Original Article

Applying the MARS method to the sponsor contract negotiations

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Abstract:
Sport is nowadays an important part of social and economic life. It contributes to economic growth and employment, increases expected life span of people and facilitates better lifestyles. It also helps to avoid healthcare costs. In 2020, the global sports market was valued at nearly US$388.3 billion with yearly growth averaging at 3.4% (since 2015). However, it must be emphasised that the market value fell from US$458.8 billion in 2019 at a -15.4% rate. The lockdown and social distancing norms as well as economic slowdown due to the COVID-19 is found to be the major reason for this decline. Though, the market is expected to revive and reach the value of nearly US$600.0 billion by 2025, and by 2030 – US$826.0 billion. The sports market is divided into segments by revenue source into the following ones: media rights, sponsorship, merchandising, and tickets. The largest segment of the sports market, reaching 38% of the total in 2020, is media rights. However, sports sponsorship market is booming: it was worth of US$57.0 billion in 2020 and it is projected to reach the level of US$89.6 billion in 2027 (at a rate of 6.72%). According to Brandessence Market Research athlete endorsements have been shown to generate a 4% increase in sales (an average of US$10 million in additional sales annually) and nearly a 0.25% increase in stock returns. It is therefore obvious that behind the physical activity sport is a big business now and negotiations, for example with potential sponsors, are an indispensable part of this business. It is extremely important in a negotiation process to learn about the preferences and expectations of the decision-maker as well as build a negotiation offer scoring system facilitating the conduct of negotiations. These are exceptionally challenging but necessary tasks. Therefore, this article aims to present the application of one of the multi-criteria methods, namely the MARS method, for this purpose. More specifically, MARS will be applied to evaluate the negotiation template for sponsor contract negotiations. The method can ease and accelerate the negotiation process due to its properties such as, for instance, clarity, fit to reality and user-friendliness.
Key Words*:* **sponsorship, pre-negotiation preparation, negotiation offer scoring system, MCDA, MARS**

Introduction

Sponsorship is a business relationship between a provider of funds, resources or services and an individual, organization or event that offers in return some rights and benefits which may be used for commercial advantage. And sport in recent times is undoubtedly a unique and powerful social, cultural, and economic phenomenon (Górecka, 2020) with one distinctive attribute, which is sincere, unforced and usually strong emotions of fans, who are also customers (Kończak, 2018). Thanks to these emotions, universalism and mass participation of people as well as the increasing demands of athletes and fans, sports organizations and the media, modern sport has become not only a resource-intensive business area but also a place for creating funds (Buszko, 2020). Marketing through sport is attractive for companies because thanks to it they can achieve their goals such as strengthening the image of their brand and attractiveness of their products, drawing the attention of potential customers to their products, strengthening the credibility of their advertising message, as well as increasing satisfaction with the purchase of the advertised goods (Kowalski, 2016). Sponsoring communication in sport is not limited to presenting the sponsor's logos on advertising media (Kończak, 2018). Sports sponsorship is today a comprehensive marketing solution (360-degree communication tool), combining not only branding and advertising, but also activities aimed at individual and business customers, events, communication based on feelings, communication on social media, and – the last but not least – projects supporting PR and CSR (Kończak, 2020). Nowadays, sponsorship has become the opportunity to run storytelling and content marketing – in times of information and advertising overload, this is especially interesting and useful for brands. In connection with the digital possibilities, huge opportunities arise for both global players and small start-ups. However, in order to make the proper use of these opportunities and achieve the goals assumed, it is necessary to purchase adequate rights in advance – rights that the entire sponsor's organization will benefit from. On the other hand, it is significant for the rights holder to be familiarised with the requirements and expectations of potential sponsors, or with their working models and internal corporate structures as it may result in a better preparation of rights packages and more effective advertising directed to potential buyers. To be successful in applying for a

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sponsor, you need to take into account your organization's ability to deliver rights and benefits to buyers so as not to make empty promises and to prepare an attractive offer on this basis (Kończak, 2020). Rights and benefits that can be offered to the sponsor include: naming rights, signage, awards presentations, hospitality, advertising, logo, membership, product promotions, newsletter, and publicity. In any contract you enter into with a sponsor, you must clearly state the terms of their use.

