The Impact of the Negotiators' Personality and Socio-Demographic factors on their Perception of Unethical Negotiation Tactics

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Abstract:

Purpose - The study aims to examine the impact of a negotiator's profile (personality, gender, age and experience) on his perception of unethical negotiation tactics.

Design/methodology/approach – A survey has been conducted among 220 middle manager employees and chief executive officers (CEOs) who are directly involved in the negotiation processes and activities for their organizations. A component factor analysis (CFA) was first performed. Then, a multiple regression analysis and ANOVA analysis were conducted to test the study hypotheses.

Findings – The study suggests that negotiators with a high level of ‘openness to experience’ perceive the use of ‘traditional competitive bargaining’ and ‘inappropriate information gathering’ as ethical. However, ‘conscientious’ negotiators perceive the use of ‘misrepresentation of information’ and ‘inappropriate information gathering’ as unethical. In addition, negotiators with a high level of ‘agreeableness’ perceive the use of ‘misrepresentation of information’ as inappropriate. ‘Misrepresentation of information’ was perceived as more inappropriate for women than for men. Finally, older and highly experienced negotiators perceive ‘inappropriate information gathering’ as unethical more than younger and less experienced ones.

Research limitations/implications – The study measures perceptions rather than actual behavior.

Practical implications - The study findings could help firms to identify the more suitable profiles in terms of socio-demographic variables and also personality traits for positions

related to negotiation with their stakeholders, especially for those with more long-term orientations.

Social implications - Recognizing the potential of businesses to provide an important contribution to society and the large influence of business ethics in people's everyday lives, including business managers', trigger a better grasp of the factors that help alleviate unethical practices and that nurture a business culture embedded in an increasing demand for business ethics worldwide. Negotiators are not the exception. Hence, identifying which personality traits are likely to predispose negotiators to endorse unethical negotiation tactics may help shape training programs suitable to produce favorable inclinations to comply with ethical negotiations' principles. This seems to be possible, on the face of the recent findings suggesting the likelihood of personality traits changes, following the implementation of some particular actions (Hudson and Fraley 2015).

Originality/value - To the best of our knowledge, this study is among the few that examine the impact of the negotiator's personality traits and his socio-demographic variables on his perception of the appropriateness of negotiation tactics. This study is in line with calls to reconsider the role that personality plays in negotiation processes, ethical/unethical behavior and outcomes, after a long period of skepticism among scholars as to its significant impact.

Keywords: Unethical negotiation tactics; Personality traits; Perceived appropriateness; Gender; Age; Work experience.

Introduction

Negotiation is recognized to be one of the most common human activities in business as in everyday life (Engle, Elahee and Tatoglu 2013; Iroham et al. 2019; Lewicki and Robinson 1998; Naghavi and Mubarak 2019). As strategic alliances and business networks have significantly increased and the world has become globalized, negotiation has increasingly become a part of corporate operations (Caputo 2019; Crane et al. 2019; Naghavi and Mubarak 2019; Sheer and Chen 2003).

In business, managers spend a significant portion of their time negotiating in order to convince their partners and resolve disagreements (Caputo 2019; Engle, Elahee and Tatoglu 2013; Iroham et al. 2019; Mintzberg 1973). Besides, as businesses increasingly engage in overseas markets, a growing demand is being placed on them to be ethical by their various

stakeholders (Crane et al. 2019). Nevertheless, despite the widespread recognition of the benefits of adhering to ethical principles in business (Kelchner 2017), achieving a better outcome and using an effective strategy imply that some managers may adopt questionable practices that violate ethical standards in order to enhance their skills and position in negotiation (Batson and Thompson 2001; Chan and Ng 2016; Korobkin 2020; Lewicki and Robinson 1998).

Despite considerable interest in the topic of business ethics among academicians, some factors that could influence the negotiator's behavior, his decision-making process and outcome are still under-researched (Al-Khatib et al. 2016; Chatterjee and Singh 2020; Morse and Cohen 2019). In this line of thought, personality traits have been recently identified as influential on the negotiator's coping strategies and tactics (Al Khatib et al. 2016; Amistad et al. 2018; Gilkey and Greenhalgh 1986; Morse and Cohen 2019; Steinel and Harinck 2020) and are argued as important in predicting unethical behavior (Skandrani and Sghaier 2016; Cadogan et al. 2009; Ones et al. 2007).

