THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE ON THE NEGOTIATION STYLES OF BRITISH STUDENTS

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Abstract

In this study, the argument is that British students whose major subject is politics are very tough and direct in their negotiation, but they lack the understanding of the many cultural factors that should be taken into account when negotiating with others from different backgrounds. So, the main purpose of this study is to describe the understanding of British politics students of negotiation in intercultural settings. First, the concepts of culture and negotiation processes in general are explained, and then cultural influences on negotiation are discussed. A questionnaire was used to collect the data, which revealed that the British students are noticeably influenced by their cultural values. The results show that the respondents lacked an understanding of negotiation and that certain cultural factors may hinder the negotiation process.

Introduction

Negotiation is a very common phenomenon. It is a process that takes place in everyday life when two or more people have conflicting interests and they want to reach a common solution that benefits them both. In a globalized world, the amount of negotiation in business, education, and political settings is increasing steadily, and every day more and more different negotiations take place between people from different

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cultures. In order to achieve success in these negotiations, there are many cultural factors that should be taken into account (Brett 2000).

There is a perception that the researcher has come across during his studies that English students whose major subject is politics are very tough and very direct. They lack the understanding that their cultural values may affect their style and strategy of communication. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to describe British politics students' concepts of negotiation in intercultural settings, and to see to what extent their cultural values may affect their style. Three cultural values will be tested: "risk taking, tolerance for change and ambiguity; and uncertainty avoidance".

The study starts by explaining the concepts of culture and negotiation processes in general and then continues by discussing the effect of culture on negotiation. The purpose of this study is to study those cultural values that may affect negotiation styles in certain contexts.

Definition of culture

Culture has many definitions, and it affects everything people do in their society because of their ideas, values, attitudes, and normative or expected patterns of behaviour. Culture is not genetically inherited, and cannot exist on its own, but is always shared by members of a society (Hall 1976, p. 16). Hofstede (1980, pp. 21-23) defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group from another", which is passed from generation to generation, it is changing all the time because each generation adds something of its own before passing it on. It is usual that one's culture is taken for granted and assumed to be correct because it is the only one, or at least the first, to be learned.

Culture is a complex concept, and no single definition of it has achieved consensus in the literature. So, out of the many possible definitions examined, the following definition guides this study: culture is a set of shared and enduring meaning, values, and beliefs that characterize national, ethnic, or other groups and orient their behaviour (Mulholland 1991).

Communication

When two people communicate, they rarely talk about precisely the same subject, because effective meaning is flavoured by each person's own cognitive world and cultural conditioning. Communication can be divided into three categories: verbal (use of words with specific meanings), paraverbal (tone of the voice) and non-verbal communication (Ferraro 1990, p. 45). Language used in verbal communication is not a universal means, but it is deeply rooted in a particular culture (Hargie and Dickson 2004). It is impossible to understand a culture without taking into account its language(s) and vice versa. Language plays an important role in creating the context of negotiation and in allowing negotiators to prepare for cross-cultural interactions (Rubinstein 1999).

Nonverbal communication implies emotions, attitudes and feelings show in different gestures and motions (Hargie and Dickson 2004) and it may be conveyed unintentionally by facial expressions, gestures, and body language. An understanding of non-verbal communication is said to be one of the most important parts of communication between people from two different cultures (Usunier 1996, p. 112). Non-verbal signs assist the interpretation of verbal messages and they may have greater significance than the verbal aspects (Hargie and Dickson 2004). Hall's (1976) concept of cultural context of communication has spurred a vast range of research on the impact of context on the

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negotiation encounter. He examined the context of communication based on a high/low context continuum. Low context countries (such as England) rely on formal communication that is often verbally expressed; hence, informal context is less important in understanding the message. However, success in international negotiation lies in the successful exchange of both verbal and nonverbal messages (Mulholand 1991).

