

Project NAAM: Pilot Approach and Findings Report

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I. Introduction

In our 2021 brief *Intelligence Augmentation: Upskilling Humans to Complement AI*, we postulated that, with increasing advancements in artificial intelligence (AI), there would be a heightened need for people to understand and hone their uniquely human skills related to judgment (practical wisdom). Since its publication, OpenAI's large language model, made accessible through ChatGPT, has led to a wide variety of proposed partnerships between humans and AI. For example, educators have started leveraging the technology to support learners with personalized tutoring and with an initial round of feedback before a review from the instructor.

Our goal with **Project NAAM: Negotiation to Advance and Advocate for Mobility** was to explore the nature of the human-AI partnership and the use of emerging technologies for inculcating those skills in which humans hold a competitive advantage, at least in the foreseeable future. Due to the cultural component of judgment and the increasing newcomer population in the United States, we decided to focus this initiative on immigrants and refugees.

In this report, we summarize some of the work we pursued on the meta-skill of negotiation to better understand intelligence augmentation (IA) and to train for human judgment in the age of generative AI. We start off with a discussion on our rationale for focusing on negotiation and then dive into our approach for the pilot, including involvement from target communities and the pilot design. Next, we cover some key insights and challenges that we took away from the pilot creation and implementation and their implications for practitioners looking to carry out similar work. Lastly, we sketch out potential future directions for scholarly inquiry and learning design associated with building a negotiation empowerment learning experience for multicultural workers.

II. Intelligence Augmentation in the Age of GenAI

Judgment is “a form of deliberative thought that seeks to be unbiased, grounded in ethical commitment, and appropriate to the situation in which it is deployed” (Cantwell Smith, 2019; Dede, Etemadi & Forshaw, 2021). It involves embodied, cultural, ethnical, and metacognitive reasoning (Tassis & Etemadi, 2023). Examples of judgment include ethical decision-making, conflict resolution, and negotiation.

Negotiation is an interaction between two or more parties in which the overall objective is to achieve a better overall outcome than what the parties can accomplish individually. The ability to negotiate comes into play in personal, professional, and community-facing interactions. Doing it well can mean the difference between achieving a successful outcome and feeling hindered. Negotiation is a meta-skill that incorporates other types of judgment, such as perspective-taking, empathy, and conflict resolution.

Project NAAM focused on this meta-skill, as it incorporates [embodied, cultural, ethical, and metacognitive reasoning](#): during a negotiation, each party needs to leverage an understanding of embodied and contextual knowledge, along with ethical frameworks, subjective values and culturally-influenced cues to construct meaning and chart a path forward. Afterwards, to assess how they did and how they might improve in a future interaction, each party must utilize metacognitive reasoning. Given this complexity, sophisticated negotiation is not a skill we see being easily replaced by machines in the near term.

III. Approach

This section delves into the process we took, from reviewing the scholarly literature to identifying a community partner, running focus groups, designing a pilot and implementing it with the target community.

Research

This project is at the intersection of four subject areas: learning sciences, negotiation, emerging technologies and culture. A literature review was conducted on negotiation, the intersection between culture and negotiation, the teaching of negotiation (including a review of syllabi for negotiation courses offered at 26 leading US universities), technological tools used for the teaching and practice of negotiations, and the limitations of current curricular models as they relate to workforce development. We found that little work had been done to understand how the interplay between culture and negotiation impacts the way we teach the subject.

Our hypothesis was that underserved multicultural individuals could benefit from a free, culturally-relevant negotiations learning experience that (1) encouraged reflection on the intersection of culture, context, and negotiation and (2) leveraged emerging technologies (e.g., generative AI) for repeated practice and tailored feedback.

Community Engagement

While we believed this work to be important for immigrants, we wanted to gather input from those on the ground before moving this project forward. Given the large concentration of MENA (Middle East North Africa) immigrants in Northern Ohio, the recent arrival of 2,600 Afghan refugees, and the high skill-to-income gap for this population, we decided to focus our efforts on the MENA and Afghan communities living in the region. Rise Together—an organization that is interested in supporting local

workforce development efforts, especially from a multicultural perspective—connected us with [Smart Development Inc.](#) and the Afghan Community Association. They brought deep knowledge of culture, community engagement, and implementing workforce programs for local Arab and Afghan populations.

