

**THE ISSUE OF TRUST IN CROSS-CULTURAL NEGOTIATION – A CASE OF POLAND**Michał CHMIELECKI<sup>31</sup>, ŁUKASZ SUŁKOWSKI<sup>32</sup>**Introduction**

The number of companies operating internationally is growing continuously. The world is opening up for foreign firms and investments. The increase in connections among organizations all over the world have inspired researchers to scrutinize the impact of culture on negotiations (Requejo & Graham, 2008). Many studies have documented cultural differences in negotiations (see e.g. Adair & Brett, 2005; Adair et al., 2007; Fang, 1999).

The vast majority of the literature on negotiations across cultures consists of studies on negotiations in or negotiations from individual cultures. Their aim is to provide recommendations regarding how to conduct negotiations in particular cultures as well as to point difficulties in negotiations relating to a given culture. Another stream of research focuses on comparing negotiations and negotiation styles among different cultures. Yet, many other studies analyze interactions among negotiators from two or more cultures, while another stream in the research looks at the cross-cultural negotiations as such (see H. Agdnal, 2007). Nevertheless, regardless of the type of the research that is carried out, a strong focus on several countries, mainly the U.S. and East Asian economies, is apparent in the studies. The research on the Polish negotiation style is rather scarce. The purpose of this article is to present how trust is perceived and treated in business negotiations by Polish managers. The article presents unique empirical findings obtained from the analysis of negotiation simulations from the perspective of Positive Organizational Scholarship. This paper adds value to the field of conflict management by considering the role of trust in cross-cultural negotiations. Our main hypothesis is that in case of Polish managers culture will functions as an invisible barrier, for creating positive environment for negotiations based on trust.

The paper is composed as follows: in the first part concepts such as culture, trust and negotiation are described. Subsequently the paper presents and discusses the unique results of the research concerning the Polish negotiation style.

**Culture**

Culture is a complex phenomenon. Sułkowski (2009) observes that the notion of a culture is multidimensional and it is characterizes by a great variety of definitions functioning both in theory and in practice. Complexity of culture makes impossible to create one, proper definition. Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) suggest “culture is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others” (p. 4). Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) add that a culture is a mental programming which takes place throughout human’s life, though programming some patterns like thinking and feeling take place in early childhood (p. 2-3). In other words, this is a culture that defines people of a particular country. Thanks to mental programming that stimulates certain behavior, people feel commitment to a particular culture. Bjerke (2004) says that culture like many other subjects is learned and shared within a given community (p. 19).

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Culture is a part of life that must be learned. Bjerke (2004) adds that culture is nothing else but well-versed way of thinking and behaving (p. 19). Salacuse (1994) emphasizes that a culture is a heritage of a given community handed down through the generations as a set of rules, categories and concepts accepted by a community (p. 61). Also Lebaron and Pillay (2006) base on Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) theory because they claim that a culture is an unsaid agreement within a party, which indicates its identity and link people (p. 26). To sum up, as the definition of a culture suggested by Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) seems to be a fundament for all the other definitions, it is also going to be the foundation of this article.

National culture is “perhaps the broadest social context within which negotiation can occur” (Carnevale, 1995, p. 310). When individuals conduct business across national borders, they often bring to the negotiation table diverse cultural mindsets with which they interact with one another (Simintiras, 2000).

## **Negotiation**

Numerous scholars would date rigorous research in the field of negotiation back to von Neumann and Morgenstern’s (Von Neumann, Morgenstern, 1947) classic work on games and economic behavior. From that point many various definitions and approaches were coined. Negotiating can be viewed as coordination in an environment of diverse interests and conflicts (Ahdrich, 2006). It can be portrayed as a management process of the interrelationship among interests, rights, and power between or among parties. Negotiation refers to a process in which individuals work together to formulate agreements about the issues in dispute. This process assumes that the parties are willing to communicate and to generate offers and counter-offers. Agreement occurs if and only if the offers made are accepted by both of the parties. Regardless of definition, negotiation involves several key components including two or more parties to a negotiation, their interests, their alternatives, the process and the negotiated outcomes. (Chmielecki, 2013)

It must be stressed that negotiations are the subject of cross-cultural research in cross-cultural management. Intercultural management, as a field of knowledge, provides guidance that can be useful in business practices and enable efficient collaboration between people from different cultures. Intercultural management deals with the analysis of different types of cross-cultural interactions for example: organizational culture, human resource management, operations and leadership teams multicultural development of cultural competence, expatriate issues, knowledge management, cross-cultural communication, cross-cultural conflict resolution including cross-cultural negotiations. (Chmielecki, 2013)

Negotiations are always more fruitful when parties freely share information about their interests and goals. All negotiations involve risk. That’s why establishing trust at the bargaining table is crucial. Nevertheless, there are cultural differences in trust and *how* cultural differences in trust influence negotiation strategy.

