



The Interplay of Culture and Gender in the Perceived Ethicality of Negotiation Tactics

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Abstract

This paper examines the interplay of national cultural values and gender-related behavioural norms in the context of business negotiations. In particular, it presents the methods and findings of a quantitative investigation carried out among business negotiators in the West Transdanubian Region in Hungary aiming to detect differences between male and female business negotiators' judgement on, and employment of ethically ambiguous negotiating tactics. With regard to the perceived ethicality of the tactics the findings seem to reveal strong masculine cultural orientation since female negotiators' judgements on the appropriateness of the tactics were very similar to those of their male counterparts. On the other hand, women claimed to use the tactics less frequently than men, which might indicate that female negotiators' behavioural norms and practices are more gender-bound than the values they hold. The paper also discusses the limitations of the research and proposes further lines of investigations.

Keywords: Culture, Business ethics, Gender, Masculinity, Negotiations, Tactics, Values, Practices.

Introduction

This paper sets out to investigate whether there are differences between male and female business negotiators when assessing and opting for or against the employment of ethically ambiguous negotiating tactics. Although the last decades have seen increasing international academic interest in this topic, in Hungary there is a lack of similar research. Given these conditions, the present study aims to test theories rather than build one. The examination relies on two constructs: the notions of femininity and masculinity as an important dimension of national cultural values and Lewicki and Robinson's framework on marginally ethical negotiating tactics^{1,2}. The literature review looks at important yet often inconsistent results in these fields as well as findings on the different approach men and women take to negotiations. The empirical part of the paper presents the methods and findings of a questionnaire survey carried out among business negotiators in Hungary's West Transdanubian Region in order to see whether there are differences in male and female business negotiators' judgement on, and employment of ethically ambiguous negotiating tactics.

Review of Related Literature: Femininity vs masculinity:

The concepts of femininity and masculinity, as two opposites of one cultural dimension, were first put forward by Professor Geert Hofstede in a seminal volume¹. In masculine societies the dominant values are success, competition and achievement, whereas in more feminine societies the emphasis is on harmony, quality of life and caring for others. In masculine societies gender roles are traditionally conservative: boys fight, girls cry; in the families men are expected to be the bread-winners and women the home-makers.

The figure for Hungary, which first appeared in the second edition of *Cultures and Organisations*, is 88, placing Hungary on the strongly masculine end of the dimension³. However, the index of 17, which appears in the Hungarian translation of the same volume, depicts a very feminine culture: the editor of the Hungarian edition, with Hofstede's permission, replaced the indices with figures obtained from an examination of his own claiming that his sample was more similar to the original Hofstedean IBM sample than the database Hofstede used for his calculations concerning Hungary⁴.

Subsequent studies continue to come to controversial results concerning the issue. For example, the SMILE project, which investigated the values of Hungarian-German transnational companies of different sizes, also found tendencies towards femininity in Hungary, and the results of a survey of Hungarian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating in the West Transdanubian region are in line with these findings^{5,6}. However, the findings of the STRATOS project, which also concentrated on the values of SMEs, indicate masculine orientation and Falk-Bánó came to the same conclusion on the basis of her fieldwork findings in fifty-three international organisations, which are located mainly in Budapest, the capital^{7,8}.

Hofstede links masculinity to competition and femininity to cooperation, which provides us with the opportunity to examine this dimension of his theoretical construct in the context of negotiations. Both a quantitative and a qualitative investigation found that male and female Hungarian business negotiators alike attribute very assertive qualities to good negotiators^{9,10}.

These findings, which served as a springboard for the present study, also support the masculinity-orientation view.

Ethically ambiguous negotiating tactics: In a seminal study, Lewicki and Robinson put forward the view that negotiating tactics are on a continuum of ethically appropriate to ethically inappropriate with a grey area in between the two groups². They claimed that there are marginally unethical tactics in the grey area, which are justifiable under some circumstances but unclear as to their ethical appropriateness. In a large-scale questionnaire survey they made more than 1,000 MBA students from two American universities rate on the appropriateness and likelihood of use of 18 marginally unethical tactics. On the basis of the results, they established the following five factors (groups of tactics): (F1) Misrepresentation of information; (F2) Traditional competitive bargaining; (F3) Bluffing; (F4) Manipulation of opponent's network; and (F5) Inappropriate information gathering².

