

Gender Differences in Negotiation: Considering the Usual Driving Forces?

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Abstract—Negotiation is a specific form of interaction based on communication in which the parties enter into deliberately, each with clear but different interests or goals and a mutual dependency towards a decision due to be taken at the end of the confrontation. Consequently, negotiation is a complex activity involving many different disciplines from the strategic aspects and the decision making process to the evaluation of alternatives or outcomes and the exchange of information. While gender differences can be considered as one of the most researched topic within negotiation studies, empirical works and theory present many conflicting evidences and results about the role of gender in the process or the outcome. Furthermore, little interest has been shown over gender differences in the definition of what is negotiation, its essence or fundamental elements. Or, as differences exist in practices, it might be essential to study if the starting point of these discrepancies does not come from different considerations about what is negotiation and what will encourage the participants in their strategic decisions. Some recent and promising experiments made with diverse groups show that male and female participants in a common and shared situation barely consider the same way the concepts of power, trust or stakes which are largely considered as the usual driving forces of any negotiation. Furthermore, results from Human Resource self-assessment tests display and confirm considerable differences between individuals regarding essential behavioral dimensions like capacity to improvise and to achieve, aptitude to conciliate or to compete and orientation towards power and group domination which are also part of negotiation skills. Our intention in this paper is to confront these dimensions with negotiation's usual driving forces in order to build up new paths for further research.

Keywords—Gender, negotiation, personality, power, stakes, trust.

I. INTRODUCTION, NEGOTIATION AS A COMPLEX ACTIVITY

AS with many concepts, there are different angles and ways of defining negotiation. The following definition presents three essential aspects of any negotiation: the idea of a specific process, the presence of conflicting aspects, and the finality involving the participants.

"Negotiation is a joint decision-making process through which negotiating parties accommodate their conflicting interests into a mutually acceptable settlement" [1]

Each party in the relationship must cooperate to reach his or her objective and each party can block the other one from attaining his or her goal [2]. This interdependence sets up a mixed-motive relationship in which both parties cooperate by

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competing for divergent ends [3]. As shown by Lax and Sebenius [4], any negotiation includes both "value creating" (integrative) and "value claiming" (distributive) features.

The interdependence between these two poles creates several dilemmas for the negotiator in his decision making process. First, the willingness to find a solution despite the divergence regarding the decision implies that negotiators must carefully fix their objectives with certain flexibility. Then, they must decide on the level of cooperation, honesty and trust, the level of toughness [5] but also on the ways and means that should be used. Nelson and Wheeler [6] studied how negotiators experience these tensions in practice, revealing that mostly the tension is between assertiveness and empathy.

According to Sebenius [7], one of the common mistakes made by negotiators is to neglect the other side's problem or even, when they see the other side's concerns, to dismiss them.

Nevertheless, since negotiators in the process are evolving from competition to cooperation and reverse, they reveal in the interaction the relative power that they have over the acceptance from the other party of options or decisions. But the power position is never definitely fixed as one of the characteristics of negotiation is to make it shift during the course of the arguments used. During the process participants can become adversaries or partners due to the quality of the relation, the nature of the conflicting issues, of information exchanged but also because of behaviors, attitudes and perceptions. The levels of honesty, trust and therefore cooperation are influenced not only by the uncertainty of the situation, the objectives, interests or stakes but also by the orientation given from the very beginning of the relationship depending on the estimated power of each participant.

There are thus three main driving forces in negotiation: trust, power and stakes combined with interests.

Trust which can be considered as a tendency to believe that your counterpart will satisfy and respect your expectations, is usually based on mutual perceptions exposed during the interaction but also on previous experiences and history of relationship. But while we all recognize the importance of the concept in any negotiation it is not only a difficult one to define but also a difficult one to exercise. Making recommendations or learning about how to establish trust in the negotiation process is a difficult task due to the number of variables which can be considered.

Power is also a very vague concept as it seems more interesting to investigate the sources of power than its effects.

Moreover, the principle of any negotiation is to change the balance of power in order to reach an agreement.

Finally as we will see further, stakes and interests which are entangled with the balance (or the unbalanced level) of power are also difficult to analyze because they include objective and subjective dimensions.