The negotiation process

Negotiation is a process that takes place between two or more parties with conflicting interests (De Mesquita 2004). The negotiation leads to a joint action, which has to cope with the parties' individual objectives that define or redefine the terms of their interdependence (McCall and Warrington 1984, p. 13). Basically "negotiation is a method of conflict settlement, and a joint decision-making process through which negotiating parties accommodate their conflicting interests into a mutually acceptable settlement" (Faure 1993, p. 7). Negotiation is a tool used to solve conflict situations, some of which demand more intensive preparation, planning, and negotiating than others because of the higher stakes involved (e.g. in political negotiation). The parties' goals in negotiation are to achieve an agreement that offers them a better deal than they would get simply by accepting or rejecting the other party's offer (Hofstede and Usunier 1996, p. 125).

In cross-cultural negotiation, when two people communicate, the effective meaning is flavoured by each person's cultural conditioning. When negotiating internationally, this translates into anticipating culturally related ideas that are most likely to be understood by a person of a given culture. In any cross-cultural context, the potential for misunderstanding and talking at cross-purposes is great, and it would be naïve to venture

into cross-cultural negotiation with the belief that views a member of another culture as a brother in spirit. The negotiation style anyone uses domestically can be inappropriate when dealing with people from another cultural background; in fact its use can often result in more harm than gain. Different cultural systems can produce different negotiating styles. Styles are shaped by each nation's culture. No one can avoid bringing along his cultural assumptions, images, and prejudices or other attitudinal baggage into any negotiating situation. Typically the purpose of negotiation is to find a formula for the distribution of a contested value or a set of values between the negotiating parties (Faure 1993).

Cultural characteristics that influence negotiation

As already stated, various cultural factors make up the character of an individual. All cultures have subcultures. The fundamental differences between cultures have an impact on the success of negotiation across the globe (Hargie and Dickson 2004). However, one should start preparing for international negotiations by learning one's own cultural values and how much they differ from those of the other party (Hofstede and Usunier 1996, p. 126). There is no sole opinion about the cultural components that should be taken into account when negotiating. The following section describes some of the different views found in the literature.

Culture influences the way people perceive and behave in any setting. When talking about the international environment, culture is usually observed at a national level (Kale 1996, p. 22). In intercultural encounters, negotiators should place more importance on the quality of human and social relations than on legal and political matters (Usunier 1996, p. 22). It might be necessary to adapt some positions on political issues to cope with local

needs. But also, in order to be trusted by one's own side, it is essential to share the national culture and a value of the country one represents (Hofstede and Usunier 1996, p. 120).

The most important factors affecting international negotiation, according to Ghauri (1996), are time, individual versus collective behaviour, and an emphasis on personal relations. Some cultures are more concerned with the issue which they are negotiating about and the future of the relationship between the parties. Others are found to place more importance on the personality of the negotiator than the issue at hand (Ghauri 1996, pp.11-13). As an example of this factor, Tenbrunsel et al (1996 cited Bazerman 2000) examined the implications of relationships for the selection of a negotiation partner. Essentially, they argued that people are satisfied when matched with other people they already know rather than seeking out new partners at the cost of finding better-fitting matches.

Also Usunier (1996) stated that different patterns of relationships (such as individualism versus collectivism) and patronage relationships affect international negotiations. They affect the ways people interact with each other, the ways they mix human relationships, and what their decision-making process is like. However, the level of formality used when communicating public and private issues should be taken into account in all types of negotiation. Usunier (1996) divided the relevant cultural factors into two groups: the situational aspects of the negotiation and the characteristics of the negotiators; and other important characteristics of culture that influence negotiations such as language and communication, institutional and legal systems, time orientations and

mindsets. He stated that culture has an indirect influence on the outcome of negotiations (Usunier 1996, Hargie and Dickson 2004).

