

From Strategy to Judgment: Developing Contextual Judgment through AI-Assisted Reflective Negotiation Learning

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Abstract: Negotiation pedagogy has traditionally treated strategy as its core product: curricula deliver frameworks, tactics, and preparation heuristics, and students rehearse them in role-play simulations followed by instructor-led debriefing. Yet research on negotiation and on expert performance suggests that the binding constraint on negotiator effectiveness is not strategic knowledge but contextual judgment, the calibrated ability to read a situation, select among known moves, and revise one's approach in real time. This conceptual paper argues that judgment develops through reflective cycles in which experience is converted into calibrated intuition, and that AI-assisted reflective learning offers a scalable mechanism for compressing those cycles in negotiation education. Drawing on the expertise literature on deliberate practice and intuitive judgment, the feedback literature, and emerging evidence on large language models in education, the paper develops a framework in which AI systems function as reflective partners that capture decisions, generate counterfactuals, pose Socratic questions, and audit judgment patterns. Five design principles for curriculum integration and the principal risks of over-reliance, validity, and authenticity are discussed. The argument redirects negotiation education from the transmission of strategy toward the deliberate cultivation of judgment.

Keywords: Negotiation Education; Contextual Judgment; Reflective Learning; Large Language Models; Expertise Development

1. Introduction

Generative artificial intelligence has changed the relationship between students and knowledge. Large language models can produce explanations, alternatives, arguments, scenarios, and recommendations in seconds. In higher education, these capabilities create both opportunities and

pedagogical challenges. GenAI can support personalized learning, generate practice materials, and provide alternative perspectives, but its outputs may also contain inaccuracies, omissions, biases, or inappropriate generalizations. Consequently, researchers increasingly emphasize the need for human oversight, critical evaluation, and instructional structures that position AI as part of a learning process rather than as an unquestioned source of answers (Kasneci et al., 2023).

This issue is particularly important for professional subjects such as international business negotiation. Negotiation education traditionally develops knowledge of concepts and strategies, including preparation, interests, alternatives, issue management, concessions, and communication. Yet negotiation competence cannot be reduced to knowing these strategies. Negotiators operate under incomplete information, competing interests, changing relationships, time constraints, and uncertain reactions from the other side. A strategy that is effective in one situation may be inappropriate in another.

Generative AI makes the distinction between strategy knowledge and strategic judgment increasingly important. A student can now ask an AI system to identify the parties' interests, recommend an opening offer, generate possible concessions, anticipate counterarguments, and propose a negotiation plan. The educational problem is therefore not simply whether students can produce a strategy. It is whether they can judge the quality and relevance of alternative strategies and adapt them to the circumstances at hand.

This paper proposes a teaching design that addresses this problem. Its central premise is that negotiation education in the age of GenAI should move beyond strategy acquisition toward contextual judgment. The objective is not to teach students to distrust AI, nor to encourage them to rely on AI more extensively. Rather, AI should be deliberately integrated into a cycle in which

students experience negotiation, formulate their own reasoning, encounter AI-generated alternatives, reflect on differences, test strategies against alternative perspectives, and make the final strategic decision themselves.

The design proposed here is conceptual and prospective. It is not presented as an evaluation of a completed course. Its purpose is to specify a transferable pedagogical framework that instructors can implement in negotiation courses and potentially adapt to other professional domains.

2. From Strategy Knowledge to Contextual Judgment

The central pedagogical problem can be expressed as a distinction between two levels of competence.

At the first level, students acquire strategy knowledge. They know how to identify interests, formulate alternatives, prepare concessions, manage issues, establish an agenda, and respond to proposals. Such knowledge remains essential. However, the availability of GenAI reduces the difficulty of accessing strategic options. A student can obtain multiple plausible strategies without having developed those strategies independently. At the second level, students develop contextual judgment. They can determine which strategy is appropriate under particular conditions, identify the assumptions embedded in a recommendation, recognize information that is missing, anticipate how contextual changes may alter the value of a strategy, and justify why a proposed course of action should be adopted, modified, or rejected.

Contextual judgment is defined in this paper as the capacity to evaluate and adapt strategic alternatives in relation to the specific configuration of interests, constraints, relationships, uncertainty, and interaction dynamics in a negotiation. This definition deliberately avoids treating contextual judgment as a generic synonym for critical thinking. It is domain-specific and decision-oriented. A student demonstrating contextual judgment does not merely identify strengths and weaknesses in a strategy; the student determines whether those strengths and weaknesses matter in the particular negotiation.

The distinction has important implications for instructional design. If AI provides students with strategic options before they have independently interpreted a negotiation problem, the system may reduce the need for initial problem framing. If, in

contrast, students first formulate a position or strategy and subsequently compare it with AI-generated alternatives, the AI output becomes a basis for evaluation rather than a substitute for initial reasoning. The pedagogical objective is therefore not to maximize the amount of AI assistance. It is to design the sequence in which independent reasoning, AI interaction, reflection, and subsequent action occur.

3. Theoretical Foundations

The proposed framework draws on experiential learning, reflective practice, metacognition, and reflective judgment, which together support a shift from strategy acquisition toward context-sensitive decision making. Kolb (1984) conceptualizes learning as a cycle in which concrete experience is transformed through reflection and subsequent experimentation. In negotiation education, simulation therefore provides more than an opportunity to apply concepts; it creates situations in which students must confront uncertainty, interactional dynamics, and the consequences of their strategic choices.

