

## **DECEPTIVE BEHAVIOR IN INTRA- AND CROSS-CULTURAL BUSINESS NEGOTIATIONS OF MEXICAN PEOPLE: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Business negotiations are often plagued by various forms of unethical tactics. This paper focuses on deception, a widely used unethical tactic in negotiations. Building on existing research, this study examines emotional deception and informational deception and the likelihood of their use in intra- and cross-cultural negotiations by Mexican negotiators. Based on responses from 116 Mexican managers, this study shows that Mexican negotiators are more likely to use informational deception rather than emotional deception in both intra and cross-cultural negotiations. The study however did not find any difference between intra- and cross-cultural negotiation behaviors of Mexican managers with respect to the extent of use of deceptions. The study also found that for the most part, female and male negotiators exhibit very similar behavior in both intra- and cross-cultural negotiations.

*Keywords:* Cultural Values, Deception, Intra-cultural, Cross-cultural Negotiation

### **INTRODUCTION**

Business negotiation dates to the dawn of human civilization, perhaps even earlier. Almost every country has its own literature devoted to business negotiation. Despite the existence of this broad and deep expanse of research, gaps exist. For example, we have very limited comprehension of the role that ethics plays in business negotiations. Since unethical behavior can alter significantly the outcomes of negotiations, any study of negotiation behavior can be enhanced by using the lens of ethics. It is generally held that empirical analysis of ethical behavior leads to a better ethical environment (Goolsby & Hunt 1992). Further, the ability to understand what constitutes acceptable and expected behavior in a negotiation can be a key success factor in international business (Volkema, 1998).

Mirroring the growth of international trade and cross-border investments, international business negotiations have also grown significantly over the past few decades (Lytle, Brett, Barsness, Tinsley, Janssens, 1995). Examining the role of ethics in international business negotiations, which involve people from different cultural backgrounds, could be far more challenging than studying ethics in purely domestic negotiations. This is mainly because our notion of what is ethically appropriate and what is not is often influenced by our cultural values

(Kopelman & Rosette 2008; Volkema & Fleury, 2002). Every culture has its own norms about what is right and what is wrong behavior (Brett, 2000).

Many scholars (e.g., Barry & Robinson, 2002; Menkel-Meadow & Wheeler, 2004; Volkema, 1998) posit that business negotiations are intrinsically full of ethical dilemmas and provide a fertile environment for engaging in opportunistic behavior. Some scholars (e.g., Allhoff, 2003; Carson, 1993; Dees & Crampton, 1991) even argue that unethical behavior may be necessary in certain business situations. However, in this age of social media when people expect ethical behavior from the business community, the use of unethical tactics in closing a deal may deprive such a deal of the legitimacy that it needs. The use of unethical negotiation behavior also extracts a toll on the society as it affects general economic development and well-being of people (Bird & Smucker, 2007). It is thus not surprising that the topic of ethics has generated renewed interest among researchers. This surge in research on ethics is a reflection of the growing societal concern for ethical lapses in the corporate world (Bazerman & Banaji, 2004) that calls for a better understanding of how we perceive and handle ethics in a business context. This paper seeks to contribute to our better understanding of ethical behavior in international business negotiations by probing how Mexican business people are likely to conduct themselves in both intra-cultural (e.g., negotiating with people from the same national culture) and cross-cultural (i.e., negotiating with foreigners) contexts. We are examining both intra- and cross-cultural negotiation behavior as our behavior differs from negotiation to negotiation depending on the context (Carnevale & Pruitt, 1992). Several studies (e.g., Elahee, Kirby & Nasif, 2002; Warden & Chen, 2009) show that our ethical behaviors vary significantly between intra- and cross-cultural- negotiations.

While there can be a wide range of unethical tactics used in business negotiations, this paper focuses on deceptive behavior in its two forms, informational deception and emotional deception (discussed in detail later in the paper), and examines the likelihood of use of emotional and informational deceptions in both intra- and cross-cultural business negotiations by Mexican business people. A secondary objective of this paper is to see if there is any difference between male and female Mexican negotiators in their propensity to engage in these two deceptive negotiation behaviors. Finally, this study also seeks to examine if Mexican people are inclined to engage in one type of deception more than the other.

