CHAPTER
7

Preparing to Negotiate: Goals, Interests and Information

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Introduction

Most negotiations are won or lost before the parties meet. A negotiator who arrives without a clear idea of what to aim for, where to stop and why the other side wants what it says it wants is forced to improvise, and improvisation favours the side that has done its homework. Experienced negotiators often say that preparation accounts for most of their success, and research on negotiation supports them: the targets negotiators set, the alternatives they identify and the information they gather shape outcomes more than any tactic used at the table.

This chapter sets out a disciplined method of preparation in four steps. Section 7.1 asks what the negotiator wants: the target to aim for, the limit beyond which to walk away and the priorities among several issues. Section 7.2 asks why each side wants what it says it wants, distinguishing the **positions** parties state from the **interests** explaining them, and showing that every negotiator must prepare not only for the other side but also for the constituency behind his or her own. Section 7.3 asks what the negotiator knows, and needs to know, about the other side, the market and the context, and how to build arguments that the other side will accept as legitimate. Section 7.4 brings these elements together in a planning template that is used throughout the rest of the book.

The chapter turns the goals of Chapter 6 into a plan for the table, and it applies the first pillar of the framework, **profit**, at the level of the individual negotiation: what value is at stake in this deal, and how much of it can we hope to capture? The Deal File follows a negotiation that failed in a revealing way. In September 2024 the union representing Boeing's machinists reached a tentative agreement with the company, and its members rejected it. The strike that followed lasted 53 days and cost billions of dollars. It reveals what happens when negotiators prepare for the party across the table but not for the party behind it.

DEAL FILE

Boeing's Machinists Say No

In 2024 Boeing was in a difficult position. A door panel had blown out of a 737 MAX in flight in January, regulators had capped its production and its finances were under severe strain. At the same time, its contract with District 751 of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM), which represented more than 30,000 Boeing manufacturing employees, mainly in Washington State, was due to expire on 12 September (Boeing, 2025a). The contract dated from 2008 and had been extended in 2011, 2014 and 2016 (Boeing, 2024b); the extension of 2014 had frozen the machinists' traditional pension plan, and many felt that their pay had fallen behind the cost of living.

On 8 September Boeing announced a tentative agreement with the union, which it described as offering the largest general wage increase in the history of the relationship, together with greater contributions to retirement savings (Boeing, 2024b). The members voted it down, and on 13 September they went on strike. Boeing paused production of all its commercial aircraft except the 787 in South Carolina (Boeing, 2025a).

Table 7.1

The Boeing machinists' strike at a glance

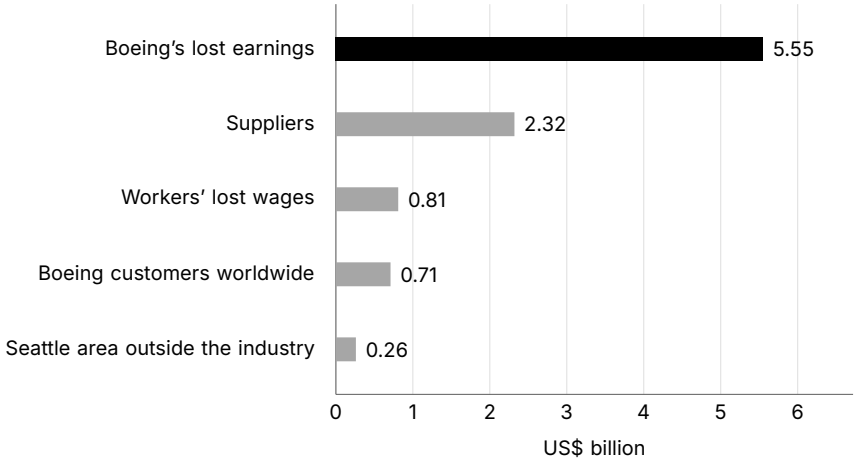
Parties	Boeing; Districts 751 and W24 of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, representing about 33,000 workers in Washington, Oregon and California
At stake	Wages; the restoration of the pension plan frozen in 2014; bonuses and job security; Boeing's ability to resume production
Duration	53 days, from 13 September to 4 November 2024
Outcome	After further rounds, members ratified on 4 November 2024 a general wage increase of 38 per cent over four years and a ratification bonus of US$12,000; the frozen pension plan was not reopened, although the pension multiplier for members already vested rose to US$105 a year

Note. Author, based on Boeing (2024b, 2025a) and IAM Union (2024).

