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Towards a Competent Negotiator in the Intercultural Context

Abstract: As intercultural negotiations appear frequently on the business agenda and involve high-stakes investments, negotiators are expected to possess appropriate competencies. The author opens the article with the intricate nature of negotiations, describing their underlying processes and strategies; subsequently, she discusses the link between negotiations and culture, reviewing studies within this area and underscoring the importance of developing cultural intelligence. Finally, she offers insights into the framework of negotiation competencies and negotiation pedagogy.

Key words: negotiations, intercultural communication, cross-cultural management, management education

Introduction

Negotiation has been ranked among the most salient skills expected of global managers, who, according to some estimations, “spend more than half of their time negotiating” (George, Jones, & Gonzalez, 1998, p. 750). Nowadays, contemporary businesses employ negotiators representing

various cultures. Negotiation processes form a vital part of managing change (Kochan, & Lipsky, 2003); moreover, they are an inseparable element of international business management, paving the way for all international business transactions (Budhwar, & Pathak, 1999) and, thus, they offer immense potential for boosting an organization's competitive advantage (Băeș, Bejinaru, & Iordaceh, 2015). Hence, there is a burning need for competent business people who are prepared to effectively negotiate in intercultural contexts.

Negotiation

Negotiation is a communicative activity during which participants strive to reach a set of goals (Keough, 2017). Negotiators specify ways of working together or allocating resources (Brett, 2007, p. 1) through an arduous process, the basis of which constitutes “reciprocal argument and counter-argument, proposal and counter proposal in an attempt to agree upon actions and outcomes mutually perceived as beneficial” (Sawyer, & Guetzkow, 1965, p. 479). Intercultural or international negotiations include individuals, groups, or organizations that come from different cultures, defining their relationship, their goals or outcomes; they also inform each other about shared and differing issues, interests, needs, influencing and persuading each other so as to arrive at reciprocally favorable decisions or agreements which will be eventually executed (Moore, & Woodrow, 2010).

Negotiations may take place in a company, in a neutral venue, such as a café, or virtually via email, instant or text messages, as well as through videoconferences (Keough, 2017). In terms of e-negotiations, we can distinguish synchronous and asynchronous modes of communication (Harkiolakis, & Halkias, 2012, pp. 114–115). Apart from bilateral interaction, negotiations may be conducted multilaterally

(Narlikar, 2010) and with the help of interpreters (Talpaş, 2014), representatives, or agents (Gelfand, & Realo, 1999).

The basis for understanding negotiations (Kochan, & Lipsky, 2003; Sebenius, 2015) was laid by the 'Behavioral Foundational Negotiation Theory' (Walton, & McKersie, 1965), which "has stood the test of time" (Lipsky, & Avgar, 2007, p. 49), triumphing in spite of some criticized aspects, including the imperfections connected with labeling its terms (Sebenius, 2015); it has proven its applicability in various intercultural contexts, including the importance of relationship building when negotiating with China (Li, & Libig, 2001). Two twin processes, among others, derived from its framework constitute 'distributive bargaining' (also known as a zero-sum game) and 'integrative bargaining' (or a non-zero-sum game) (Walton, & McKersie, 1965). The first is seen as a win-lose negotiation tactic or a winner-takes-all approach as it is based on pure conflict of interests. This form of negotiation is also referred to as 'competitive' or 'hard bargaining' as it focuses on reaching the result without trade-offs; it is often contrasted with the second type of negotiation, which involves trade-offs for both sides to obtain gains and can result in win-win outcomes (Weir et al., 2020). It emphasizes the finding of a solution, which gives both parties involved a feeling that they have received something fair in the business process or settlement, and thereby it is also known as a cooperative approach, calling for "expanding the pie" (Sebenius, 2015). While in distributive bargaining (competitive approach) the parties are often characterized by mutual mistrust, in integrative bargaining the parties' relationship is portrayed by high levels of trust, which is seen as important for forming international strategic alliances (Jeive, & Saner, 2019).

When devising a strategy, negotiators take into account a set of constituents. These may be found in 'The Building Blocks of Negotiation Strategy' (Brett, 2007) which discerns: 1) parties, i.e. decision-makers

or their representatives at the bargaining table, who identify 2) issues to be negotiated; 3) positions (what is asked for) with interests (why something is negotiated) and priorities; the fundamental source of the negotiator's 4) power, i.e. BATNA, describing 'Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement' (Fisher, Ury, & Patton 1991), that is what needs to be done if the offer is not accepted by the other party. BATNA is often defined as the best option not included in the present negotiation (e.g. when negotiating a deal, it might be reaching another seller). The strategic framework also consists of 5) targets, or what is realistically feasible to obtain in a negotiation. As Brett explains, "Having targets helps negotiators increase their net gains. Setting targets is another challenge, but BATNAs can serve as a guide" (Brett, 2007, p. 14).

