

Cultural and personality differences in negotiation: A proposed conceptual framework

Abstract

Culture and personality have been two of the most-studied factors in negotiation research. The impact of culture on the negotiating process has intrigued both scholars and practitioners. Culture differences will impact negotiation in various ways, especially in cross-cultural negotiation, for negotiation is one of the most challenging communication tasks in business. Both everyday experience and academic research suggest that personality plays an important role in the negotiation process and outcomes.

This paper reviews the development of negotiation research. It reviews different perspectives on negotiation studies, including a culture and a personality perspective.

The proposed framework will be explained in depth based upon studies on culture and personality in negotiation research.

Keywords: Cross-cultural studies, Hofstede's culture dimensions, Personality, Five-Factor Model of personality, Negotiation

Introduction

The theoretical framework underlying the majority of research on negotiation is drawn from social exchange theory (Alexander et al. 1994). According to this theory, negotiation is one dynamic process characterized by information exchange, persuasion, and joint problem solving. Negotiation outcomes (e.g., profits, satisfaction) are generally determined by the complex interaction of two factors: (1) characteristics of negotiator and (2) process-related behaviors enacted by the negotiator in the course of negotiation.

Earlier literature suggests that the 'culture' and its implications play an important role in how people behave, act and respond to things in their communities. The cultural differences between nations and their organizations raise the question of whether what can be applied to organizations of one country is applicable to the organizations in another country. Breakdowns in negotiations when parties are from different cultures are invariably attributed to cultural differences. Though some of these breakdowns may not fairly be attributable to culture, others undoubtedly have cultural origins.

Personality has been one of the most-studied factors in negotiation research. From the social psychological studies in the early 1960s and 1970s to the behavioral decision making perspectives in the 1980s and 1990s, negotiation researchers have been attempting different methods to build actionable knowledge in this area (Bazerman et al., 2001). While suggestions regarding the impact of personality on negotiations are intuitively appealing, many studies have provided inconsistent support for such relationships (Mintu-Wimsatt, 2002).

This paper develops a conceptual model to explain how culture and personality impact negotiation. It draws on previous research on culture and personality in negotiation to develop an understanding of how they affect negotiation processes and outcomes. The paper begins with a review of fundamental concepts in the literature on negotiation, culture and personality. These concepts provide a language for what we know and what we do not know about culture, personality and negotiation and allow us to build a model of factors affecting inter-cultural and personality in negotiation process and outcome.

Our finding is supposed to help managers in these communities to understand the various cultural implications with the aim of mitigating their negative effects on their managerial performance.

Negotiation

Negotiation is a form of social interaction. It is the process by which two or more parties try to resolve perceived incompatible goals (Carnevale and Pruitt, 1992).

The primary component of negotiation processes is negotiation behavior (Alder and Graham 1989; Pruitt 1981; Rhinehart and Page 1992; Thompson 1990). Because of the large volume of research on negotiation behavior in many disciplines, it is necessary to restrict the scope of this study. In this study we will examine two different negotiation behaviors: competitive behavior and integrative behavior. Competitive behavior involves the use of zero-sum or combative tactics such as threats, promises, position, commitments, and persuasive agreements (Pruitt and Lewis, 1975), characterized by maintaining high levels of aspiration and high limits for negotiation outcomes, and by using very inflexible tactics aimed at forcing concessions from the other party. Competitive negotiators always try to maximize their own outcome relative to their opponents' outcome when knowledge of the other person's payoffs is available (Messick and McClintock, 1968). Integrative behavior, which is cooperation and information-exchange oriented, focuses on problem-solving and mutually satisfactory solutions, wherein the needs and preferences of both parties are honestly discussed and eventually satisfied (Weingart et al., 1996). Different researchers have used different labels for this concept, such as problem-solving approach, integrative bargaining strategy, problem-solving orientation, but findings have been relatively consistent that integrative behaviors are positively related to negotiation outcomes (Alder and Graham 1989).

Culture in Negotiation Research: Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Culture, defined as «the collective mental programming of people in an environment,” (Hofstede, 1980), refers to a conditioning of a group of people which will influence a lifetime of thought processes, behavior, and actions. Hofstede (2005) define culture as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others”. It consists of learned values (e.g., notions of modesty, concept of friendship), patterns of behavior (e.g., gestures, facial expressions), and meanings (e.g., concept of beauty, religious rituals) which are shared by members of one group and used as a guide to organize lives. Culture shapes and defines every act of individuals and societies. Culture is an ingrained behavioral influence which affects the way collective groups approach, evaluate, and negotiate opportunities for international business. Faure and Sjösted (1993) define culture as the socially transmitted norms, beliefs, and values influencing the behavior of individuals in a given community. This paper attempts to examine the issues surrounding the impact of national culture on the ability to reach an agreement in international business negotiations.