## **Trust**

A concise definition of trust is, “confident positive expectations regarding another’s conduct” (Lewicki, McAllister, & Bies, 1998: 439). Trust is of great interest to organizational scholars in many fields (e.g., Andersenn, 2005; Gill, Boies, Finegan, & McNally, 2005). One reason for this interest is the belief that trust in the workplace has important implications for the outcomes of individuals, groups, and organizations. Hosmer (1995) noted that trust is essential for understanding interpersonal and group behaviour, economic exchange, managerial effectiveness, and social stability. Others have emphasized the role of trust in teamwork (Jones & George, 1998), risk-taking and outcomes in work relationships (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995), the choice of governance structures, responses to crisis and downsizing (Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998), and an organization’s competitive advantage (Jones, 1995). In general, this theoretical work suggests that trust leads to better work relationships, improved decision-making, and enhanced organizational effectiveness.

## Culture, Trust and negotiation – state of current research

Trust has long been recognized by scholars and practitioners alike as an important factor for negotiation success. People from different cultures vary in their willingness to trust one another (Inglehart, Basáñez, & Menéndez Moreno, 1998; Johnson & Cullen, 2002). Many scholars claim that across many interpersonal interactions, Westerners (i.e., North Americans, Western Europeans) tend to make the “swift trust” assumption, which is: others deserve to be trusted until they prove otherwise (Dirks, Lewicki, & Zaheer, 2009; Weber, Malhotra, & Murnighan, 2005). Easterners (i.e., East and South Asians) generally trust less than Westerners (Delhey & Newton, 2005; Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994).

While the presence of cultural differences in negotiation strategies is quite well documented, the *explanation* what elements of culture influences negotiation behaviours and strategy is less well understood. Drawing on research indicating that trust facilitates information-sharing strategies among negotiators (Butler, 1999; Kimmel, Pruitt, Magenau, Konar-Goldband, & Carnevale, 1980), and research indicating that trust varies by culture (e.g., Branzei, Vertinsky, & Camp, 2007; Delhey & Newton, 2005), I propose that trust is one of the elements for cultural differences in the choice of negotiation strategy and tactics.

Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman (1995, p. 712) define trust as the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party. This definition is particularly pertinent to my theorizing because negotiation is an interaction between identifiable parties (e.g. Walton & McKersie, 1965) in which some strategies leave negotiators more vulnerable to exploitation than other strategies.

That is why it can be proposed that trust partly may account for cultural differences in the choice of negotiation behavior, strategy and tactics (see figure 1).

**Figure 1 Theoretical model integrating theory about culture, trust, negotiation behaviours and strategies and outcomes.**



*Source: Own model*

## Negotiation and Positive Organizational Scholarship

This part adopts a positive organizational scholarship lens to examine negotiation theory. Whether focusing on social or cognitive processes, the basic assumptions of most negotiation research are drawn from social exchange theory (Blau, 1964 ; Emerson, 1976), which conceptualizes relationships as economic transactions of material or nonmaterial goods. Many of the assumptions as well as propositions that underlie POS generally depend on relationships based on trust between individuals. Positive organizational scholarship environments are typified by positive attributes, such as belief in the goodness of human contribution and human potential leading to positive performance (Cameron, 2007). POS research also advocates the belief that people desire to make positive contributions to the their organizations, and one of the key features of positive organizations is trust (Cameron, 2007).

Positive negotiators create a positive climate by emphasizing the positives and growing aspects of their organizations. They develop a positive climate through demonstrating among other willingness to trust the other side of the negotiations. It influences communication, which if becomes positive is important in creating a positive negotiation environment. This also influences emotion management. And building on humanistic psychology (Rogers, 1961), it can be suggested that engaging in mindful and strategic emotion management through a process of self-narration (Kopelman, Chen, & Shoshana, 2009) enables negotiators to develop positive regard for the self and others.

### Research methods and findings

The research was conducted in among management *students* enrolled in several MBA programs in Poland. Students formed groups of 4-6 people and took part in negotiations simulation the lasted from 45 to 75 minutes. All together we have examined 17 simulation (34 groups).