Regardless of that relevance, empirical evidence about the role of personality and individual characteristics in determining the negotiator's behavior remains limited (Spain, Harms and LeBreton 2014) and controversial (Bazerman et al. 2000). Some scholars have pointed to methodological choices (e.g., sampling, data collection method) as partly responsible for null effects of personality on a negotiator's attitudinal and behavioral responses. They advocate that many studies have either treated personality traits separately without considering other important factors (Bazerman et al. 2000), involved stylized laboratory designs that lack the flexibility to let individual differences shine (Elfenbein 2015; Sharma et al. 2018; Steinel and Harinck 2020) or have often used student samples, particularly MBA students, which cannot accurately capture the behavior of real-world negotiators (Agndal, Åge and Eklinder Frick 2017; Sharma et al. 2018; Steinel and Harinck 2020). Others (i.e., Liu, Ma and Liang 2019) contended that previous studies on negotiation and negotiation ethics have mainly considered specific traits or negotiation contexts and failed to put together a broad structure of personality to examine its effects. This has led to inconclusive evidence for the dispositional influence on negotiation ethics.

In line with the resurging interest in the role that personality plays in negotiation processes and outcomes (Elfenbein 2015; Morse and Cohen 2019; Neville and Fisk 2019; Steinel and Harinck 2020), addressing the impact of personality traits and socio-demographic variables on

the perceived appropriateness of questionable tactics in negotiation would be of great relevance. Therefore, this study aims to examine the impact of the negotiator's personality traits and socio-demographic variables on the perceived appropriateness of ethically questionable tactics in negotiation. To our knowledge, this is the first study to address explicitly this issue in a field study among middle manager employees and CEOs directly involved in business negotiation activities. From a theoretical standpoint, this study would help to fill the gap identified in the negotiation literature about a presumed fallacious statement as to the inconsequential impact of personality traits on the negotiator's attitude and behavior. From a practical standpoint, also, it may help managers to take suitable courses of actions in the pre-recruitment and post-recruitment phases, and also to design training programs and consequently improve the decision-making process, lay out the prerequisites for an ethical perspective in doing business for firms and alleviate reputational risk (Ma and Parks 2012).

This paper is organized as follows. First, we present a literature review on the unethical behavior in negotiation and the impact of the negotiator's personality traits, socio-demographic variables on the perceived appropriateness of unethical negotiation tactics. Next, we expose the study methodology and results. We conclude by discussing the major implications of this study, its limitations and future research directions.

1. Literature review and hypotheses

1.1. Unethical negotiation tactics: do personality traits matter?

Business negotiation is recognized to be a breeding ground for ethical issues as both parties are trying to reach an agreement while preserving and defending their own interests and goals (Cohen 2002). This could involve difficult choices about the means used to maximize the outcomes (Lewicki and Robinson 1998). For Lewicki and Stark (1996), effective negotiators cannot be completely sincere and open about their preferences; still, some honesty is needed to reach an agreement. Despite their willingness to comply with ethical principles, some negotiators are likely to use suspicious behavior and violate ethical standards, as their expectations of a negotiation's negative outcomes increase (Batson and Thompson 2001).

Scholars, who have addressed the above issues, have identified five unethical tactics that are more often adopted by negotiators (Al-Khatib et al. 2008; Lewicki 1983; Lewicki and Robinson 1998; Lewicki and Stark 1996): (1) Traditional competitive bargaining:

exaggerating demands that are much broader than what the negotiator really wants to settle; (2) Attacking the opponent's network: compromising the opponent's confidence through his professional network, and threatening to embarrass him through his professional network; (3) False promises: promising actions, outcomes or future grants that he knows he would not deliver, in order to have concessions from the other party in the negotiation (4) Misrepresentation of information: denying the truth of the information, even if it is valid and approved, in order to strengthen his arguments or position; (5) Inappropriate information gathering: questioning for information about the opponent in a dubious way such as paying bribes or recruiting someone to bring sensitive information on the opponent.