Hofstede (1984, 1991, 2001) created five dimensions, assigned indexes on each to all nations, and linked the dimensions with demographic, geographic, economic, and political aspects of a society (Kale and Barnes, 1992), a feature unmatched by other frameworks. It is the most comprehensive and robust in terms of the number of national cultures samples (Smith et al., 1996). His five dimensions of culture are the following:

(1) Power distance refers to the extent to which a society accepts the fact that power in institutions and organizations is distributed unequally.

(2) Uncertainty avoidance refers to the extent to which members of a society feel uncomfortable in ambiguous and uncertain situations and take actions to avoid them.

(3) Individualism versus collectivism refers to the extent to which individuals are supposed to look after themselves or remain integrated into groups.

(4) Masculinity versus femininity refers to the distribution of emotional roles between the genders. It contrasts “tough” masculine with “tender” feminine societies.

(5) Long-term versus short-term orientation refers to the extent to which a culture programs its members to accept delayed satisfaction of their material, social and emotional needs. Long-term orientation is future-focused and has long-term goals whereas short-term orientations focus on respect for tradition and are oriented toward the past and the present.

It should be noted that Hofstede’s conceptualization of culture has been criticized as too simplistic because it ignores the existence of extensive within-country cultural heterogeneity (Sivakumar and Nakata, 2001; Jones, 2007) and assumed that culture is static over time (Ford et al., 2009).

When people from two different cultural groups negotiate, each brings to the table his or her way of thinking about the issues to be negotiated and the process of negotiation. Some of that thinking is affected by the negotiator’s cultural group membership and the ways in which issues are typically assessed and negotiations carried out within that cultural group.

Figure 1 represents inter-cultural negotiations as a function of differences between parties with respect to preferences on issues and negotiation strategies.

Much has been written about the meaning of culture in international and cross-cultural negotiation both from a theoretical as well as from practical perspective. There is a noticeable consensus and substantial evidence in the literature that negotiators from different cultures tend to behave differently. Brett (2001) developed a simple conceptual model illustrating the influence culture may have on negotiators.

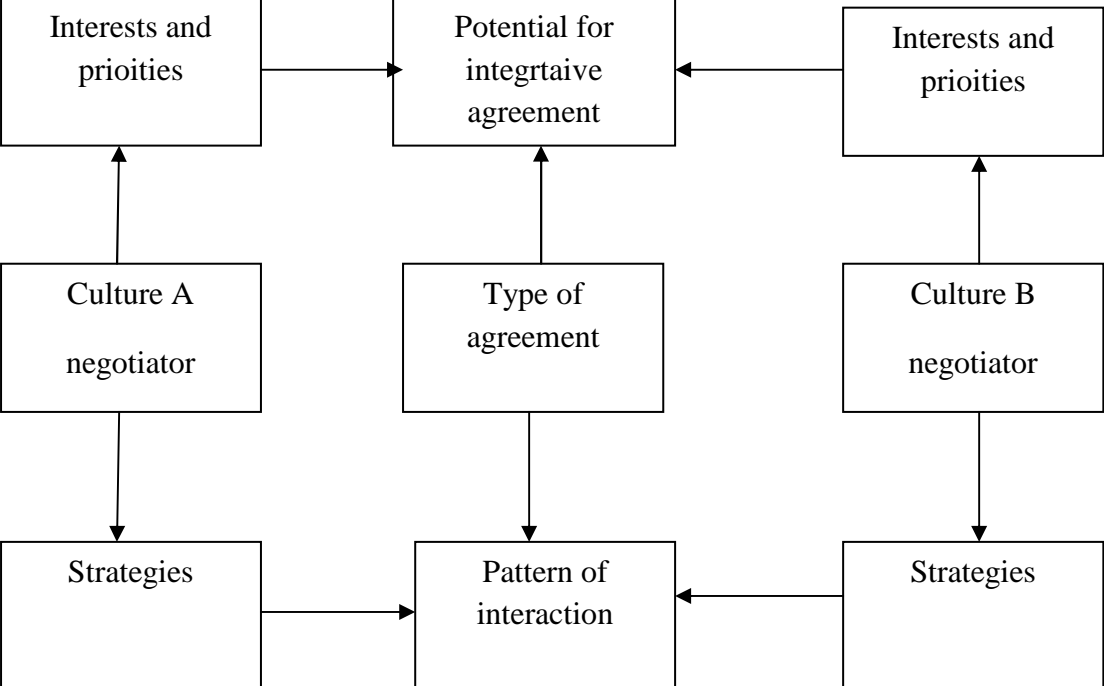


Figure 1 – How culture affects negotiation

Source: Brett (2000)