As argued by Kochan and Lipsky (2003, p. 1), "The essence of negotiation lies in identifying the interests of those involved and satisfying mutual interests while finding efficient and equitable trade-offs or compromises." It is important to underscore negotiators' endeavor to reach a net value outcome, which means that an agreement is better than no agreement. In view of that, being aware of the no-agreement alternative motivates negotiators to explore the possibilities of arriving at a settlement. The other party's no-agreement alternative induces negotiators to realize how much to ask for when they start negotiating at the bargaining table. Thinking in terms of net value outcome helps negotiators not to "satisfice", namely to pursue the minimum outcome being just a bit more satisfactory than the alternative, motivating them to look for a much better option (Brett, 2007).

Negotiations and culture

Negotiators are inevitably embedded in social contexts, and "the social context in negotiation is invariably culturally constituted" (Gelfand, & Cai,

2004, p. 238). The concept of 'culture' "has so many definitions and facets that any over-lap in this myriad of definitions might actually be absent" (Yengoyan, 1989 cited in Baldwin, Faulkner, & Hecht, 2006, p. 4); it may be viewed as "an evolving set of shared beliefs, values, attitudes and logical processes that provide cognitive maps for people to perceive, think, reason, act, react and interact" (Tung, Worm, & Fang, 2008, p. 61).

Cultural differences create profound difficulties in the international negotiation process. The challenging decisions which negotiators need to take are connected with the amount and form of preparation; the emphasis on tasks vs. interpersonal relationships; the dependence on general principles in preference to task-specific matters; and the number of people present (including or excluding interpreters) and the degree of negotiators' power (Budhwar, & Pathak, 1999, p. 502).

Hence, the link between culture and negotiations has been approached through different types of studies. For example, case studies (e.g. Wilkins, & Le Nguyen, 1997; Blackman, 1997; Vuorela, 2005) provide us with emic perspectives and insightful explorations of a particular intercultural or intracultural negotiation situation, but lack, e.g. a common metric (Gelfand, & McCusker, 2002). Cross-national comparative analyses (e.g. Graham, 1983; Graham, Evenko, & Rajan, 1992), in turn, pinpoint variances in the application of negotiation tactics encountered in diverse geographic contexts; nevertheless, their downside consists in surmising that culture represents the location of the sample, which may give way to ambiguous theorizing about culture, finding causal relationships, and drawing conclusions that might reflect stereotypes. Cultural dimension approaches, on the other hand, inspect negotiation behavior across cultures with the use of dimensions of cultural variation (Gelfand, & McCusker, 2002).

The cultural dimensions appeared in the studies of Hofstede (1980; 2001; 2011); first, they comprised the famous 'five': power distance,

uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, long term/short term orientation, with the dimension of indulgence/restraint added years later. In 2011, Hofstede – apart from listing dimensions of national cultures – proposed dimensions of organizational cultures, including process-oriented vs. results-oriented; employee-oriented vs. job-oriented; parochial vs. professional; open system vs. closed system; loose vs. tight control; and normative vs. pragmatic.

An ampler approach to measure cultural values based on over 60 nations was offered by the GLOBE study and included: performance orientation, future orientation, assertiveness, power distance, humane orientation, institutional collectivism, in-group collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and gender egalitarianism (House et al., 2004). Such an extension, according to Hofstede (2011, p. 18), occurred for “conceptual reasons.”

Schwartz (2006), in turn, having scrutinized data gathered from 73 countries, arrived at 7 cultural value orientations categorized within the poles of the three comprehensive cultural value dimensions: harmony and mastery; embeddedness vs. affective autonomy and intellectual autonomy; egalitarianism and hierarchy.

Such studies constitute an attempt to construct universal laws with validity-based generalizations across cultural contexts (cf. Gelfand, & McCusker, 2002). As Schwartz (2006) notices, those cultural value emphases are likely to be the core feature of culture, since they articulate shared notions of the cultural ideals. The studied cultural values may offer an important basis for activating the need for further exploration of the opponent during the interaction and evoking readiness to implement adjustments. “Common elements and repetitive cultural patterns found in a group’s central cultural cluster should be looked on as possible, or even probable, clues as to the ways that members of a cultural group may think or respond” (Moore, & Woodrow, 2010, p. 6).

