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# COMPOSITION OF A NEGOTIATION TEAM – A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN POLISH AND AMERICAN NEGOTIATORS

**Summary.** The purpose of this study is to (a) examine theoretical and empirical literature about similarities and differences in cross-cultural negotiation styles between Polish and American negotiators, (b) explore the impact of cross-cultural differences in negotiation team composition between Polish and American negotiators, (c) identify team composition implications for international trade negotiations. Cross-cultural negotiation has a significant influence for companies doing business in other countries wanting to have productive outcomes, whereby negotiation processes and outcomes will become the most important factors for reaching agreements in the business world. The article presents quantitative research findings obtained from 211 Polish and 149 American respondents.

**Keywords:** negotiation, composition of a negotiation team, negotiation team, cross-cultural negotiations

# BUDOWA ZESPOŁU NEGOCJACYJNEGO – STUDIUM KOMPARATYWNE POMIĘDZY POLSKIMI I AMERYKAŃSKIMI NEGOCJATORAMI

**Streszczenie.** Celem tego badania jest (a) analiza teoretycznej i empirycznej literatury na temat podobieństw i różnic w stylach negocjacji międzykulturowych pomiędzy polskimi i amerykańskimi negocjatorami, (b) zbadanie wpływu różnic międzykulturowych na skład zespołu negocjacyjnego w kulturze polskiej i amery-kańskiej (c) określenie konsekwencje składu zespołu negocjatorów dla między-narodowych negocjacji handlowych. W artykule przedstawiono wyniki badań ilościowych uzyskane od 211 polskich i 149 amerykańskich respondentów.

**Słowa kluczowe:** negocjacje, skład zespołu negocjacyjnego, zespół negocjatorów, negocjacje międzykulturowe

# 1. Introduction

Globalization used to be the exclusive domain of large multi-billion dollar companies. Nowadays, even small sized enterprises cannot escape the issues associated with global trade, complex supply chains, outsourcing and offshoring. International business requires people to communicate more effectively across cultural and national boundaries. For the past few decades scholars have explored the ways in which culture influences values, communication styles, and business practices. Today there is a great recognition among scholars and specialists that cultural differences affect all facets of international business [Chmielecki, 2008]. In this specific, divergent and constantly changing environment, negotiation is a key area in which managers need to improve their expertise, [Lax, Sebenius, 1986; Loewenstein, Thomson, 2000] especially in intercultural aspects. Even those who never leave their home office have to interact effectively with people from varied backgrounds [BerthoinAntal, 1995; Davison and Ward, 1999]. The role that the twenty-first-century business leader has to play is much different than it used to be. One of the vital skills is the ability gain from diversity. Diversity in technology, science and of course culture. The need to develop intercultural competencies has taken on greater importance for more people in business than ever before [Gregersen et al., 1998; Lane, Maznevski, Mendenhall & McNett, 2004].

# 2. Culture and national character

The belief that a nation possesses certain collective mental characteristics isn't a new concept. In 98 CE Tacitus described the character of ancient German tribes. In the 14th century the great Muslim scholar Ibn Khaldûn described differences between mentalities of nomads and sedentary peoples. [Hofsted, McRae, 2004]. Later in the 18th century, many renowned philosophers like Hume or Kant explored the questions of "national character". A lot of progress was done after World War II when the U.S. government asked anthropologists to help understand the way their enemy nations thought [Chmielecki, 2008]. The role of culture in the world of business has been the subject of various research for at least twenty-five years. Researchers have studied the influence or the impact of national cultures on organizational behavior and the way managers from different cultural backgrounds interact with one another [e.g. Adler, 2002; Hofstede, 1980, 1991; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997, Early and Erez, 1997]. Sułkowski [2002] observes that the notion of a culture is complex and it is characterized by a great variety of definitions functioning both in theory and in practice, so a given definition may express only one, selected aspect of a

culture. In other words, the complexity of culture makes it impossible to create one, proper definition. One of the most commonly used definitions of culture, not being a complex one at the same time, in the literature on culture, negotiations and business in general, has been provided by G. Hofstede, who was the author of the first major empirical multi-country study of consequences that culture has for the field of management. Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) suggest that "culture is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others" (p. 4). Bjerke (2004) expresses the opinion that culture is a mechanism which fuses social structures (p. 13). Thus culture is an output formed by a given community consisting of some bases, ideas and classes. Schwartz (qtd. in Lewicki et al. 2007) describes culture as the values, distinguishing ten essential values, namely: power, security, traditions, conformity, benevolence, universalism, self-directions, simulation, hedonism achievement and power (p. 237). What is more, the values might cooperate with each other or there might be a conflict between them. In practice, the values which are on the opposite side of the circle tend to be in a conflict. For the purpose of this paper the definition given by Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) is the most appropriate for the working definition. It explains the term of the culture precisely, focusing on a culture as a tool which indicates an identity of a given group and underlines its unique character.