Usunier (1996) discussed cultural gaps, and arguing that the more pronounced the gap is between the negotiating parties, the greater the potential for misunderstanding and the more time they will lose talking past each other. Culture, he believed, has a harmful effect on negotiation itself in four crucial ways: (a) by conditioning one's perception of reality; (b) by blocking out information inconsistent or unfamiliar with culturally grounded assumptions; (c) by projecting meaning onto the other party's words and actions; and (d) by possibly impelling the ethnocentric observer to an incorrect attribution of motive. Robin and Brown (1975 cited Bazerman 2000) reviewed the extensive literature on individual differences in negotiation, including both demographic characteristics and personality variables. Even with hundreds of investigations, these factors typically do not explain much variance in negotiator behaviour. These individual differences do influence negotiated outcomes, according to Thompson (1998 cited Bazerman 2000), but slight changes in situational features swamp these effects. Many authors have reached the conclusion that simple individual differences offer limited potential for predicting negotiation outcomes (Hargie and Dickson 2004).

Hofstede's dimensional model

Power distance

Power distance is "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede 1991, p. 28). This means that the level of inequality lies behind the attitudes of followers as much as leaders. In all societies, inequality is present, but in some societies

more strongly than in others (Hofstede and Usunier 1996, p. 121). Power distance between a boss and a subordinate is the difference between the extent to which the boss determines the behaviour of his/her subordinate and the extent to which the subordinate determines the behaviour of his/her boss (Hofstede 1980, p. 72).

Hofstede (1980) assumes that the larger the power distance, the more centralised the control and decision making structure, which affects the structural dimension of negotiation which refers to the enduring external constraints within which negotiations unfold. In the larger power distance countries, negotiations have to be concluded and accepted by the top authority (Jandt 2001). Regarding power distance in the UK, the level can be said to be low. Low power distance usually means that everybody has the same rights and privileges. Values like equality are emphasized in society and in working life (Hofstede and Usunier 1996). A low power distance culture values competence over seniority with a resulting consultative management style.

Individualism versus collectivism

This dimension describes "the relationship between an individual and his/her fellow individuals, the collectivity which prevails in society" (Kale 1996, p. 23). In other words, it describes the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups and reflects the ways in which people live and work together. One extreme includes societies which have very loose ties between individuals, and everyone is expected to look after their own self-interest. The other extreme includes low individualism societies. These societies have very strong ties between individuals that form in-group (Kale 1996, p. 23). In international negotiation, in order to be able to formulate arguments and presentations, it is important to know whether the opposite party is collectivist or individualist, that is,

whether it is looking for a collective solution or an individual benefit (Hargie and Dickson 2004).

When considering collectivism and individualism in the UK, it can be stated that individualism is valued more, and that identity is based on the individual rather than on society. It is typical to think in 'I' form. However, Geert Hofstede's (1980) analysis of England illustrated its people's strong feeling towards individualism. Individualistic cultures tend to value open conflict and linear logic. In these cultures, competition rather than cooperation is encouraged, individual initiative and achievement is stressed, and individual decision making is valued (Samovar and Porter 2004).

Uncertainty avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance means a lack of tolerance for ambiguity and the need for formal rules (Kale 1996, p. 22). It indicates "the extent to which a certain culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured, new, unknown and surprising situations" (Hofstede and Usunier 1996, p. 122), and "how they perceive unstructured, unclear, or unpredictable situations which they try to avoid by maintaining strict codes of behaviour and a belief in a absolute truth (Hofstede 1989, p. 308). Low (weak) uncertainty avoidance countries (such as the US, UK) do not feel threatened by ambiguity and uncertainty and they do not feel a need to control environment, events and situations (Samovar and Porter 2004).

They more easily accept the uncertainty inherent in life and they are not as threatened by deviant people and ideas, so they tolerate the unusual (Samovar and Porter 2004). People from these cultures prize initiative, dislike the structure associated with hierarchy, are more willing to take risks, are flexible, think that there should be as few rules as

possible, and depend not so much on experts as on themselves. As a whole, people from this type of culture are more relaxed (Samovar and Porter 2004). Also, Bottom and Studt (1993 cited Wimsatt 2002) found that negotiators from such cultures are more likely to cooperate.