We have chosen Mexico as the focal country of our study for a number of reasons. First, Mexico, with a population of over 120 million people, is one of the important emerging economies in the world. As of June 2014, Mexico has the 11th largest economy in the world (Worldfactbook, 2014). Mexico is an important member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the Pacific Alliance. Second, it is the second largest trading partner of the United States (US) after Canada and also one of the largest recipients of US foreign direct investment. Third, Mexico is also the only country in the Americas which has free trade agreements with over 50 countries including the US, the European Union and Japan (Worldfactbook 2014). Fourth, Mexico is home to several large multinational firms which are active in different parts of the world. As Mexico is playing an increasingly important role in global trade and investment, it is imperative for us to gain a better understanding of various aspects of Mexican negotiation behavior.

## THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Ethics refers to the set of rules that define the behavior of a person. Chester (2012) describes good business ethics as the behavior involving adequate use of knowledge and known facts, demonstrated in line with strong integrity, honesty, and professionalism in order to ensure transparency in all actions. In an intercultural negotiation however, determining what is ethical becomes challenging as social environment, religion, belief systems, and laws that determine the behavior of individuals need to be taken into account (Paul & Elder, 2012).

Being unethical, on the other hand, is to act differently from what the majority of society would perceive to be fair and right according to the circumstances. Rivers and Lytle (2007) define unethical tactics as being those tactics that could be regarded as improper depending on an individual's ethical reasoning. In other words, unethical behavior is breaking the set of rules that our societies have defined as right. There are several ways one can be unethical in business negotiations such as paying or receiving bribes, bluffing, cheating, lying, misrepresenting, skipping facts, not rectifying the wrong assumptions of the other party, withholding pertinent information, etc.

Carr (1968), in his seminal work on ethics, raised the question of whether bluffing in business is unethical. Comparing business with poker games, Carr showed that both business and poker games lack strict rules that prohibit the use of bluffing as a tool. As a result, bluffing is widely used by negotiators. Not using this tool, Carr argued, is tantamount to ignoring the opportunities that the game allows to the players and could seriously jeopardize the negotiator's business prospects. Carr also pointed out that people act differently depending on the context. For example, businessmen with families may adhere to a strict sense of ethics in their family life, exhibit values formed by their religious beliefs, and obey the rules of the society where they were raised. However, these very same business people may not behave ethically in their workplace; because when they are in their offices, they become just game players exhibiting different sets of ethical behavior according to what they are motivated by in their jobs.

While discussing about the ethics of deception in negotiation, Strudler (1995) posits that lying in negotiation is common. Strudler further posits that dishonesty can bestow an unfair advantage on one party over the other. However, if the opponent responds by being dishonest, that would eliminate this unfair advantage. Similar views were expressed earlier by Dees and Crampton (1991) who opined that that being untruthful is a tactic that may be accepted to defend oneself from an opponent who is lying. Carson (1993) echoed the same view by arguing that deception as a self-defense technique is justified when the other party is being dishonest.

Fulmer, Barry and Long (2009) provides examples of two forms of deception: deception as an element of *interaction* (e.g., cheating) and as an element of *emotions* (e.g., fear, false happiness). Sometimes, deception occurs when the counterpart does not ask for enough information. It can also happen when one party simply omits some information. Fulmer, et al. (2009) present some examples to illustrate that negotiators who use more deceptive tactics during negotiations frequently get better outcomes at the bargaining table.

Building on the work of Fulmer, et al. (2009), which was greatly influenced by previous work by Robinson, Lewicki, and Donahue (2000), this study examines four deceptive negotiation behaviors, namely ‘Positive Emotion Management,’ ‘Negative Emotion Management,’ ‘False Promises,’ and ‘Misrepresentation.’ Fulmer, et al. (2009) labeled the first two tactics as “*Emotional Deceptions*” and the last two tactics as “*Informational Deceptions*.” They developed the emotional deception scale items from the work of Barry (1999) and the informational deception scale items from the work of Robinson, et al. (2000). These tactics are explained below:

### **Emotional Deceptions**

- **Positive Emotion Management**, as defined by Fulmer, et al. (2009), consists of behavior in demonstrating emotions that are designed to not make the other party(ies) feel comfortable.
- **Negative Emotion Management**, as defined by Fulmer, et al. (2009), refers to manipulation of expressions with the goal of influencing others to create an uncomfortable situation so as to force the other party(ies) to change his/her position.

