



ORIGINAL PAPER

Manifolds of Communication: Negotiating Social, Political and Economic Constructs

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Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to explore the concept of communication, analysing binary systems such as both the verbal and the nonverbal, objectivity and subjectivity honesty and manipulation. Social negotiation entails an economic sense of specificity, selling not only a product, but also yourself. Selling means having something in common with your buyer and, if that is not the case, you are forced to forge that bond yourself through communication, empathy, emotional and factual eloquence. The seller's constructed message represents an important cog in the mechanism of efficient communication, yet that is sometimes prone to vulnerability. The articulated message can often be overruled by the partner of discussion who is unable to find himself or herself in what you are selling, in what you are communicating. The interlocutor may reject the necessity of admitting or recognising certain truths or limitations and reject a message based on the simple flaw that it is not subjectively self-evident. No matter how well we might describe the general qualities of the goods and services we are trying to sell, no matter how objectively and explicitly we might expound the situation, any such arguments may fall prey to platforms of disavowing in the absence of a personal functionality of language, a direct human connection.

Keywords: *negotiation; bargaining; manipulation; suggestion; nonverbal.*

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1. Introduction

The development and fulfilment of the entire negotiation apparatus is meant to produce an acceptable future outcome derived from a current or present situation that is socially unacceptable. The main objective of the negotiating parties is to make sure that a solution raring from one part to another is achieved based on the enactment of an equivalent reaction on the other side of the negotiating table. The felicitous harmonisation of the interests of distinct parties represents an essential pillar of a functional society. The fuel behind a negotiating is basically the desire to obtain the benefits that can only be the product of an accord while at the same time fearing the losses and negative consequences that might ensue in the event of disagreement. Thompson defines negotiation as “an interpersonal decision-making process by which two or more people agree how to allocate scarce resources” (Thompson 2000, 2). Any negotiation is motivated by interests and the two partners would not be part of that negotiation if they did not desire to reach a solution or agreement, no matter how strict or different their initial standpoint might be. Both parties may be deadlock if, from a communicative perspective, they are reluctant to make the first step or accept and tolerate the slightest modifications in the status quo. This is also an issue when weak negotiators crack under the pressure and get a bad deal that is detrimental to the interest that they represent. Researcher Zhang Yuxian, in his paper *The Politeness Principles in Business Negotiation*, believes that: “Negotiation is the solution to reach an agreement or to solve the disagreement. It is also a process of exchanging, discussing and even arguing about the issue. Any party in the negotiation wants to cooperate with the other party to reach his purpose and try to win the most benefits as well. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt the appropriate language strategies. Among them, politeness strategies are most commonly used to contribute to a successful business negotiation. Politeness strategies can enhance the mutual trust and understanding among negotiators so as to increase the opportunities. This article attempts to highlight the politeness principles and analyze their application in business negotiation. The appropriate treatment to the threat of face in communication can retain both positive and negative aspects of the face, thus making the negotiation go on smoothly.” (Yuxian 2013, 50)

The main issue facing negotiators is how to present a reasonable amount of flexibility as to the initially formulated demands without conceding too much, thus, jeopardizing their own interests, but providing just enough in order to break the ice and forge a bridge of dialogue that can swiftly expand the negotiating potential of the entire discussion. Most individuals engaged in the art of conversation shall also resort to methods of manipulation and intimidation against their interlocutors. These elements can be easily decoded if one focuses on the artificial, unnatural scaffolding of the dialogue. We owe it to ourselves and our partners to overlook the negative and keep an open mind to those hints that betray a genuine willingness to come to a mutually beneficial agreement. These positive signs are basically a covert invitation, indirectly granted to the partner in dialogue, fostering the idea to reject the unacceptable and negotiate honestly and in accordance with the principles of profit and synergy. According to Diana Marcu that conversational synergy is fuelled by the ability to engage and convince one’s interlocutor: “Negotiation implies persuasion, which is the ability of one person to make the other change his/her point of view on a particular aspect or situation. The difference between negotiation and a discussion is that the negotiation has a purpose and it usually ends with a firm conclusion, while at the end of a discussion the partners don’t always

find a common conclusion. While negotiating, individuals always need to take into consideration the needs of the other party.” (Marcu, 2013:70)