II. THREE MAIN DRIVING FORCES

A. Trust

The idea of trust is based on certain vulnerability. Trusting people means that you expect that they will act in a good manner, accordingly to your interests, without any complete control or guarantee over it. To Rousseau et al. [8], trust is "a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another". This definition highlights two fundamental aspects which are the notion of risk and the interdependence. Because these two aspects are necessary conditions, variations in these factors before and during the relationship will alter the level and form of trust between the participants [8].

Lewicki et al. [9] define trust in terms of "confident positive expectations regarding another's conduct" leading them to consider distrust as "negative expectations". Trust would be then a "propensity to attribute virtuous intentions" and to act on the basis of someone else conduct. They consider trust and distrust as separate dimensions, showing that there is a huge difference between low distrust and high trust.

As described by Turel and Yuan [10], trust can be considered as a personality trait or as a state due to the situation or the context. In the first case, a predisposition to trust others should lead to different approaches and strategies than those of distrustful individuals. In the second case, trust is a momentary state of mind leading a negotiator to a specific action.

Basically, as explained by Rousseau et al. [8], trust can be considered in three different ways: as an independent variable (cause), a dependent variable (effect), or an interaction variable (condition).

As the level of trust is going to be an important factor regarding the negotiators' strategies and orientations, another fundamental whilst difficult concept will influence the process and sometimes the outcome: it is the "strength" or the relative power of the participants.

B. Power

Before and during negotiation, power is established under the influence of numerous variables, bringing for the negotiators the essential question of the balance of power in the process.

A first approach regarding power in negotiations may consider resources that permit a party to punish or reward another one for its behaviour. For Zartman [11] power can

come also from elements that determine the vulnerability of the other party to such punishments or rewards.

Boulding [12], considering that power is the ability to get what we want, divides it in three major categories from the point of view of its consequences: *destructive power*, *productive power* and *integrative power*. The last one has a destructive and productive aspect depending on the relationship and its origin.

Lewicki et al. [13] assume that power in negotiation must not be considered as absolute and coercive even if it is mostly a capacity to influence or the ability to bring about outcomes that are desired. They prefer to separate the power revealed in negotiations from the influence processes used in interpersonal relations.

In that sense they join the relational definition of power given by Deutsch [14] that emphasises the specificities of each situation. The power of an actor in a given situation (contingency approach) can be evaluated as the "degree that he can satisfy the purposes that he is attempting to fulfil". Therefore power depends also on the relationship rather than purely on the resources of each participant. According to Deutsch [14], some elements of power derive from the situation or the context instead of being only attributes of each actor. The characteristics of the situation as well as the characteristics of the participants determine the balance or the asymmetry of power. As he suggests there is a clear distinction between the *environmental power*, the *relationship power* and the *personal power*.

To Bacharach and Lawler [15], the level or degree of dependency has an obvious effect on the asymmetry of power in the sense that the more dependent an actor is relative to opponent, the weaker is the negotiation strength. But this dependency has to be considered on two different aspects; the existence and potential of alternatives but also the importance of interests, stakes, objectives or expectations. Not only do the participants count on resources that they possess which are of interest to their opponent, but also they have different expectations regarding the interests provided by these resources.

Dupont [16] classifies the sources of power in two categories: the ones linked to the situation (over which the negotiator might have different levels of control) considered as "objectives" factors and those in connection with the negotiator himself like skills or credibility.

Finally, according to Kim et al. [17], power can be divided in four components:

- *Potential power* which can be defined as the underlying capacity of negotiators to obtain benefits from their agreement.
- *Perceived power* which can be considered as a negotiator's assessment of his counterpart potential power in the relationship.
- *Realized power* which refers to the extent to which negotiators claim benefits from their interaction
- *Power tactics* which are basically the negotiators' efforts to change the balance of power in the relationship

Altogether these elements create, according to Kim & al, an integrative model which emphasizes the dynamic nature of power relations before and within the negotiation process.

C. Stakes and Interests

Interests are considered by Lax and Sebenius [4] as the element that can measure negotiation. According to them, it is the raw material of negotiations and can take many forms including tangible but also intangible elements. Although negotiators focus on their interests and must take into consideration the other party's interests they have a very narrow conception of it.

Lax and Sebenius [4] make a clear distinction between intrinsic and instrumental interests leading to three misunderstood aspects of negotiation: interests in the process, the relationships and in principles.