Rising offers and rising costs. Boeing raised its offer step by step during the strike, while its losses mounted: on 23 October it reported a net loss of US$6.2 billion for the third quarter of 2024 (Boeing, 2024c). On 4 November the members ratified a contract with a general wage increase of 38 per cent over four years, compounding to almost 44 per cent, and a ratification bonus of US$12,000. The traditional pension plan was not reopened (Boeing, 2025a; IAM Union, 2024). The strike's costs reached far beyond the two parties. Figure 7.1 shows an estimate of the direct losses in the first six weeks, which by then approached US$10 billion.

Figure 7.1

Estimated direct losses from the Boeing machinists' strike in its first six weeks, by group (US$ billion)



Note. Author, based on Anderson Economic Group (2024). The estimate covers the period from 13 September to 25 October 2024 and totals US$9.66 billion.

Questions to keep in mind. Why did the members reject an agreement reached by their own negotiators? What were the machinists' real interests, and did the first agreement address them? What information did each side lack, and how might better preparation have shortened or prevented the strike? The chapter answers these questions in turn.

7.1 What Do We Want? Goals, Targets and Limits

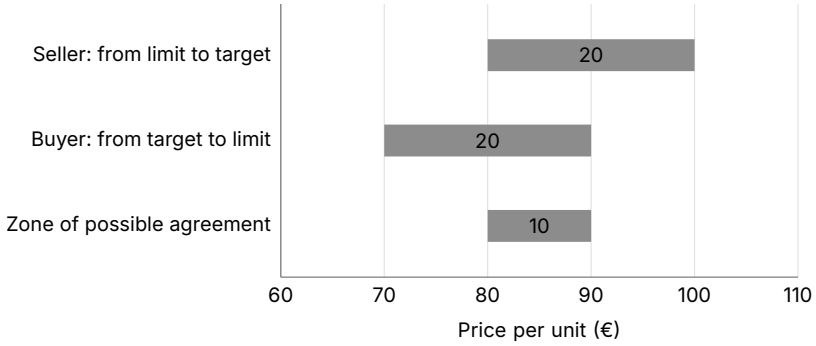
Targets and Limits

A negotiator should enter every negotiation with two numbers, or their equivalent for issues not measured in money. The **target**, sometimes called the aspiration, is the best outcome that the negotiator can realistically hope to achieve. The **limit**, or **reservation point**, is the least favourable outcome that the negotiator will accept; anything worse than the limit is worse than no agreement at all. Between the two lies the range within which the negotiator expects to settle.

The limit should not be chosen arbitrarily. It follows from the negotiator's best alternative to a negotiated agreement, the BATNA introduced in Chapter 4. A seller whose best alternative is to sell to another buyer at €80 has a limit of about €80, adjusted for any differences in risk, timing or cost between the two deals. Negotiators who set their limits without reference to their alternatives either accept agreements worse than what they could obtain elsewhere or reject

Figure 7.2

Targets, limits and the zone of possible agreement in a price negotiation (€ per unit)



Note. Author's illustrative example. The seller aims for €100 but will accept no less than €80; the buyer aims for €70 but will pay up to €90. Any price between €80 and €90 leaves both better off than no agreement.

agreements which are better. The economic distinction of Chapter 6 matters here: a limit should cover the full economic cost of an agreement, including the opportunity cost of the capital and capacity it ties up, not merely the costs that appear in the accounts.