Together, we hosted two focus group sessions with Arab and Afghan members from the community. The goal of the focus groups was to identify pain points related to immigrants' success in work and life. During these sessions, we heard about challenging negotiation situations the participants have experienced. Several questions were raised about issues that traditional negotiations training does not fully cover, especially in terms of how work and life situations interact with cultural structures. For example, "When is negotiation on the table and when is it not? Can we reduce implicit bias through the way that we negotiate? How do we build trust in a negotiation, especially when Americans might not trust newcomers? How do we welcome the counterparty to engage with us when we're from a different culture?"

Pilot Design

Once we knew that negotiation was a pain point for these populations, we looped in long-time [Harvard Business School Professor Michael Wheeler](#), who has spent decades developing successful online negotiation courses at scale. We used his existing free resource on negotiation, Negotiation 1-2-3, as the basis for this pilot.

The pilot was a suggestive comparison with Part A being a module constructed with culture, immersion, and learning design in mind and Part B being two lessons taken from Negotiate 1-2-3 ("[Powerplays](#)" and "[Aspirations and Outcomes](#)"). All participants completed Part A, and they were invited to complete Part B as well. The purpose of the pilot was to (1) understand participants' learning experiences with the new module developed as Part A and (2) compare the experiences of those who only completed Part A with those who completed both Part A and Part B.

Part A consisted of five sections: (1) an introduction with instructions; (2) a self-assessment survey with an explanation of the results; (3) a brief lecture on the nature of and preparation for negotiations; (4) a worked example with hypothetical culturally-relevant avatars; and (5) a practice negotiation, similar to the example, with an AI-powered chatbot that provides immediate detailed feedback on the participant's performance and improvement opportunities. This part leveraged reflection questions, community opinions, and interactive practice exercises with feedback. Combined, these encouraged the participants to explore their pre-existing conceptions of certain negotiation moves, analyze the cultural implications of the content, and practice honing their skills in a role-play with a chatbot. Part A also used avatars to create an example negotiation scenario between an Arab-born manager and his American female boss. Participants watched the two avatars negotiate over the course of a series of videos and reflected on the interactions. Multiple learning approaches were embedded to involve participants and then solicit their input.

Between Parts A and B, the overall negotiation content remained roughly the same. Learners were guided on how to set the stage for a negotiation and what powerplays look like in practice. Both parts included interactivity via polls and some form of content delivery through presentations or readings.

Participation

Despite great initial interest in this project, our pilot rollout coincided with the beginning of the Gaza War, which found many people deeply focused on ensuring the well-being of their loved ones and community members. Participants were recruited by our team, Smart Development, Inc., and the Afghan Community Association and included Afghan coaches supporting Upwardly Global's efforts with skilled immigrants and refugees in Texas. Fourteen individuals launched the pilot, eight of whom finished, and of those eight, five completed only Part A and three did Parts A and B. Five participants across both groups were interviewed on their experience and takeaways. Four interviews were conducted in English and one in a combination of Persian and Dari Persian (spoken in Afghanistan). Given that English was not the native language for the majority of participants, translation and interpretation played a critical role both in participants navigating the pilot material and interview and conveying their thoughts authentically and in the interviewer capturing the participants' experiences and perspectives in a way that ensured the preservation of cultural nuances.

IV. Learnings & Implications for Practitioners

Over the course of the last two years, we collaborated with partners on the ground and subject matter experts to develop the negotiation empowerment pilot module and gather feedback. Despite the small sample size, we received overwhelmingly positive input. Overall, many noted that the pilot gave them newfound confidence in their abilities to advocate for their interests, and they expressed hope for the continuation of this work and the development of a more comprehensive version.