The students were asked to become members of the Oil Pricing Board of one of the two less developed countries A and B. Then teams were taken to separate rooms and given the instructions in which it was written that they would be selling oil to the country C (which was not present in the game). It was said that they were appointed for 8 months and each month the Board will be asked to set that month's price for their country's oil sales to country C. They were also instructed that their goal as a Board is to maximize their country's profits on oil sales to country C. Oil revenues are an important part of their country's

Gross National Product and what is important they are entirely indifferent to the oil profits of the other country. They were also told that by long-term agreement with country C, the price that each country charges must be \$10, \$20, or \$30.

Country B Price

Figure 2. Negotiation matrix

|                 |      | \$30 | \$20 | \$10 |
|-----------------|------|------|------|------|
| Country A Price | \$30 | 11   | 18   | 15   |
|                 | \$20 | 2    | 8    | 15   |
|                 | \$10 | 2    | 3    | 5    |
|                 |      | 11   | 18   | 15   |

Source: Own study

They were also told that it is not possible to negotiate with another country (A with B, B with A) and that it perhaps might happen that they will have the chance to meet. In fact there were to possibilities for the teams to meet before month no. 4 and before round number 8. Below is the negotiation simulation profit record table.

**Table 1.** Negotiation simulation profit record table

| Month | PRICE CHOSEN |           | PROFIT FOR MOTNH |           |
|-------|--------------|-----------|------------------|-----------|
|       | Country A    | Country B | Country A        | Country B |
| 1     |              |           |                  |           |
| 2     |              |           |                  |           |
| 3     |              |           |                  |           |
| 4     |              |           |                  |           |
| 5     |              |           |                  |           |
| 6     |              |           |                  |           |
| 7     |              |           |                  |           |
| 8     |              |           |                  |           |

*Source: Own study*

In month number 4 profits were doubled and the participants were informed about that directly before month number 4. This was the time were they could meet and negotiate. In months 7 and 8 profits were quadrupled providing incomes were different. Participants were informed about that directly before month number 7. This was the time were they could meet and negotiate. What was surprising was the fact that out of 17 simulations 12 ended in almost exactly same way, with small variations in the first or second month (see table 2. Even if negotiators during the meeting agreed on giving higher prices for the common good, the actual prices handed to the facilitator were different than those negotiated.

**Table 2.** Profit Record table – typical results

| Month                              | PRICE CHOSEN |           | PROFIT FOR MOTNH |           |
|------------------------------------|--------------|-----------|------------------|-----------|
|                                    | Country A    | Country B | Country A        | Country B |
| 1                                  | 10           | 10        | 5                | 5         |
| 2                                  | 10           | 10        | 5                | 5         |
| 3                                  | 10           | 10        | 5                | 5         |
| 4 *2                               | 10           | 10        | 10               | 10        |
| 5                                  | 10           | 10        | 10               | 10        |
| 6                                  | 10           | 10        | 5                | 5         |
| 7 * 4<br>(If incomes<br>different) | 10           | 10        | 5                | 5         |
| 8 *<br>(If incomes<br>different)   | 10           | 10        | 5                | 5         |

*Source: Own study*

## Discussion

One could think that it can be explained by *cultural tightness and looseness classification*. Yamagishi and colleagues (e.g., Takahashi et al., 2008; Yamagishi et al., 1998) suggest an answer, which is as follows: high- and low-trust cultures have different mechanisms for controlling behavior. Cultures in which social norms are clearly defined and reliably imposed (i.e., "tight" cultures; Gelfand, Nishii, & Raver, 2006) tend to enforce behavioral expectations through monitoring and sanctioning (institutional mechanisms). In contrast, cultures in which social norms are relatively flexible and informal (i.e., "loose" cultures; Gelfand et al., 2006) typically propose expectations but permit individuals to define the range of tolerable behavior within which they may exercise their own preferences (Gelfand et al., 2010).

That is why enforcement in loose cultures is left rather to interpersonal mechanisms than law. Yamagishi's research articulates the implications for trust in negotiations. Because of the fact that institutional mechanisms govern behavior in tight cultures, individuals from these cultures

rely rather on institutional trust (i.e. law and contracts) more than interpersonal trust to control behavior and sanction deviance. Because interpersonal mechanisms govern behavior in loose cultures, the exact opposite would be true there (e.g., Takahashi et al., 2008; Yamagishi et al., 1998; Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994). Nevertheless in this case this does not explain the situation. Poland is classified rather as a loose culture (see table 3) and yet it does not fully rely on interpersonal trust.