The findings allowed them to draw conclusions on the different preferences of business students according to demographical data. Among others, they found significant differences in the preferences of respondents with different cultural backgrounds, for example that Americans were more accepting of F2 tactics than Eastern Europeans and also that Americans and Asians were more accepting of F3 tactics than Eastern Europeans. Lewicki and Robinson noted that they found no data on significant cultural differences which would have allowed for comparison of their findings. Later they expanded their research and concluded that "the perception of negotiation tactics is sensitive to cultural differences"^{11(p.658)}. They also called for further research into the interplay of national culture, business practices and what is considered ethical behaviour in negotiations

During the almost twenty years which have passed since the publication of their original research, a growing number of authors have published articles with data that prove differences in the preferences of negotiators with different cultural backgrounds. For example, Triandis et al. studied the relationship of deception and culture and concluded that although the situation and the importance of the outcome affect the tactical choices of negotiators, the judgement on what is considered a lie and to what extent a tactic can be used differs from culture to culture¹². Rivers examined Australian negotiators' perceptions of ethically ambiguous tactics (henceforth EANTs) along four dimensions and also discussed potential cross-cultural variations on these dimensions¹³.

Quite a few of these investigations set out to identify the cultural aspect which is responsible for the difference. Volkema, for example, found correlations between intercultural differences in negotiators' preferences and the Hofstede dimensions of culture, namely individualism/collectivism, high/low power distance and masculinity/femininity, although admittedly the results bore some inconsistency^{14,15}. Zhang, Liu

and Liu compared American and Chinese negotiators' aptitude to deceive and came to the conclusion that Chinese negotiators, coming from a collectivistic culture, tend to employ more informational deception than American negotiators, while their individualistic American counterparts are more likely to commit more negative emotional deception¹⁶. Also in the context of Chinese and American inter-cultural and intra-cultural negotiations, Yang, De Cremer and Wang concluded that American negotiators were more prone to use EANTs with Chinese counterparts than with Americans, and Chinese negotiators were less likely to use them with Americans than with Chinese¹⁷.

In the above-discussed study Lewicki and Robinson found that female respondents, regarding tactics related to traditional competitive bargaining (F2) as inappropriate, tended to be more cooperative and fair-minded². In a subsequent volume Lewicki et al expand upon the issue and describe some underlying cognitive and behavioural processes. They state that men and women think about negotiations and communicate differently; women are often treated worse in negotiations and their tactics can be less successful than those of their male counterparts, and finally, gender stereotypes affect negotiator performance¹⁸.

Negotiations and gender: Kray and Haselhuhn express the view that competition motivates unethical behaviour and negotiation is a "stereotypically masculine task involving competition over scarce resources"^{19(p.1124)}. Stereotypically, women are more cooperative, relation-oriented and empathic than men. Thus, it seems to be a reasonable conclusion that female negotiators are less likely to accept and employ marginally ethical tactics. A number of studies seem to confirm this conviction. Robinson et al found that men are more likely to accept EANTs than women¹¹. Yurtsever and Ben-Asher's two studies show that male negotiators are more prone to misrepresent information than female negotiators, and moreover, they use these tactics more often when they negotiate with women²⁰. Kray and Haselhuhn manipulated negotiators' motivation across four studies and concluded that men are more pragmatic (or lenient) when it comes to setting ethical standards¹⁹.

However, there are studies which show that factors other than gender might play a more important role in ethical decisions. Forte found that female American managers exhibited only slightly more principled moral reasoning ability than men²¹. Sidani et al. detected gender-related significant differences (with women being more sensitive than men to ethics-related issues) in only in 4 out of a range of 18 examined situations and scenarios and showed that age is a more decisive variable²². At the same time, the findings of Gupta et al. indicate that accounting students' ethical choices are not affected by their age or gender²³. Moreover, they showed that students' stated behaviour did not correspond to their actual behaviour, which highlights the problems of self-reported surveys on individual values and practices in general.