### **Informational Deceptions**

- **False Promises**, as explained by Robinson, et al. (2000), and also reiterated by Fulmer, et al. (2009), consists of making promises by a party which he/she has no intention of following through.
- **Misrepresentation**, also originally propounded by Robinson, et al. (2000), and subsequently used by Fulmer, et al. (2009), refers to providing informational that misstates the party’s position interest and intentions.

While this paper relies heavily on the theoretical framework developed by Fulmer, et al. (2009), it has extended their work in a significant way by looking beyond domestic negotiations. This study compares the same group of people’s likely behavior in both intra- and inter-cultural context with respect to the likelihood of use of the four aforementioned deceptive negotiation tactics.

## **HYPOTHESES**

Our focal country Mexico possesses an interesting culture blending the cultural beliefs and practices of invading Spaniards and native Amerindian population. In his seminal work, Hofstede (1980) reported an individualism score of 30 for Mexico. This low individualism score squarely puts Mexico in the category of collectivist cultures. The same study reported a score of 82 for the uncertainty avoidance index, a score of 81 for the power distance index, and a score of 69 for the masculinity-femininity index for Mexico. Mexico is thus considered a masculine country with a large power distance and strong tendency to avoid uncertainty.

While people in every country may show, to a certain extent, preferential treatment for local people over foreigners (Brewer, 1999), the tendency to treat foreigners differently than

compatriots is likely to be particularly prevalent in collectivistic and strong uncertainty avoidance cultures like Mexico. This is because members of a collectivistic and strong uncertainty avoidance culture usually exhibit less trust toward foreigners (Doney, Cannon, & Mullen, 1998; Lituchy, 1997).

Fulmer, et al. (2009) demonstrate that deceptive tactics are less frequently used when the opponent is a known person rather than a stranger. It could be due to a variety of reasons such as fear of retaliation, the risk of earning a bad reputation, possibility of law suits by the other party, etc. Foreigners may not be in the same position like local people to retaliate against a party or cause it social embarrassment for its unethical behavior. Foreigners are also less likely to go through the trouble of resorting to legal recourse unless the amount involved is significantly high. In other words, there are less disincentives for engaging in deceptive behavior with foreigners as opposed to local people. Therefore, we can argue that when people negotiate with a person from the same country, they are less willing to use deceptive tactics than when they are negotiating with a person/party from a different country. It is therefore hypothesized that:

H<sub>1</sub>: Mexican negotiators are likely to use emotional and informational deception tactics more with foreigners than with people from their own country.

The role of gender in negotiation has attracted a lot of research attention for quite some time. However, the previous findings are contradictory when it comes to the question of gender differences in ethical behavior in negotiations. It was shown by Anton (1990) that both women and men tend to use unethical tools such as bluffing in negotiation. On the other hand, Westbrook, Arendall, and Padelford (2005) demonstrate that there is a gap in the negotiation styles between women and men. Women are believed to exhibit more compassion and sympathy for their opponents, regardless of their prior contact with them. As women are more cooperative than men, they are expected to have a better understanding of their opponents during a negotiation (Babledelis, Deaux, Helmreich, & Spence, 1983), and consequently, be able to close a deal successfully. Men, on the other hand, are considered risk takers, which is a characteristic that defines the competitive style that men tend to have. Olekalns and Smith (1999) found strong evidence for their assertion that negotiators who are competitively driven are inclined to resorting to unethical behavior during negotiations. Greenhalgh and Gilkey (1993) argue that men view negotiation as an encounter sport, using tactics that lead them to present unethical behavior more than women. Based on these findings from the extant literature, we hypothesize that:

H<sub>2</sub>: Male Mexican negotiators are likely to use more deceptive tactics than female negotiators.