Certain eventual indicators act as transitional vectors which signal both perception and convenient response as it applies to the other. It would be functionally erroneous not to fully analyse and interpret the complete ramifications of an elusive conversational undertaking. The generation and formulation of hints in negotiation do, by no means, guarantee an automatic response, but they go a long way towards mitigating the differential objectives of the parties, keeping the negotiation open, hoping for a possible solution and the drafting of an agreement. Every time such aspects are afforded the privilege to intercede, the entire process of negotiation is somewhat reset in order to interpret and integrate the desires of other negotiators, as well as their reactions to new propositions.

The nonverbal provides an invaluable gathering of intelligence for negotiators. The entire outcome of an act of communication can, sometimes, be changed through a single look. Accepting the other means understanding the other, and this can only be done if we display a willingness to connect to our partners of discussion. A proper attitude can shatter the flood doors of dissent and make way to a river of cooperation and harmony. Eye contact, a relaxed and familiar voice, open arms replacing rigidity, touching one's face or hair, even unbuttoning one's coat can act as a facilitator for good dialogue. Hostility, on the other hand, is the great enemy of negotiation. Aggressive body language, maintaining an excessive distance, hostile staring, as well as a high-pitched tone of voice can crush a potentially productive dialogue before it even gets the chance to be formed. In analysing the traditional versus the contemporary as they relate to communication and negotiation, Thomas West believes that: “Whereas traditional understandings of negotiation are characterized by a willingness to compromise, understandings of mutual critique are characterized by uncertainty and risk. And whereas negotiation is invested in maintaining the status quo, mutual critique realizes that strong critique may serve as an impetus to upset the status quo. Mutual critique involves an understanding of social relations as dependent on both the need to critique other positions as well as the need to listen critically to them.” (West 1997, 16)

Negotiation must always be an act of equality and social harmonisation. If these preconditions are not achieved, an agreement will be almost impossible to reach and even if one is produced through fear and intimidation, it will undoubtedly fail the test of time. The person seeking to establish dominance will attempt to express force, speak loudly, harshly, not allow the other to communicate, even point fingers and systematically attack the other interlocutor. The other person, finding himself or herself under the spectre of dominance, may be inclined to reduce the intensity of all channels of communication and avoid eye contact in an attempt to elude confrontation. This will swiftly make way to frustration, shortness of breath and isolation, both self-imposed as well as external. If the status quo is not rapidly modified, the entire process of communication will fall under the tentacles of disappointment and dismay, triggering an absolutely minimal amount of eye contact and connectivity.

2. Manipulation

There countless individual and social perspectives regarding negotiation but underlying truth that there can be no negotiation without manipulation. Therefore, manipulation is not necessarily a strictly negative element but rather a direct consequence of strategy and tactics. Each and every negotiation is reliant on the

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formulation of specific strategies. There are multiple scenarios and procedures of control that can be successfully employed in a discussion. The exploration of these factors is very important in order to perfect them or avoid them at all costs, depending on which side of the negotiation we are. The purpose of manipulation in the procedure of a negotiation is to generate the perception of a broken power report. Thus, a power struggle will be able to generate a superior level of expectations or, quite the opposite, it will reduce the horizon of expectation should we vastly overestimate the power of our interlocutors and significantly underestimate ours. Simply put, if the other party seems stronger, you will be willing and even happy to walk away with far less. Therefore, manipulation will influence and control all levels of expectations and behaviour within the framework of a partnership in negotiation. In the paper *Power Dynamics in Negotiation*, it is postulated that: “the conceptualization of potential power allows us to incorporate prior negotiation research, which has typically operationalized power in terms of power-dependence theory’s two dimensions. Negotiation researchers typically have altered the power relationship between negotiators by manipulating either the benefits negotiators can bring to the bargaining table.” (Kim, Pinkley and Fragale 2005, 803)