Intrinsic interests are independent of any subsequent deals while instrumental interests are influential on following deals or outcomes. The first ones are objective and can be mostly quantified on a short term basis while the other ones are more long-term oriented and can be totally subjective.

Both can be present in the three aspects mentioned before: even if negotiators evaluate agreements by measuring the value obtained from the outcome, the way the negotiation process was carried might have an importance as well. The relationship brings intrinsic interests because of the trust established between the parties but sometimes they may find no instrumental interest in keeping the relationship. Finally, negotiators can share or develop common values or norms that can provide immediate or future effects.

Leroux [18] talks about instrumental or fundamental stakes; the visible, material, tangible part (instrumental) made up mostly of economic aspects is sometimes less important than the invisible one (fundamental) which refers to notions like self-esteem, status or reputation.

As Dupont [16] shows, there is a clear link between interests and stakes. Every negotiation implies expectations, objectives, interests, consequences (positive or negative), risks, probabilities (chances). The stake of the negotiation is the impact of the outcome on the interests, tangible or intangible ones.

Combined together these driving forces determine most of the strategic choices in negotiation like the competition or cooperation orientation, the willingness to impose or to adapt to the situation, short or long negotiation, open or restricted number of points to negotiate and offensive or defensive attitude.

III. GENDER DIFFERENCES IN NEGOTIATION

Are men and women different when they negotiate? How to explain these differences?

Does it really matter that men and women conceptualize negotiation differently?

Does gender impact negotiation performance?

Over nearly the past forty years, in fact since the publication by Rubin and Brown [19] of the first literature

review on the subject, theory and empirical research have provided us with conflicting assertions and inconsistent or disparate findings.

Initially gender was considered in negotiation as a stable set of individual characteristics leading research to a direct effect model neglecting the influence of contextual variables in the interaction. The gender differences would become predictive of specific bargaining behaviours, strategies and even outcomes.

But, according to Stuhlmacher and Walters [20], differences in outcomes can be expected due to differences in perceptions, behaviours and contextual factors. To them even if men and women have different negotiating styles, the effect of these discrepancies on the outcome is unclear. The effectiveness of a specific behaviour is linked to the context and the constraints of a specific negotiation. More than this, according to Barkacs and Standifird [21], not all females behave the same way just as all males don't.

A previous study from Walters et al. [22] found that women have a tendency to demonstrate more cooperative behaviours than men but according to the authors, the choice of competitive or cooperative behaviours vary mostly depending on the constraints of the negotiation context. Calhoun and Smith [23] in a study about the effects of gender and motivation on negotiation showed that even if female pairs obtained during the experiment lower joint profit than the male ones, it was only when the external motivation to be concerned by both their own and their counterpart profit was low. According to them, it would be wrong in these conditions to conclude that men are more effective negotiators than women.

Therefore gender differences are likely to interact with other situational factors. Some researchers have praised for a contingency approach with a situational perspective [24], [25] but such situational interactions are difficult to identify due to the vast display of contextual variations that characterize negotiation.

Gender differences are more influential in vague and confusing negotiation situations because it requires improvisation and reveals personality traits. In that sense, some situational variables can moderate or on the opposite amplify those differences.

To Kolb [26], differences are characterized either in a deficit model or a valuing difference model. In the first case, which is the most expressed, the focus is on a lack of skills or performance from women compared to men.

Kolb [26], [27] recommends considering gender as emergent in interaction. Participants behave in a way that is seen as gender-appropriate in a specific context, leading to the question of which conditions are driving gender differences to express themselves. She talks about "Shadow negotiation" because of the tacit understandings about how to act and what is the role of gender in the process.

There is a perception as a social construction that men and women negotiate differently and this is leading to stereotyped expectations. This is leading to gender schemas which are

implicit sets of assumptions about sex differences and how they express. Participants assume that their counterparts will conform themselves to gender behaviours.