“For me, personally, I just like to do it with an AI. I was able to type, think about what I want to say, and then go from there. If I flex that muscle a little bit more, then I'd feel more comfortable doing it in person with someone. Even I have actually had moments now that I'm thinking about it where I have been speaking up in meetings and my work, and advocating for myself, or setting boundaries...whereas maybe in the past, I would have been a little bit shy saying it.”

“[My parents] came here from either Palestine or from Jordan, each of them respectively. And they didn't know the American workforce. They're even now to this day, still learning about it. Yeah, so, I think the initiative that you guys have with implementing this is much needed to help bridge the gap for a lot of us who are immigrants, first generation, or even second generation. It's like we're just

trying to play catch up, and you guys are helping us to, like I said, to bridge that gap a little bit to make it easier.”

Participants spoke about the network effect of this pilot—from being recommended to the pilot to using the realizations as advice for others:

“First of all, I think this was a very good initiative. Actually, one of my friends, he referred and he forwarded that initiative to me, and I really wanted to do this because I think negotiation is one of the key, key, influential things that you can do in your job.”

“I really did feel like I benefited a lot from it. I've been even talking with others about it, like Arab or non-Arab, it doesn't matter. So it's even been benefiting other people. Like, I know someone who had a tough thing happening with their work, and I was talking with them to say, you know, advocate for yourself and be open to negotiating with them. Offer suggestions on what you would like to do, but then be open to hearing what they have to say.”

These sentiments allude to the broader impact of the pilot in not only encouraging participants to push beyond their initial comfort zones and to engage more assertively in negotiations, but also to share their takeaways with their network.

Below, we describe some of the learnings coming out of this work and their implications for practitioners interested in developing judgment-related learning experiences for underserved communities.

Learning #1: One does not necessarily need to teach advanced negotiation strategies to empower individuals.

The worked example and subsequent practice exercise focused on simple messages: the importance of preparation before a negotiation and of persistence in launching one. Nevertheless, they made an impression on participants.

- “I learned this, in case the meeting time is forgotten by the other party, we should organize the meeting again and satisfy the other party that the issue was very important and in general, what is important to us is the result of the negotiation that we have to get it.” Paraphrased from Dari: “In the last week, I had to have a negotiation with my children’s school principal and originally they did not accept to meet with me. Typically, I would have taken the original rejection to mean that it is non-negotiable but having gone through the pilot module, I decided to try again. Eventually the principal accepted and we came to an agreement that was suitable for me and my wife.”

- “When my boss offered the bonus to me, past me would have accepted it and considered it a small win. However after this training, I felt confident to negotiate further with my boss.”
- “I learned that you have to make the jump and start the conversation. What's the worst that could happen? Going off of that, if my suggestion is shut down, I do not have to also shut down. I can offer alternative solutions/ideas.”

Implication: Even seemingly small takeaways (such as “I can pursue a negotiation with the other party even when they are not ready”) could have profound lasting impressions on a population that is still learning the ins and outs of a new culture.

Learning #2: Exposing learners to interaction styles to which they might not have been accustomed and then having them reflect on the experiences helped get them to think about the cultural- and individual-level aspects of negotiations.

Early on, someone asked us why this pilot was not targeted towards people from only one country because even within the MENA region, there are cultural differences between countries. We argued that, even within countries, there are differences between groups of people, and even within groups of people, there are differences between individual people (e.g., negotiating with one’s mother might look different than with one’s father).

For example, we can say *Americans, on average, tend to be direct*, but in practice, it is relative and varies by region, person, and context. In any interaction, perceptions of the interaction are influenced by a plethora of cultural, situational, and individualistic nuances. Rather than trying to capture every nuance and being prescriptive in a learning experience, room can be made for consideration of the nuances and their impact on mental schemas and behavior.

In this pilot, we exposed participants to a scenario where the female boss was overtly blunt, and then we showcased how the junior employee named Muhammad could have responded, using a balance between assertiveness and empathy, to advocate for himself. Following each clip of the negotiation, we provided commentary from a member of the community and from Professor Michael Wheeler. Participants’ reflections on the impact of their culture and of US culture on negotiation illustrated the diversity of lenses and interpretations.