Targets matter as much as limits. In classic experiments, Siegel and Fouraker (1960) found that negotiators with higher aspirations obtained better results than those with modest ones, provided their aspirations remained within the range of what the other side could accept. Negotiators who focus on their limits tend to settle close to them, while those who focus on their targets tend to settle closer to the targets (Thompson, 2020). A target should therefore be ambitious but justifiable: high enough to stretch the negotiator, and supported by arguments that the other side will recognise as reasonable.

The Zone of Possible Agreement

When a buyer and a seller each have a limit, an agreement is possible only if the buyer's limit is higher than the seller's. The range between the two is the **zone of possible agreement** (ZOPA), introduced in Chapter 2 through the example of the brake housing. Figure 7.2 shows a negotiation in which the zone exists. If the seller's limit were higher than the buyer's, there would be no zone, and the parties would be better off without an agreement unless one of them could change its limit, for example by adding a new issue or finding a new source of value.

Neither side normally knows the other's limit, and each has a reason to conceal its own. Part of preparation is therefore estimating the other side's limit from

what can be learned about its alternatives, costs and constraints, a task to which Section 7.3 returns.

Several Issues and Their Priorities

Most business negotiations involve more than one issue. A supply contract may cover price, volume, delivery times, quality standards, payment terms, warranties and the length of the agreement. A collective agreement may cover wages, pensions, bonuses, working hours, job security and the location of future work. The set of issues is sometimes called the **bargaining mix**, and preparing it well is one of the most valuable things a negotiator can do.

For each issue, the negotiator should set a target and a limit, and then rank the issues by importance. Priorities allow trade-offs: a negotiator who knows that delivery time matters more than payment terms can concede on payment in return for faster delivery. Chapter 8 shows how trading across issues of different importance to each side is the main way in which negotiators create value. Without clear priorities, a negotiator either refuses to trade anything or trades away what matters most. Table 7.2 applies these ideas to a supply contract, from the supplier's point of view.

Table 7.2

Targets, limits and priorities for a supply contract (supplier's view)

Issue	Target	Limit	Priority (1 = highest)
Price per unit	€100	€80	1
Annual volume	50,000 units	30,000 units	2
Contract length	3 years	1 year	3
Payment terms	30 days	60 days	4
Delivery time	4 weeks	2 weeks	5

Note. Author's illustrative example.

KEY MOVE

Set a target and a limit for every issue before you meet, and rank the issues by importance. Base your limit on your best alternative, and your target on what you can justify, not on what you hope for.

7.2 Why Do They Want It? Interests behind Positions

Positions and Interests

Fisher and Ury (1981) drew a distinction that has become central to the teaching of negotiation. A **position** is what a party says it wants: a price, a wage increase, a deadline. An **interest** is the need, concern or fear that explains why it wants it. Positions are often incompatible, while interests frequently are not, because the same interest can be met in several ways. A union that demands a wage increase of 40 per cent may be driven by an interest in keeping up with the cost of living, in security in retirement, in fairness compared with executives' pay or in respect after years of concessions. Each of these interests could be met by a different combination of measures, some of them less costly for the employer than a large wage rise.

Interests can be grouped into several types (Lewicki et al., 2020):

- **substantive interests**, concerning the tangible outcome: money, volume, time, security;
- **process interests**, concerning how the negotiation is conducted: whether a party is consulted, listened to and treated fairly;
- **relationship interests**, concerning the future of the relationship between the parties;
- **interests in principle**, concerning what the parties regard as right, fair or legitimate.

Uncovering interests requires asking why: why does the other side want this, and why is it important to it? It also requires asking why not: why might the other side reject an apparently attractive offer? The answers often reveal options that neither side had considered.

The Party behind the Table

Walton and McKersie (1965) identified a form of bargaining often neglected by negotiators: **intra-organisational bargaining**, the negotiation taking place within each side between the negotiator and those he or she represents. Union leaders must satisfy their members, managers their boards, diplomats their governments. The two-level game described in Chapter 4 is a broader version of the same idea. A negotiator who reaches an agreement acceptable to the other side but not to his or her own constituency has not reached an agreement at all.