According to this model cultural values have a noticeable influence on negotiation interests and priorities, while cultural norms affect negotiation strategies and patterns of interactions. The fundamental methodological conclusion for that can be drawn from this model is quite discouraging for the scholars dealing with this topic. If culture affects such basic elements of negotiation as: interests, priorities or strategy selection and also given that the influence of culture is mostly subconscious, all differences in any observable aspects of cross-cultural negotiation can always be ascribed to cultural differences between the negotiators. Each individual is emerged in many cultures which influence his negotiating behavior. At the same time, there are many other variables beside culture that also have similar effects. These include individual variables such as negotiators' personality, as well as structural or process variables. As pointed out by Elgström (1994), it is very difficult to assess correctly the relative influence of each variable and it is inappropriate to treat culture as the unique explanatory variable of the negotiation process and outcomes. Therefore, the studies using culture as the only independent variable explaining the differences in any aspects of negotiation are of limited use and in some cases can even be tautological allowing the Moreover, as pointed out by Avruch (2000) and Sebenius (2002), not every member of a culturally homogeneous group equally shares all characteristics of this culture. Rubin and Sander (1991) emphasized that the variety of behavioral differences within cultures can be as wide as in cross-cultural comparisons. All these and other difficulties have led Zartman and Berman (1982) to label the linkage between culture and negotiation a "most troublesome question" especially in international negotiation research. Although cultural factors undoubtedly play an important role, it is essential not to overestimate their influence on international negotiation.¹⁰ This suggestion becomes especially vital in the context of the research result obtained by Djalidin, et al. Lytle (1999) who claimed that there is a general tendency to ignore the importance of situational factors in favor of cultural explanations which they called cultural attribution error. Many researchers have investigated Arab culture and its significance. As mentioned earlier, Hofstede (1991) studied the national culture of seven Arab countries. He referred to them as the "Arab Group". Hofstede characterised Arab countries as having a large power distance, relatively strong uncertainty avoidance, high collectivism, and a moderate Masculinity / Femininity. Weir (1993) emphasized the unique characteristics of the Arab culture and identified it as a fourth paradigm that represents the management practice in Arab countries besides the three most well known paradigms (American, European, and Japanese cultural paradigms). He commented that the components of this paradigm are rooted in the Islamic, social, and political life of Arab countries.

Hofstede's work has not been without its critics. It is the subject of a long-standing debate and has received a great deal of attention in the literature. Most criticisms have focused on methodological (generalizability, cultural boundedness, subjectivity, and the method of data collection) and theoretical perspectives (construction of dimensions, conceptualization of culture, and its recent application) (McSweeney, 2002).

Cultural values may result in preferences on issues that are quite distinct. For example, negotiators from cultures that value tradition may be less enthusiastic about economic development that threatens to change valued ways of life, than negotiators from cultures that value change and development. The same values that generate cultural differences in preferences may also act as cultural blinders. Members of one culture expect preferences to be compatible, and cannot understand the rationality of the other party, whose views on the same issue are at odds with their own. It is generally always unwise in negotiation to label the other party as irrational. Such labelling encourages persuasion to get the other party to adopt the first's view of the situation, rather than the search for trade-offs that are the foundation of integrative agreements. There is opportunity in differences, or what is represented in Fig. 1 as integrative potential.

Cultural values and norms also may affect negotiators' strategic negotiation processes. For example, negotiators from cultures where direct, explicit communications are preferred may share information by stating and reciprocating preferences and priorities, by commenting on similarities and differences, and by giving direct feedback.

Negotiators from cultures where the norm is to communicate indirectly and infer meaning may share information by making multi-issue proposals and inferring priorities from subtle changes in proposals. In our research contrasting US and Japanese negotiators, we found that the Japanese were using a relatively large number of proposals, compared to the US negotiators, and the US negotiators were using a whole array of direct communications relatively more frequently than the Japanese (Adair et al., 1998).

