

# **SUSTAINABLE NEGOTIATION**

What Physics Can Teach Us about  
International Negotiation

# **SUSTAINABLE NEGOTIATION**

What Physics Can Teach Us about  
International Negotiation

BY

**ELIANE KARSAKLIAN**



United Kingdom – North America – Japan  
India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited  
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2017

Copyright © 2017 Emerald Publishing Limited

**Reprints and permissions service**

Contact: [permissions@emeraldinsight.com](mailto:permissions@emeraldinsight.com)

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without either the prior written permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying issued in the UK by The Copyright Licensing Agency and in the USA by The Copyright Clearance Center. Any opinions expressed in the chapters are those of the authors. Whilst Emerald makes every effort to ensure the quality and accuracy of its content, Emerald makes no representation implied or otherwise, as to the chapters' suitability and application and disclaims any warranties, express or implied, to their use.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-78714-576-4 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-78714-575-7 (Online)

ISBN: 978-1-78714-981-6 (Epub)



ISOQAR certified  
Management System,  
awarded to Emerald  
for adherence to  
Environmental  
standard  
ISO 14001:2004.

Certificate Number 1985  
ISO 14001



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better.

— Albert Einstein (1879–1955)

# Foreword

A science writer, I spend my time thinking of ways to explain complex scientific concepts to the general public. This often involves developing metaphors and mental models that can make a subject more approachable. In fact, even at the level of a working scientist, particularly in physics, the job is more about constructing models that make good predictions of how parts of the universe will behave than it is about finding an absolute “truth” about reality.

As I have a background in business, I have often thought that it should be possible to use some of the model-building processes of physics to construct practical tools for business people. This is particularly true when considering quantum physics, which departs from the kind of science most of us were taught at school by incorporating probabilities. This was the aspect of quantum physics that so upset one of its early contributors, the great Albert Einstein. In the quantum world, we can never know certain values exactly. There is always uncertainty, and until measured, all we can know about a quantum particle is a collection of probabilities. This uncertainty maps well onto anything in the business world involving forecasts and human interactions. Yet most business theory is stated in terms of impossible certainties rather than probabilities.

Another change of view that came with quantum theory is that it is no longer possible to think of an experiment being totally isolated from its surroundings. The other equipment, the

building — the experimenter his or herself — the very act of looking at something can have an influence on its outcome. And again, in business — particularly in negotiation — there is the need to take this wider interaction into account.

Quantum physics is full of paradoxes. This word is frequently misused to mean a fallacy — a belief that isn't true. In reality, a paradox is something that runs contrary to received opinion, something that is *difficult* to believe, but is actually true. One of the greatest workers in the field, Richard Feynman once said "I'm going to describe to you how Nature is — and if you don't like it, that's going to get in the way of your understanding it... The theory of quantum electrodynamics describes Nature as absurd from the point of view of common sense. And it agrees fully with experiment. So I hope you can accept Nature as she is — absurd."

If you are to be successful in working in quantum physics — or in explaining it to the public — you have to be comfortable with paradox. Ideally, you should even enjoy it. And *Sustainable Negotiation* shows that the same is true of negotiation. A central challenge in quantum physics, for example, is explaining the "two slit" experiment. Classical physics describes how waves of light passing through two slits before hitting a screen interfere with each to produce dark and light bands. But in quantum physics, we send single particles of light — photons — toward the slits, and over time the same pattern emerges. In explaining this, we think of waves of probability for the location of the photon passing through the slits and interfering. Something that was traditionally given a single location now must be thought of from many directions, using an infinite set of possible locations. Similarly, this book shows how successful negotiation, particularly when dealing with different cultures, often involves moving from an 'either/or' mindset to an 'both/and' mindset that can encompass more than one apparently contradictory viewpoint, recognizing that the decision to treat two possibilities as antitheses is often an arbitrary one in human interaction.

Another essential of quantum physics is being able to describe how a system evolves over time. It's not enough to simply get right, for example, what will happen when two particles meet. We

need to be able to describe the changes in the system — usually in the form of probabilities — as time goes by. This also comes through very effectively in the ‘sustainable’ aspect of sustainable negotiation. For too long our business decisions have been short term and focused on delivery at a specific point in time. *Sustainable Negotiation* encourages us to bring time more into the equation, taking the continuing view of a negotiation, rather than seeing it as a one-off outcome.

When I came across this book, I was delighted to discover that Eliane Karsaklian has used her unique perspective, combining experience in international negotiation and science, to produce new insights. Just as the physicist looks for the simplest discoverable principles underlying the components of the universe, so this book brings out the key elements at the heart of negotiation.

I know that a lot of people are put off by scientific jargon and thinking, and may find the idea of a business book driven by the principles of physics scary. But there’s no need for this. I find that, if it’s presented correctly, primary school children are perfectly capable of understanding the basics of quantum theory. In fact, they often take to it more easily than adults, because they aren’t scared of paradoxes. So, I encourage you to jump in and enjoy the most original look at negotiation we’ve had in many years.