## 3. Dimensions of culture

Hofstede's dimensions analysis can assist the business person in better understanding the intercultural differences within regions, and also between countries, in negotiations. Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) believe that "individualism stands for a society in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family only" (p. 401). A member of an individualistic society is concentrated on his own interests and the interests of his relatives. Hofstede (2005) mentions that there are only a few societies in the world which might be called individualistic, whereas a great majority of societies are more interested in common good, and thus these societies are called collectivist (p. 74). Individualistic societies focus on the idea of self-actualization while collectivistic societies put emphasis on the common objectives of the group. Individual rights tend to be the crucial values for highly individualistic cultures. In collectivistic cultures there is a close tie between people: they take responsibility for other members of a group, they protect one another in exchange for loyalty.  Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) add that there is a negative correlation between individualism and power distance, namely, a country which is long-power distance is collectivist, whilst small-power distance countries are individualist (p. 82). "Power distance can be defined as the extent to which the less powerful members of

institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005, p. 46). They describe the following institutions as primary layers of community, namely the family, school and workplace (p. 46). Brown (2000) adds that power distance is able to define the range of scope to which a less powerful individual approves the disparity of power within a community (p. 190). Brown (2000) says in his book that power distance exists in every single culture, yet the tolerance of this inequality varies among cultures (p. 190). In other words, power distance indicates the degree of unequal division of power that a member of a group is able to accept. Although the above mentioned division of power exists in each culture, members of a given culture have different attitudes toward the division, and thus there can be a distinction between high and low-power distance societies. Lebaron and Pillay (2006) observe that due to gender, race, age, education and social statuses in a high-power distance culture some member's are considered as superior to others (p. 46). Lebaron and Pillay (2006) suggests that "high-power distance starting points shape more formal relations, while low-power distance starting points invite more open conflict and discussion between those at different levels within an organization" (p. 47). Thus high-power distance cultures are not as flexible and low-power distance cultures insofar as building relationships. According to Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) "uncertainty avoidance is the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations" (p. 403). The uncertainty avoidance index (UAI) indicates the degree to which members of a given community feel nervous in an unknown situation. Brown (2000) makes an important point that countries whose uncertainty avoidance index is weak tend to be contemplative, less aggressive and relax whilst countries with strong uncertainty avoidance seem to be more active, aggressive and intolerant (p. 190). Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) believe that communities with a strong avoidance index tend to create a wide range of laws and regulations in order to prevent uncertainty (p. 182). They add that countries with weak avoidance index use more often common sense (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005, p. 184). To sum up, people coming from form a high uncertainty avoidance culture fully respect the law and other regulations. In contrast, a low uncertainty avoidance culture is not as rule-oriented, accepts changes and is able to take risks in face of challenge. "Masculinity" stands for a society in which emotional gender roles are clearly distinct: men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success; woman are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life" (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005, p. 402). Thus in a masculine society there is a strongly visible division between a role which is played by a man and that played by a woman. According to the authors (2005) the contrary of masculine society is a feminine one which is defined as society where men's and women's roles dovetail (p. 120). They claim in their book that masculine and feminine societies vary in solving

global conflicts, namely feminine countries aim to negotiation and gain consensus whilst masculine societies achieve their goals by fight (2005, p. 150). Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) define the term *long-term orientation* as "The fostering of virtues oriented towards future rewards, in particular perseverance and thrift" (p. 401). As far as the short term orientation is concerned, Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) claim that the short-term orientation is "The fostering of virtues related to the past and present- in particular, respect for tradition, preservation of 'face', and fulfilling social obligations" (p. 401). They mention that the opposite of long-term orientation is short-term orientation where people respect the tradition and their main aims is past and present (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005, p. 210). In other words, long-term orientated countries accept changes with ease whilst countries which have short term orientation are more conventional and traditional. Taking Hofstede's and Hofstede's (2005) view of the situation, key features of short term orientation are as follows: veneration of tradition, involvement in personal stability, social status and obligations, actions which will produce immediate results (p. 210). They remark that perseverance as a tool which will bring slow results, veneration of circumstances and forethought are the key features of long-term orientation (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005, p. 210). To conclude, the crucial value of a long-term orientation culture is long-lasting commitment whilst short-term orientation culture is more flexible, thus changes occur more frequently and rapidly. People coming from long-term orientation culture tend to accept slow results and are more persistent to achieve their aims [Chmielecki, 2013].