Preparing for the party behind the table means understanding what the constituency wants, what it will accept, how it will judge the result and how it will decide. It means communicating with the constituency during the negotiation, managing its expectations and, where necessary, educating it about what is achievable. It also means understanding the constituency on the other side,

DEAL SNAPSHOT

Air Canada's Flight Attendants Reject a Wage Deal, 2025 and 2026

In August 2025 the flight attendants of Air Canada, represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), went on strike and continued after the federal government had ordered them back to work. A central issue was not the level of pay but its scope: flight attendants were paid mainly for time in the air, not for the work they did on the ground during boarding. On 19 August the union and the airline reached a tentative agreement that introduced pay for time on the ground, rising from 50 to 70 per cent of the hourly rate by 2028, together with first-year wage increases of 8 to 12 per cent (Air Canada, 2026). In September, however, more than 99 per cent of the members who voted rejected the wage terms, and the parties sent the remaining wage question to arbitration (CUPE, 2026). On 17 February 2026 the arbitrator upheld the tentative agreement, except for raising the wages of flight attendants at Air Canada's leisure carrier, Rouge, by a further percentage point in the first year (Air Canada, 2026). Like the Boeing case, the vote showed a gap between what negotiators believed their members would accept and what the members themselves considered fair. It also showed how an interest that had been neglected for years, payment for unpaid work, can shape members' judgement of every other term.

since an offer accepted by the other negotiator may still be rejected by those he or she represents.

KEY MOVE

For every position on the table, on both sides, ask what interest lies behind it. Then ask what the people behind each negotiator need in order to accept the agreement, and prepare for them as carefully as for the person across the table.

7.3 What Do We Know? Information and Arguments

The Information a Negotiator Needs

Information is a source of power, and its absence is a source of weakness. Chapter 2 showed that hidden information is one of the economic roots of conflict; Chapter 1 showed that strikes can be a costly way of revealing it. Good preparation reduces the need for such costly revelation. Table 7.3 lists the main categories of information a negotiator should gather.

The most valuable information is usually the other side's alternatives and constraints, because these determine its limit. Boeing could estimate the cost of a

Table 7.3

Information to gather before a negotiation

About	Key questions	Possible sources
Ourselves	What are our interests, targets, limits, priorities and alternatives? Who must approve the deal?	Internal analysis; consultation with colleagues and decision makers
The other side	What are its interests, alternatives, constraints, deadlines and decision process? Who are its negotiators?	Public reports, past agreements, industry contacts, the other side itself
The market	What are current prices, costs, capacity and trends? What deals have others made?	Industry data, statistics, consultants, published contracts
The context	What legal, political or social factors could affect the negotiation?	Laws and regulations, media, experts
The relationship	What is the history between the parties? How much trust exists?	Records of previous negotiations, colleagues who know the other side

Note. Author, based on Lewicki et al. (2020) and Thompson (2020).

strike to itself, but it needed to know how long its machinists could afford to stay out, how strongly they felt about the pension and how much influence the union's leaders had over their members. The union, for its part, needed to know how long Boeing could afford a stoppage while its finances were already under strain. Both sides misjudged the other at important points.

Information can also be gathered during the negotiation itself, by asking questions and listening carefully to the answers. Many negotiators talk too much and ask too little. Chapter 16 examines the skills of questioning and listening.

When the other side comes from a different culture, the list of questions grows. Moore and Woodrow (2010) suggest that negotiators find out how the counterpart's society is organised before they meet: whether its legal system works well enough to provide a fair, timely and affordable decision, or whether people rely on other ways of settling differences; whether its government agencies are bureaucratic or informal and hire on merit or through family and friendship ties; how its economy is structured; and which religious or ideological beliefs shape everyday dealings and make some topics, behaviours or settlement options taboo. The answers affect the other side's alternatives, its decision process and the forms of agreement it can accept. Chapter 18 presents the framework from which these questions come.