Brian Clegg  
[www.brianclegg.net](http://www.brianclegg.net)

# Introduction: What Do Smartphones, Cards, and Pets — and Physics — Have to Do with International Negotiation?

*I don't demand that a theory correspond to reality because I don't know what it is. Reality is not a quality you can test with litmus paper.*

— *Stephen Hawking*

Congratulations on your bravery!

To my knowledge, this is the first book to connect international negotiation with quantum physics. My guess is that you are a practical business leader who wants to be a better negotiator — and not a physicist by background or inclination. You likely have some judgments about how applicable physics is to the future of your organization, yet you're reading this anyway. Your intellectual curiosity is bravery in my book. I promise to reward you for taking the time to read this one.

## Drawing on Unusual Connections

Being willing to look at the world in a different way is one of the characteristics of a successful negotiator — domestic or international. You must be able to hold your point of view while simultaneously understanding your partner's. There may be aspects of what each party wants that appear mutually exclusive. Still, you are determined to find common ground to create a business opportunity where one didn't exist before.

The goal of this book is to give you the tools to be more facile with this.

And the source material for making this happen is the natural world, because that's where we all live. What makes the perspective you find here a little different is that we're viewing it through the lens of quantum mechanics.

This book takes a disruptive approach. It invites you to break with old theories to create a more sustainable approach to the business world. We don't talk about "counterparts" here. That's because, in sustainable negotiation, we don't "counter," we collaborate. We work together in our search for sustainable growth. Here, you will find ways to see the world through other lenses, and to incorporate sustainability in your business practices.

The American and Nobel laureate in physics, Steven Weinberg, said that nature is much simpler than it looks. I believe the same thing about international negotiation. Too often, we make it mysterious, complicated and conflicting. We focus on differences while symmetries are right there — and we can't see them because we are too busy focusing on issues created by asymmetries.

Sustainable negotiation takes negotiation back to its most simple state. This is the one in which people work to build a sustainable business together, instead of trying to get the upper hand or take over the other party. In sustainable negotiating, we look for complementarity instead of opposition. Different is good. It generates more energy.

You might not see the immediate link between physics and negotiation. But if man is a microcosm of the universe, as stated

by theoretical physicist David Bohm, observing the universe should help us to understand human behavior.

In physics, scientists attempt to guide particles based on their position and the trajectory. In negotiation, we tend to guide other negotiators' steps in the direction we want them to take. Scientists can't *know* all the properties of the particles they study, so they use wavefunction to describe the *probability* that the particle is in a particular place or state. The same is true for negotiators. You can't know everything about the other people you're dealing with, and how they are thinking and feeling. All you can do is work with probabilities and believe that something you can't see — what's happening inside of them — does exist.

Take nature as an example. We look at a tree and see its green leaves. What we don't see is the photosynthesis process that makes them this way. When sunlight hits a leaf, photons crash into chlorophyll molecules. The chlorophyll absorbs the photon's energy, and then channels that energy toward the chemical factory of the cell, which is busy making sugars. The photon's energy spreads just like waves across the leaf's cells.

The same is true in international negotiation. All you see your partner's behavior. You can't anticipate precisely all your partners' moves, but you can work with probabilities of having your suggestions and points of view taken into account — if you have done your homework and know them and their culture better.

## The Nature of “Reality”

Here is the idea you may find most challenging in this book, so let's get it out in the open right away:

### Quantum Mechanics Teaches Us That Reality Is Truly Unknowable

Does that feel like an awfully big leap? Take a deep breath. Here's an everyday example to easily explain that idea.

You hold a smartphone in your hand. On it, you see the photo of a two-door brown car in the shade of a tree on the opposite side of a city street. Your view is of the driver's side, and the window is rolled up.

It appears to be a parked car. Nothing too remarkable.

Then you tap the image.

Now you watch a five-second video. The car is moving down a tree-lined street. When the sun hits it, you notice that the car is red. The driver's window rolls down. You see a young man with curly brown hair at the wheel. A pug sitting on his lap sticks its head out the window, and the wind catches its lolling tongue.

The picture tells one story. The video tells a different one. Which is "reality"?

Here's the truth. If you come from the Western part of the world (with an objective collapse culture — more on this later), you will believe the photo is real. You default to condensing information into a moment in time. If you come from the Eastern part of the world (a super position culture), you will believe the video. You perceive a flow of information as real.

Is the car brown or red? Is it moving or still? Is it empty or is there someone inside? It all depends upon context: the way and the moment you look at it.

Of course, the photo and the video are *both* different approaches to the same reality. The problem is that we all judge what's real through the lens of our original culture. When we're unaware this is happening, we can be confused by — or angry with — people who don't look at things "our way." You already know that either approach can kill a negotiation.

## Dealing with Paradoxes

International negotiation is all about perception and context. This is where quantum mechanics comes in. It teaches us that more than one thing can be true at the same time.

