

Negotiating through Uncertainty



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What is Negotiation?

- Any conversation in which you are steering a relationship
- Includes the relationship with yourself
- Not just the “money conversations”

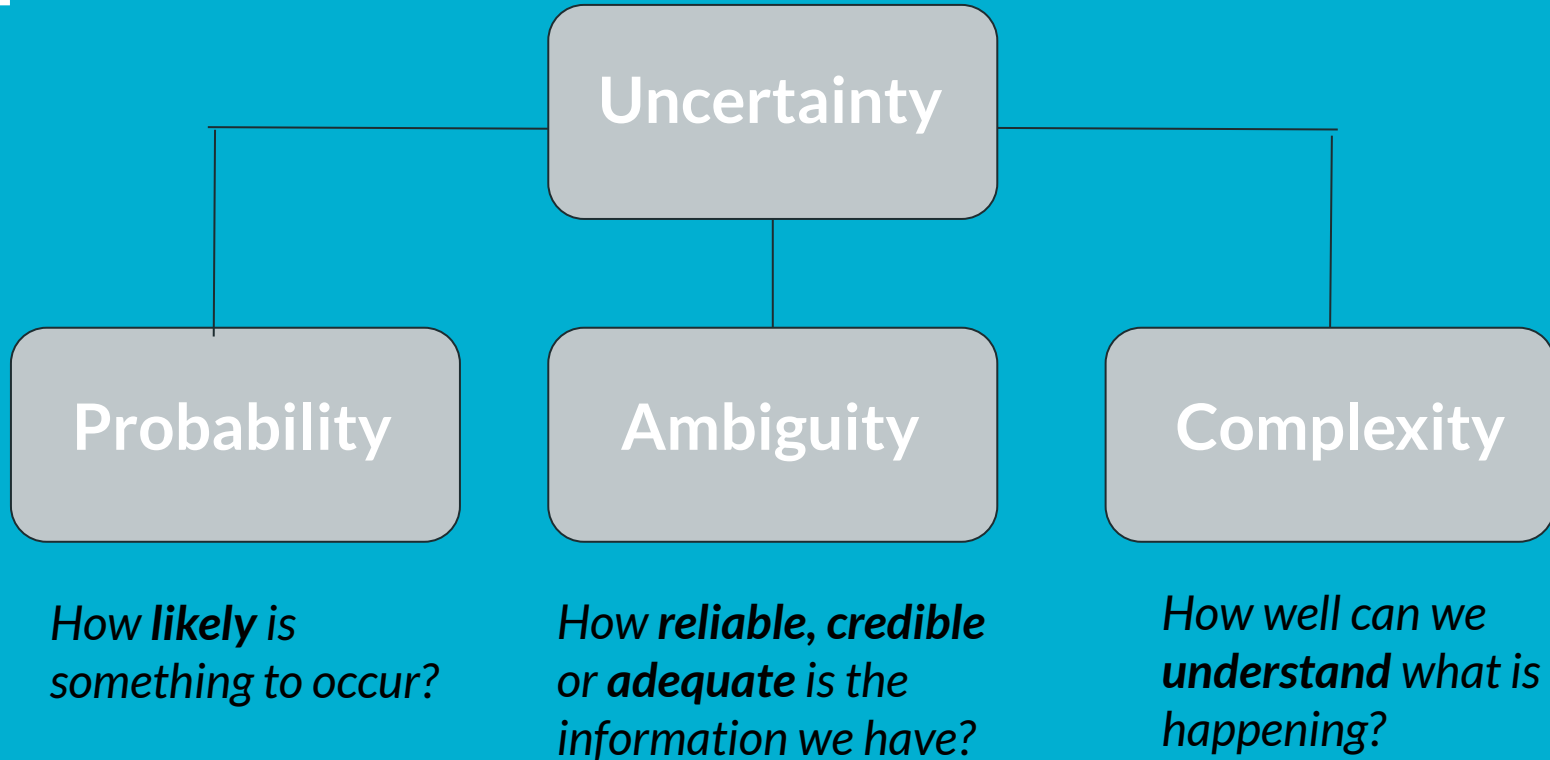




Understanding Uncertainty

- Factual
- Emotional
- Goal
- Procedural

Factual Uncertainty



Factual Uncertainty

- We don't know all the information about **COVID-19**
- We don't know everything about how our **economy** or **industries** may be affected
- We don't know **how long** things will be affected
- We don't know what **business** or **life** will look like on the **other side**

Coping with Factual Uncertainty

- Ask Open Questions

- What do we know? What do we need to know?
- How have we successfully dealt with uncertainty before?
- What is our first step?

