The Effect of Negotiator Characteristics on the success of international B2B negotiations

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Abstract;

This paper examines the effects of negotiator characteristics, namely individual motivation, cognitive capability, team commitment, open-mindedness and interpersonal competency on successful negotiation. The authors conducted an online survey among international business executives working in the UK for MNC subsidiaries who were asked to report on the success of their most recent negotiating experience in terms of integrative and distributive outcomes. Unexpectedly, statistical analysis found that the respondents' individual motivation appears to have a negative effect on integrative outcomes while, as expected, the other characteristics had a positive effect. Our results not only contribute to international negotiation theory, but also can assist in the selection and training of practitioners.

Key Words;

International negotiation, personal characteristics, B2B marketing, integrative outcomes.

Citation;

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Introduction and Literature Review

International business negotiation is often a key element in marketing success. Negotiators frequently interact with potential business partners from markedly different cultural or social backgrounds. To be successful, they have to acquire a complex skill set that has to be acquired 'on the job' – a skill set that is useful in preventing undesired perceptions, filtering out communication 'noise' and that promotes successful negotiation outcomes. To quote Shi and Wright (2001:186); "In a global business environment, the business executive's work has an increasingly international orientation and international business negotiation becomes an important competency".

The growth of new emerging markets and of the global economy have seen increasing demand for negotiation training for marketing executives. Training consultants generally teach negotiation skills by drawing on communication theory and socio-psychological perspectives. They mostly emphasize "interest-based negotiation" (Fisher, Ury and Patton, 1991), where negotiators work to identify underlying interests on both sides, explore creative options for mutual gain, and use legitimate standards to determine the best possible solutions (Senger, 2002). Scholars have offered both comparative and prescriptive studies (Ghauri 1996; Francis 1991; Zartman and Berman 1982) since "International negotiators require additional skills and competencies on top of those required in domestic business negotiations" (Reynolds, Simintiras and Vlachou (2003:236).

The process of business negotiation is generally described as either taking an integrative or a distributive frame (also known as cooperative versus competitive frame, associated with win-lose and win-win outcomes e.g. Fisher and Ury 1981; Ghauri 1996; McCall and Warrington 1984). Ghauri (1996) notes that the 'atmosphere' of the negotiation can have varying degrees of either cooperative (associated with an integrative frame), or competitive (associated with a distributive frame) aspects.

The study of international negotiator characteristics and varying negotiating methods has led, however, to prescriptive literature on the 'ideal' ways to communicate and behave, often with reference to different cultures (e.g. Brett 2000; Al-Ghamdi 1999; Brett et al. 1998; Gilsdorf 1997; Graham et al. 1994; Herbig and Kramer 1991; Kjaerbeck 1998; Martin et al. 1999; Mintu-Wimsatt and Gassenheimer 2000; Oikawa and Tanner 1992; Uljin and Verweij 2000; Woo and Prud'homme 1999; Acuff 1997; Rubin and Sander 1991; Marrotti 1998; Tracy 1998; Ferraro 1996; Nair and Stafford 1998; Lewis 1996; Ghauri 1996; Khakhar and Rammal 2013). Other research has focused on negotiation styles, power, problem-solving, skills, tactics and conflict resolution from social psychological and behavioral theory perspectives (Shi and Wright 2001). The success of negotiations in international settings relies on the ability of managers to effectively *communicate* their message in different cultural settings (Schoop, Kohne, & Ostertag, 2010). Managers must be aware of the contextual factors influencing the negotiation process, and should have the ability to alter their style and strategies to suit their needs (Saee, 2008).

Various theoretical models have been proposed (Phatak and Habib 1996; Calantone et al. 1998). These generally rely on deductions from literature reviews and qualitative research (Dupont 1991; Ghauri 1996). Quantitative tests have been done using student respondents and have been cross-cultural in nature (Graham et al. 1994).