For those of us in Western cultures, this means getting comfortable with ambiguity. We boil information down into the

photo. But your Chinese partners are seeing the video. Instead of correcting this person — usually by drawing his attention to goals, facts, figures, and deadlines — we have to understand that his view is equally valid.

“Equally” is very important. Neither party should — or can — give up its cultural viewpoint and enter solely into the other’s. What happens if you impose your will on other people? How can you expect them to be happy to continue to work with you — to treat you fairly and create new, mutually beneficial opportunities — if they feel you have beaten them into submission? How would *you* feel if forced into a win/lose scenario?

Instead, you need to literally create a *third* culture: one of integration.

## The Culture in a Deck of Cards

How can you do this? Consider the metaphor of playing a card game.

Let’s say you and your partners each have six cards. How can you play a game together? You have a few options:

1. The other person knows a game that only requires six cards. You don’t know this game. She offers to teach you how to play it. However, you feel the imbalance, because she already knows the game and automatically will be better at it than you will.
2. The reverse is true. You offer to explain a game to her, and she feels the discomfort of being a beginner.
3. Neither one of you knows a game that only requires six cards, so you decide you can’t play.
4. You both know the same game and agree to play it. Once again, one of you may be more experienced with the game than the other, creating an inequity.
5. The two of you agree to create a new game together. Each of you suggests rules and weighs in on the ones that make

sense. You ultimately develop a game that neither has played before, so your level of expertise is equal. And you are both equally involved in creating the game, which makes more sense to you. It is *your* game and not just a game coming from who knows where.

## Welcome to Sustainable Negotiation

When you choose alternative #5, you've entered the world of sustainable negotiation.

You intuitively understand the value of this. In the past, when the "formal" negotiation has ended — and both parties have signed on the dotted line — you are *still* negotiating. There may be details to resolve. Customers of one side or the other to entice into participating. New opportunities that arise that weren't considered in the original agreement. You must lay the groundwork for continuing goodwill in negotiating, so you can sustain a future of working together.

You can do those things if you have established a culture in which each party already knows how to interact with the other, what is acceptable and what isn't, and is genuinely interested in creating a continuous relationship.

## How Your Pet Can Help You

Sustainable negotiation is rare in the business world today. Most often, I hear the objection that the other culture or negotiator is "too different" and doesn't have the same values, perspective, or willingness.

Let's go back to the natural world of physics to answer this. Do you have a pet at home? Have you been able to work with your pet so it understands the commands that you give (and, if it's a dog, is more likely to follow them)? Have you spent time with your pet and understand when it is excited? Or tired? Or peevish? Or hungry?

What we're talking about here is *cross-species* communication. If you can do this, then you can bridge the gap to connect with other *people*. Most of what it requires is a genuine interest in — if not

caring for — the other. So treat your negotiating partner at least as well as you treat your pet!

## Let's Do This Together

What I'm asking you to consider is a sustainable approach to negotiation: where there is no winning or losing, and there are no term limits to working together. To make this shift, you'll need some useful background: on everything from culture, to principles of quantum mechanics. The chapters that follow build upon each other to provide this to you:

- *Negotiation is about energy:* The evolution of ideas about negotiation parallels what happened 100 years ago in physics. This changed science forever — and for the better. Let's do the same with negotiation.
- *Negotiation is about paradoxes:* The old ideas about negotiation are based on conflict. To be successful today, negotiators must understand duality and be comfortable with paradox management.
- *Negotiation is about optical illusions:* Rainbows are a great metaphor for negotiating, because they are intangible but visible, require opposites to come together, have no beginning and no end, and you have to be in the right place at the right time to see them.
- *Negotiation is about probabilities:* We try to control uncertainty in negotiations by looking for patterns in people's behavior. But all behavior depends upon the context of the person who is acting, as well as the person who is observing and reacting.
- *Negotiation is about integration:* To be successful international negotiators, we need to move beyond our cultural mindsets of exclusion (*either/or*) and inclusion (*both/and*) to integration (*either/and*).
- *Negotiation is about sustainability:* Sustainable negotiation doesn't have a time limit (such as the end of a contract). It's a

never-ending process of working with a partner and adjusting the relationship as needed, so everyone has a reason to stay.

- *Sustainable negotiation is possible*: This is not the same as win/win negotiation. It's about using a set of ethical principles, following a clear process, and knowing how to introduce sustainable negotiation and what to do if a partner backslides into a competitive approach.

At the end of each chapter, you'll find not only a useful summary, but also negotiation and physics exercises you can do to use the new perspective you've gained. I also invite you to share the results of your experiments with me, and I'll be happy to answer your questions and offer additional insights.

Physics teaches us that the universe is a system, and that everything is interrelated and interdependent. Humans — and the negotiations among them — are no different.

So join me on this journey to take a “natural world” perspective on international negotiations. Make it your goal to use every opportunity to create a situation where sustainable negotiation is possible. You'll find all of the tools you need to do this here. And when you employ them, you'll be amazed at how successful — and respected and in demand — you will become.