A piece of empirical research carried out by Dobrijević in the former Eastern bloc of Europe is of special importance to the focus of the present article. She found that although men concentrate more on winning than women, Serbian female negotiators do not use more cooperative tactics than men and moreover, that they are more likely to care only about their own interests than their male counterparts²⁴. In explaining her results, Dobrijević refers to the masculine values of the society: "(...) as Serbia is a male-dominated culture, women who want to succeed in the business environment have to be very assertive, and sometimes even ruthless"^{24(p.51)}.

Aims: The purpose of this study is to see whether there are gender-related differences in Hungarian practising business negotiators' perception and use of ethically questionable negotiating tactics.

Methodology

The data come from a questionnaire, which, drawing on Lewicki and Robinson's survey (discussed above), contained fourteen of their EANTs (below) in the first person singular. The broad groups of the marginally ethical tactics they represent are given in brackets (F1: Misrepresentation of information; F2: Traditional competitive bargaining; F3: Bluffing; F4: Manipulation of opponent's network; F5: Inappropriate information gathering)². i. I intentionally misrepresent factual information to my opponent in order to support my negotiating position. (F1), ii. I make a shocking opening offer/demand in order to undermine my opponent's confidence. (F2), iii. I hide my real bottom line. (F2), iv. I pretend to be in no hurry in trying to get my opponent to give concessions. (F2), v. I gain information about my opponent's position and strategy by asking my business contacts. (F2), vi. I promise good things to my opponent if he gives what I want even if I know I can't or won't give them. (F3), vii. I threaten my opponent even if I know I would not harm them. (F3), viii. I make my opponent feel they can only get what they want from me although I know they could get it cheaper or faster elsewhere. (F3), ix. I contact my opponent's superior and try to undermine their professional credibility. (F4), x. I threaten to make my opponent look unprofessional in front of their superiors. (F4), xi. I contact my opponent's superior and try to encourage them to defect to my side. (F4), xii. I 'hire' a subordinate of the opponent in order to gain confidential information on their position and strategy. (F5), xiii. I gain information directly from my opponent through gifts, entertaining and personal favours. (F5), xiv. I gain information about my opponent's position from 'paid informants' (e.g. acquaintances). (F5)

The respondents rated, on a scale between 0 and 4, the appropriateness of the tactics (0=completely inappropriate; 1=very rarely appropriate; 2=sometimes appropriate; 3=often appropriate; 4= appropriate in the majority of cases) and they also stated how frequently they employ them (0=never; 1=very rarely; 2=sometimes; 3=often; 4= almost always).

The subjects were selected by quote sampling. The quote was established on the basis of Hungarian Central Bureau of Statistics data on the ratio of economic sectors which the companies operating in the Western Transdanubian region represent. As well as the geographical cluster criterion, only practising businesspeople who work in an international environment and routinely conduct negotiations with Hungarians as well as representatives of foreign cultures, were asked to fill in the questionnaire. The following analysis relies on the responses given by 239 subjects, 125 men and 114 women. SPSS 18.0 was used to process and analyse data.

Results and Discussion

The perceived ethicality of the tactics: Table-1 contains the descriptive statistics concerning the perceived appropriateness of the EANTs (0=completely inappropriate; 1=very rarely appropriate; 2=sometimes appropriate; 3=often appropriate; 4= appropriate in the majority of cases).

As we can see in Table-1, business negotiators in the region in general do not seem to hold a high opinion of marginally ethical negotiating tactics. The most accepted tactics can be linked to traditional competitive bargaining (gaining information about the opponent from own business contacts; hiding the bottom line; pretending to be in no hurry) and, albeit to a lesser extent, to inappropriate information gathering. The respondents seem to hold a low opinion of tactics related to the manipulation of the opponent's network and the misrepresentation of factual information. Bluffing seems to be similarly unpopular except for the 'only now, only from me, only to you' tactic ("I make my opponent feel they can only get what they want from me although I know they could get it cheaper or faster elsewhere").