DEAL SNAPSHOT

Walmart Negotiates with a Chatbot

Walmart buys goods and services from tens of thousands of suppliers, and many of its smaller contracts were never renegotiated because the company lacked the staff to do so. It therefore tested automated negotiation software, in which a chatbot negotiates with suppliers within targets and limits set by Walmart's buyers. In a pilot in Canada, covering goods not for resale such as shopping carts, fleet services and store equipment, the chatbot reached agreement with 64 per cent of the suppliers it approached, against a goal of 20 per cent, achieving average savings of 1.5 per cent and extending payment terms to an average of 35 days. In an extended pilot, the agreement rate rose to 68 per cent and average savings to 3 per cent, and the system was introduced in the United States, Chile and South Africa. More than 80 per cent of suppliers reported that they found the system straightforward and liked being able to make counter-offers (ASCM, n.d.). The case shows preparation turned into software: the chatbot can negotiate only because Walmart's buyers have set clear targets, limits and priorities for every issue in advance.

Building Legitimate Arguments

Information becomes useful at the table when it is turned into arguments. Fisher and Ury (1981) recommended basing proposals on **objective criteria**, standards that both sides can accept as fair independently of their will: market prices, industry benchmarks, inflation, precedent, expert opinion or accepted principles of fairness. A proposal supported by an objective criterion is harder to dismiss than one supported only by the negotiator's preference, and it allows the other side to accept it without appearing to give in.

Arguments also shape the opening of a negotiation. Research on anchoring has shown that first offers strongly influence final outcomes: in an experiment by Galinsky and Mussweiler (2001), the party making the first offer tended to obtain a better result, unless the other side focused on its own target or on the first party's alternatives. A well-prepared negotiator therefore decides in advance whether to make the first offer, how ambitious it should be and what arguments will justify it. Chapter 13 develops the use of offers and concessions, and Chapter 16 the psychology of anchoring.

KEY MOVE

Gather information about the other side's alternatives and constraints before you meet, and support every important proposal with an objective criterion the other side can accept.

7.4 The Planning Template

Bringing It Together

The elements of this chapter can be brought together on a single page. Table 7.4 presents a planning template that negotiators can complete before any important negotiation. The template is used in the Your Move cases throughout the rest of the book, and students are encouraged to use it whenever an exercise asks them to plan a negotiation.

Table 7.4

Negotiation planning template

Element	Questions to answer
1. Strategic purpose	How does this negotiation serve our strategy? What would success look like in a year's time?
2. Issues	What issues will be negotiated? Which can we add to create value?
3. Our interests	Why do we want what we want? Which interests are substantive, process, relationship or principle?
4. Their interests	What does the other side need, and why? What would make it say no?
5. Our alternatives	What is our BATNA? How can we improve it before we negotiate?
6. Their alternatives	What is their BATNA? How strong is it, and can we influence it?
7. Targets and limits	What is our target and our limit on each issue? What is our estimate of theirs?
8. Priorities	How do we rank the issues? What can we trade for what?
9. Objective criteria	What standards will support our proposals?
10. Constituencies	Who must approve the agreement on each side, and what do they need?
11. Information gaps	What do we not know, and how will we find out before or during the negotiation?
12. Opening and process	Who will make the first offer? What will it be? What is our agenda and timetable?

Note. Author, based on Fisher and Ury (1981), Lewicki et al. (2020) and Thompson (2020).

Using the Template Well

The template is a discipline, not a form to be filled in mechanically. Three practices make it useful. First, it should be completed jointly by the people who will negotiate and the people who will approve the result, so that targets, limits and priorities reflect the views of the organisation and not only of the negotiator. Second, it should be revised as the negotiation proceeds, since new information

may change estimates of the other side's limits or reveal new interests. Third, the parts concerning the other side should be completed by imagining oneself in its position, a practice that reduces the tendency, discussed in Chapter 16, to see the other side as more hostile and less reasonable than it is.