While the use of both emotional deception (consisting of positive and negative emotion management) and informational deception (comprising false promises and representation) are common, people may not necessarily use them to the same extent. Using emotional deception may not come naturally to people as it requires pretention and acting. In situations when the negotiating parties do not have adequate information and knowledge about the needs, interests, positions, resources etc. of the other party, they may be tempted to provide information that is incorrect, incomplete, or over- or under-stated. Therefore, it is hypothesized:

H<sub>3</sub>: Mexican negotiators are more likely to use informational deception tactics than emotional deception tactics.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Instrument**

The survey used in this study for data collection was constructed based on a study by Fulmer, et al. (2009). It was developed originally in English. The questionnaire was translated into Spanish by one of the authors who is bi-lingual (in English and Spanish), with Spanish being his mother tongue. To ensure translation accuracy and equivalence, a second opinion of a bilingual professional (English and Spanish) was sought and necessary adjustments were made. The questionnaire was administered electronically.

To capture the difference in unethical negotiation behavior in intra-cultural (i.e., negotiations within country) and cross-cultural (negotiation with foreigners) negotiations, the same scale items developed by Fulmer, et al. (2009) were used in both section 1 and 2 of the instrument. However, in section 1, the respondents were primed to assume that they are negotiating with someone from their own country, while in section 2, they were primed to assume that they are negotiating with someone from a foreign country. Section 3 of the instrument contained some demographic questions for classification purposes.

### **Sample Selection and Data Collection**

We used a snowball sampling method for this study. At the first stage, through our personal network, we electronically contacted young Mexican managers occupying senior management positions in their firms who are involved with global business. We then requested them to help us identify more subjects for our study. We explained to them the criteria for eligibility to be our subjects - managers who are relatively young and who possess experience in business negotiations. We deliberately targeted young Mexican managers as young managers are more frequently well-versed with English than older managers and as such are more likely to possess experience in international negotiations.

A filter question was added at the beginning of the questionnaire about negotiation experience of the respondent. About 98% of the respondents had previous negotiation experience. We excluded the responses of those who did not have negotiation experience. This yielded a usable response of a total of 116 managers.

## **DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

As stated in the earlier section, data was collected by means of a self-administered survey. We had decided on a cut-off date for receipt of our data. The late responses received after our cut-off dates were used as proxy for non-respondents and used for non-response analysis. A total of 28 n responses came after the cut-off date. No difference was found in the response of regular and late respondents.

## Sample Characteristics

Of the 116 usable responses received, 57 were male and 58 were female, while one person did not disclose his or her gender. About 85% of the respondents had a bachelor degree and over 45% had a master or a higher degree. The occupation of the respondents also showed considerable diversity. Thirty-five percent of our respondents had a job related with sales and the remaining 65% of the respondents held positions in various other departments such as procurement, purchasing, human resource, finance, R&D, general administration, etc. Over 31% of our respondents had negotiation experience of five years or longer, while the remaining 69% had less than five years of negotiation experience. About 17% of the respondents held a senior management position, while 83% of our respondents held an executive position. An overwhelming majority of our respondents (107 out of 116) were below 30 years of age, thus fulfilling our objective of reaching out to young Mexican managers.

## Findings

First, to test the reliability of the measures, Cronbach Alpha of each of the four constructs were calculated. Since the respondents were presented with two scenarios, one involving negotiation in their home country (i.e., intra-culture) and one involving a foreign country (cross-culture), the reliability of the four constructs were measured for both intra-cultural and cross-cultural negotiations. Table 1 below reports the Cronbach Alpha score of the constructs.

Table 1. Reliability Scores of the Constructs

Construct	Alpha Score in Intra-Cultural Negotiation	Alpha Score in Cross-Cultural Negotiation
Negative Emotion Management	84.3%	86.2%
Positive Emotion Management	91.9%	92.9%
False Promises	94.8%	92.9%
Misrepresentation	78.2%	82.8%

Nunnally (1978) recommended 85% Alpha score for descriptive studies. Most of the alpha scores reported above indeed meet the criteria recommended by Nunnally. After calculating the reliability score, we conducted paired T tests to compare the mean score of the likely use of various deceptive tactics by Mexican negotiators in both intra- and cross-cultural negotiations. The mean score and standard deviations of emotional and informational deception tactics are provided in Table 2A and 2B.