Indulgence versus Restraint (IVR) – the sixth dimension is based on Minkov's World Values Survey and was added by Hofstede to his dimensions in 2010. It provides an explanation of the importance of culture in the way people from different countries enjoy their life. IVR is a degree the to which a particular nation's culture allows its members to live their lives as they wish, without imposing tight social restrictions on them. IVR has not been yet thoroughly reviewed and discussed in literature.

## 4. Negotiation and international business

"International Business can be defined as all business transactions that involve two or more countries. It involves the movement of resources, goods, services, and managerial and technical skills across national boundaries. Resources transferred include capital, people, and technology" (Loth & Parks, 2002, p. 419). International trade is defined as people or governments among two or more countries that do business transaction of goods or services (Tsai, 2003). Neslin and Greenhalgh indicated that for sellers and buyers in international trade, negotiation is one of the most important matters (as cited in Simintiras & Thomas,

1998). Gilsdorf also indicated that negotiation is the most challenging communication tasks in business (as cited in Woo & Prud'homme, 1999). Negotiation is a process of communicating back and forth to discuss the issues, and reach an agreement that two parties could not initially satisfy (Foroughi, 1998).

Negotiation is the process by which at least two parties try to reach an agreement on matters of mutual interest. The negotiation proceeds as a perception, and information processing and reaction (Herbig, 1997). "Negotiation is a dynamic process, and outcomes develop from patterned exchanges between negotiating parties and their constituencies" (Druckman, 2001, p. 520). Delivre's work (as cited in Gilles, 2002) indicated that "negotiation is a process for managing disagreements with a view to achieving contractual satisfaction of needs. Negotiation is a kind of social interaction for reaching an agreement for two or more parties with different objectives or interests that they think are important (Manning & Robertson, 2003; Fraser & Zarkada-Fraser, 2002). In cross-cultural negotiation, the situations are more complicated because of different cultures, environments, communication styles, political systems, ideologies, and customs or protocols (Mintu-Wimsatt & Gassenheimer, 2000, Hoffmann, 2001). Studying cross-cultural negotiation in an international business has become an imperative.

Globalized trade, outsourcing, supply-chaining have changed the world. Emergence of worldwide financial markets, realization of a global common market, based on the freedom of exchange of goods and capital, development of a global telecommunications infrastructure, and increase in information flows between geographically remote locations have changed the way people perceive, understand and do business. Time and space have shrunk. People are no longer insulated from cultural differences as they have been in the past. Intercultural communication plays a vital role not only in business encounters but in every realm of our lives. When people meet one another, they discover differences in perspectives, behaviors, and communication styles [Chmielecki, 2008].

In this complex and constantly changing environment culture is one of the elements that decides about success or failure. "People from different countries see, interpret, and evaluate events differently, and consequently act upon them differently". [Adler, 2002, p. 77]. Cultural misunderstandings occur not only when difference is noticed and misinterpreted, but very often when a surface similarity (e.g. in etiquette) obscures significant difference that exist at the deep level. [Barna, 1998].

# 5. Culture influence on a negotiation team

It's obvious that different cultural systems produce different negotiating styles, and the effects of cross cultural differences on international negotiation are widely acknowledged. There is substantial empirical evidence that negotiating tendencies differ by culture [see Adair et al., 2001; Graham et al., 1994]. These styles are shaped by each nation's culture, history and other factors. Negotiators' experience not only differences in language or dress code, but also in different perceptions of the definition of business goals and motivation. Culture influences negotiation in many ways. Firstly through its effects on communications and through their conceptualizations of the process, then through the goals negotiators aim at, the means they use, and the expectations they hold of the other side's behavior. Moreover, culture affects the range of strategies and tactics that negotiators develop. In international negotiations people bring to the negotiating table their beliefs, values and expectations. Very often they are unconscious of them. According to these values they interpret, present, judge and communicate. Cohen [Cohen, 1997] notes that cultural factors usually complicate and prolong negotiations. However, when properly managed they can lead to increased mutual gains [Chmielecki, 2008].

Casse indicated that in cross-cultural negotiations, parties who belong to different cultures have different thinking, feeling, and behaving. (as cited in Woo & Prud'homme, 1999). In 1997, Acuff described negotiating styles as differences that "include the importance placed on relationship development, negotiating strategies, decision making methods, spatial and temporal orientations, contracting practices, and illicit behaviors such as bribery" (as cited in Volkema & Fleury, 2002, p. 382). On of the important differences is also how the teams are composed, how they are led and how the decisions are made.