Certainly, sponsorship deals are nothing new. In most cases, such contracts have been success stories, mutually beneficial for both sides – organizations/individuals and corporate sponsors. Nevertheless, some important lessons have been learned for negotiating and structuring such agreements. Thus, when negotiating a sponsorship contract, you need to pay attention, among other things, to the following issues that should be thoughtfully negotiated and meticulously worded in the arrangement (Kishner, 2011):

- termination provisions – the focus is on what triggers either party's right to terminate (e.g., public accusations of moral turpitude, either indictment or conviction for a felony, bankruptcy) and how fees and/or royalties will be referred to in case of termination;
- lockouts and other work stoppages that can happen as a result of natural disasters (e.g., earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, hurricanes, floods, COVID-19 pandemic) or strikes/collective bargaining disputes – what will be the conditions that make it possible for the organization/individual to preserve its revenue stream from the sponsor while it is not in operation;
- evolving and expanding nature of naming rights and sponsorship deals – technological advances implemented on a regular basis and the development of new forms of media require careful wording in contract provisions with reference to what rights and benefits are being granted to the sponsor;
- exclusivity period and right-of-first-offer provisions – corporate sponsor may necessitate that at the end of the contract term the organization/individual must negotiate exclusively with the sponsor for a defined period (e.g., one month) and/or that if the organization/individual receives deal offers from other sponsors, it must also offer the same deal to the current sponsor on the equivalent terms; it is in the organization's/individual's interest to avoid such restrictive provisions;
- favourable provision – instead of a locked-in fee structure, the organization/individual should seek to negotiate increasing fees and premiums for the obtainment of good performance (e.g., winning streak, championships, high media ratings);
- conflicting sponsorship arrangements – the organization/individual may be contractually prohibited from making other sponsorship arrangements with the sponsor's competitors or companies that the sponsor actually does not want to be associated with; it is in the organization's/individual's interest to do their best to avoid such restrictive provisions;
- handling and protecting both sides' contractual rights in the case of ambush marketing.

As Benjamin Franklin said: 'By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail'. Since preparation is one of the key factors leading to success, negotiation theory recommends wide-ranging groundwork before starting negotiations (Stein, 1989; Zartman, 1989; Simons & Tripp, 2003). This preparation includes the recognition of the negotiation problem, getting to know your needs and limitations, as well as understanding what the other side expects and anticipating their limitations. It also includes the evaluation of the negotiation template (Górecka, 2015), which presents the structure of the negotiation problem by defining a list of negotiation issues and their feasible options. On its basis a set of potential negotiation offers may be determined, specifying various combinations of options for all the negotiation issues considered. Since comparing offers while taking into account many different criteria is, on the whole, quite difficult, a negotiation offer scoring system is usually constructed to support negotiators in their task. This system assigns scores to the potential offers, which makes comparisons much easier (Górecka, 2015).

There are tons of different more or less known multi-criteria decision making/aiding (MCDM/A) methods, which can be used to develop a negotiation support tool in the form of a negotiation offer scoring system, such as, for instance, SAW (Keeney & Raiffa, 1976), AHP (Saaty, 1980; Saaty & Vargas, 1991; Saaty, 2006), TOPSIS (Hwang & Yoon, 1981) or PROMETHEE II (Brans & Vincke, 1985; Brans et al., 1986). Recently, two other approaches have been developed to address their weaknesses and some application problems (see e.g., De Keyser & Peeters, 1996; Wachowicz & Kersten, 2009; Wachowicz & Wu, 2010; Wachowicz & Błaszczyk, 2013; Roszkowska & Wachowicz, 2015), namely MARS (Górecka et al., 2014; Górecka et al., 2016) and SIPRES (Górecka, 2015; Górecka, 2016). In both – according to the experimental study by Roszkowska & Wachowicz (2014) – decision-maker's preferences are defined qualitatively; however, the results obtained are quantitative. Therefore, advanced analyses of the negotiation process can be carried out such as visualizing the negotiation progress, measuring the scale of concessions, searching for the improvements in the contract, finding the arbitration (fair) solution or drawing general descriptive conclusions (Filzmoser & Vetschera, 2008; Kersten et al., 2014).