Cultural differences, discussed in Chapter 18, also affect preparation. In some business cultures the relationship must be established before substantive issues are discussed, and a negotiator who arrives with a detailed agenda of issues may appear cold or impatient. The author's research on communication in international business shows how misreading such expectations can undermine even well-prepared negotiators (Kumar, 2022, 2023).

KEY MOVE

Complete the planning template with the people who will approve the result, and revise it as you learn. A plan that only the negotiator understands will not survive contact with the constituency.

BACK TO THE DEAL FILE

Reading the Boeing Strike

The tools of this chapter explain why the first agreement failed and why the strike lasted as long as it did.

The negotiators and the members had different targets. The union's negotiators accepted the first offer, perhaps judging that it was close to Boeing's limit at a time of financial strain. The members' target was far higher, and their limit, as the strike showed, lay well above what their negotiators had accepted.

Interests behind positions were neglected. The wage figure was the position, but behind it lay interests in security in retirement, in recovering ground lost since the pension freeze of 2014 and in respect after years of concessions. The first agreement offered little on these, and even the final agreement did not reopen the traditional pension plan. The members' acceptance after 53 days suggests that the strike itself, by demonstrating their resolve, partly met their interest in respect.

Preparation for the party behind the table failed. Both the union's negotiators and Boeing's misjudged what the members would accept. In the language of Walton and McKersie, the intra-organisational bargaining within the union had not been completed before the agreement was presented. The rejection was not a dispute over a few details but a signal that the negotiators had not understood their constituency.

Each side lacked information about the other's alternatives. Boeing may have believed its workers could not afford a long strike; the workers may have believed that Boeing, already in crisis, would concede quickly. Each was partly right. The successive offers were a costly way of discovering where the zone of possible agreement lay, and Figure 7.1 shows how much of the cost fell on suppliers, customers and the regional economy.

The final agreement used new issues to close the gap. The ratification bonus of US$12,000 and the higher pension multiplier for vested members allowed the company to offer more without reopening the traditional pension plan, and allowed members to accept without it. This is the use of the bargaining mix described in Section 7.1.

MA EXTENSION

Ratification as a Signal

Walton and McKersie (1965) argued that negotiators must manage the expectations of their constituents as well as the demands of the other side. Putnam (1988) added that a negotiator whose constituency is known to be hard to satisfy may gain bargaining power, because the other side must offer more to obtain ratification. Ashenfelter and Johnson (1969), discussed in Chapter 1, modelled strikes as a way of bringing members' expectations into line with what the employer can pay. Apply these ideas to the Deal File. Did the overwhelming rejection of the first agreement strengthen the union's position in later rounds? Could the union's leaders have used the threat of rejection more deliberately? What does the case suggest about the value of consulting members before, rather than after, an agreement is reached?

ETHICS CHECK

Preparation involves gathering information about the other side. Some sources are clearly legitimate, such as published reports and market data. Others are more doubtful: monitoring the social media of the other side's negotiators, recruiting its former employees for what they know, or using automated tools that probe its limits. Where should a negotiator draw the line? Is it ethical for a firm to negotiate with suppliers through a chatbot that the suppliers may not fully understand?

Pillar Scorecard

Your Move

This is a constructed teaching case.

You are the human resources director of a chemical company near Opole that employs 1,200 people. The collective agreement with the company's two trade unions expires in three months. Inflation has fallen, but workers remember that

Table 7.5

Pillar Scorecard: the Boeing machinists' strike, 2024

Pillar	Importance in this case	Evidence
Profit	Very high	Wages, bonuses and pensions for 33,000 workers, and billions of dollars of lost production, were at stake
Power	High	Each side tested how long it could endure a strike while Boeing's finances were already under strain
Persuasion	High	The union's negotiators failed to persuade members to accept the first agreement; later offers had to be framed to win a majority

their pay lagged behind prices in earlier years. The unions have announced a demand for a wage increase of 15 per cent; the board has authorised you to offer up to 6 per cent. A competitor that opened a plant nearby last year is recruiting skilled operators at higher wages. The larger union's leader faces an election next spring.