**Table 3.** Tight and loose cultures.

| <b>Tightest</b> |             | <b>Loosest</b> |               |
|-----------------|-------------|----------------|---------------|
| 1               | Pakistan    | 17             | Iceland       |
| 2               | Malaysia    | 18             | France        |
| 3               | India       | 19             | Hong Kong     |
| 4               | Singapore   | 20             | <b>Poland</b> |
| 5               | South Korea | 21             | Belgium       |
| 6               | Norway      | 22             | Spain         |
| 7               | Turkey      | 23             | USA           |
| 8               | Japan       | 24             | Australia     |
| 9               | China       | 25             | New Zealand   |
| 10              | E. Germany  | 26             | Netherlands   |
| 11              | Portugal    | 27             | Greece        |
| 12              | The U.K.    | 28             | Venezuela     |
| 13              | Austria     | 29             | Brazil        |
| 14              | Mexico      | 30             | Israel        |
| 15              | Germany     | 31             | Estonia       |
| 16              | Italy       | 32             | Hungary       |
|                 |             | 33             | Ukraine       |

*Source: Own work based on Michele J. Gelfand, al., Differences Between Tight and Loose Cultures: A 33-Nation Study, Science, 1100 (2011);*

Here the explanation is rather Polish history, and to be more precise partition of Poland, two world wars and communist era during which the country did not have proper conditions to develop international trade and that is why does not have a strong tradition in negotiations. It also explains the fact why Poles tend to be so distrustful about business partners.

Below are the results of national report on social trust in Poland. It is visible that situation is improving but still in 2012 74% people believed that in relations with people you have to be cautious, only 23% believe that you can generally trust people.

**Table 4.** Trust towards people.

| Year   | Which of those two opinions is closer to your views? |                                                  |             |
|--------|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-------------|
|        | You can generally trust people.                      | In relations with people you have to be cautious | Hard to say |
|        | In percent                                           |                                                  |             |
| I 2002 | 19                                                   | 79                                               | 2           |
| I 2004 | 17                                                   | 81                                               | 2           |
| I 2006 | 19                                                   | 79                                               | 2           |
| I 2008 | 26                                                   | 72                                               | 2           |
| I 2010 | 26                                                   | 72                                               | 2           |
| I 2012 | 23                                                   | 74                                               | 3           |

Source: Report on social trust in Poland, [www.cbos.pl](http://www.cbos.pl) access 25.04.2014

**Table 5.** Trust towards business partners.

| Year   | Which of those two opinions is closer to your views? |                                                   |             |
|--------|------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-------------|
|        | Trust towards business partner pays off              | Trust towards business partner usually ends badly | Hard to say |
|        | in percent                                           |                                                   |             |
| I 2002 | 24                                                   | 45                                                | 31          |
| I 2004 | 29                                                   | 46                                                | 25          |
| I 2006 | 27                                                   | 44                                                | 29          |
| I 2008 | 33                                                   | 40                                                | 27          |
| I 2010 | 34                                                   | 42                                                | 24          |
| I 2012 | 38                                                   | 37                                                | 24          |

Source: Report on social trust in Poland, [www.cbos.pl](http://www.cbos.pl) access 25.04.2014

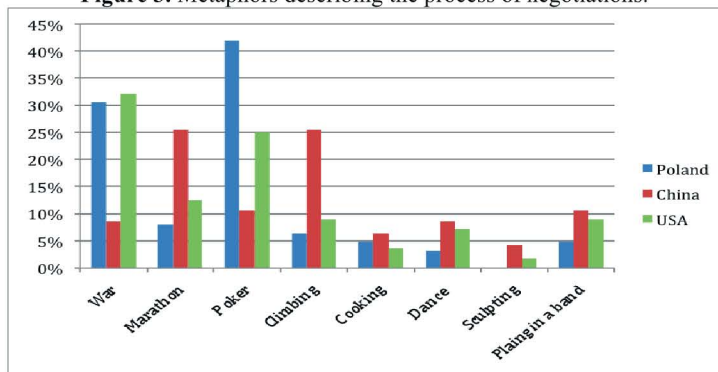
Interesting findings were obtained by one of the Authors of this article (Chmielecki, 2013). The Author researched metaphors describing the process of negotiations. Table 6 describes various types of metaphors.