Table 2A. Comparison of Likelihood of Use of Emotional and Informational Deception

Category of Deception	Types of Deception	Mean: Intra-cultural	Mean: Cross-cultural	Std. Dev.: Intra-cultural	Std. Dev.: Cross-cultural
Emotional Deception	Positive Emotion Management	2.08	2.15	0.72	0.78
	Negative Emotion Management	3.0	2.99	0.85	0.91
Informational Deception	False Promises	2.56	2.58	0.98	1.0
	Misrepresentation	4.75	4.75	0.92	0.95

The results of the paired T test are reported in Table 2B.

Table 2B. Results of Paired T Test Comparing the Use of Deception in Intra- and Intercultural Negotiations

Types of Deception	Significance
Positive Emotion Management	0.450
Negative Emotion Management	0.429
False Promises	0.783
Misrepresentation	0.325

The scores reported in Table 2A show that the likelihood of using the various deceptive tactics does vary between intra-cultural and inter-cultural negotiations. However, when we look at the results of the T-test provided in Table 2B, we find that there is indeed no statistically significant difference between the likely negotiation behavior of Mexican managers in their intra-cultural and cross-cultural negotiations. Therefore, we did not find any support for H<sub>1</sub>.

To test if there is any difference in the likelihood of use of deception among male and females in their intra- and cross-cultural negotiations, an independent sample T test was calculated. The results are provided in Table 3A and Table 3B. Table 3A contains the descriptive statistics about the likelihood of use of various deceptive tactics by male and female negotiators in intra-cultural negotiations as well as the p value from the T test. Table 3B contains the descriptive statistics about the likelihood of use of various deceptive tactics by male and female negotiators in cross-cultural negotiations as well as the p value.

Table 3A. Comparison of Male and Female Responses for Intra-cultural Negotiations

Deception Tactics	Male		Female		Significance (2 tailed)
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	
Positive Emotion Management	2.91	.93	2.94	.85	.88
Negative Emotion Management	2.23	.70	1.90	.67	.01
False Promises	2.35	.86	2.32	1.03	.87
Misrepresentation	2.62	.90	2.50	.93	.47

Table 3B. Comparison of Male and Female Responses for Cross-cultural Negotiations

Deception Tactics	Male		Female		Significance (2 tailed)
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	
Positive Emotion Management	2.88	.97	2.90	1.06	.89
Negative Emotion Management	2.23	.70	1.96	.78	.06
False Promises	2.58	.87	2.58	1.09	.69
Misrepresentation	2.54	.92	2.43	.99	.47

The T test results show that with the exception of negative emotion management, there is no significant difference between men and women in the likelihood of use of deceptive tactics in negotiations. The lower score for female respondents indicates that female negotiators are less likely to exhibit negative emotion in negotiation as compared to their male counterparts. In other words, men are likely to use more negative emotion in both intra-cultural and inter-cultural negotiations than women. Therefore, the findings provide only partial support for H<sub>2</sub>.

As for the likelihood of using informational deception more than emotional deception tactics, we combined the scores for the items of positive and negative emotion management into one variable called “Emotional Deception” and the scores for the items of false promises and misrepresentation into one variable called “Informational Deception” and compared the mean scores of these two variables in both intra and cross-cultural contexts. Table 4 below presents the descriptive statistics of these two variables. The mean score is higher for the likelihood of use of information deception than the likelihood of use of emotional deception in both intra- and cross-cultural negotiations.

Table 4. Comparison of the Scores of likelihood of Using Emotional and Informational Deceptions

Deception Tactics	Intra-cultural		Cross-cultural	
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Emotional Deception	2.368	.82	2.32	.79
Informational Deception	2.6	.76	2.48	.89

The T test result shows significant difference at 95% level between these two types of deceptions about the likelihood of their use in both intra- and cross-cultural negotiations. The findings thus lend support to H<sub>3</sub> that Mexican negotiators are more likely to use informational deception than emotional deception.

### CONCLUSION

This research was conducted with a view to find out how Mexican business people use deception in intra-cultural and cross-cultural negotiations. While the findings of this study do answer some of the questions raised, they also leave some questions unanswered and raise new questions that warrant further investigation.