Reflection is essential to transforming such experience into learning. Schön (1983) distinguishes reflection-in-action from reflection-on-action, emphasizing that professional competence involves both adapting during practice and examining the reasoning behind decisions afterwards. This is particularly relevant to negotiation, where the appropriateness of a strategy may change as information and counterpart behavior evolve.

Generative AI adds a further dimension to this process because it can provide alternative strategies and recommendations with little effort. Its pedagogical value therefore depends on whether students evaluate these alternatives rather than simply adopt them. Metacognition provides the relevant mechanism: students need to monitor not only their negotiation reasoning but also how they frame problems, interact with AI, and evaluate its outputs (Flavell, 1979). AI can consequently function as a source of alternative reasoning against which students examine their own assumptions and decisions.

This process connects to reflective judgment, which concerns reasoning in ill-structured situations where information is incomplete and multiple interpretations are possible (King & Kitchener, 2004). Negotiation has these characteristics, since the appropriateness of a strategy depends on the particular configuration

of interests, constraints, relationships, uncertainty, and interaction dynamics. Building on these perspectives, this paper conceptualizes contextual judgment as the capacity to evaluate alternative negotiation strategies in relation to the specific circumstances of a negotiation and to justify whether a strategy should be adopted, modified, or rejected.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest a coherent pedagogical logic: experience provides the basis for reflection; reflection creates the need to examine and compare strategic alternatives; metacognition regulates both the learner's reasoning and the use of AI; and reflective judgment provides the basis for justified decisions under uncertainty. Contextual judgment is used here as the domain-specific educational objective that connects these processes within negotiation learning.

4. Design Logic

The proposed framework is based on a simple design proposition: AI should be introduced into negotiation learning in ways that increase the range of available strategic alternatives without reducing the student's responsibility for interpreting and selecting among them.

Three conditions follow from this proposition. First, students need opportunities to formulate an initial interpretation or strategy independently. This creates a meaningful basis for comparison. Second, AI interaction should be structured around comparison, critique, and alternative generation rather than unrestricted answer production. Third, increasing access to AI should be accompanied by increasing student responsibility for verification, adaptation, and

final decision making.

The framework therefore does not treat AI use as an independent teaching activity. AI is embedded within a repeated experiential cycle in which students act, reflect, compare, evaluate, revise, and act again.

5. AI-Assisted Reflective Negotiation Learning Framework

The core of the proposed framework is a recurring learning cycle that integrates negotiation experience, reflection, AI-supported comparison, strategic revision, and subsequent application.

The six stages form an integrated cycle rather than a linear sequence completed only once. Students first encounter a negotiation situation and make decisions. Reflection then requires them to reconstruct important decisions and identify unexpected developments or weaknesses. AI is introduced only after this initial cognitive engagement and provides alternative strategic perspectives. Students then evaluate the differences between their own reasoning and the AI-generated alternatives, including the assumptions and contextual conditions underlying them. Based on this evaluation, students revise their strategies and justify what they retain, change, or reject. Finally, they apply the revised understanding to another negotiation in which the contextual conditions are sufficiently similar to allow transfer but sufficiently different to prevent mechanical repetition.

The framework therefore links learning to progressive transformation rather than simple completion. Each cycle should modify what students attend to in the subsequent negotiation.

Table 1. Core Components of the Framework

Component	Pedagogical purpose	Student task	Role of instructor
Negotiation experience	Create concrete decision problems	Act and make strategic choices	Design an authentic, uncertain negotiation
Reflection	Make decisions and assumptions explicit	Examine actions and consequences	Facilitate structured debriefing
AI comparison	Expose alternative reasoning	Compare own strategy with AI output	Design appropriate AI tasks
Strategic evaluation	Assess context–strategy fit	Accept, modify, or reject alternatives	Question assumptions and reasoning
Strategy revision	Convert reflection into revised understanding	Produce a justified revised strategy	Provide feedback on reasoning
Re-application	Test transfer and adaptation	Apply revised understanding in a new context	Increase complexity and contextual variation

The framework is designed around progressive responsibility. Students are initially responsible for forming their own strategic position. As AI

involvement increases, they become increasingly responsible for evaluating and directing the interaction with AI. The technology therefore

becomes more capable within the learning process while the learner's decision responsibility becomes greater rather than smaller.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

The framework proposed in this paper integrates experiential learning, reflective practice, metacognition, and reflective judgment into a domain-specific objective of contextual judgment. It therefore positions AI neither as a substitute for negotiation reasoning nor merely as a productivity tool, but as a resource for making alternative reasoning available for examination and challenge. The framework also implies that case design, reflection, assessment, and instructor facilitation should be aligned around the same objective: students should be evaluated not only on the strategies they can generate, but on their ability to explain why a strategy fits a particular situation and when it should be adapted.

The framework is conceptual and requires empirical validation. Future research can examine whether its progressive AI structure supports stronger strategic reasoning, transfer, and context-sensitive decision making than less structured forms of AI use. Nevertheless, the central proposition is straightforward: as AI makes strategy generation increasingly accessible, negotiation education should place greater emphasis on the human capacity to interpret context, evaluate alternatives, and make justified strategic choices.

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