A negotiation team is a group of individuals who come together for the purpose of representing a specific entity during a negotiation with a second party. One must remember that the process of negotiations is structured in such a way that there is very often no obvious need for a negotiation team. However, working in a smartly-designed negotiation team usually appears to be more effective than performing individually. The team efficiency is based on its potential to generate integrative solutions, which may be explained as a result of the assembled skills and expertise of each member, intensive exchange of information between the team and its counterpart, allowing better fact-finding and mutual understanding of goals. All together this leads to a "cross-fertilisation of knowledge," creatively pooled idea-generation and accurate decision-making. (Thompson, 2009; Mannix, 2005)

It must be stressed that the above mentioned benefits are not guaranteed. The expertise and skill advantage may not be fruitful if members of the team disagree on some key issues.

Temperaments which are incompatible or other kinds of personality conflicts within the team may disharmonise relationships, lead to confusion, delays, or poor decision making.

The specific composition of a team will vary, depending on the culture, context and the group itself. A head or lead negotiator is often chosen. This person ensures that the team actually works as a "team" where there is one channel of communication so that a consistent message is communicated to the other side. The negotiating team will also need to include, or at least have access to, expert advice on a range of issues that will arise during the process. This might range from a lawyer or consultant, to the occasional need for resource people with specialty skills, e.g. in engineering, geology or economics. Whatever its composition, its members will need to have all the required skills, including cultural competence, communication etc. Roles are usually defined for different team members depending on their capacities and interests. To ensure a positive impulse provided by the spirit of cooperation in a team, the mutual understanding and direction towards a single goal is essential. It does not mean that conflict among the team members is always harmful. On the one hand, having a majority of "yes" individuals who are loyal to the team leader may cause sub-optimal agreement as the team leader is much more interested in e.g. finishing the assignment ahead of time. The negative effects of disagreement can be avoided by the assignment of functions between members and delegating the ultimate power of decision-making to a single person, the team leader. Another good reason to form a negotiation team is to gain some kind of psychological advantage. The members in a team of negotiators usually feel more powerful and less pressured than negotiators who perform individually. This also allows for the team leader to involve members of the team in the development of different arguments on different points and to present a larger opposition, as well as to employ some negotiating tactics which requires several members of a team.

## 6. Research method and findings

The author began research in this area several years ago. Research methodology and tools were prepared for the purpose of a doctoral thesis. However, the author has decided to continue the research process. This new research phase has included a CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview) which was conducted between early January and late September 2013. Research findings were obtained from 211 Polish and 149 American respondents characterized in table 1. The purpose of this research was to explore the impact of cross-cultural differences in negotiation team composition between Polish and American negotiators, and identify team composition implications for international trade negotiations. It is recommended that in order to gain a fuller picture of the issues underlying the findings,

both qualitative and quantitative research with larger groups of respondents should be undertaken.

Table 1

Characteristic of the sample used for this paper

| Total number of respondents: | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Poland | 211 | Gender: | Male 112 |
| | | | Female 99 |
| | | | |
| USA | 149 | Gender: | Male 79 |
| | | | Female 70 |

Source: Own work.

The vast majority of respondents were mid-level managers from medium sized companies, international trade practitioners and final year business students with business experience. The average age was estimated to be 38 years old.

Table 2

Inside your negotiation team are the members competitive or cooperative?

| | Cooperation | Competition |
|---|---|---|
| **Poles** | 96% | 4% |
| **Americans** | 91% | 9% |

Source: Own work.

One aspect of negotiations which is seldom addressed is that of the negotiations which take place on each side of the bargaining table, in contrast to those which take place across the table. In reality, one of the most difficult aspect of the negotiation process can be reaching consensus among team members. Experienced negotiators prepare relentlessly and set aside time and energy for these "internal" negotiations. The effective management of the relationship with organizational hierarchy may be the most important issue to ensure success. The way we choose to navigate through those heavy conversations inside a team matters on both a micro and a macro level, influencing the quality of the negotiated agreement, and which has two imperatives – every team considers two imperatives. The first is the need to know the facts and figures. The second is the need to deal with emotions, which will help cultivate a positive sensibility towards your common goal. In the modern world of negotiations there's a pressing need for negotiation teams to foster collaboration both internally and externally, by forming partnerships to solve problems. Culture obviously plays a vital role here. When it comes to cooperation and competition among members we can observe (tab. 2) that the results are quite similar, although the Americans as a more individualistic culture tend to be more competitive even inside the negotiation team.