Research methodology

Overview of the research

The present research deals with English students' understanding of inter-cultural negotiation. The main purpose of the research focuses on "understanding of negotiation, tolerance for change and ambiguity, orientation toward uncertainty and risk taking", which will be measured using a questionnaire technique. Because of the difficulty of observing a real political negotiation, or of fabricating such situations, a questionnaire may investigate how the subjects will react to certain limited phrases. This can make the results more reliable and original for the purpose of the study. Also, because of the amount of information that might be gathered by a properly designed questionnaire, it is worth using this method in conducting this study. The questionnaire's twenty questions will be divided into four groups; each group will deal with one aspect of the values mentioned above to answer the main question of the research.

In general, the questionnaire (see appendix) in this study was designed to suit the subjects and the target measures, and was designed to gather qualitative data. The questionnaire was also carefully crafted and phrased to avoid ambiguity. Qualitative questions may also require more thought on the part of the participant and may cause them to become bored with the questionnaire sooner (Potter 2002). Therefore, only five

short questions were listed in each part of the questionnaire, with the same set of response options.

Sampling and Procedure of data collection

Two groups of ten postgraduate English students "international relations" were selected from the Schools of Politics at the Universities of Newcastle and Northumbria. They were chosen as their main field was international relations and they might be aware of the cultural differences between nations. This knowledge might come from studying subjects like 'intervention', or 'nationalism', and how these affect relations in the international arena. The students were contacted via email through the main offices in both schools. Newcastle University students were also contacted via the Blackboard system.

Data Analysis

Part one

The data collected was analyzed using Microsoft Excel. Questions in the first part were designed to investigate the students' understanding of negotiation, figure one shows the number of students who participated in the study (20) and the number of the statements which they responded to by underlining "T" true or "F" false (see appenxi for statements). It is immediately obvious from the chart that all the participants disagreed with statement five, which may be explained in various ways. It could demonstrate their commitment to the job, their sense of the group, or their lack of concern about developing personal relationships.
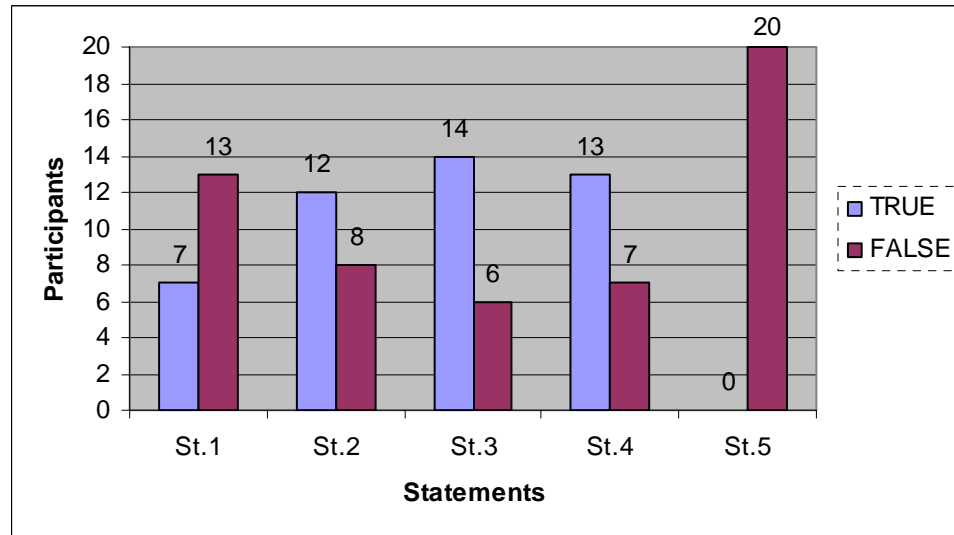
Figure One: - Understanding of Negotiation

The second highest percentage disagreement was with the first statement (65%). On the other hand, the highest agreement response was 70% for statement three. This implies that more than half of the participants did not fully understand that the negotiation process may be more a win-win process (Hofstede 1980).