Studies addressing these questionable practices have often examined their impact on a negotiation's effectiveness and outcome, and many of them focused also on their antecedents. In the context of salespeople, Cadogan et al. (2009) identified four groups of factors that might influence their ethical behavior: 1-individual, 2-organizational, 3-job characteristics, and 4-situational. Skandrani and Sghaier (2016) identified two additional groups of factors: 1- those related to stakeholders and 2- cultural factors. Nonetheless, research addressing these influences reveals a lack of unanimity, especially when it comes to the impact of personality factors. Indeed, controversial and inconclusive results are drawn through a recent literature review advocating a substantial predictive power credited to personality characteristics in negotiation outcomes (Crossley et al. 2016; Elfenbein 2015; Sharma et al. 2018).

1.2 Personality traits

The negotiator's personality is one of the fundamental factors in the negotiation and decision-making process (Agndal, Åge and Eklinder Frick 2017; Brinke et al. 2015; Elfenbein 2015; Dugan, Rouziou and Bolander 2020; Ohiomah, Benyoucef and Andreev 2020). It is widely recognized as a key component in determining strategic choices and outcomes of negotiation (Ahmed et al. 2010). Despite the body of knowledge on personality traits in the business negotiation context (de Moura and Costa 2018; Dimotakis, Conlon and Ilies 2012; Ma 2008; Ome 2013; Pérez-Yus et al. 2020; Sharma, Bottom and Elfenbein 2013; Spain et al. 2014; Spain, Harms and LeBreton 2014; Wilson et al. 2016), many areas of research have not been covered and the studies are still specific to some contexts and cultures (Ma and Jaeger 2005). Examining the impact of personality traits on the ethical/unethical attitude and behavior in business negotiations is one of these under researched areas. To examine this relationship, this study adopts a well-established and commonly used framework to investigate personality

characteristics, namely the Big Five model. This model includes five personality traits, i.e., ‘openness to experience’, ‘neuroticism’, ‘conscientiousness’, ‘agreeableness’ and ‘extraversion’. The long version of the scale –used in this study- showed high internal consistency and a reproducibility of its five-factor structure (Pérez-Yus et al. 2020). The next section describes these five dimensions and their relationship to perceptions of unethical conduct.

Openness to experience. ‘Openness to experience’ characterizes people who tend to be very imaginative and willing to entertain new ideas (Peabody and Goldberg 1989). These people are also intelligent, creative and open to unconventional and non-traditional values (Judge et al. 2002). According to Thoms, Moore and Scott (1996), this personality trait involves characteristics such as curiosity, open-mindedness and artistic tendencies. Previous studies support a positive relation between openness to experience and self-reported knowledge exchange (Cabrera, Collins and Salagafo 2006; Matzler et al. 2008). The effect of ‘openness to experience’ on ethical behavior received little interest in previous studies. Findings show significant and non-significant relationships between this personality trait and ethical judgment and behavior (Havârneanu and Măirean 2016; Kalshoven, Den Hartog and De Hoogh 2011; Karim, Zamzuri and Nor 2009). In this line of thought, Havârneanu and Măirean (2016) showed that individuals who present a high level of openness to experience are likely to report a low level of aggressive violation. In a similar vein, Pérez-Yus et al. (2020) found that negotiators having a greater openness tend to display greater flexibility and divergent thinking. They suggest that this could help broaden negotiations and contribute to develop better offers for themselves and for others. Anwar and Shah (2018) found a positive relationship between ‘openness to experience’ and the ethical behavior of individuals in organizations. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H1: The more the negotiator scores high in openness to experience, the more he perceives questionable negotiation tactics as unethical.

Neuroticism. ‘Neuroticism’ describes people who tend to be emotionally unstable and express negative emotions such as anxiety, stress, anger, sadness and disgust (McCrae and Costa 1987; Toegel and Barsoux 2012). A person with a high level of ‘neuroticism’ is likely to exhibit a predisposition to depression and embarrassment. He is also inclined to show less ability to control his depression and low confidence in his own abilities (Judge et al. 2002). A high level of ‘neuroticism’ can create barriers to communication with others (Mayer et al.