There are very effective tools in resisting manipulation. The first would be the procurement and allocation of preconditions for negotiations. In this case, one might postulate a safe framework of discussion that can actually shield from any attempts at manipulation. Secondly, we might also find solace in declaring certain parts of the discussion non-negotiable. Although there may always exist a vulnerability, it is up to us to distinguish stability from instability. Thirdly, we can set a strict agenda for discussion. This agenda shall not be influenced by context or illusion, allowing one to consolidate and stabilise personal power and interest. Sometimes, it is enough to simply not let yourself fall prey to illusions or artificial perception if you always perceive things as objectively as possible, grounding arguments into facts rather than subjective constructs which rely solely on declaration and manipulation. Another tactic of manipulation will see one party try to impress the other by appearing extremely well-prepared, bringing forth props such as an abundance of files and documents that may bear little relevance but will undoubtedly be powerful visual vectors of consolidation. Daniela Scortan asserts that “the persuasive discourse used by researchers to convince their peers of the merits of their research, or by authorities to explain and gain acceptance for their decisions, also consists of selling ideas. In all situations, arguments, reasoning and evidence in order to generate persuasion.” (Scortan, 2019:58)

A very efficient strategy in trying to dislodge the defences of the other party will see the opposing negotiator morph into an ally of sorts that totally agrees with you and supports your standpoint, but who is somehow limited by a superior authority. The negotiator will justify his or her reluctance by invoking tough bosses that somehow, indirectly, are now basically, to a certain extent, your bosses. The conversational possibilities are negatively controlled by an elusive third party that cannot be dealt with or negotiated with because it is not even in the room.

The construction of a self-deprecating image can also act as a powerful tool of manipulation in a negotiation. It will significantly disarm the other party as you yourself will fully agree that they are offering a more than fair deal, which you are unable to comply with, based on your own artificially constructed limitations. Paradoxically, by portraying a weak image of yourself, you are actually consolidating your role in the

negotiation, making the other party believe that a deal cannot be reached if they do not lower their standards significantly in order to accommodate your deceptive weakness.

Apart from these psychological constructs, there are also cheap tricks that are meant to influence and destabilise the physical and psychological wellbeing of an opponent. Providing an inferior, low quality, smaller chair, making the other person face the light in a room, triggering interruptions are meant to disrupt and destabilise the other party. Even the location where the negotiation takes place can be important as it can provide the proverbial home advantage for one interested party. Once the home advantage is established, you can resort to all manners of tricks such as adjusting the temperature in a room in order to make people uncomfortable or uneasy, placing a big clock in the middle of the room in order to subconsciously suggest there is a time pressure involved. This manner of trickery can be successful if they remain cloaked, perceived only by the subconscious mind. When placed under such circumstances, the simple acknowledgement of the situation can turn the tables and grant you the power to ask to adjust the temperature, demand a better chair, pull the blinds and shutters etc.

3. Formulating suggestions

Social confrontation tends to make negotiations more difficult as it sabotages the process of agreement. Proposals, on the other hand, will help the negotiation process move along through concrete steps and initiatives. That is why they must never be deemed as taboo or inappropriate. Cristina Burtea-Cioroianu believes the formulation of suggestion is deeply rooted in the acquisition of general fluency and linguistic prowess: “the acquisition of a general fluency, where the main emphasis is on the successful communication (a successful transmitting/receiving of messages) and where the acquisition of grammar is only an episode towards reaching a major goal.” (Burtea-Cioroianu, 2020:146)

When our partner in discussion presents a set of proposals, he or she attempts to provide an ideal outlook regarding personal objectives. Therefore, the objectives presented can be compatible or incompatible, thus, the subject of the negotiation process shall be to harmonise incompatibilities. The desire for compatibility is a strong enabler generating a strong platform of agreement for opposite objectives, striving to achieve agreement and unlock a seemingly tough and inaccessible negotiation. It is paramount for us to comprehend an order of priorities and acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses that facilitate flexibility based on the manners in which he or she communicates. Uncovering that which is genuine, real and vulnerable will open a lot of access points that can ultimately overlap and connect to our own desires for the discussion. If we have compatibility, an agreement will be more than likely, but if this compatibility is compromised or cancelled, then we are prone to failure as both negotiators and communicators. Technology is the latest instrument that has uplifted social interactions, evaluations and assessments to previously unforeseen levels of proliferation: “The evolution of technology, worldwide access to the internet (the largest and fastest way of communication) and the appearance of social media, all these, have revolutionized every field of activity. We can say that everyone is online and is interconnected with the world. Information travels fast and it can be easily accessed through smart devices.” (Stoian, 2019:133)