Nonetheless, while culture may embrace clusters of individuals with rather uniform attitudinal or behavioral patterns, every culture contains “outliers—people who vary significantly from the norm and are outside the cultural cluster” (Moore, & Woodrow, 2010, p. 6). And as Hofstede himself argued, although culture is seen as a collective phenomenon, “Within each collective there is a variety of individuals” (2011, p. 8). Some individuals within a collectivistic society may have an allocentric profile, i.e. exemplifying collectivism, while others may be idiocentric, i.e. clinging towards individualism, which in turn might considerably influence the manner of conducting negotiations (Caputo et al., 2019). While India is profiled as a culture of high collectivism, and masculinity (Hofstede, 2001), numerous Indians regard themselves as individualistic and not masculine-oriented (Yoo, Donthu, & Lenartowicz, 2011). This evidences that culture defined at the national level (e.g. collectivism) does not have to translate into an individual’s cultural orientation.

As cultural dimension approaches used to explore cultural values at the national level, Caputo et al. (2019) measured five cultural dimensions (Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Collectivism, Long-Term Orientation, and Masculinity) at the individual level, illuminating the relationship between cultural values, cultural intelligence, and negotiation styles. The results evidenced that individuals with high levels of power distance, collectivism, and masculinity are more inclined to choose a competitive negotiation style, while negotiators characterized by high uncertainty avoidance, collectivism, and masculinity have a propensity for a cooperative negotiation style. Such studies go beyond the practice of identifying cross-cultural differences (e.g. in terms of styles or preferences), proving that the “awareness of these differences makes a difference” (Kray, 2005, p. 159) as knowing the other party’s negotiation style may help to predict their behavior (Moura, & Seixas Costa, 2015).

Cultural intelligence

Apart from underscoring individual cultural values as essential for a cross-cultural negotiation, the study conducted by Caputo et al. (2019) also highlighted the role of cultural intelligence (CQ), which is referred to as “a person’s capability for successful adaptation to new cultural settings, that is, for unfamiliar settings attributable to cultural context (Earley, Ang, & Tan, 2006, p. 5). Moreover, four different components of CQ may be distinguished (Ang, & Van Dyne, 2008, pp. 5–6):

- Metacognitive CQ pertains to one’s degree of conscious cultural awareness while interacting with an individual from other cultures;
- Cognitive CQ refers to one’s knowledge of norms, practices, and conventions which underlie different cultures; such knowledge is developed through educational and personal experiences with those cultures;
- Motivational CQ is one’s ability to focus on learning about and performing in situations marked with cultural differences;
- Behavioral CQ describes one’s ability to manage appropriately verbal and non-verbal behaviors during the interaction with individuals from different cultures.

There are specific types of intercultural experiences that appear to influence and increase the levels of CQ. For example, in line with Crowne’s (2008) study, both employment and education in a foreign country topped the list. As far as education is concerned, in the study of Li et al. (2013), who employed ‘Experiential Learning Theory’ to scrutinize the learning process of 294 international executives and graduate business students in China and Ireland, the length of intercultural exposure turned out to be positively related to CQ in those global executives who were characterized by a divergent learning style. Thus, the authors recommend considering learning style

in assessment and provision of developmental opportunities (such as sending employees abroad to gain international work experience) so that people who are selected for such activities will be most likely to benefit from them.

Groves, Feyerherm, and Gu (2015) investigated CQ and its impact on cross-cultural negotiation effectiveness confirming that CQ prognoses negotiation performance in an intercultural setting; thanks to cultural intelligence, the participants showed interest-based negotiation behaviors in a context that required behavioral adjustment. In other words, negotiators characterized by high CQ levels were found to be able to “reconsider culturally bound thinking and revise their understanding of cross-cultural negotiation contexts” (Groves, Feyerherm, & Gu, 2015, p. 232) by way of challenging their own suppositions concerning the other negotiating party.

In Caputo et al. (2019), cultural intelligence turned out to be a significant mediator between collectivism, long-term orientation, and competitive negotiation style, and it also mediated between collectivism and cooperative negotiations style. Negotiators with high CQ have greater flexibility in selecting their negotiation style when during business encounters with negotiators from other cultures (Caputo et al., 2019, pp. 32–33).

Negotiation pedagogy

The findings of the abovementioned studies boil down to practical implications: business people sent abroad to accomplish goals connected with negotiations should, among other competences, possess high CQ levels. In addition to this, due to antagonistic interests or the state of interdependence and the necessity to reach an agreement rather than deadlock, being an effective negotiator indisputably requires a mixture of

advanced competences and skills. 'The Negotiation Competency Model' (Smolinski, & Xiong 2020, p. 370) lists "categories of competencies in which one must excel to become a master negotiator"; it groups negotiation skills and attitudes into four categories (2020, pp. 371–383):