Table 3

Does a negotiation team need a strong leader to function well?

|           | Yes  | No   |
|-----------|------|------|
| **Poles**     | 62%  | 38%  |
| **Americans** | 81%  | 19%  |

Source: Own work.

Leaders will take ownership of their team's failures and successes, and they will work to correct mistakes and replicate things that work. Part of taking responsibility is assigning the right task to the right team member. A team of negotiators can often bring a broader range of knowledge to the negotiating process than individuals can, and a team is often more creative.

Whether a negotiating team needs a skilled leader who can plan effectively, keep disagreements inside the team, and manage the flow of information to and from the team or not is as we can see from the table above culturally dependent. Respondents from both cultures strongly believe that the team needs a strong leader to function properly. The results from the American group indicate that as a very individualistic country they need a leader with strong personality to coordinate and maximize the efforts of the whole negotiation team.

Table 4

Do negotiation team members have fixed positions i.e. well-designed roles and duties?

|           | Yes  | No   |
|-----------|------|------|
| **Poles**     | 82%  | 18%  |
| **Americans** | 64%  | 36%  |

Source: Own work.

When properly organized, negotiating teams are less likely to overlook important details, plan better, and think more broadly. Research indicates that negotiating teams set higher targets than individuals – but when faced with large risks, the team is more cautious.

Respondents from both cultures strongly believe that a proper divisions of roles and tasks not only gives a positive impression of a negotiation team but first and foremost leads to better outcomes, Nevertheless, American to a lesser extent than Polish respondents have fixed positions and tasks. This may be caused by a high IDV of American negotiators who are eager to participate in negotiations alone, often negotiate alone, and are used being responsible for many roles and tasks alone.

Table 5

Who is responsible for decisions that have been taken?

|           | Whole team | Leader |
|-----------|------------|--------|
| **Poles**     | 73%        | 27%    |
| **Americans** | 76%        | 24%    |

Source: Own work.

Very often in case of collectivist cultures with a high power distance index, the team of negotiators is not able to reach a decision on their own. They have to consult the outcomes with their direct supervisors or the headquarters. Negotiation teams from collectivist cultures are usually bigger than teams from cultures characterized by high IDV (e.g. American culture). Although Americans are characterized by higher IDV than Poles, in both cultures the majority of respondents believe that the team and not the leader is responsible for the outcome of the process. The role of a leader is mainly to assign tasks and divide roles among the members.

Table 6

According to you, is changing (replacing) negotiators inside your team during the process of negotiation fair?

|            | Yes | No  |
|------------|-----|-----|
| **Poles**     | 39% | 61% |
| **Americans** | 72% | 28% |

Source: Own work.

Replacing negotiation team members serves at least two purposes. It can be employed as a tactic or it can rescue the process form a situation of personal hostility. In the first scenario, it can be viewed as an unfair or unethical tactic. This can be culturally dependent. Americans are quite more flexible in terms of replacing negotiation team members. They are more willing o implement tactics that rely on introducing new people to the negotiation process. They are also more eager to employ experts. Poles see that behavior as more unethical. They believe you should finish the negotiation process with the team configuration that started.

## 7. Summary

Understanding the culture in a country or region in which someone is doing business is a critical skill for the international business person. Without that understanding, the whole idea of a venture becomes uncertain and is put at risk. Business practices are soaked with culture. Culture is visible at every stage of the negotiation process. Every corner of the world redefines the phenomenon of negotiation, giving it a different dimension and taste. The more people differ, the more they have to teach and learn from each other [Barnlund, 1988]. Over the last few decades international business has changed dramatically. Culture's impact on negotiations is immense. In order to avoid failures, managers need to approach the conflict resolution process from a more culturally competent point of view. Team composition issues is clearly one that requires much thought and analysis.

The major findings of this literature review demonstrate that the biggest differences between the composition of a negotiation team between Poland and the USA lies within the leadership of the team and in the perception of and attitude towards replacing negotiators during the process. In terms of making decisions and cooperation inside the team, both countries are quite similar. The article presents interesting results that can be especially useful for Polish and American negotiators, being either managers, specialists, company owners, or all those who trade and work across those two cultures.

Additional research from multiple perspectives is necessary to address the issues postulated in this particular cross-cultural configuration. Further exploration would especially benefit from qualitative research which could target gender, competencies, roles, and the role of experts inside a team.

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