In this article, we will analyse the case of negotiating the terms of a future sponsorship contract for the first division motor club in Poland. Using the MARS method, we will analyse the offer exchange process, find the potential sponsor's as well as the sponsored party's concession curves and decide which proposal is the best for the motor club.

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Material & methods

Let us assume that the first division motor club in Poland is looking for a sponsor. In the negotiation process the club decides to formalize and evaluate the negotiation template to obtain the negotiation offer scoring system. In the evaluation process the MARS approach will be used. As a result all potential offers will be scored, which will facilitate discussions with a potential sponsor.

The acronym **MARS** stands for: **M**easuring **A**ttractiveness near **R**eference **S**ituations. This technique is based on the ZAPROS method (Larichev & Moshkovich, 1995) and on the MACBETH method (Bana e Costa & Vansnick, 1997; Bana e Costa & Vansnick, 1999). The MARS procedure is composed of the following stages (Górecka et al., 2014; Górecka et al., 2016):

Stage 1. Determination of the evaluation scale to be applied for each criterion/issue that is considered in the problem being negotiated.
Stage 2. Pairwise comparison of the attractiveness of the hypothetical alternatives/offers, each with the best evaluation/resolution level for all of the criteria/issues but one (the ZAPROS-like approach), and the ideal alternative/offer (with the best evaluations for all of the criteria/issues), applying the ordinal scale (with the following markings: 'more preferable', 'less preferable', and 'equally preferable') or the following semantic categories (the MACBETH-like approach): 'no', 'very weak', 'weak', 'moderate', 'strong', 'very strong', and 'extreme' or a succession of these (in case of hesitation or disagreement). The comparisons are made using the M-MACBETH software, which automatically should verify their consistency and offer suggestions to resolve possible inconsistencies.
Stage 3. Solution of the linear program referring to the comparisons made (using the MACBETH approach and the M-MACBETH software) to obtain the scores from a scale ranging from 0 to 100 for the elements compared with the purpose to form the Joint Cardinal Scale (the ZAPROS-like approach).
Stage 4. Replacing the evaluations/resolution levels in each vector describing the alternative/offer considered in the decision-making/negotiation problem by the corresponding scores on a Joint Cardinal Scale (JCS) ranging from 0 to 100 and determining for each alternative/offer the distance from the ideal alternative/offer applying the formula:

$$L_i = \sum_{k=1}^{n} (100 - p_{ik})$$

where p_{ik} is the score from the 0-100 JCS substituting the evaluation of alternative/offer a_i according to criterion/issue f_k.
Stage 5. Developing the complete ultimate ranking of the alternatives/offers according to the distance values L_i in the ascending order.

The above procedure will be applied to determine the evaluations of possible offers submitted in the course of sponsor contract negotiations from the point of view of the motor club. In the negotiation process the following four issues are discussed: f_1 – contract length, f_2 – payments, f_3 – scope of rights and benefits, f_4 – legal conditions. The negotiation template is defined linguistically for all of them.

Stage 1. Negotiation issues and evaluation scales for options determined by the negotiator (the motor club) within the analysed negotiation problem are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Negotiation issues and evaluation scales for options determined by the motor club

Issues		Options - abbreviations	Options – descriptions
f_1	Contract length	A1	**Favourable:** long term contract (longer than 10 years)
		A2	**Suitable/neutral:** mid-term contract
		A3	**Adverse:** short-term contract (1-3 years)
f_2	Payments	B1	**Good:** high 2.5-3.5 PLN million annually + premiums for championships
		B2	**Suitable/neutral:** medium 2-2.5 PLN million annually
		B3	**Bad:** 1.5-2 PLN million annually
f_3	Scope of rights and benefits	C1	**Good:** basic package
		C2	**Average:** basic package + selected items
		C3	**Bad:** maximum sponsorship package