However, perceptions of international negotiator characteristics have not been examined empirically amongst business executives, despite researchers' speculation about their effects on negotiation behavior, process and outcomes (Tung 1988; Wall and Blum 1991). For example, Tung's conceptual paradigm was based on five key dimensions; contextual environment, negotiation context, negotiator characteristics, strategy selection and process/progress, and negotiation outcomes.

Because of the general absence of empirical testing among actual business negotiators, these models have not been popular with practitioners (Weiss, 2006). This paper contributes to filling this gap. In the methodologies of existing research on international business negotiations, the choice of research respondents and participants has been criticized (Weiss 2006; Angdal 2007). As mentioned, much of the research in negotiations is experimental in nature, relying primarily on students as research subjects. Ramsay (2004) notes that the academic literature on negotiation is dominated by studies of American undergraduate psychology students. The rationale for using students is related to ease of access. There is some discussion whether negotiation behavior of students accurately reflects negotiation behavior of 'real' negotiators, whilst the negotiating behavior of students has been shown to differ significantly from that of professionals (Zarkada-Fraser and Fraser 2001). In this vein, this study has approached the subject in a non-simulation and non-experimental manner, with a non-student sample. This will provide a more relevant view of the negotiation process in order to provide a full essence of international business negotiations.

Research Question and Methodology

In order to develop a "negotiator profile" to describe international business negotiators, we used a framework based on Shi and Wright's (2001) work. This consists of the following five factors:

1. Interpersonal Competency
2. Cognitive Capabilities
3. Team Commitment
4. Individual Motivation
5. Open-Mindedness

Based on our literature review, we hypothesized that all the five factors listed above would lead to more integrative negotiation outcomes. It should be noted that our assertion that greater team commitment would lead to more integrative outcomes conflicts with Polzer (1996) who found that when teams were present, competitiveness increased and cooperation and trust decreased. Nonetheless, we hypothesized that a greater team commitment of the international business negotiator would mean a more integrative negotiation process, as individual members strived to contribute their efforts to the team, while making the team strive *collectively* to achieve overall effectiveness in the negotiation process. This assertion is also inferred from literature that focuses on interpersonal skills for negotiators within a team (Ghauri and Usunier 2003).

Despite different interests, individual members strive to contribute their personal effort to the negotiation team while the team strives collectively, to achieve *overall* effectiveness in the negotiation process (Poole, 1991). Thus, the intensity of an individual negotiator's motivation and interest in the negotiations can influence the result (Shi and Wright 2001). Individual members must strive to contribute their personal effort to the negotiation team, while the team strives collectively, to achieve overall effectiveness and efficiency in the negotiation progress. While high levels of individual motivation may affect the negotiator’s perceptions or even his personality (O’Conner and Carnevale 1997), we assume that individual motivation will be viewed favorably by both sides in the negotiation and also lead to greater team commitment. While (Rao and Schmidt 1998) have suggested that opportunism has a negative impact on the integration process, it should be noted that while opportunistic behavior may be associated with high levels of motivation, it is not a necessary consequence of motivation. Thus we hypothesize;

H1. The greater the interpersonal competency of the negotiator, the more integrative the negotiation process.

H2. The greater the cognitive capabilities of the negotiator, the more integrative the negotiation process.

H3. The greater the commitment to his team of the negotiator, the more integrative the negotiation process

H4. The greater the individual motivation of the negotiator, the more integrative the negotiation process.

H5. The greater the open-mindedness of the negotiator, the more integrative the negotiation process.

Our survey instrument was adapted from Shi and Westwood (2000) and Shi and Wright (2001) and included additional measures and changes to some of the wordings and tenses of existing questionnaire items. This was necessary to make it applicable to the sample used in our study and questions were also refined and tested using factor analysis to ensure adequate reliability and validity. Our aim was to isolate factors that captured relevant characteristics of the international business negotiator that were generally applicable to international executives. The atmosphere of the negotiation was measured using a variable which measured the perception of the negotiation process in terms of a cooperative verses competitive process. The specific items used are available from the authors.

