anything that hampers any stage of the communication process
- **Receiver** – the person or group for which a message is intended
- **Medium** – the pathway through which an encoded message is transmitted to a receiver
- **Decoding** – interpreting and trying to make sense of a message



Dangers and Barriers

Some experts claim that people like to spend 85% of your time engaged in some form of communication and that ineffective communication damages organisational performance. There are many barriers to communication which include:

- Noise

- Assuming the receiver has the information
- Assuming the receiver understands the message
- The receiver assuming that the sender meant rather than checking
- The receiver deliberately misinterprets the message because they do not like its content
- The sender deliberately sends a misleading message

Communication within Serco tends to contain jargon. Jargon is words or abbreviations that are rarely understood by people that aren't familiar with or that are new to the company. E mails tend to be sent around camp that are cascades of information from the senior management team to the supervisors and then to everyone else. Some of the information contained in the e mails have abbreviations that not everyone understands or that aren't explained properly. Trust is so important within Serco. It is difficult to communicate with a person if you feel you can't trust them especially if the information is sensitive. The senior management team sometimes have very strong views and ideas about certain aspects of the business. This can become problematic if they chose not to listen to the thoughts of people working on the next level. By not listening and taking things on board this may cause a bit of tension and unhappiness within the work force.

Methods of Communication

Spoken methods of communication involve people actually speaking and often supplies you with an instant response. In some circumstances it is possible to see the person you are communication with for example in a meeting. The most common methods of spoken communication I use at work and their advantages and disadvantages are detailed in the table below.

Verbal Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
Telephone	I can talk to someone directly and get an answer right away.	Unfortunately on the hone the person needs to be at their desk to take the call. I can't see the person's face when I talk to them. I can't gauge their body language and facial expressions.
Meetings	Allows me to provide information to a few people at the same time rather than individually which saves time. It people to discuss the information together in an open forum Decisions can be made by more than one person	I need to be chairing the meeting to ensure I get what I need from the meeting Lack of attendance by key players can hold up the decision making process Meeting can over run which means decisions may be rushed.
Face to Face	This gives me both verbal and non verbal feedback immediately I can get undivided attention from the person	There is no details of what happened when the face to face discussion took place. I need to locate the person before I can talk to them The person may allow

		themselves to be side tracked by other things if it is not a formal meeting.
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Written methods are ways of communicating by written words rather than verbal. In the table below you will see various written methods of communicating I use at work and both their advantages and disadvantages.

Written Methods	Advantages	Disadvantages
Letters	Letters provide me with a permanent record of information. Information via letters can be transmitted to many people at the same time	Letters can often be slow. If letters are being sent internally around camp then they can definitely be slow as the mail service on camp isn't so speedy.
Intranets	Information about fitness classes for example can be published on the intranet and everyone has access to it and can see what's happening	Assuming people will look at the sports pages to see what is going on can be a disadvantage as not everyone will be interested.
E-mail	This is the quickest form of written communication This method also provides a permanent record of information and conversations Large documents such as the monthly report can be attached via e mail	The receiver still needs to check their e mail regularly to ensure a speedy response. Not everyone will open e mails titled sports!!

Improving Communication

Ways in which both myself and Serco can improve communication between each other are:

- Induction for all new staff on the business so no one is left wondering what Serco as a company does
- To improve the detail and content in information sent out to all staff so that people don't get confused and understand the information correctly
- Ask people in meetings as things come up if they are all happy and understand
- Improve working relationships with line managers so that a trust can be built
- Listen to and discuss issues and problems with the senior management team
- Encourage feedback to the senior management team by all staff
- Provide communication training where possible

Part D – Chairing Meetings

What are meetings?