Part two

Part two was designed to assess students' risk taking, and it can be noted from figure two that 80% of the participants responded "sometimes false and sometimes true" to statement 5, and the other 20% "usually false", which may mean that they prefer new rather than familiar things (high risk taking). Interestingly the rest of the participants (40%) were equally divided between the responses "usually false", and "usually true", and here we can interpret that 50% of them prefer their opinions not to be challenged, because their opinions or decision is not to be made quickly, as they are traditional and like to have time to consider all aspects of the negotiation deal. Therefore, British negotiators can be agreeable, and are also quite tough to disagree with. On the other hand,

the responses to statement three are quite interesting, with the same response rates of 40% to "usually false" or "sometimes true, sometimes false". Only 20% of the responses were "always true", which may reflect that the majority of the students do not like to challenge authority, which may reflect their hierarchy system.
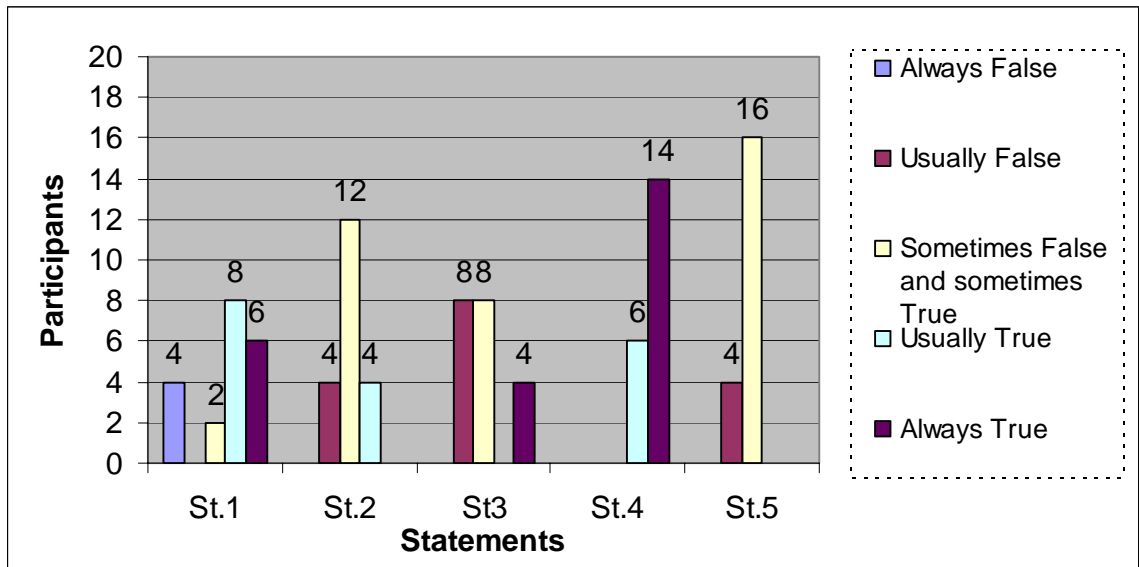

Figure Two: - Risk Taking

However, all of the students' responses were "always or usually true" to statement four. This response can be explained by their preference for being independent, private and to respect others. Interestingly, 40% and 30% of the responses respectively were "Usually true" and "always true" to statement one. Only 20% of the responses to this statement were "always false", and the rest were "sometimes false, sometimes true". From these figures we can suggest that most of their responses show their belief in their ability to control their own destiny. This may represent their values of individualism, in the sense of a belief that individuals have the power to determine their own destiny (Hulholland 1991).