Participants in the study were executives who had been involved in international business negotiations. To gain an appropriate population we assumed that foreign Multinational Enterprise (MNE) managers of subsidiaries based in the UK would have international business negotiation experience within their work environments with UK or European counterparts. The rationale for this assumption was that most business transactions are preceded by business negotiations (Reynolds, Simintiras and Vlachou 2003), and that therefore foreign MNE managers of subsidiaries would have appropriate international business negotiation experience. The initial population consisted of managers from lists that were obtained from a variety of sources, such as (1) The British

Chambers of Commerce Directory of International Members based in the UK, (2) Manchester Business School Alumni Network lists (3) Lists of foreign MNE subsidiaries based in the UK obtained from the database AMEDUS. These lists were seen as reliable and comprehensive in detailing the electronic contacts, names, positions as well as identifying which foreign subsidiaries were in active within the UK. We identified 1,213 potential respondents, who were sent a series of invitation and reminder emails describing the nature of the study, and an invitation to participate if they felt that they could be classified as executives with experience in international business negotiations. Thereafter, they were asked to recall their last international business negotiation experience when filling in the questionnaire. Following two reminder emails explicitly inviting the participation of experienced business negotiators only, a total of 155 useable questionnaires were completed online. This data collection process took approximately three months.

The study included a number of relevant respondents including business managers and negotiation practitioners from (1) international management consultancies specializing in advising on international negotiation strategies, (2) international business negotiators within international trade (3) procurement consultants (4) real-estate negotiators and (5) sales negotiators. Over 60% of the respondents were male, whilst most of the responses were part of the 36-40 years age group and 37% were 41 years of age or above. Around only 4% of responses came from individuals aged 61 years or above. Over 57% of the participants had greater than three years of international business negotiation experience, confirming the appropriateness of our sample. Only 19% of the respondents had less than one year of international business negotiation experience. Over 52% of the respondents were in senior management, whilst 29% were in middle management, 61% had completed post graduate studies, whilst 20% were educated to undergraduate level.

A two-step approach recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) was utilized. This was executed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to provide the reliability and validity of our scales. It is also consistent with other business research (e.g. Chia Ling 2005; Hadjikhani and Thilenius 2005). Our resulting model had two components: *a measurement model* and *a structural model*. Substantive research in the social sciences has employed a two-step modeling approach for theory development and testing (e.g. Bollen 1989; Li and Catlantone 1998; Chia Ling 2005). In this approach the measurement model is separately estimated prior to the estimation of the structural model. By doing so, more reliable measurements were secured to avoid interaction between the measurement and the structural model. After running both measurement and structural models, our analysis shifted to calculation of the parameter estimates of the structural model in order to determine their statistical significance.

Findings

The mean of each of our variables (on a scale from 1 to 5) are shown in table 1:

Table 1. Average Negotiator Characteristic Scores

Inter-Personal Competency	4.201
Cognitive Capability	3.435
Team Commitment	3.962
Individual Motivation	3.820
Open-Mindedness	4.134

We analyzed the data by assessing the measurement model through CFA analysis, as the measurement items are required to provide adequate construct validity and reliability for the results of the data analysis to be credible (Ghauri and Gronhaug 2005). Putnam (2005) recommends the use of factor analysis within negotiation research due to its general popularity within the social science.. An approach recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) was utilized to assess the measurement model. A satisfactory measurement model using CFA demonstrates good reliability and validity (Anderson and Gerbing 1988). In this research, there was sufficient evidence that the indicator variables or questions really did measure the underlying constructs of interest and the model adequately fits the data. For both reliability and validity, there are a number of different ways that they may be measured using CFA. The model chi-square was 4029.865 with 1259 degrees of freedom, $p<0.0001$. The 'normed' or relative chi-square was (4029.865/1259) = 3.2. RMSEA=0.113, 90% CI for RMSEA=0.110; 0.117. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was 1.000 and the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) was 0.945, and consistent with the fit statistics suggested by Stevens (2002). Fornell and Larcker (1981) recommend a minimum composite reliability of .60. An examination of the composite reliabilities revealed that all meet that minimum acceptable level. The variance extracted estimates assess the amount of variance that is explained by an underlying factor in relation to the amount of variance due to measurement error. Fornell and Larcker (1981) suggest that constructs should exhibit estimates of .50 or larger. Estimates less than .50 indicate that variance due to measurement error is larger than the variance captured by the factor. The variance extracted estimates meet this minimum threshold, so the validity of our latent constructs as well as the associated constructs was acceptable. Results for various reliability estimates are shown in table 2;