The mean figures do not reveal great differences between male and female negotiators' perceptions of the ethicality of a given tactic. In general, men seem to be more accepting of the EANTs: ten tactics received higher ratings from male negotiators. At the same time, in the case of four tactics the mean for women is slightly higher. The scores in general range from an absolute rejection (minimum 0: completely inappropriate) to general acceptance (maximum 4: appropriate in the majority of cases) of each EANT except for two: no male negotiator assigned a mark 4 to falsely promising the opponent good things, while no female negotiator assigned a mark 4 to threatening the opponent to make them look unprofessional in front of their superiors.

The one-way analysis of variance revealed no significant relationships between tactics and gender, either. This means that gender only does not seem to be responsible for the differences.

The frequency of use of the tactics: Table-2 shows the descriptive statistics concerning how often respondents employ the EANTs (0=never; 1=very rarely; 2=sometimes; 3=often; 4= almost always).

Table-1
The appropriateness of EANTs

EANT	N	mean	std dev	std error	min	max
I intentionally misrepresent factual information...	Men 125	.63	.876	.078	0	4
	Women 114	.58	.891	.083	0	4
I make a shocking opening offer/demand...	Men 125	1.58	1.109	.099	0	4
	Women 114	1.62	1.215	.114	0	4
I hide my real bottom line.	Men 125	2.64	1.221	.109	0	4
	Women 114	2.52	1.184	.111	0	4
I pretend to be in no hurry...	Men 125	2.14	1.300	.116	0	4
	Women 114	2.22	1.196	.112	0	4
I gain information about my opponent's position...	Men 125	2.81	1.299	.116	0	4
	Women 114	2.96	1.208	.113	0	4
I promise good things to my opponent...	Men 125	.66	.943	.084	0	3
	Women 114	.63	1.041	.098	0	4
I threaten my opponent even if I know...	Men 125	.41	.784	.070	0	4
	Women 114	.37	.834	.078	0	4
I make my opponent feel they can only get what they want from me...	Men 125	2.10	1.388	.124	0	4
	Women 114	1.84	1.328	.124	0	4
I contact my opponent's superior and try to undermine...	Men 125	.38	.779	.070	0	4
	Women 114	.43	.862	.081	0	4
I threaten to make my opponent look unprofessional...	Men 125	.42	.835	.075	0	4
	Women 114	.34	.714	.067	0	3
I contact my opponent's superior and try to encourage them to defect...	Men 125	1.08	1.044	.093	0	4
	Women 114	.89	.925	.087	0	4
I 'hire' a subordinate of the opponent in order to gain confidential information...	Men 125	1.05	1.135	.102	0	4
	Women 114	.94	1.024	.096	0	4
I gain information directly from my opponent through gifts...	Men 125	1.43	1.227	.110	0	4
	Women 114	1.29	1.267	.119	0	4
I gain information about my opponent's position from 'paid informants'...	Men 125	1.34	1.258	.113	0	4
	Women 114	1.07	1.195	.112	0	4