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Part three

The design of this part of the questionnaire was to assess the students' tolerance for change and ambiguity. From a first glance at figure three, it can be noted that the responses to statements four and five were equally divided between "Always", and "usually true". This means that all the participants agreed that they were relaxed, not tense and easily integrated into new situations. At the same time, the responses to statement two were much the same, with only 20% giving the response "sometimes false and sometimes true" and 50% and 40% respectively to "always true", and "usually true". This means that the British are very selective in their behaviours and can easily adopt and employ new behaviours with an increased tolerance for ambiguity.
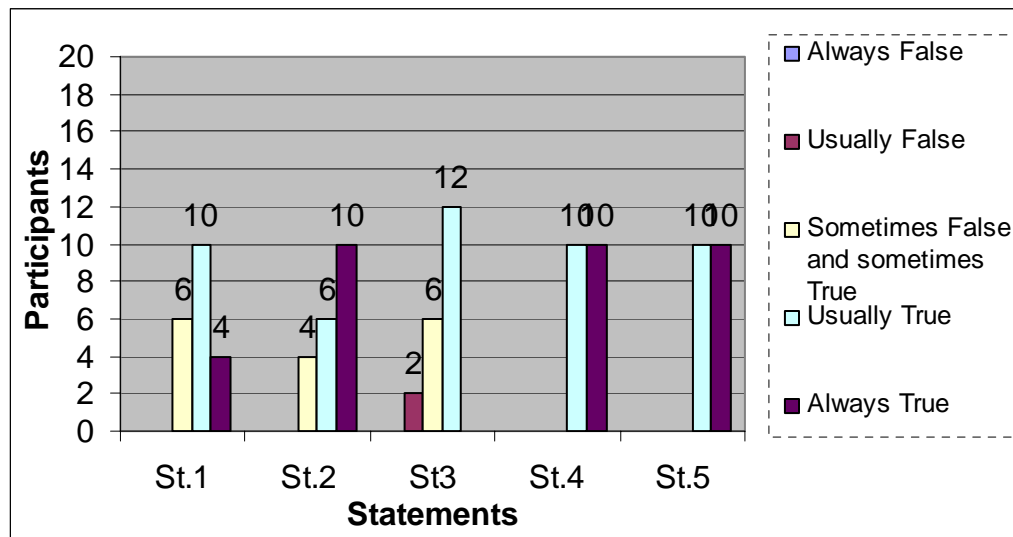

Figure Three: - Tolerance for Ambiguity

On the other hand, the responses to statements one and three were more or less the same, with around half saying "usually true" and about 30% to "sometimes false and sometimes true" for both, and the only response with 10% of "usually false" in this part was to statement three. We can interpret from those responses that the participants know

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when to make a decision to approach new persons and how to adapt their own behaviours

to others, which may reflect their knowledge of how to tolerate ambiguity.

Part four

Figure four represents responses to the five statements designed to assess the

students' uncertainty avoidance. Noticeably, 70% and 60% of the responses respectively

were "Sometimes false, and sometimes true" to statements three and four. Whereas for

the rest of the participants in both responses were "usually true", with only 10% "always

true" for statement four. From these two statements, it is obvious that the British are more

concerned about the truth rather than predictions or comparisons, though on the other

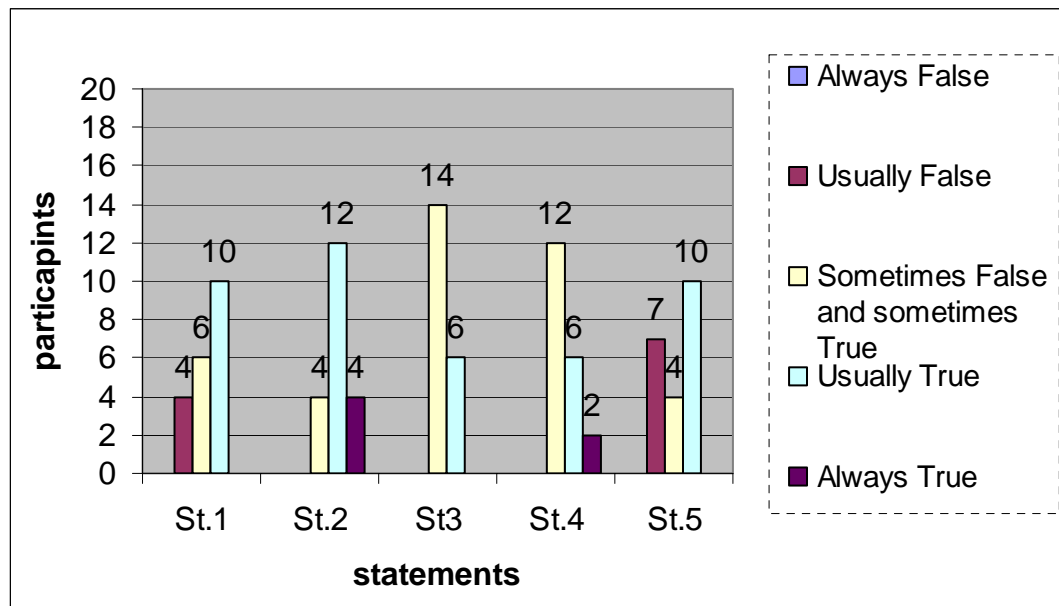hand they are unhappy with inconsistencies and try to solve them using their beliefs.