2012). Campbell (1997) found that neurotic students were more likely to behave unethically and to cheat on exams. Aghighi (2019) focused on ethical leadership and found that neurotic individuals are less likely to be perceived as ethical leaders. In this line of thought, persons scoring high on aggression traits are more likely to engage in unethical behaviors (Tsalikis 2015). Huels and Parboteeah (2019) reported that more neurotic people are more inclined to adopt non-compliant behaviors. Therefore, we expect that negotiators who have high levels of 'neuroticism' will perceive questionable negotiation tactics as less unethical.

H2: The more the negotiator scores high in neuroticism, the more he perceives questionable negotiation tactics appropriate.

Agreeableness. This trait describes kind, modest, altruistic and helpful people. This personality trait is reflected in the desire for cooperation and friendship (Furnham et al. 2007; Peabody and Goldberg 1989). In fact, people with a high degree of 'agreeableness' tend to be confident and willing to help others (Shiner and Caspi 2003). They also adopt friendly, caring and honest behaviors (Wilson et al. 2016). We can associate 'agreeableness' with people concerned about the well-being of individuals and who can even adjust their behavior to satisfy others (Graziano and Eisenberg 1997). Jamaludin and Mehon (2020) consider this personality trait as a key factor in promoting ethical behavior. In this line of thought, Walumbwa and Schaubroeck (2009) and Kalshoven, Den Hartog and De Hoogh (2011) have found a positive relationship between 'agreeableness' and ethical leadership. Russell et al. (2017) supported this link in the context of employees' behaviour at work; employees' agreeableness is positively related to their ethical behavior. Accordingly, we expect that people with a high level of 'agreeableness' are more likely to endorse ethical behaviour and to perceive questionable negotiation tactics as unethical. As a result, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: The more the negotiator is agreeable, the more he perceives negotiation tactics as unethical.

Conscientiousness. This conscientiousness trait describes characteristics such as being organized, dependable and purposeful (Costa and McCrae 2010; McCrae and Costa 1987). Highly conscientious individuals prefer planned behavior to spontaneous behavior (Barry and Friedman 1998). These people embody perseverance, responsibility, devotion, they respect the rules and adhere to moral obligations (Toegel and Barsoux 2012). Conscientiousness has

been shown to predict honesty and likelihood of endorsing an ethical ideology (Lodi-Smith and Roberts 2007; McFerran, Aquino and Duffy 2010) and preference for the conflict-resolution style of negotiation (Ome 2013). In the workplace, people high in ‘conscientiousness’ have been found to be less likely to engage in dishonesty (Roberts and Hogan, 2001). Anwar and Shah (2018) have shown that ‘conscientiousness’ is positively related to the perception of the ethical behavior of individuals working in organizations. Consequently, we can assert that:

H4: The more the negotiator scores high on conscientiousness, the more he perceives negotiation tactics as unethical.

Extraversion. This dimension of personality describes people who are benevolent, friendly, talkative and assertive (Antes et al. 2007; Özbağ 2016.). It is an indicator of sociability (Costa and McCrae 2010) that determines the level of individual influence in a group (Barry and Stewart 1997). According to Wilt and Revelle (2017), ‘extraversion’ reflects individual differences in the tendencies to experience and exhibit positive affect, assertive behavior, decisive thinking and desires for social attention. Accordingly, people who score high on ‘extraversion’ show generosity, altruism and cooperation (Elfenbein 2015). They are also happier, more active and more energetic compared to others, and they generally appreciate excitement and stimulation (Costa and McCrae 2010; Wilson et al. 2016). Previous studies show empirical evidence as to the positive link between ‘extraversion’ and ethical judgment and behavior in the workplace (Jamaludin and Mehon 2020). Persons scoring high on ‘extraversion’ are likely to exhibit more ethical behaviors (Bratton and Strittmatter 2013). Conversely, introverts show a higher predisposition to engage in socially unacceptable behaviors (Furnham et al. 2007). Consequently, we propose the following hypothesis:

H5: The more the negotiator is extraverted, the more he perceives questionable negotiation tactics as unethical.