Table 2. Reliability Estimates

Constructs	*Composite Reliability*	*Variance Extracted*	*Cronbach alpha*
Interpersonal Competency	0.731	0.563	0.987
Cognitive Capability	0.701	0.655	0.828
Team Commitment	0.905	0.761	0.976
Individual Motivation	0.987	0.796	0.959
Open-Mindedness	0.803	0.692	0.877
Negotiation/Process	0.670	0.582	0.711

Data analysis thereafter focused on assessing the structural model fit. The aim of the structural model is to determine if the data fits the model well (Chia Ling 2005). A more 'parsimonious' model was re-estimated yielding the following fit statistics; The chi-square for the model was 477.693 with 276 degrees of freedom ($p<0.001$). The normed chi-square was 1.73. RMSEA was 0.065; the 90% CI was 0.055; 0.075. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was 1.000 and the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) was 0.986. These values are indicative of a model that fits very closely with the data. All indices were also better than those in the previous measurement model. Analysis then moved to the deduction of the correlations between the constructs of this structural model to ascertain relationships between the dependent and independent variables. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table3. Summary of the Correlation Analysis

Explanatory Variables	*Proposition*	*Correlation*
Interpersonal Competency	Integration	0.207*
Cognitive Capability	Integration	0.173*
Team Commitment	Integration	0.091*
Individual Motivation	Integration	-0.168*
Open-Mindedness	Integration	0.077

* p-value<0.05

H1, H2 and H3 are thus supported by these results. Unexpectedly, however, individual motivation was negatively correlated correlation with integrative outcomes. Thus H4 is rejected and we found that individual motivation was actually associated with *distributive* outcomes. The correlation related to H5 was positive but not statistically significant so this hypothesis was not supported.

Discussion and Implications

We found support for three of our five hypotheses (and four statistically significant results) and this has both managerial and theoretical significance. Our results for interpersonal competency and cognitive capability have implications for decision-makers responsible for the composition/ training of negotiating teams or negotiators (these could be policy-makers for government level negotiations, or multinational managers at the firm level). Greater investment at the government and firm level in training and development of negotiating staff (e.g. team-working skills, cultural and social adaptability) increases the likelihood of cooperative negotiation processes – this investment should be balanced against the possible gains from particular negotiations. Managers could conduct this at the pre-negotiation phase (Ghauri 1996) through specialist negotiation workshops. In particular, cognitive processes may be composed of visualizing, judging, evaluating and intuiting skills. To support such processes, negotiators need mechanisms that transform these observations and first-hand knowledge into a deeper level of comprehension and understanding. We believe that interpersonal competency and higher cognitive capabilities can be developed through specifically tailored negotiation programs that require the use of information from personal experiences, critical thinking skills and, most importantly, extensive practice at a real professional level. Our results indicate that cognitive capabilities are associated with cooperative processes. Hence an attempt to widen these capabilities will also have favorable implications for negotiations. Cognitive capabilities may also be related to general intelligence and the 'process of knowing'; the consciously or sub-consciously comprehended senses (e.g. skills such as adaptability) and a comprehension of subjectivity (e.g. reading 'between the lines') can come only from continued learning and exposure to new negotiating situations over time.

An example of the importance of interpersonal competency can be found in the negotiation training industry where seminars, lectures, simulations and exercises are given to executives with a view to improve skills such as adaptability, discipline, listening skills, relationship management and reading 'body-language' or non-verbal cues. Negotiation trainers should know how to develop these useful skills as they may lead to positive processes, whilst executives should also be perceptive in detecting such skills in individuals when composing a particular negotiation party.