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f_4	Legal conditions	**D1**	**Very favourable:** 1) the club does not lose the right to remuneration from the sponsor if the audience is forbidden to participate in the match, but the match is broadcast on television or the Internet; 2) the club is entitled to the full remuneration if the games of its team, originally cancelled, would have been played on a different date; 3) the club – in the event of the cancellation or suspension of the tournament with the participation of its team – may carry out alternative promotional campaigns, e.g. via its social media; 4) the club has the right to terminate the contract in the event of public accusations of moral turpitude, an indictment of a crime, criminal conviction and/or bankruptcy; 5) the *rebus sic stantibus* clause is limited; 6) at the end of the contract term, the club does not have to negotiate exclusively with the current sponsor
		D2	**Favourable:** 5 or 4 out of 6 conditions are met
		D3	**Suitable/neutral:** 3 out of 6 conditions are met
		D4	**Adverse:** 2 or 1 out of 6 conditions are met
		D5	**Very adverse:** 1) the club loses the right to remuneration from the sponsor if the audience is forbidden to participate in the match; 2) the club is not entitled to the full remuneration if the games of its team, originally cancelled, were played on a different date; 3) the club – in the event of cancellation or suspension of the tournament with the participation of its team – cannot carry out substitute promotional campaigns; 4) sponsor has the right to terminate the contract in the event of public accusations of moral turpitude, an indictment of a crime, criminal conviction and/or bankruptcy; 5) the sponsor may invoke the *rebus sic stantibus* clause; 6) at the end of the contract term, the club must negotiate exclusively with the sponsor for one month.

Stage 2. The ideal offer and the hypothetical offers with the best resolution level for all of the negotiation issues but one look like it is shown in Table 2. In turn, in Fig. 1 the pairwise comparisons required by the MARS method (performed by the negotiator using the M-MACBETH software) are presented.

Table 2. The ideal offer and the hypothetical offers

f_1	f_2	f_3	f_4
A1	B1	C1	D1
A1	B1	C1	D2
A1	B1	C1	D3
A1	B1	C1	D4
A1	B1	C1	D5
A1	B1	C2	D1
A1	B1	C3	D1
A1	B2	C1	D1
A1	B3	C1	D1
A2	B1	C1	D1
A3	B1	C1	D1

Fig. 1. Pairwise comparisons conducted by a negotiator (stage 2) and the 0-100 scale obtained with the help of the
M-MACBETH software (stage 3)

	A1, B1, C1, D1	A2, B1, C1, D1	A1, B1, C1, D2	A3, B1, C1, D1	A1, B1, C1, D3	A1, B1, C2, D1	A1, B1, C3, D1	A1, B2, C1, D1	A1, B1, C1, D4	A1, B1, C1, D5	A1, B3, C1, D1	Current scale
A1, B1, C1, D1	no	very weak	very weak	vweak-weak	vweak-weak	weak	weak-mod	moderate	moderate	mod-strg	mod-strg	100.00
A2, B1, C1, D1		no	very weak	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	moderate	93.33
A1, B1, C1, D2			no	weak	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	moderate	86.67
A3, B1, C1, D1				no	very weak	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	weak-mod	66.67
A1, B1, C1, D3					no	very weak	positive	positive	positive	positive	weak-mod	60.00
A1, B1, C2, D1						no	weak	positive	positive	positive	weak-mod	53.33
A1, B1, C3, D1							no	very weak	positive	positive	weak	33.33
A1, B2, C1, D1								no	no	positive	vweak-weak	26.67
A1, B1, C1, D4									no	weak	vweak-weak	26.67
A1, B1, C1, D5										no	very weak	6.67
A1, B3, C1, D1											no	0.00

Consistent judgements

Stage 3. On the basis of the consistent pairwise comparisons performed in stage 2 the 0-100 JSC for the considered negotiation problem is formed. It is presented in Table 3 as a result of applying stage 3 of the MARS procedure with the help of the M-MACBETH software. Cardinal score assigned to each option reflects the scale of concession required when the ideal option in the package is replaced by the option under consideration (see Fig. 2).