1.3 Gender

Gender has gained increasing interest among negotiation scholars in recent decades. However, studies addressing its relation to ethical judgment and behavior outline mixed findings. Some of these studies reported no significant differences between male and female with respect to their ethical judgment and conduct in negotiations (Bass et al. 1995; Robin and Babin 1997; Westbrook et al. 2011). Other studies supported the statement that men and

women have different opinions about their acceptability of questionable negotiation tactics (Robinson, Lewicki and Donahue 2000). For example, Volkema (2004) showed that women tend to behave more ethically and appropriately than men. Similar results were reported by Chan and Ng (2016) and Kray and Haselhuhn (2012). These latter found that men were more likely to perceive the use of all practices proposed by Lewicki (1983) as appropriate. In a series of studies, Kennedy, Kray and Ku (2017) studied the driving mechanism underlying gender differences regarding the endorsement of questionable negotiation tactics. They found that women's stronger moral identities, relative to men's, provide a buffer against the temptation to rationalize, plan and engage in unethical behaviors in competitive negotiations.

H6: Women perceive the use of unethical negotiation practices less ethical than men.

1.4 Age

Previous studies reveal divergent results regarding the relationship between age and ethical business behavior (Sidani et al. 2009). In this regard, some studies have not supported the link between age and the endorsement of ethical judgment and behavior (Authors 2016; Ekin and Tezolmez 1999; Lokman et al. 2018). In contrast, some other findings supported the hypothesis that older negotiators tend to behave more ethically than younger ones (Perry and Nixon 2005). Cortese (1989), Ekin and Tezolmez (1999), and Kum-Lung and Teck-Chai (2010) reported similar results. In the same vein, Ross and Robertson (2003) argued that younger salespeople and business professionals are more likely to choose an unethical solution and endorse lower ethical standards. Eweje and Brunton (2010) asserted that older students appear to be more ethically oriented. In line with the widely shared assumption that age brings wisdom (Eweje and Brunton 2010; Knotts, Lopez and Mesak 2000), we can expect that:

H7: The older the negotiator is, the more he perceives negotiation tactics as unethical.

1.5. Work experience

Negotiators with more work experience are more likely to come up with collaborative solutions than negotiators with low work experience. They generally perceive negotiation as a problem-solving exercise (Manning and Robertson 2004; Murnighan et al. 1999; Steinel, Abele and De Dreu 2007). In salespersons' relationships' literature, Shapeero et al. (2003) and Roche (2013) contend that the more experienced the salespersons are, the more they are

self-assured in their skills and less likely to engage in unethical activities. Eweje and Brunton (2010) found that more experienced students appear to be more ethically oriented and that attitudes towards ethical issues might vary according to a person's career stage. They conclude that work experience could influence a person's ethical judgment. Therefore, we state that:

H8: The longer the work experience the negotiator has, the more he perceives negotiation tactics as unethical.

2. Methodology

2.1 Sampling

In order to test the study's hypotheses, an empirical study was conducted in an emerging market, i.e., Tunisia. This North African country is one of the striking examples of economic growth. Its strategic geographical position offers many opportunities for launching and building successful businesses (Signé 2018). Despite harsh challenges, many foreign investors, both individuals and groups, showed a noticeable interest in implementing business ideas in Tunisia, as the Tunisian market is considered less saturated and developed than other developing countries and an attractive potential market with a GDP growth forecast at 4.1% in 2021¹. According to the Government of Tunisia's Foreign Investment Promotion Agency (FIPA), overall foreign investment flows for 2018 surpassed \$1 billion, primarily in the form of foreign direct investment (FDI), with about 4.3% in portfolio investment (27.5% increase over 2017)². However, some experts pointed to some ethical dilemmas that may reduce the overall trust in this market. According to Diwan (2019), illegal activities such as cronyism should be fought for ethical reasons, as they hinder firms' economic performance. Consequently, addressing ethical issues from different perspectives, including business negotiation ethical practices, and identifying the drivers of ethical/unethical attitude and behaviour would be insightful and helpful in designing the appropriate courses of action to alleviate the drawbacks of these ethical dilemmas.