The review of culture and its role in negotiation behavior leaves us in need of a more encompassing cross-cultural framework for negotiation. We have examined the existence of dimension distance differentials across national cultures, and the effects these produce. Prominent researchers point to the economic utility of knowledge regarding national culture profiles (Franke, Hofstede & Bond, 1991). We have learned from previous studies that cultures with high masculinity, (assertive and competitive behavior), seek distributive outcomes and will have great difficulty with a synergistic negotiation process. Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance and power distance will be likely to accept distributive outcomes and less likely to be comfortable with a synergistic negotiating process. This impact of culture through the influence of cognitive bias creates a challenge to negotiating strategy and a void which seeks a model that can predict and obtain integrative outcomes.

Culture constitutes the broadest influence on many dimensions of human behavior. This pervasiveness makes defining culture difficult (McCort and Malhotra, 1993). This difficulty hampers research about the influence of culture on international consumer behavior (Manrai and Manrai, 1996; McCort and Malhotra, 1993; Clark, 1990; Nasif et al., 1991; Dawar et al., 1996; Lenartowicz and Roth, 1999) and has been used to criticize cross-cultural research (Sekaran, 1983).

Personality in Negotiation Research: The Five-Factor Model of personality

Some people are better negotiators than others. How do the best negotiators think and behave differently from average negotiators? Researchers have been examining the impact of individual differences on negotiation process and outcomes in order to answer this question. An enormous amount of research has been conducted on this topic (Hermann and Kogan, 1977; Thompson, 1990; Rubin and Brown, 1975) even since the early research efforts to define personality effects began in the late 1950s. Unfortunately, many of the findings in this area are fragmented, contradictory and difficult to apply to practical settings, raising the question of whether further exploration of personality factors in negotiation would be worthwhile (Bazerman et al., 2001; Pruitt, 1981). Herman and Kogan (1977), for instance, summarized review work that examines the impact of personality on negotiation to find that only a few personality variables had influence on negotiation and these few variables were generally investigated in studies yet to be replicated. More recently, Thompson (1990), in a review of the literature on negotiation behavior and outcomes, claimed that personality and individual differences "played a minimal role in determining bargaining in dyadic negotiations".

Over the decades of negotiation studies, researchers have been assuming that personality is relevant to the understanding of the process and outcomes of negotiation encounters.

Unfortunately, empirical evidence for the role of personal characteristics in negotiation is often inconclusive, if not contradictory (Bazerman et al., 2000; Pruitt and Carnevale, 1993). Many scholars even question whether personality affects negotiation at all (Bazerman et al., 2000; Lewicki et al., 1994).

In this paper we report one study designed to overcome some of the limitations that have plagued previous research on the relationship between personality and negotiation. Rather than focus on isolated personality traits, as has been the case in the majority negotiation studies in literature (Bazerman et al. 2000; Dittlof and Harris 1996; Rubin and Brown 1975), we draw upon a comprehensive model of personality structure and examine all the personality dimensions. Moreover, we examine personality effects in negotiation within an international context, echoing to the call by Kremenjuk (2002) that there is an urgent need to find similarities not only among negotiations but also among negotiation styles of people from different countries and from different ideological and cultural backgrounds. Speculation on cultural influences on negotiation dates back to the early 20th century, but the scientific study of this subject has a short history, with the last 20 years having seen an increase in the amount of research on cultural differences in negotiations due to the increased globalization in the world economy (Gelfand and Dyer, 2000).

Both everyday experience and academic research suggest that personality plays an important role in the negotiation process and outcomes, however, no single personality trait or characteristic is found *consistently* linked to success in negotiation. Researchers have recognized the need for a comprehensive personality structure or at least the general outlines of the trait taxonomy (Eysenck and Eysenck, 1984). Consensus has finally been reached that the Five-Factor Model (FFM) of personality, often termed as “Big Five” (Goldberg, 1990), can be used to describe the most salient aspects of personality after an impressive body of literature has accumulated in the last decade. Compelling evidence supports the robustness of the Five-Factor Model: across different theoretical frameworks (Goldberg, 1981); using different instruments (Conley 1985; McCrae, 1989; McCrae and Costa, 1989); in different cultures (Noller, Law, and Comrey, 1987); using ratings from different sources (Norman and Goldberg, 1966; Watson, 1989), and with a variety of samples.