Figure four: Uncertainty Avoidance

"Usually true" was the most frequent highest response (60%) to statement two and

the others were divided equally between the responses "sometimes true and sometimes

false", and "always true". Therefore, we can see that more than 80% say that this

statement is either "usually or always true". This means that the British are flexible, not

threatened by deviant ideas, and more likely to take risks. The responses to statements one and five are mostly "usually true", which means that they like initiative, are flexible, and reflective, and the rest of the responses were either "sometimes false and sometimes true" or "usually false".

Discussion

According to the analysis of part one of the questionnaire, British negotiators can be classified as being concerned more with the issue which they are negotiating about and the future of the relationship between the parties rather than with the individuals who are representing other countries. This may reflect their attitudes to groups as individualistic in the sense of their nationality (Miall and Milsted 1993), and their understanding that individual relationships may affect the outcomes of the main issues in the negotiation process. Most of the participants reflected their cultural characteristics; they were very formal and placed great importance on proper protocol. They valued competence over seniority with a resulting consultative management style. From the statement about communication behavior, most of the results imply that the British negotiators are polite, reserved and mannered. British culture is high context; that is, nuances of communication are important. In general, most British spend more time listening and expect a prompt answer when they make a statement or ask a question (Samovar and Porter 2004).

In their general understanding of negotiations, more than half of the participants thought that in any negotiation situation someone wins and someone loses, which means that they lack understanding of negotiations, which are mainly to achieve an agreement that offers them a better deal than they would get simply by accepting or rejecting the

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other party's offer, or to get a win-win outcome from negotiation (Hofstede and Usunier 1996, p. 125).

On the other hand, the results in chart two show the British students' risk taking, and we can notice from the results that most of the participants prefer new rather than familiar things, which could be translated into a tendency towards risk taking attitudes. This supports the conclusions in the literature which classify British culture as having low uncertainty avoidance, and not feeling threatened by ambiguity and uncertainty (Kale 1996). On the other hand, more than half of the participants did not like their opinions to be challenged. This percentage is too low to agree with the key writers who comment that the British are tough to disagree with because simply they are very traditional and have considered all aspects of the negotiation deal before taking any decision, which may mean that their decisions are final. On the other hand, the responses to challenging authority are quite interesting. Only a small percentage agreed with this statement. This may reflect different degrees of hierarchy, ranging from a rather flat, consensus style of management to a steep, hierarchical, top-down structure (Jandt 2004). Formality between subordinates and superiors is common, and deference is usually shown to managers and leaders (Samovar and Porter 2004).

Noticeably, all the participants agreed about one's own decisions. This response can be explained by the individualistic culture and their preference for independence, privacy and respect of others. Interestingly, the majority think that they can control their own destiny. This reflects a strong belief that the past can determine and control the future, and also reflects an attitude towards time as linear and segmented. More specifically, the

British view time as a scarce resource which must be rationally and controlled through the use of schedules and appointments (Samovar and Porter 2004).