- “In our culture the promotion and wage increase is based on how many years of the work you have done for the company, but in US it is only one of the factors, you must have achievements”

- “Timeliness, the use of surnames, the power dynamic, and confidently talking how good oneself is are all aspects of the US culture that are not necessarily common in all cultures”
- “Even if we do not give someone what they want, politeness is at the core of any formal conversation in my culture. Navigating this and ensuring to speak your mind focus on your value, abilities, contributions, and skills is very helpful to learn from the US culture.”
- Hearing commentary from community members, “who you think would have no issues with pushing the envelope, advocating for themselves or others, to hear that they also do struggle with it, and that it's been a process, then [I] think ‘oh, I'm also on this journey, and she is as well... It's like reiterating the idea of growth mindset versus fixed mindset... I can also be able to do that.”

Implication: Reflection exercises and diverse input from various community members can help individuals consider the impact of culture and individual traits on negotiations.

Learning #3: A long, detailed module might be more prohibitive than helpful.

Most existing negotiation curricula are designed for individuals within higher education who have advanced levels of English and can dedicate the necessary time to upskilling. Our participants, however, came with varying levels of English proficiency and limited time and resources. We received verbal feedback that the 3-hour time commitment was too long for many, as they already juggle demanding familial and professional responsibilities. Moreover, some found the negotiation-specific jargon challenging. These factors might have impacted people's ability to participate despite being interested.

Implication: Simplifying not only complex concepts but also learning experiences to bite-sized pieces could help improve engagement, especially for underserved populations with varying language proficiency and limited time and resources. Consider offering simple modules (requiring less than an hour) with 1-2 key learning goals to lower the barriers to reaching interested learners and scaling impact.

V. Moving Forward

The goal of the first iteration of the pilot was to investigate how individuals would receive a negotiations empowerment learning experience that factored in culture and provided asynchronous practice enabled by generative AI. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with many participants interested in staying involved. As we explore future directions for this work, we wanted to outline some possibilities that came out of internal discussions and pilot feedback.

Research

- Larger sample size – Eight is a small sample size, especially given that the target audience is around 212,000 people. Implementing a shorter version of the pilot with a larger sample size could unearth new and different insights.
- Assess learning – This initial pilot did not measure whether or not participants had learned more about negotiations from the example module. A future study could use a before and after case study approach to evaluate learning.
- How negotiation is defined – In some interviews, we heard comments such as “I have only negotiated once in my life” or “my last negotiation was many months ago.” Thus, it would be valuable to understand more deeply how newcomer populations from the Afghan and MENA regions define and conceptualize negotiations and whether their mental models have evolved since immigrating.
- What it takes to become an adaptive negotiator – Some participants were hyperfocused on negotiations in a specific context (e.g., in a particular role, company, industry) and defining one peoples as x and another as y . It would be useful to develop a deeper understanding of how people conceptualize the process to become an adaptive negotiator and how their conceptualizations are influenced by cultural schemas.

Learning Design

We intend to embed our learnings, participant feedback, and requests for additional scaffolding into future iterations of the learning experience. For instance, it was “a bit challenging” when they had to “impersonate someone else...without [knowledge of] the domain, position, and organizational culture,” so providing more comprehensive preparatory exercises might facilitate role playing. Another point that we repeatedly heard was that participants “wished there would be a build up where a second situation context was a bit different to see how we can apply themes as opposed to the exact methods that Muhammed applied.” Going forward, we plan to offer a menu of simulations so that learners can practice their skills in diverse scenarios under varying circumstances.

We hope this study can serve as a catalyst for those seeking to empower newcomers with the skills to negotiate and advocate for themselves. As this work continues, we strive to inch closer to the final vision of a free, scalable negotiation empowerment learning experience that not only bridges cultural gaps, but also equips individuals to thrive in their personal, professional, and community-facing lives.

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