The personality factors that make up the Big Five are not themselves traits but rather dispositional categories under which a variety of specific traits may be subsumed (Barry and Friedman, 1998). According to Barrick and Mount (1991), these five factors include

- (1) Neuroticism, which is associated with being anxious, depressed, worried and insecure;
- (2) Extraversion, which is associated with being sociable, assertive, talkative and active;
- (3) Openness to experience, which is associated with being imaginative, curious, original and open-minded;
- (4) Agreeableness, which is associated with being courteous, flexible, trusting, cooperative and tolerant; and
- (5) Conscientiousness, which is associated with being careful, responsible and organized.

Neuroticism

Associated with such common traits as being anxious, depressed, angry, worried and insecure, neuroticism indicates an unstable emotional state. Individuals high in neuroticism tend to have a negative self-concept, low self-esteem and less self acceptance, and tend to have more anxiety about how they look to others, which makes the individual vulnerable to the uncertain situation in the negotiation (Ma, 2008).

Extraversion

As an indicator of one’s interpersonal assertiveness, gregariousness and confidence (Costa and McCrae, 1995), extraversion has been found to predict levels of individual impact on group interaction (Barry and Friedman, 1998). Individuals high in extraversion are more inclined to develop interpersonal relationships, spend more time with others and enjoy being around people (Ma and Jaeger, 2005).

Defined as the tendencies to be co-operative, considerate, generous, altruistic and trusting of others, agreeableness may be the Big Five dimension most closely tied to interpersonal negotiation (Barry and Friedman, 1998). Research findings support that individual differences in agreeableness are linked to perceptions of and preferences for co-operative conflict resolution behaviors (Barry and Friedman, 1998; Graziano et al., 1996). In situations involving interdependence, agreeableness reflects a stable social value orientation that is trusting and co-operative and consequently agreeable negotiators are more likely to have a high trust perception of the other (Ma, 2008).

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Conscientiousness

Sometimes termed as "Will", conscientiousness reflects being dutiful, thorough, responsible and self-disciplined (McCrae and Costa, 1989). Within the context of dyadic negotiations, these personality features are good for negotiation preparation, but not necessarily related to any of the cognitions studied here. Empirical studies also support the fact that conscientiousness is generally not related to any negotiation success, either in distributive negotiation or in integrative negotiation (Barry and Friedman, 1998).

Openness to experience

Openness to experiences has often been defined as having an active imagination, being intellectually curious, having a preference for variety and willingness to entertain new ideas (Costa and McCrae, 1992). Openness reflects the extent to which people are willing to make adjustments in notions and activities in accordance with new ideas and situations. Within the context of dyadic negotiations, open-minded negotiators are more likely to take into consideration both the interests of their counterparts and the interests of their own, and consequently less likely to have a win-lose orientation in defining negotiation situations (Ma, 2008).

For this purpose, this study proposes a model shown in Figure 2. In this model, the five dimensions of the Five Factor Model of personality are proposed to affect behaviors and outcomes of interpersonal negotiations.