Kray and Thompson [28] in an extensive review of theories and empirical supports on gender and negotiation identify five main theoretical perspectives:

- 1) Men and women initially differ in the way they consider negotiation (competition vs cooperation) in their bargaining styles, in how they handle conflict and negotiation but also how gender impacts the degree to which negotiators focus on interests, rights, and power in resolving disputes.
- 2) On the contrary, men and women don't differ fundamentally but rather the negotiating partners hold different expectations about men and women that lead them to be treated differently. Negotiators adjust their behaviour depending on their counterpart gender and they perform differently as a result of their opponent behaviour. Gender would then affect the way negotiators are expected to behave but also the way they are treated.
- 3) Negotiators have different expectations depending on their counterpart gender that they communicate deliberately or negligibly causing behaviours that are consistent with these expectations and creating a self-fulfilling effect. The power or the negotiator's expectations produces a behaviour confirmation.
- 4) The situation is a primary determinant of any behaviour. Men and women are inherently similar if not identical in their approach of negotiation but external and situational factors create the appearance of gender differences and contribute to related behaviours. In that sense, the balance of power and how power is expressed can be a determinant and an explanatory variable of the expression of gender differences during negotiation.
- 5) Depending on the situation, the impact of gender issues on the negotiation process and outcome can be moderated. Either the situational context will lead to the activation of stereotypes, presumably negatives, which will have an effect on the process and will amplify gender differences by reducing reality to simple traits or, normative contextual cues will force the participants to adopt a standardized behaviour. In strong situations (high level of stakes for example), accurate behaviours are more clearly defined while in weak situations there is a lack of behavioural indications leading to the expression of individual differences that can be related to gender ones.

These five perspectives bring several challenges for any research.

How to define and measure participants' expectations in terms of gender practices?

How could the impact of the situational context in negotiation be determined and analysed?

Kray and Thompson [28] recommend a systematic change between situations where presumed situational asymmetries within a group across negotiators are present or absent;

For example how women and men respond differently in single-sex versus mixed-sex contexts. But this doesn't take care of personal differences within male and female populations, considering that all personalities are homogeneous so are their behaviours.

IV. HRM TESTS TO THE RESCUE AND NEW TRACKS FOR RESEARCH

Human resources management tools like self-assessment or self-evaluation tests are usually used to help understanding employees or candidates' main personality traits in order to facilitate recruitment, staff integration and career development.

Based mostly on the Big Five model [29], [30] which dimensions are *openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism* they can be extended to other dimensions related to motivation and task oriented behaviours or skills.

The Big Five model or Five Factor model has been widely used for searches over the world regarding personality and has become a dominant theory of trait structure in personality psychology while many critics limit its contribution to the empirical dimension.

Concerning gender differences, a study in 55 nations using the Big Five Inventory found that women tended to be somewhat higher than men in neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. The difference in neuroticism was the most prominent and consistent, with significant differences found in 49 of the 55 nations surveyed [31].

The test that is proposed to be used is an extension of the five factor model based on a "forced choice" between propositions linked to several personality traits and related to the interaction between the individual and its environment.

The questionnaire leads to a "portrait" in ten dimensions considered as behavioural skills with score between 0 and 100.

Within these dimensions, some are more or less directly related to negotiation: The ability to improvise, the capacity to communicate and exteriorize, the propensity to compete or on the contrary to conciliate, the open mindedness and receptiveness to others, the capacity to control anxiety and stress or to relax and finally the willingness to exert power.

Each and every "portrait" based on these dimensions is unique not only because it represents a personal combination influenced by many factors like personality, experience, education but also because of the participants' situation or the circumstances at the time of the test.

Nevertheless, it provides an indication of the most important behavioural traits with a degree of flexibility and so can be compared with other portraits.

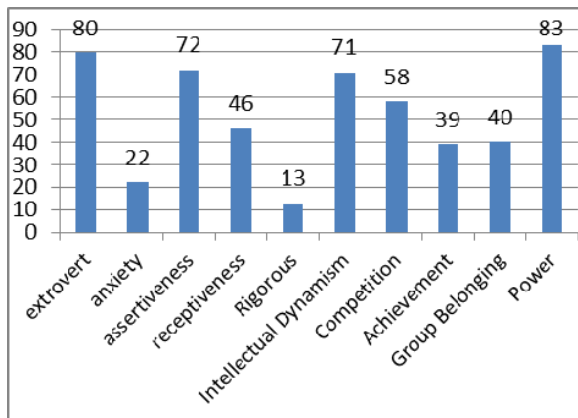


Fig. 1 First example of a psychological “portrait” based on 10 dimensions

In Fig. 1 we see that the test participant has a tendency to exert power and value its use (score = 83, average = 50), a strong capacity to communicate and express his feelings or impressions (80), a preference for competition (58), a good proportion of self-assurance (72) a strong preference for improvisation (rigorous=13), a tendency to be individualistic (group belonging= 40) and a capacity to stay calm and to resist to pressure (anxiety= 22).