Stage 4. For each offer the distance L_i from the ideal offer is defined.
For instance, the distance values for option a_{47} = [A2, B1, C1, D2], option a_{68} = [A2, B2, C2, D3], and option a_{110} = [A3, B2, C1, D5] are calculated as follows:
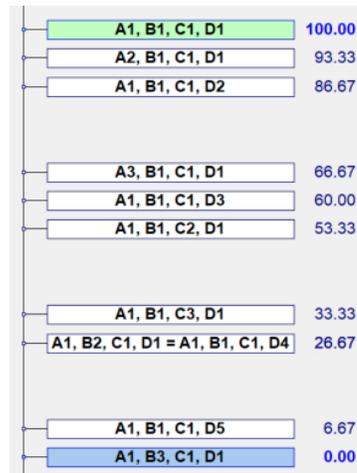L_{47} = (100-93.33) + (100-100) + (100-100) + (100-86.67) = 20.00,
L_{68} = (100-93.33) + (100-26.67) + (100-53.33) + (100-60.00) = 166.67,
L_{110} = (100-66.67) + (100-26.67) + (100-100) + (100-6.67) = 199.99.

Table 3. Joint Cardinal Scale software

Evaluation/resolution level	Score p_{ik}
A1, B1, C1, D1	100.00
A2	93.33
D2	86.67
A3	66.67
D3	60.00
C2	53.33
C3	33.33
B2, D4	26.67
D5	6.67
B3	0.00

Fig. 2. The 0-100 scale obtained in the M-MACBETH

Stage 5. Examples of L_i distances to the ideal offer for packages that can be built within the negotiation template as well as their ranks are shown in Table 4. Having the multi-issue distances determined we provide the negotiator with the relevant cardinal data sufficient to decide which of any two offers is better and by how much. Moreover, these scores may be used to conduct the symmetric analysis in order to determine the fair (arbitration) solution for both sides or to visualize the negotiation progress as well as the concession paths.

Table 4. Example of feasible offers (12 out of 135), their distances to the ideal offer and ranks

Offer	Criterion value				Score from the JCS				Distance	Rank
i	f_1	f_2	f_3	f_4	p_{i1}	p_{i2}	p_{i3}	p_{i4}	L_i	
1	A1	B1	C1	D1	100	100	100	100	0.00	1
46	A2	B1	C1	D1	93.33	100	100	100	6.67	2
2	A1	B1	C1	D2	100	100	100	86.67	13.33	3
47	A2	B1	C1	D2	93.33	100	100	86.67	20.00	4
…	…	…	…	…	…	…	…	…	…	…
58	A2	B1	C3	D3	93.33	100	33.33	60	113.34	39
107	A3	B2	C1	D2	66.67	26.67	100	86.67	119.99	40
…	…	…	…	…	…	…	…	…	…	…
81	A2	B3	C2	D1	93.33	0	53.33	100	153.34	69
…	…	…	…	…	…	…	…	…	…	…
68	A2	B2	C2	D3	93.33	26.67	53.33	60	166.67	77.5
…	…	…	…	…	…	…	…	…	…	…
83	A2	B3	C2	D3	93.33	0	53.33	60	193.34	101
110	A3	B2	C1	D5	66.67	26.67	100	6.67	199.99	102
…	…	…	…	…	…	…	…	…	…	…
134	A3	B3	C3	D4	66.67	0	33.33	26.67	273.33	133.5
135	A3	B3	C3	D5	66.67	0	33.33	6.67	293.33	135

Results

When analysing the results, we will use a standard tool for visualizing the negotiation process, which is the concession path graph. Assuming that the following ten offers were submitted during the negotiation process

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(see Table 5) and recreating their chronology over time, we will plot the concession paths for both sides – possible sponsor and the sponsored party. Fig. 3 shows the concession paths of the sponsor (blue) and the motor club (pink) from the motor club's perspective (in its performance space).