Timing is also of the essence when it comes to bringing forward proposals and options, and the ability to simply feel when the moment is right separates the experienced negotiator from an inexperienced beginner. Any negotiation sees deadlocks,

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moments of difficulty, portions of dialogue that simply demand something special in order to restore equilibrium. If the other party shows a willingness to put pen to paper and reach an agreement, then we are looking at a mutually advantageous undertaking. Being in a hurry or rushing things can also compromise the objectives of the negotiating parties, as too much desire and willingness must always be tempered by wisdom and pragmatism. Usually, however, any act of communication that seeks to obtain something from the other partner will see vast portions of time and energy drained by little things and capricious aspects of human interactions and unwillingness. It is, therefore, up to a skilled and intuitive negotiator to be able to navigate through the uncertainties and reach the proverbial end of the maze, without the added risk of seeing the agreement revised or reevaluated because of poor construction. In his analysis of the complexity of communication in negotiation, Francesco Gardani expounds that: “Due to its necessarily cross-disciplinary character, the topic of negotiation has been studied by students from different backgrounds, most prominently by sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists and political scientists. In the wake of globalization and the rise of free trade, the transformation of the general context in which negotiations take place has increasingly shifted the focus of research to the cross-cultural aspects of business communication, and business negotiation in particular. Researchers have shown that four elements of culture – behavior, attitudes, norms and values – may impact negotiating practice and, based on this insight, have set up catalogues of factors and variables to which negotiators should pay attention in intercultural settings.” (Gardani 2017, 91)

All proposals must be structurally sound and allow for a solid development of stages. When bringing forth the proposals, we should consider and integrate both our desires and those of our interlocutor, and an honest and open dialogue can go a long way towards achieving this status quo. It is for this exact reason that we see an extended use of conditionals and modal verbs in order not to challenge or make the other person feel pressured or constrained. Proposals must entertain the conditional dimension of an eventual hypothesis, as one cannot simply provide a framework of concession from the get-go. A conditional element will generate a lot of space for the subsequent implementation of the negotiating process. The level of assertiveness has to be toned down, limited as much as possible, and we must shy away from structures of imperative aggression.

Vagueness, as a functionality of language, can open an astonishing platform of flexibility as it relates to an initial stratagem of variation. Too little flexibility can kill a negotiation before it even gets a chance to get off the ground while too much will be synonymous to weakness and an unwillingness to fight for or defend your own personal position. Being silent in times of uncertainty represents a great tool for avoiding utterances that can be detrimental to the position for which you are trying to find arguments.

A harmonious dialogue is often predicated on the principle that we should never push our partners into a corner, and always provide two or more options and suggestions when we ask for something. This will prevent an immediate and instantaneous rejection and harness the power of vagueness by demanding additional adjustments and clarifications. Irina Boncea envisions a social discourse learning curve that is empowered by a complex sense of learning based on synaesthesia, the successful cooperation of senses: “The use of several senses simultaneously instead of a single sense as a primary source of information ensures multiple cognitive associations and

deepens our experience of the learning situation, which, in turn, ensures long-term retention.” (Boncea, 2020:71)

When the questions are asked and the answers are listened to, the next step is, almost always, to provide a counteroffer. An additional proposition will also integrate the willingness of the other negotiator to bring forward a personal brand of solutions and stratagems in order to soften and possibly even eliminate the possibility of impasse, thus, reaching a reasonable state of compromise. The exchange of proposals and ideas shall be managed by using non-restrictive conditionals for the betterment of specific solutions. When negotiators achieve a level of sufficient trust, they can accelerate the honest exchange of proposals, and this will, in turn, accelerate the discussion process itself, reaching objectives that are desired or at least tolerated by all the people involved.