In terms of negotiation, some of these characteristics can be considered as real assets: the preference for competition, a capacity to communicate (convince), a resistance to pressure together with an aptitude to improvisation. Probably the score on receptiveness (46) would reveal an insufficient capacity to listen to others while the high score of intellectual dynamism (71) proves a real curiosity and an interest for new things and approaches.

If this is the portrait of a male participant the question is to know if in a negotiation process with a female counterpart displaying opposite scores (see Fig. 2) the outcome (if one is reached) reflects gender differences, personality ones or aptitudes to negotiate.

In Fig. 2, we clearly see someone who doesn’t believe much in competition (40), has no real interest for power or its use (28) but looks after protection, has a tendency to be introverted (33), is quite reluctant to listen to others (42) and not so opened to new ideas (50), and finally is pretty much easily stressed (60).

What would then be the differences between the Fig. 1 profile and the Fig. 2 in terms of negotiation? Could these differences be attributed to gender only?

The same question arises in the case of a negotiation with a female participant showing close characteristics to Fig. 1. The confrontation of similar profiles would in that case put the stress only on characteristics related to gender, if revealed.

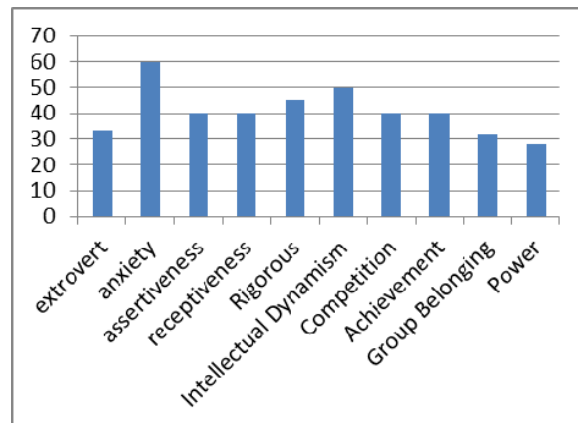


Fig. 2 Second example of a psychological “portrait” based on 10 dimensions

Furthermore, a survey with male and female participants with common or close characteristics regarding how they consider power, trust, evaluate their interests or stakes might reveal similarities or gender differences over the driving forces in negotiation.

According to Kray and Thompson [28] findings suggest that power is an explanatory variable for understanding gender and negotiations, although it is unclear whether it exerts a systematic impact on bargaining behavior across contexts for men and women. Some evidence suggests that men and women respond comparably to power or how to use it. When placed in identical power situations, differences between how men and women respond are often not clearly identified.

The idea is not only to experiment a situation involving mixed sex participants with a perfect power balance, a high and mutual level of trust, comparable stakes or incentives but also to involve similar psychological profiles in order to make sure that any discrepancy derives not from the individual’s profiles or the situation but from a gender influenced way of considering negotiation.

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

As a purely human activity used in order to solve conflicts or in a more positive way, to build projects, negotiation is a complex interaction involving participants with different visions of what is or should be a proper one. From the vision of the relationship as a pure competition, focusing only on interests, to cooperation based on trust, the negotiators will position themselves in terms of tactics and ways or means which are, to them, appropriate in order to succeed. This positioning depends on many variables linked to the specificity of the situation, the context, the levels of power, trust and stakes but also who are the participants with their characteristics, personalities, skills and competencies.

The debate over gender differences in negotiation is timeless. Not only these differences are difficult to interpret

and evaluate but at the same time they are also expected as a social construct based on stereotypes.

While situational characteristics may alter the effects of gender on negotiation, a stronger influence might come from the psychological profile of the participants. A negotiation between two participants from opposite sex with a common preference for competition in a powerful and offensive way will make difficult the assumption that women are more cooperative than men or that men are more aggressive; especially if they define the driving forces of negotiation the same way.

If we consider gender as an interactive phenomenon, it might be useful for further experiments to confront people with similar profiles in order to reveal discrepancies that are quite invisible but that we suspect implicitly.

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