Table 5. Submitted negotiation offers and their evaluation by means of the MARS method from the motor club's perspective (in its performance space)

Side	Offer - number	Specification of the offer	Distance L_i
Sponsor	Offer 1	[A2, B3, C3, D4]	246.67
Club	Offer 2	[A2, B1, C1, D2]	20.00
Sponsor	Offer 3	[A3, B3, C3, D3]	240.00
Club	Offer 4	[A2, B1, C2, D2]	66.67
Sponsor	Offer 5	[A3, B3, C2, D3]	220.00
Club	Offer 6	[A2, B1, C3, D1]	73.34
Sponsor	Offer 7	[A2, B2, C3, D2]	160.00
Club	Offer 8	[A2, B1, C3, D2]	86.67
Sponsor	Offer 9	[A3, B1, C2, D3]	120.00
Club	Offer 10	[A2, B1, C2, D3]	93.34

The shape of the concession path tells us about the negotiator's behaviour and allows us to determine the progress in the negotiation process as well as to predict whether it is heading towards a compromise. The path of the sponsor's concessions in the analysed case should have the shape of a decreasing function, which would indicate further concessions that the partner makes in consecutive rounds of negotiations. For the same reason the path of the motor club's concessions should be an increasing function. In the case of the motor club's negotiations with a potential sponsor, the curve of the sponsor's concessions starts at the level of 246.67 and successively drops to the level of 120. In turn, the curve of the motor club's concessions begins at the level of 20 and rises gradually to the level of 93.34. The sponsor may accept the club's last offer and sign a contract at the proposed level, or may try to modify his partner's last offer if he sees an opportunity for a concession on his part. If the club's proposal is accepted by the sponsor, the result of the negotiations can be considered as satisfactory for the club – the evaluation of the contract (93.34) is much closer to the evaluation of the ideal offer (0.00) than the anti-ideal one (293.33).

Fig. 3. Concession paths of the sponsor and the motor club from the motor club's perspective (in its performance space).
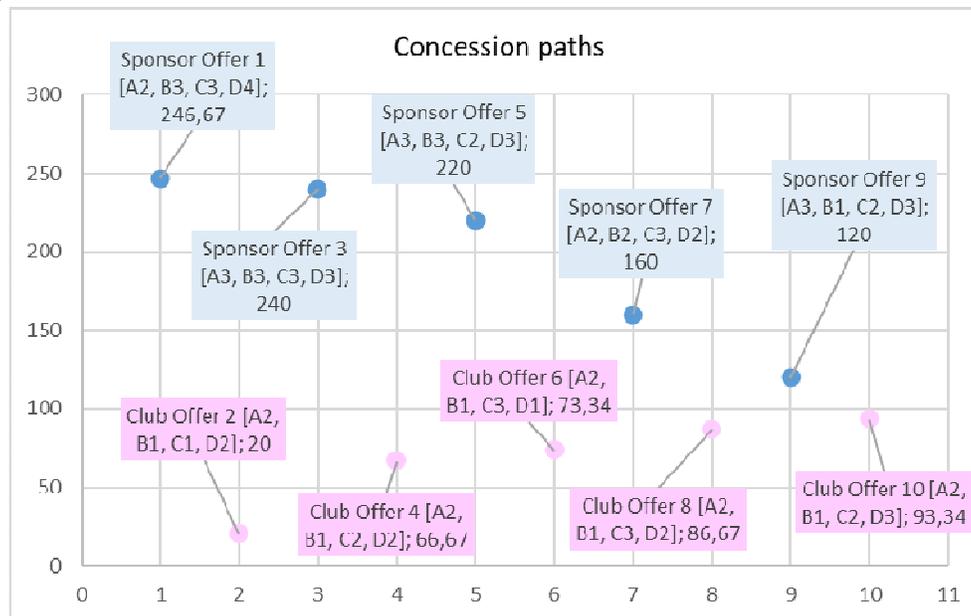
Discussion