4. Nonverbal structures of interaction

The simple encounter of gazes when one meets another for the first time, maintaining and respecting personal and social boundaries can go a long way towards the establishment of an honest chain of communication. A simple shake of the hand, its intensity, its duration can convey respect as well as politeness and a willingness to adhere to social taxonomies. The information sent by our body, face and tone of voice can set up the perfect background for a successful communication. A handshake can even convey importance, interest, and is often associated with balanced synchronicity. We can choose to initiate the base, intensity and rhythm of that handshake, or simply mimic and adapt to the handshake of our interlocutor, thus, conveying a climate of trust and submission, giving the other communicator the sense that he or she is in control, and this circle of safety will open countless pathways towards productive communication in conversational awareness and reciprocity.

Maintaining the right distance from the people we seek to interact with is also paramount and full of relevance. Breaching protocol and invading one’s personal space can activate territorial self-defence mechanisms and hinder the willingness of the other to communicate. Too much proximity can even be misconstrued as aggression and trigger the body’s natural defence mechanisms of rejection and abandonment. Too much distance will automatically be deemed as abnormal behaviour, hiding an entire range of negative emotions such as a lack of compassion, weakness or even a negative hidden agenda that you are unable to keep under control. Communication is about more than finding the right message, it is also about finding the right distance, about learning how to get close to people but not too close and not too far. Moreover, too much distance outright sabotages communication, both psychologically and even physically. One might have trouble seeing the expressions of the other person’s face, even see the phatic function of language compromised by simply not being able to hear the message of the other person. In addition, too much distance can also disrupt an entire range of subjective factors, which are contested by many such as charisma, flair or chemistry.

Physical and psychological distance in communication do not rely on a concrete and objective operational equation. Talking to people and listening to them in return represents an everchanging paradigm requiring continuous adaptation and intuition dependant on temper, personality, contextual reasoning and even mood.

An evolving sense of awareness of distance management, as they relate to communicational undertakings, shall instruct us to intuitively assess a situation and make the best possible decisions as effectively and naturally as possible. Establishing visual contact, the use of facial features in negotiation promotes a substantial force of

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nonverbal messaging. An effective act of communication would entail that both communicators make direct eye contact for approximately half the conversation. Any figures that are lower or higher than that can elicit negative undertones. Avoiding eye contact may be misconstrued as deceptive, as if you are trying to hide something, viewed as a sign of lying. Overusing eye contact can also be deemed as aggressive and intrusive behaviour, separating procedures and protocols from the society-accepted norms.

The way in which we carry our bodies can act as gestures of separation with respect to our willingness to get close to our partner. Certain rigid postures can challenge communicational partnership and bring forth arrogance and vanity. Being too tense or shaking will betray weakness, fear and vulnerability or a negative hidden agenda that is putting obvious pressure on the psyche. Posture can establish dominance or respect, and it is up to us to decide how we control our bodies in order to use the meta-verbal so as to influence a discussion or a negotiation with our peers.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, each person communicates in their own rhythm or personal style but this individual touch is always governed and regulated by robust social rules and prerequisites. Bearing in mind that we are ultimately social animals it is important for us to learn to respect each other, be aware not only when to speak, but also when and how to listen. The rules of civilised society dictate that the purpose of communication is not only to understand the message, but also to understand and respect that person and his or her values. When we listen, we should use more than our ears alone, we should use our soul, our empathy and negotiate new ways of personal and collective self-improvement. Last but not least, every discussion, every negotiation should start and end with a smile. If the eyes are the windows of the soul, then a smile is that very soul reaching out to capture the affections of another, to express emotions of humanity and empathy, to shout out not just a message of love, but also a willingness to listen and understand, to ensure the fact that we need not negotiate out of fear, but must never fear to negotiate in the name of our shared humanity and sentimental social likeness.

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