- language and emotionality divided further into the quality of expression, active listening, questioning, and emotion management;
- negotiation intelligence (influencing the choice of concrete skills and tactics), thorough understanding interests and options, stage setting, making the first offer, managing concessions, searching for trade-offs, generating creative options, using objective criteria, post-settlement settlement (creating value via Pareto improvements), strategic adaptability (strategy matching and behavioral adjustments), team performance (role division and decision support);
- relationship building (the emphasis on the cross-cultural nature of trust and relationship building and the understanding of and dealing with the negotiator's style); "a good negotiator must be able to comprehend disparate behavioral norms motivated by different cultural mindsets" (Smolinski, & Xiong 2020, p. 378); also, such an individual is expected to develop relevant attitudes and awareness of cultural differences as well as to adapt the tactics and cope with the differences showing tolerance and respect;
- moral wisdom (empathy for partner's interest and transparent approach towards information-sharing).

Apart from underlying key skills, attitudes, and values, the model sets comprehensive standards for negotiation pedagogy, which may help managers acquire desired and success-oriented behaviors and assess their performance. Thus, the authors offer a practical list of observable behavioral indicators and each competency is divided into different proficiency levels.

It is certainly heartening to see a growing number of training courses honing negotiation skills, which are organized at the academic and corporate levels. There are continuous efforts to measure their effectiveness (cf. Movius, 2008; Lewicki, 2014) and, in consequence, various recommendations and implications are issued (e.g. Soliman, Stimec, & Antheaume, 2014; Moreno Salamanca, 2018). For example, Timura (2010) takes stock of the common methods used in teaching negotiations: first, providing trainees with a set of heuristics for scrutinizing conflicts and negotiation; second, making participants ponder upon their own role in conflict and negotiation and concentrate on the behavioral dynamics (personal and interpersonal); third, making trainees apply heuristics and improve their negotiating skills by way of role plays or simulations with a purpose to achieve training goals. For instance, a simulation called “Luna Pen,” lasting one week, familiarizes participants with the influence of culture upon international business negotiation and portrays negotiation as a process. It is also crucial to take into account the experience represented by the participants, “Effective trainers can often exploit differences in the experience and perspectives of those participating in role plays to highlight one or more pedagogical points about the role of culture, power, context in influencing the negotiation process and determining negotiation outcomes” (Timura, 2010, pp. 159–160).

Smolinski and Kesting (2013) highlighted the importance of organizing negotiation competitions and described their beneficial effects upon negotiation pedagogy, such as the increased levels of participants' commitment and gained experience in authentic cultural differences. Melzer and Schoop (2016) underscored the need for personalized negotiation training in the context of electronic negotiations by way of integrating learning styles and negotiation styles. It is worth mentioning that electronic negotiation support systems are used for simulating

negotiations which enable participants to test different strategies; context-sensitive negotiation support systems show only the information and options which are based on their individual characteristics; end-user training, in turn, adopts “information systems, integration and evaluation of individual characteristics of learners and training methods providing a personalized approach” (Melzer, & Schoop, 2016, p. 1190). Ade, Schuster, Harinck, and Trötschel (2018) in their Mindset-Oriented Negotiation Training (MONT) suggested looking beyond the learning of skills and knowledge and including mindset development. Herlache, Renkema, Cummins, and Scovotti (2018) described the application of a cross-cultural negotiation exercise with the participation of two countries located in a collaborative learning setting supported by web-based technology. The exercise took place after lectures on cultural differences and team negotiations, and it included guidelines of a fictitious cultural briefing.

It appears that nearly all negotiation courses contain theoretical input (such as conceptual approaches, findings from studies or logs written by practitioners) and practice (e.g. case studies, simulations, role-plays, and application tools); even though instructional options abound, it is still problematic to define ‘best practice’ (Lewicki, 2014, p. 495). What is certain is that negotiation training directly influences the performance of the participants, and the more time they devote to training, the more practice of business negotiation will be accumulated, all of which adds to the vital experience for the trainees and gains for the firm they represent (ElShenawy, 2010).

Conclusion

Intercultural negotiation is a multifaceted topic, and the studies hitherto conducted reveal its richness. There are numerous challenges that

negotiators face and, thus, there is a variety of methods and techniques specifying how to master adequate competences and skills. This unequivocally means that there is a lot to expect from a well-versed negotiator who needs to be prepared for inevitable intercultural diversity in all contexts. Nowadays, an international workplace is one to which everyone contributes through their own cultural values. Recent studies show that negotiation skills training should be backed up by the development of cultural intelligence which is among the prominent characteristics expected of negotiators; individuals who are properly trained or selected in terms of high CQ levels to conduct intercultural negotiations will maximize the likelihood of accomplishing corporate goals (Imai, & Gelfand, 2010; Groves, Feyerherm, & Gu, 2015; Caputo et al., 2019).

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