Due to the growing trend of globalization, the nature of business operations have changed and negotiators are increasingly bargaining in an international context. As this study demonstrates, there is not a large difference in the use of unethical tactics by Mexican negotiators in their domestic and international negotiations. This contradicts some previous findings (e.g., Elahee et al., 2002). This change may have happened due to the fact that Mexico is now much more integrated with the global economy than it was before when the previous studies on Mexican negotiation behavior were conducted. The demographic statistics of our respondents show that the majority of our respondents are young managers, below the age of 30. They grew up in a post-NAFTA, post-WTO environment and have gained more international exposure at an early age than the managers of previous generation of Mexicans. It is therefore possible that the new generation of Mexican managers are more open to people from other countries than their predecessors. As a result of this higher comfort level with foreign nationals, they may use very similar bargaining styles with both their compatriots and foreign negotiators. This finding can motivate foreigners to do more business with Mexico as they are now aware that Mexican people would exhibit similar negotiation behavior regardless of the nationality of their opponent.

We also did not find any support for the hypothesis about gender differences with respect to the use of deceptive tactics in intra- and cross-cultural negotiations (with the exception of use of negative emotion by men), which contradicts previous findings. This lack of difference in the negotiation behavior of male and female negotiators could be explained by the fact that now-a-days female negotiators receive the same types of education and training that men receive. Moreover, in their everyday life, they are exposed to similar experiences that men face. As a result, the gap between male and female negotiators has mostly disappeared even in a masculine society like Mexico. This finding has profound implications for business firms. It is important for business

firms to take note of this convergence in the negotiation behavior of male and female negotiators and treat them equally when forming negotiation teams. As female negotiators behave very similar to that of male negotiators, similar negotiation responsibilities should be delegated to both men and women.

We did find support for our third hypothesis that Mexican business people would use more informational deception than emotional deception in negotiations. The premise on which this third hypothesis was built is perhaps true for other countries as well. Therefore, the finding that people tend to resort to informational deceptions more than emotional deceptions could be true beyond the borders of Mexico. As our findings show that negotiators frequently use informational deception, it is important for negotiators to pay special attention to the information provided by their opponents. In other words, this finding reinforces the saying, “Trust but verify.”

### **Limitations**

Similar to any scientific endeavor, this study also suffers from certain limitations. One of the main limitations of this study is the possible effect of social desirability bias on the part of the respondents. Ethics is a subject that is difficult to examine because people often avoid a controversial subject and give the answer that the society wants to hear, a phenomenon that experts call ‘social desirability bias.’ It is quite possible that the actual likelihood of using emotional and informational deception is much higher than what the respondents have indicated in our study. Another limitation of the study stems from the fact that we had used snowball sampling instead of random sampling, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to the larger context of Mexico.

### **Direction for Future Research**

The limitations stated above provide opportunities for future research. Future researchers should try using a larger sample selected randomly and also complement the quantitative research with qualitative work to gain a richer understanding of the complexities involved in business negotiations. The findings indicate that the new generation of Mexican managers’ exhibit different negotiation behavior than managers of previous generations as reported in earlier studies on the topic. However, no conclusion can be drawn based on the findings of a single study. Future researchers should further investigate if the new generation of Mexican managers do exhibit different behavior than the previous generation of Mexican managers.

Additional insights about the complex relationship between cultural values and ethical negotiation behavior could be gained by extending this study to other countries. It should be noted here that different cultural groups within a country may also have different ethical orientation and negotiation style. It is thus recommended that future researchers also examine the negotiation behavior of specific groups or subcultures within a country. Future researchers should use more sophisticated statistical tools such as structural equation modeling to uncover latent relationships, if any, among different variables and also consider conducting longitudinal studies to see how managers’ ethical perception and behavior may change over time. Finally, future researchers should also attempt to study how management intervention can reduce the likelihood of use of unethical behavior in negotiations. While much work lies ahead, it is hoped that this study would

encourage future researchers to undertake further research to enrich our understanding of various facets of international business negotiations.

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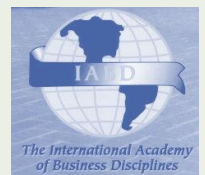
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