What the negotiator is involved in are the first two stages of the MARS method. These are developing the evaluation scale – separately for each criterion/issue of the negotiation problem as well as comparing pair-wisely the differences between the attractiveness of the alternatives/offers from the reference set applying the ordinal scale, or seven semantic categories ranging from 'no' to 'extreme'. Further three stages – the construction of the JCS, obtaining distance values, and building the complete ultimate ranking of the considered alternatives/offers do not require the decision-maker's participation. These stages are achieved without any need

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to interact with the negotiator. As a result, the scores obtained reflect the distances to the ideal alternative/offer. Therefore, the lower the score, the better the alternative/offer is.

It should be pointed out that the MARS procedure is a hybrid of two original procedures, namely the ZAPROS method and the MACBETH method. The former allows decision-makers to state their preferences in a verbal way and provides a functional method for analysing the trade-offs between the alternatives using few reference alternatives only (Larichev & Moshkovich, 1995). Unfortunately, it also leads to the ordinal ranking and allows the occurrence of the incomparability relation between the alternatives. As a result, it cannot be applied directly to build a negotiation offer scoring system. Thus, the elements of the MACBETH approach were applied to overcome these problems. This allows the identification of the cardinal scores for the alternatives/offers as well as to determine the potential inconsistencies that may occur when eliciting preferences within the classic ZAPROS method. Furthermore, the ZAPROS functionality is widened and thus allows the decision-maker to state not only whether one alternative/offer is preferable to another, but also to specify verbally by how much. Thus, the scoring system obtained in this way allows performing advanced symmetric and asymmetric negotiation analyses. For example, this can be measuring the scale of concessions or this can be determining the arbitration (fair) solution.

Conclusions

As professional sports become increasingly lucrative, more and more contracts that require negotiation are being concluded. On the one hand, teams, leagues and athletes are attracted to such arrangements because they represent a significant revenue stream, and on the other hand, corporate sponsors compete for and pay the highest sums for invaluable advertising and goodwill. However, negotiating favourable terms requires proper preparation. In this paper the MARS method was used to evaluate the negotiation template for sponsor contract negotiations. As a result all potential offers were scored and the concession paths of the possible sponsor and the sponsored party (Polish first division motor club) from the sponsored party's perspective were determined.

The MARS approach used in this article and derived from the concepts of the ZAPROS and MACBETH methods provides negotiators with an uncomplicated tool that requires them to provide the basic preferential information only. Similar to ZAPROS, while determining preferences, an intuitively interpreted verbal scale can be applied. When the negotiator is unsure about the strength of his/her preferences, the person may simply decide which offer is better and which is worse (without specifying by how much). Also, the ZAPROS procedure allows identifying a small set of reference alternatives/offers that definitely need to be assessed by the negotiator – these alternatives/offers cover the best resolution levels for all the negotiation issues, however with one exception. This for sure changes the process of revealing preferences into easier and faster one, since while making a comparison of offers in pairs, negotiators have to assess only the trade-offs. This, in fact, comes down to deciding only which of the concessions is better. This compromise-based preference elicitation process seems natural for negotiators as it is akin to the actual decision-making analysis encountered in actual negotiation when comparing different offers from consecutive negotiating rounds.

Subsequently, using elements of the MACBETH analysis, we are able to receive a strong interval scale based on verbal judgments determined by negotiators in the initial stage of the preference elicitation process. Moreover, using MACBETH allows us to eliminate two main disadvantages of the classic ZAPROS approach: first of all, no two alternatives/offers will be incomparable, and secondly, potential inconsistencies in preferences can be easily traced and removed.

To sum up, the MARS method applied in this paper is an effective tool that can be used in the negotiation process to help both parties sign a win-win contract. However, it should be emphasised that despite its obvious advantages, the MARS approach may be challenging for the analysis of big negotiation problems due to the number of required pairwise comparisons that need to be made.

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