



# Exploring Variables

*“Try to keep all variables on the table, and negotiate them as ‘one package’ rather than individually; that way you can trade one against another.”*

For a current negotiation, make a list of all of the variables that you think are relevant. Please do this now, before you read any further.

If you're an 'average' negotiator, then it's normal to miss lots of relevant variables. In an exercise at a recent negotiation workshop a group were challenged to come up with a list of at least 20 different variables that applied to a negotiation case study. After just 15 minutes they had compiled a list of 35 variables. How many did you come up with just now?



This simple exercise illustrates:

1. How many variables are involved in just one negotiation
2. How many variables are simply not considered, perhaps due to a perceived lack of time or a feeling that five or six variables is enough to deal with

In any negotiation, the more variables you have to play with, the more options you have, and the greater the chance of finding an acceptable agreement.

Variables can be continuous, such as price or time, or they can change in discrete steps, for example an item is included in the deal or it is not, half of it is...etc. Variables also have multiple dimensions. For example, when talking about price, it's not just about the €amount; other variables include the time taken to pay and how it is paid (cash, credit or trading for something else).

To identify negotiation variables, ask... *“What are the things that are important to me and to the other party in this situation?”* A small selection of examples include:

Price	Volume/quantity	Payment terms
Quality	Condition	Timing
Delivery frequency	Stock holding	Information
Guarantees	Brand image/reputation	Delivery charges
Contingency stock	Where stock is held	Access to other people
Consumables	Returns policy	Time
Who does what?	Who needs whom most?	Relationships
Ego	Pride	Saving face...

Once you've got your list of variables it is important to prioritise them, and where possible attach a 'value' to each.