

# Hypothesising

*“Nobody would put a baby into a hot bath without first testing the water”*

Hypothesising is a helpful technique to ‘test the water’, to see how serious the other party is. For example, *“If I were to offer you X how would you feel about doing Y?”*



It's crucial to note that by hypothesising you are not making a firm offer; you're using a question to find out the other party's degree of flexibility and openness, and what it might be possible to agree upon.

Hypothesising can be particularly useful for tabling a new idea, for making suggestions without locking yourself into a firm commitment, for testing out the other party's reaction to an idea, possible solution to a problem, structure of a deal, or to help break a deadlock.

Hypothesising enables both parties to metaphorically ‘dance’ around the negotiation, with neither making a formal proposal... at least not at this stage. The hypothetical question can, however, be a two-edged sword, depending on where in the process it is used.

In the exploratory/testing stage it can help open up alternatives, possibilities, options and choices, and help shape a deal that is not yet fully formed. However, if used later, when much of the deal has been constructed, it can cause frustration, as the other party may see it as a backward rather than a forward step, an attempt to unravel the framework and a suggestion that the process has to start again.

Also, be careful that you do not inadvertently reveal a concession that you *are* prepared to make. For example, if you say *“If I were to do X how would you feel about doing Y?”* then you are effectively saying that you *are* able to do X, otherwise why suggest it in the first place. So, remember, your hypothetical suggestion of you doing X is *dependent* on them doing Y. A hypothetical question is about a theoretical action or outcome; as it is an imaginary future it commits you to nothing.

Hypothesising is a very good technique to use in negotiations, particularly if you do find yourselves dancing around an issue, if neither party have been prepared so far to state a position, request, proposal or demand.

What do you think might happen if you were to use it yourself!