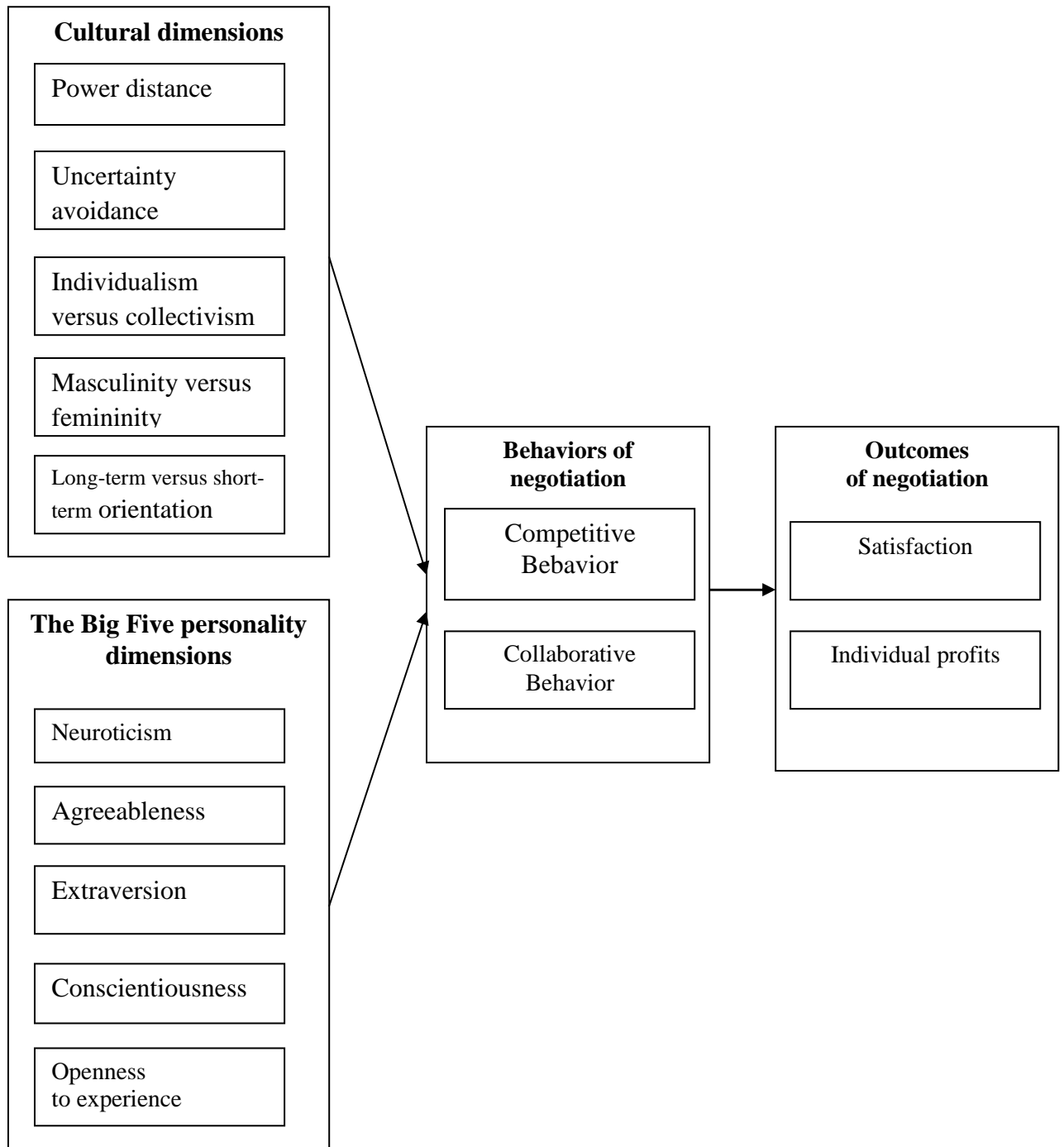


Figure 2. The impact of culture and personality on negotiation

Conclusion

Negotiation, a process through which agreement may be reached on matters of mutual interest, is essentially the art of persuasion (Pruitt, 1981). As such, persuasion can result in one of three distinct negotiating outcomes – integrative agreements, distributive agreements, or no agreements. Integrative outcomes result in the production of increased benefits through the negotiation process which are in excess of the sum of inputs. An example of this is the generation of new solutions through the negotiation process which satisfy or exceed each party's interests. This outcome is contrasted by distributive outcomes which simply result in a

division of the original inputs among the negotiating parties. Here, no new solutions are produced through the negotiation process. This is usually due to the fact that each party is preoccupied with defending or expanding its position. Culture is a fuzzy concept raising definitional, conceptual, and operational obstacles for research. We discuss several approaches to conceptualizing and operationalizing this multidimensional construct in research. We do not intend to argue that using a few dimensions provides a complete description of cross-cultural differences. However, we argue that Hofstede's framework constitutes a simple, practical, and usable shortcut to the integration of culture into studies. In spite of some criticisms to his dimensions, the argument that they capture cross-country differences has received extensive support (Lynn and Gelb, 1996). Thus, there is wide support in the literature for the use of this conceptualization and operationalization of culture. Measuring these dimensions at the individual level should constitute an important contribution to cross-cultural research. While operationalizing culture remains a challenge, our multi-method approach constitutes a contribution towards capturing this elusive concept. In this paper we also report one study designed to overcome some of the limitations that have plagued previous research on the relationship between personality and negotiation. Both everyday experience and academic research suggest that personality plays an important role in the negotiation process and outcomes. Compelling evidence supports the robustness of the Five-Factor Model across different theoretical frameworks (Goldberg, 1981). Unfortunately, empirical evidence for the role of personal characteristics in negotiation is often inconclusive, if not contradictory (Bazerman et al., 2000; Pruitt and Carnevale, 1993). Many scholars even question whether personality affects negotiation at all (Bazerman et al., 2000; Lewicki et al., 1994).

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