According to the online dictionary, meetings can be defined as an assembly or gathering of people, as for a business, social, or religious purpose.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Meetings

There are many advantages and disadvantages to meetings which are outline below:

Advantages	Disadvantages
You can get ideas and exchange information with lots of people at once	Wasting valuable time that could be used better elsewhere
You can make decisions	Costing a lot of money to get people together
People can join in	A way of managers avoiding difficult decisions
You can get to know people better	Assign to already overworked people
You can get people to work together	
You can promote team spirit	

Reasons for Ineffective Meetings

Meeting are often considered to be ineffective for the following reasons:

- No agenda is produced so people don't really know what is going
- This tends to lead to meetings running over time
- People are often unprepared
- Nothing particularly interesting gets decided upon

Meetings I Attend

The meetings I attend are:

Monthly report meetings – The reason for attending the monthly report meeting is to go over any issues that have come up from the department, to discuss any plans or things that are coming up and to discuss any success the department had. This is done in so the authorities are made aware of what is going on around the building so we can continually strive to improve.

Weekly sports pitch meetings with grounds staff – these meetings are held to discuss events that are coming up for the week. For example if there is a football match on a Wednesday the groundsmen need to know about it to set the pitch up ready. Without these meetings the pitches may not be ready for play when required.

Weekly logistics meetings – as sports and fitness falls under the Logistics department I attend where possible the weekly meeting to discuss local issues within the department.

Serco Communication Open Forum (SCOF) meetings – this is where all supervisors/heads of departments discuss their areas and what's happening at the moment. This allows everyone to know what everyone is getting up to.

First aid meetings – these meeting are held to discuss any new government legislation, to discuss areas of concern from around the table and any issues that have come up at the Defence Academy. These meetings are held quarterly.

Social committee meetings – these meetings are held once a month to try and organise events for Serco so that people can get together, network and have a good time.

Chairing My Own Meeting

When I chair a meeting, there are a few steps I take in ensuring my meetings are effective. I used these steps below which relate to best practice in ensuring my meeting with the Corporate Games reps was informative and useful:

The first step I took was to plan the meeting effectively by deciding clear objectives, inviting the necessary people, building and time scaling an agenda, booking the meeting room and organising refreshments.

I make sure I get to the meeting room early so I can make sure everything I need is there and so I can set up ready for others arriving. I started off the meeting by explaining why we have all got together.

I tried my best to stick to the agenda as best possible. I stopped after each item on the agenda and ask if everyone understands what has been discussed. In some meetings I chair there can be a few difficult people I come across.

Difficult People

If there is someone that has an issue that has arisen from the meeting that isn't specific but they want to talk about it there and then I ask them to talk to me off line because it isn't relevant to all at the meeting. By doing this I can stick to my agenda timings so as not to overrun. If one or two people start arguing about something I ask simply say we are wasting time and ask a new question to someone else in the meeting to change focus.

After the Meeting

When the meeting was finished I wrote up the minutes within 24 hours and issue them to all attendees. I then ask them to work on their actions. I make sure the actions are carried out by checking with individuals weekly and assist where needed to ensure times are stuck to

Negotiation

The process of negotiation has traditionally been described as hard bargaining and often is based on hidden agendas and power struggles. These days there is a partnership approach based on understanding and trust with the objective of obtaining a win-win situation where both parties are satisfied.

In order to negotiate successfully, the very first thing to do is write down a plan or an agenda with clear objectives but be aware that negotiations rarely follow to plan. Other things to consider are:

- How you might react to the other parties arguments
- Have an ideal outcome or position
- Make sure that there is a trustworthy atmosphere – this just helps
- Ensure the relevant people are there

- Achievement of the objective is the main success

Do's and Don'ts of Negotiation

Do's	Don'ts
Start with friendly introductions	Interrupt the other person
Listen actively	Reveal your walkway position
Be prepared to compromise	Talk too much or too little
Be prepared to take a break	Make it personal
Talk solutions not problems	Ignore the other person's point of view
Ask open questions	Be afraid to walk away
Change the package not the price	Accept something you will regret later

Negotiating is not something I am used to doing at all. In the future if I came across a situation whereby I had to negotiate, I would try and use the do's and don'ts outline above to guide myself in the right direction to getting what I want and not backing down at any time.

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