1. Using Table 7.4, complete a planning template for the negotiation.
2. What interests might lie behind the unions' demand of 15 per cent? Which could be met in ways other than a higher wage increase?
3. What information would you need about the unions, their members and the local labour market, and how would you obtain it?
4. How would you prepare for the party behind the table on both sides, so as to avoid the outcome of the Boeing case?

Conclusion

Preparation is the stage of negotiation the negotiator controls most completely, and it has the greatest influence on the result. It begins with goals: an ambitious but justifiable target, a limit grounded in the best alternative to agreement and priorities allowing trade-offs across several issues. It continues with interests, the needs and concerns that lie behind each side's positions, including the interests of the constituencies behind the table. It depends on information about the other side, the market and the context, and on arguments built from objective criteria that the other side can accept. The planning template brings these elements together and should be completed with those who will approve the result. The Boeing strike shows the cost of neglecting any of them: an agreement meeting the negotiators' expectations but not the members' interests led to a strike of 53 days and losses of billions of dollars. Preparation, however, is only the beginning. Once the parties meet, they must decide how to divide the value at stake

and whether they can enlarge it. Chapter 8 examines these two tasks, claiming value and creating it, and the tension between them.

Exercises

A. Objective Questions

1. A negotiator's reservation point is:
   a) the least favourable outcome he or she will accept
   b) the best outcome he or she hopes to achieve
   c) the other side's first offer
   d) the midpoint of the bargaining range

2. A negotiator's limit should be based mainly on:
   a) the other side's first offer
   b) the target
   c) his or her best alternative to a negotiated agreement
   d) the length of the negotiation

3. Siegel and Fouraker (1960) found that negotiators with higher aspirations:
   a) always failed to reach agreement
   b) were less satisfied with any outcome
   c) made smaller first offers
   d) tended to obtain better results, within the range acceptable to the other side

4. The zone of possible agreement exists when:
   a) the seller's limit is above the buyer's limit
   b) the buyer's limit is above the seller's limit
   c) both sides have the same target
   d) one side has no alternative

5. According to Fisher and Ury (1981), an interest is:
   a) what a party says it wants
   b) the need or concern that explains why it wants it
   c) the other side's alternative
   d) a legal right

6. Walton and McKersie (1965) used the term "intra-organisational bargaining" for:
   a) negotiation within each side between the negotiator and those he or she represents
   b) negotiation between two firms
   c) negotiation with a mediator
   d) bargaining over wages only

7. According to Figure 7.1, which group bore the largest estimated losses in the first six weeks of the Boeing strike?
   a) the striking workers
   b) the Seattle area outside the industry
   c) Boeing's suppliers
   d) Boeing itself

8. Basing a proposal on market prices, inflation or industry benchmarks is an example of using:
   a) anchoring
   b) a BATNA
   c) objective criteria
   d) intra-organisational bargaining

B. Short-Answer Questions

1. Distinguish a target from a limit, and explain how each should be set.
2. Explain the zone of possible agreement using Figure 7.2.
3. What is the bargaining mix, and why are priorities among issues important?
4. Distinguish positions from interests, and name four types of interest.
5. Why must a negotiator prepare for the party behind the table? Illustrate with the Boeing or Air Canada case.
6. Name five categories of information a negotiator should gather, with a source for each.
7. Explain how first offers can anchor a negotiation, and how the receiving party can resist the anchor.

C. Long-Answer Questions

1. Analyse the Boeing machinists' strike of 2024 using the concepts of targets, limits, interests and intra-organisational bargaining. How could better preparation on either side have shortened or prevented the strike?
2. "The most important negotiation is the one inside your own side." Discuss with reference to the Boeing and Air Canada cases and to the theory of two-level games.
3. Evaluate the use of automated negotiation by Walmart. What does it reveal about the role of preparation, and what are its limitations and ethical risks?
4. Prepare a complete planning template, using Table 7.4, for a negotiation of your choice in which you or your organisation will soon take part.

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