The correlation between team commitment and the negotiation process is also revealing. Sending teams that are skilled and experienced at working well internally will lead again to cooperative frames; while teams with less adapted frames may run the risk of greater misunderstandings. A lack of understanding and a lack of consistency *within* the negotiation team itself may lead to unsuccessful negotiations and associated losses. Team commitment should therefore focus on characteristics that help forge consensus on negotiated business deals such as: consistency of team behavior, cooperative workings within the team, an awareness of the roles in the negotiations, self-discipline in observing team regulations and focus on orderliness and conformity in terms of the individuals' behavior towards the other team members. Hence managers should (1) have cooperative workings *within* the team, (2) define the roles of negotiators in the team, and (3) enhance self-discipline in observing team regulations. Preparation and awareness may therefore lead to a greater potential for a mutual satisfaction process through team working and team commitment skills.

Our results for individual motivation are interesting – greater personal motivation (achieved through mental evaluations of personal gains and losses, such as developing personal business connections) is associated with competitive negotiation processes. Here, we assumed that personal motivation can come from personal gain. This gain can be direct (e.g. bonuses for performance) or indirect (e.g. potential promotion due to displayed competence). We believe that when there is an opportunity for either explicit or implicit personal gain, the possibility of opportunistic behavior in the negotiation will exist. The perceptions of this behavior may affect the negotiation process; our results imply that there is a possibility of 'overly' motivated individual negotiators creating competitive processes in negotiations. This is not to say that individual motivation equals opportunistic behavior, but instead the potential for opportunity and any explicit or implicit gain or loss at the personal level, may be a pre-cursor to the motivation itself. This, however, is only a proposition based on our results for individual motivation. A real-world example of such can be seen in the choke-hold of the bonus mechanisms in the stock-brokering industries, whereby bankers receive hefty individualized incentives to motivate performance-based results. Due to the amount of money involved in the individual bonuses, bankers may be driven by opportunism to undertake a greater amount of risk. It may be argued that such risky gambling behavior would not take place if such hefty bonuses were absent. In the context of negotiation, possible individual opportunistic behavior may stem from systems (explicit or implicit) in place to achieve individual motivations and this may lead to distribution, as the perceptions may be viewed or seen as resulting from opportunism itself.

As noted above, Rao and Schmidt (1998) have shown that high opportunism results in less integrative outcomes. Given our unexpected result in relation individual motivation, it is clear that the link between opportunism and motivation needs to be explored further. In practice, opportunistic negotiators may be involved in making false or empty promises and threats, in the expectation that individual advantage will be realized in the short-term. We believe that decision-makers should invest in creating a team that works successfully internally and is motivated *collectively*, as our results indicate that it is the cooperative working within the team that increases the chances of integrative negotiations, and hence leads to potential profits. Decision-makers should therefore identify individuals with “core competencies” in team working, recognizing that opportunistic characteristics that result from individual motivation may be perceived negatively and result in unsuccessful negotiation processes.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

It is important to note some of the limitations of the current study. Where possible we recommend further investigation to enhance our findings. Even though the response rate is comparable to studies of a similar nature in social sciences, it is still subject to the common biases associated with similar methods. Examples of these biases include sample selection bias and self-reporting bias.

Secondly, this study highlighted the important elements of the negotiator’s profile or characteristics, but did not study the impact of each of the elements on different parties in the negotiation, i.e. dyads. Instead, as previously stated, the view was taken that the underlying factors would apply to all parties, and ultimately their interests in the negotiation could be both mutual and conflicting in terms of price or cost (Cavusgil and Ghauri 2002; Ghauri and Usunier 2003). As a result, we did not distinguish on the operational types of negotiations. This study approached the topic from a culture-neutral point of view. Therefore, the current study is limiting in this area. However, given this, an interesting area of further investigation with regards to individual motivation arises; researchers could assess the perceptions of personal motivation in different *types* of negotiations (and distinguishing negotiating parties), or varying perceptions of motivations in different cultures or nationalities (e.g. applying the scales in this study between competing sets of cultures in international business negotiations can be proposed to infer conclusions that could be added to various prescriptive cross-cultural issues). Could it also be possible that motivated or ‘eager’ negotiators cause competitive negotiation processes, with varying results for type of negotiations as well as potential cultural parties involved? As this research report did not examine these areas, further study is recommended to build upon our conclusions. Again, these perceptions could be either culture or negotiation specific and addressing these points could also generate a deeper understanding of the complexity of international business negotiations.