In the third part of the questionnaire results about uncertainty avoidance, a very small percentage agreed when it comes to resolving inconsistencies in beliefs they hold. This does not agree with conclusions in the literature that the British are more concerned about the truth rather than predictions or comparisons, or that they are unhappy with inconsistencies and try to solve them using their own truths and beliefs (Hofstede 1991, p. 308). On the other hand, large percentages were happy to deal with something new rather than something familiar. This corresponds with the classifications by anthropologists of the British as a weak uncertainty avoidance people who do not feel threatened by ambiguity and uncertainty and who do not feel a need to control the environment, events and situations (Kale 1996; Hofstede 1989; Hall 1990). The subsequent questions were designed to see how the British integrate with others and how they respond to proposals offered to them. As a low uncertainty avoidance culture, the British are cooperative, prize initiative, are more willing to take risks, are flexible, and more relaxed in dealing with new or unknown people or proposals (Samovar and Porter 2004; Salacuse 1998).

The last part of the questionnaire was designed to assess the students' tolerance for change and ambiguity. The results were very clear, indicating that the British are very selective in their behaviours. They can be blunt, direct and very clear about their thoughts and can easily adapt and employ new behaviours to increase their tolerance for ambiguity. To sum up, according to recent results, the British negotiators' cultural values include: traditionalism, restraint, courtesy, democracy, stubbornness, eccentricity, and reason and logic.

Conclusions

Four main issues have been addressed in this study. It has discussed the understanding of the British politics students of the negotiation process, and it has assessed their tolerance for change and ambiguity, their orientation towards uncertainty, and measured their risk taking. Because culture is the main unit of analysis, and the sample size is small, the results were sketchy. This research has combined theory from the cognitive tradition in negotiation research with theory from cross-cultural psychology.

Theoretically speaking, this study illustrates that culture is intricately tied to cognition in negotiation situations, which suggests that research on negotiation may be laden with cultural elements in general, and with those cultural elements used in this study in particular. Accordingly, it is very important for future research to examine negotiation cognition and processes within cultural contexts which develop and cultivate particular skills, attitudes, or qualities. Indeed, by doing so, we may reveal different assumptions, ask different questions, and come to different conclusions. Also, to come up with more concrete results, it may be suggested that to study one particular culture, it is very important to make a comparison between this particular culture (individualist) with a different one (collectivist).

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Appendix

Dear friend

This questionnaire is designed to collect some data about British culture for a study investigating "How are core cultural values manifested in the communication behaviour 'in negotiation processes" of individuals?"

So I am trying to get some original information from this questionnaire. I would appreciate it if you could help me by completing the questionnaire below.

The estimated time to answer the questionnaire is about 7 minutes.

<u>Personal Information</u>

Nationality   Please note that this questionnaire is only for British students

Gender (A)   A - male   B - female

Age   (B)   A - Below 20   B - 20-30 C - 30-40 D - 40-50 E - above 50

A- Answer these questions by underlining either T "true" or F "false"

1- Successful negotiators usually set very high goals. (T- F)

2- In all negotiation situations someone wins and someone loses (T- F)

3- Negotiators often mean something different from what they say. (T- F)

4- Effective negotiators spend more time listening than talking during negotiation. (T- F)

5- The personal needs of the negotiators are as important as the "objective" issue. (T- F)

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B- Respond to each statement indicating the degree to which it is true in terms of the way you typically respond:

Always False (1), Usually False (2), Sometimes False and Sometime True (3), Usually True (4), and Always True (5)

1- I believe that I control my destiny. 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

2- I don't like my opinions being challenged. 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

3- I like to challenge authority. 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

4- Making my own decisions is very important to me. 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

5- I prefer familiar things to new things. 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

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1- I can adapt my behaviour to others 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

2- I can modify the way I come across to people, depending on the impression I want to give them. 1 – 2 – 3 – <u>4</u> – 5

3- I can accurately interpret the behaviour of others who are different. 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

4- I am comfortable in new situations. 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

5- I am relaxed in unfamiliar situations. 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

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1- When I obtain new information, I try to integrate it with information I already have. 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

2- If given a choice, I prefer to go somewhere new rather than somewhere I have been before. 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

3- I evaluate people on their own merit without comparing them to others. 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

4- I try to resolve inconsistencies in beliefs I hold. 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

5- If someone suggests an opinion that is different than mine, I do not reject it before I consider it. 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

About the Author

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