Source: own data

Table-2
The likelihood of use of EANTs

EANT	N	mean	std dev	std error	min	max
I intentionally misrepresent factual information...	Men 125	.58	.926	.083	0	4
	Women 114	.48	.790	.074	0	3
I make a shocking opening offer/demand...	Men 125	1.08	1.029	.092	0	4
	Women 114	1.07	1.127	.106	0	4
I hide my real bottom line.	Men 125	2.17	1.372	.123	0	4
	Women 114	1.98	1.290	.121	0	4
I pretend to be in no hurry...	Men 125	1.62	1.336	.119	0	4
	Women 114	1.65	1.303	.122	0	4
I gain information about my opponent's position...	Men 125	2.41	1.420	.127	0	4
	Women 114	2.39	1.417	.133	0	4
I promise good things to my opponent...	Men 125	.75	1.052	.094	0	4
	Women 114	.52	.933	.087	0	4
I threaten my opponent even if I know...	Men 125	.33	.727	.065	0	4
	Women 114	.32	.723	.068	0	3
I make my opponent feel they can only get what they want from me...	Men 125	1.58	1.369	.122	0	4
	Women 114	1.38	1.265	.118	0	4
I contact my opponent's superior and try to undermine...	Men 125	.46	.947	.085	0	4
	Women 114	.32	.781	.073	0	4
I threaten to make my opponent look unprofessional...	Men 125	.28	.643	.057	0	3
	Women 114	.25	.635	.060	0	3
I contact my opponent's superior and try to encourage them to defect...	Men 125	.73	.966	.087	0	4
	Women 114	.63	.875	.082	0	3
I 'hire' a subordinate of the opponent in order to gain confidential information...	Men 125	.76	1.019	.091	0	4
	Women 114	.49	.732	.069	0	3
I gain information directly from my opponent through gifts...	Men 125	.99	1.036	.093	0	4
	Women 114	.75	.976	.091	0	3
I gain information about my opponent's position from 'paid informants'...	Men 125	.90	1.146	.103	0	4
	Women 114	.64	.942	.088	0	3

Source: own data

If we compare the figures in Table-1 and Table-2, we can see that almost each appropriateness figure exceeds its likelihood of use counterpart. It means that the respondents do not (admit to) use the tactics even if they approve of them. There are only two exceptions and both concern only male negotiators: their mean ratings of the employment of falsely promising good things to their negotiating partner and contacting their opponent's superior in order to undermine their professional credibility (0.75; 0.46) exceed the appropriateness means (0.66; 0.38). Women, in contrast, even though accept these tactics in principle, seem to use them to a much lesser extent (promising good things: 0.63 vs. 0.52; undermining the opponent's credibility: 0.43 vs. 0.32). Furthermore, in the case of six tactics the maximum score given by women was only 3, while they received the maximum score from men.

The mean figures in general show more marked differences between male and female negotiators' likelihood of using the respective EANT than between their perceptions of the appropriateness of the given tactic. The most considerable variations are related to inappropriate information gathering. However, the one-way analysis of variance revealed a statistically significant relationship between tactics and gender in the case of only one tactic ("I 'hire' a subordinate of the opponent in order to gain confidential information on their position and strategy"; $F=5.393$, $p=0.021$).

Conclusion

The investigation reported in this paper set out to see whether there are differences between male and female negotiators' perceptions of marginally ethical negotiating tactics in the West Transdanubian region, Hungary. Very little difference was found regarding the perceived appropriateness of the tactics; women, however, seem to use the tactics less frequently than men. At the same time, no significant gender-related differences were detected regarding both perception and behaviour. With regard to the perceived ethicality of the EANTs, the findings indicate strong masculine cultural orientation, i.e. female negotiators seem to conform to the norms and values of their male counterparts. Yet, in practice, their behaviour appears more cooperative than that of male negotiators, although a statistically significant difference was found only in case of 1 out of the 14 EANTs.

Limitations and further lines of research: As well as the general validity and reliability concerns related to self-reported questionnaires (stated vs. actual behaviour), the key limitation of the study is the size of the sample and further, the fact that respondents were selected only from one out of the seven regions which constitute Hungary. This region, with a population of 1 million, borders mainly Austria (and to a lesser extent, Slovenia and Croatia), thus, due to the mobility of workforce and goods, it is exposed to more traditional 'Western' values. A comparison with respondents from an Eastern region would provide valuable insights into potential differences. As discussed in the literature review above, there are views that age

might be a decisive factor in the assessment and employment of EANTs. Indeed, a number of investigations have found generational differences, for example, that the younger generation in Hungary is more in favour of quality of life and individualism than the middle-aged or elderly population^{10,25,26}. A further piece of research could look into this issue. Still another examination could investigate differences between inter-cultural and intra-cultural negotiations. Lastly, to expand on the findings of the present study, it would be worth examining whether women's judgements are more affected by their national culture than their actual behaviour.

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