- Summarize: As each piece of information comes in, summarize and make sure everyone has understood what is being communicated. **Slowing things down** helps greatly when negotiating in uncertain or emotionally challenging times.

Ask for More: Ten Questions to Negotiate Anything, by Alexandra Carter

<https://www.amazon.com/Ask-More-Questions-Negotiate-Anything/dp/1982130482>

Coping with Factual Uncertainty

- **Probability:** Write down all possible outcomes. Work (yourself or with a team) to assess probability of each.
- **Ambiguity:** Write down relevant information and its source. Evaluate (yourself or with a team) what you know about its reliability, credibility and adequacy. For gaps, consider who you can consult to get more or better information.
- **Complexity:** Break things down into parts. Consider consulting experts or people outside the deal to weigh in on complex information.

Emotional Uncertainty

- COVID-19 poses a time of stress and/or trauma to many people.
- Alterations in stress response systems manifest in perception, processing, reactivity, cognition, and self-regulation -- all of which impact negotiation.
- We may perceive threats where no threat is intended, from cues that would seem neutral to others.
- Responses: Fight, Flight, or Freeze

Emotional Uncertainty and the “Big Two”

- Especially in uncertain times, we will see a rise in anger/irritability/frustration (in others and in ourselves).
- Anger/irritation/frustration in negotiation are often “cover emotions.” What do they cover for?
- The “Big Two” unexpressed emotions: fear and guilt.

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The “Big Two”

- Fear: “What will happen to our business? What will happen to me? My family? Our finances? Our health?”
- Guilt: “Why didn’t I prepare more for this?” “How did I not put myself/us in a better position?” “What should I be doing now that I am not doing?”
- Appear in family as well as business negotiations, but often are not expressed.

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Coping with Emotional Uncertainty: Mirror

- First, take time to prepare. Ask yourself, “What do I feel about this situation?” Take 5-10 minutes to write down the answer.
- Watch for anger and anxiety. Know that expressing anxiety in negotiation often leads to negative results. Anger in negotiation can lead to mixed results.
- Before each negotiation, ask yourself how you have successfully handled stressful situations before. Write down a detailed answer.

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Coping with Emotional Uncertainty: Window

- Timing is important. Choose the timing of your negotiation carefully, and give the person time to prepare. Once you start, assess whether you need to take a time out or reconvene later.
- Assess (if possible) whether the person is likely to fight, flee or freeze.
- Avoid asking “why” questions. Instead ask “What” or “How” questions.
- Summarize and acknowledge.

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Goal Uncertainty

- In times of uncertainty and change, we often need to change our goals and innovate in order to survive or thrive.
- What is the hardest part of innovation?
- Most people think it's figuring out the solution...but most innovation efforts fail because people try to **solve the wrong problem**.
- In challenging times we often focus on the unsolvable problem (how can I get that business back?) or the narrow immediate problem (I need that new deal today).

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Goal Uncertainty

- Ask: “What’s the problem I/we need to solve?” Consider the problems you can solve and the ones you cannot. Write all down.
- For the ones you can solve: get the “bigger picture perspective” by asking, “What would happen if we achieved that?”
- Example: “three new deals this quarter” becomes “we can raise our next round of financing later this year.”

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Process Uncertainty

- People are no longer allowed to gather
- People are scattered across the country and world
- Some may have additional barriers (child care, illness)
- Decision-making mechanisms may be less clear

Dealing with Process Uncertainty

- **For groups, consider a tiered process:** start with individual meetings/subcommittees.
- **Set format:** Establish time, day, participants, platform, number, if certain speakers will call in from the same location, quiet room, reserve bandwidth for optimal sound/video quality.
- **Set speaking roles and decision-making:** One speaker at a time; non-speakers on mute. Establish procedures for raising hands, giving non-verbal feedback, or voting.
- **Use video where possible:** Helps maintain trust and gives maximum information
- **Make accommodations to allow participation from all:** Short meetings for people with kids at home, closed captions, participating by text, interpreters, support people, etc.

Feedback

- What was useful from this presentation?
- What other topics would you like covered?
- What would be helpful to your organization?

Contact Me

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