The third limitation can be viewed in general terms by the use of questionnaires. Questionnaire surveys are a good method of researching negotiations if the objective of the study is to deduce perceptions, and assess the distribution of those among the population. A major drawback of questionnaires, particularly in international negotiation research, is that the questions that are asked are *couched* in the researcher's frame of reference, and hence run the great risk of missing important information that is outside that frame (Wright 1990). The influence of different researchers means that survey items which may be inferred by one researcher may not be precisely those inferred by another researcher. The questionnaire items obtained by the researcher in this research are obtained from the 'lens' or the mind-frame of the researcher, and therefore experience a degree of subjectivity, in relative terms to other researchers who may have conducted the same study.

The fourth limitation relates to our methodology including measurement and structural models; it has to be noted that a SEM is not absolute, but relative *per se*. We accept that simplifying subjective concepts in negotiation study to linear structural equations may not reveal the true complexity and dynamism of negotiations themselves. Although structural equations analyses are intended for, and very effective in hypothesis-testing analysis amongst a comprehensive set of variables, it remains a statistical approach for determining causality, not a temporal one. Negotiations vary and their related variables may also alter with time (Ghauri and Usunier 2003). Repeating the study using different sequences of actual negotiations can, however, be a very difficult task and may significantly reduce the sample size required for a SEM method. The possibility of following a negotiating team within the frame of one (or several related) business deals for a longer period of time might yield important new insights into negotiation process. To do this, either a researcher might be present during sequential negotiations, or participants would be asked to keep a protocol or complete questionnaires of their actions at every stage of the process (Agndal 2007).

Another important objective would be to determine how training should be designed to help negotiators act collaboratively. At the same time, can negotiators also learn assertive behavior to probe and test the other party's limits in an aim to achieve a more favorable outcome (Agndal 2007). With regards to team commitment and interpersonal competency, observing multiple negotiation scenarios within the same negotiation research may provide opportunities to compare how negotiation behavior changes following training. Thus, future researchers could compare negotiation processes with two teams of negotiators, one of which could be trained in the necessary skills, whilst the other would not have received any instruction.

Conclusion

Research on international business negotiation has been underway for 35 years and has developed within two major paradigms: the macro-strategic, which focuses on organizational wholes, and the micro-behavioral, which focuses on individuals (Weiss 2006). This research report adds to the micro-behavioral stream focusing on individuals. The purpose of this research was to further the empirical understanding of factors related to international business negotiators, and their link to corresponding processes. Previous prescriptive studies, although extremely useful in contributing to the understanding of often complex and dynamic negotiation processes, are sometimes lacking in quantitative analysis of real-life negotiation experiences.

Gaining an empirical understanding of the factors studied will add to the existing body of academic and practical knowledge in a specific way. The study of international business negotiations is often subjective and theories about them are constantly being updated. An existence of a body of empirical analysis will aid the evolution of the discipline for both scholars and practitioners.

Successful negotiation experiences should result in both parties feeling more satisfied with the relationship, thus enabling the parties to reap the benefits stemming from a long-term involvement. Thus, negotiation can be examined as a management mechanism that can allow both parties to benefit from the experience and move toward a stronger relationship (Atkin and Rinehart 2006). Research that explores the impact of negotiator characteristics on negotiations will, we believe, facilitate the creation of these strong relations through the pragmatic understanding of the impact of these individual level characteristics.

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