**Table 6.** Metaphors used for the process of negotiation and their explanations.

| Metaphor          | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| War               | Negotiation is a process where you either “ <i>win or lose</i> .” In negotiation every move is justified. The other side is suspicious of our motives.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Marathon          | Negotiations can be painful. They require time. Success needs time.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Poker             | The other party will probably try to cheat us somehow. We have to be vigilant about of the possibility of unethical tactics being employed against us.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Climbing          | It’s a risky process, that requires a lot of preparation. Sometimes you need to resign at some level. There are many surprises waiting for you during the process, that is why you never go alone and you have to rely on others.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Journey           | In this domain, as the term denotes, negotiation process is made akin to that of a journey, where there is a reference or starting point and a destination or end point. On the way there are some ‘twists and turns,’ sometimes you come across a “stumbling block’ and you have to ‘clear the way’.                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Cooking           | Both parties must cooperate and complete one another in order to achieve a goal.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Dance             | You must be engaged in it with all your soul. You need to move with grace and flow with the melody line (the external negotiation environment you cannot change).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Sculpting         | Like sculptor you need to get rid of many unnecessary layers of information and get to the core.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Golf              | In golf you adhere to the rules, you display professional etiquette. From time to time you have to take risks but all the time you have to maintain focus. Trust in relationships is essential. Every shot completed gives you another opportunity to make another one. Negotiators are not in a hurry to get to the end. When the ball is in the hole, there are no more shots. Golf is often a game of luck. A bad bounce here or a good bounce there can sometimes make all of the difference in a round. |
| Football (soccer) | Metaphorical use of football serves to highlight the stresses of the long negotiations, the highly conflictual confrontations and the strategy to extend deadlines and buy time in the face of the inability to reach a satisfactory agreement that would (temporarily) pacify the conflict.                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Playing in a band | Understanding and open communication between parties is crucial. If you want to focus attention on yourself too much you won’t reach a goal.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

Source: own study.

The results of a survey<sup>33</sup> are presented on the graph below (figure 3).

**Figure 3.** Metaphors describing the process of negotiations.

Source: Own study.

<sup>33</sup> 261 respondents took part in the online survey. 74 from Poland, 51 from China, 75 from the USA and 61 from Great Britain.

The initial categorizations looks as follows: an American negotiator will try to control as much as possible. He is the battlefield commander, calling the shots and bringing the firepower of his intellect to bear on the opposing forces. Chinese negotiator likes to give the appearance of being able to endure any amount of pain to get to the point where he wants to be. Polish negotiator expects to be cheated at some point, he is very distrustful (see poker metaphor in figure 2). Within the context of POS it is clearly visible that the initial lack of trust in business relations and it his particular case negotiations will lead to creation of poor negotiation environment, which will clearly lead to unsatisfactory economic results.

## Summary

Every time when two sides sit down at the bargaining table, they put something on the line i.e. concessions or sensitive information. Thus, trust is crucial in all negotiations because of this ever-present element of risk. Talks will sooner or later break down when each side doubts the other's abilities and intentions. Being overly cautious and withholding tradeoffs, concessions and information is also not the way to go because sides can let big opportunities slip them by.

The paper discussed the question how national culture affects the creation of trust in international business negotiations. It is strongly visible that in case of Polish managers culture functions as an invisible barrier, for creating positive environment for negotiations.

Here it is assumed to have a central role in the lack of development of trust, which visibly affects cooperation in cross-cultural context. Culture, along with various other factors, plays an important role in determining the level of trust a person is likely to display in a cross-cultural interaction.

## Acknowledgment

The financial support from National Science Center in Poland is gratefully acknowledged (the research grant no. DEC-2013/09/B/HS4/00498, entitled "Cross-cultural interactions in foreign subsidiaries of multinational corporations - traditional and Positive Organizational Scholarship approaches").

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## Abstract

Negotiation is an essential component of success in international business and management. The participants' culture proved to be one of the most critical factors that can stimulate or harm the process and outcome of negotiation. Recent years have seen an explosion of interest in intercultural dimensions of conflict - an unavoidable element in every organization. Books, numerous studies as well as corporate trainings and university courses offer different perspectives allow for analysis of the role of culture in conflict management. This paper adds value to the field of conflict management by considering the role of trust in cross-cultural negotiations. The purpose of this article is to present how trust is perceived and treated in business negotiations by Polish managers. The article presents unique empirical findings obtained from the analysis of negotiation simulations from the perspective of Positive Organizational Scholarship.