In this study, data is collected among 220 managers who are involved in BtoB negotiation activities. The questionnaires were self-administered and all participants were assured of their

¹ Small Business Ideas In Tunisia. retrieved from <https://www.sfconsultingbd.com/africa/tunisia-foreign-company-registration-incorporation/small-business-ideas-in-tunisia/> accessed 5 october 2020

² Statista Research Department 2020. GDP growth in Tunisia 2016-2021. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1033877/tunisia-gdp-growth/>, accessed 29 October 2020

anonymity. 53.2% of the participants in this study were female. With respect to age categories, 40.5 % are 30 years old or less, whereas 59.5% are older than 30. As to work experience, 45% of the respondents have less than 5 years, 35% have between 5 and 15 years, and 20% have more than 15 years of experience. As to their current position, 60.9% were CEOs and 39.1% were middle management employees. Table 1 summarizes the socio-demographic profile of the sample.

Table 1: Sample socio-demographic profile

Variable	Percentage
Gender	
Male	46,8%
Female	53,2%
Age	
≤ 30 years	40,5%
> 31 years	59,5%
Level of education	
High school or less	1,4%
Some college	5,5%
College degree	93,2%
Work Experience	
< 5 years	45%
Between 5 & 15 years	35%
> 15 years	20%
Current position	
CEO	60,9%
Middle management employees	39,1%

2.2 Measurement

To measure personality traits, we used the Big Five Inventory (BFI) (John, Donahue and Kentle 1991), a self-report inventory widely accepted in the literature. The BFI consists of 44 items representing five dimensions (personality traits): ‘openness to experience’, ‘neuroticism’, ‘conscientiousness’, ‘agreeableness’ and ‘extraversion’. These five dimensions are measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from ‘strongly agree’ (1) to ‘strongly disagree’ (7). As the second local language in Tunisia is French, we used the French version, translated and validated by Plaisant et al. (2005).

To measure perceptions of ethically questionable negotiation tactics, we used the SINS (Self-

reported Inappropriate Negotiation Strategies) scale, developed by Robinson, Lewicki and Donahue (2000) and validated by several other studies, e.g., Al-Khatib et al. (2016) and Al-Khatib, Malshe and AbdulKader (2008). The SINS scale consists of 18 items representing five ethically questionable negotiation tactics: (1) 'traditional competitive bargaining', (2) 'attacking opponent's network', (3) 'false promises', (4) 'misrepresentation of information', and (5) 'inappropriate information gathering'. This instrument measures a negotiator's endorsement of unethical negotiation tactics in a 'neutral' negotiating context. Respondents were asked to respond from the following perspective: "You are about to enter into a negotiation. You are negotiating for something that is very important to you and your business". The respondents were invited to score, on a seven-point Likert scale, to which extent they perceive as appropriate each suggested tactic in a negotiation, ranging from being considered 'not at all appropriate' (1) to 'very appropriate' (7). For the clarity of the statements, we used the back-translation method to translate the survey from English to French.

3. Results

3.1 Measures

SPSS 24 software was used to perform the data analysis. A Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and reliability tests were carried out. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of each dimension of the SINS and the BFI scales used in the present study. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's test of sphericity were computed to measure the sample adequacy in terms of the distribution of values to perform the factor analysis. Results showed that Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant ($p = 0.00$) and that the KMO value is 0.74 (above the minimum criterion of 0.5 (Field 2013)).

The PCA analysis allowed reducing the number of problematic items and those with low loadings on their respective factor (Threshold < 0.40) and identifying 4 factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 for the BFI scale ('openness to experience', 'neuroticism', 'agreeableness' and 'conscientiousness'). The 'extraversion' dimension was consequently dropped from the subsequent analysis. For these dimensions, the item loadings ranged from 0.6 to 0.828. The four factors accounted for 57.09 % of the variance.

The reliability test showed relatively acceptable values for all four factors. Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.6 to 0.79. According to Nunally (1978), a Cronbach's alpha of 0.70 is

considered a minimum requirement for a sound reliability test. Some recent studies suggest that a general accepted rule is that α of 0.6-0.7 indicates an acceptable level of reliability (Ursachi, Horodnic and Zait 2015; Zalma et al. 2015), specifically when the researcher is measuring a latent variable with three items (Hair et al. 2006). In this study, we adopted the least mandatory criterion as the critical threshold value of Cronbach's alpha coefficient (0.6) - to avoid the loss of information- with the requirement that the total corrected correlation of each item is higher than 0.2, as recommended by Di Iorio (2005, cf. Zalma et al. 2015), and that eliminating the item does not significantly improve the Alpha indicator (Cossío-Silva et al. 2016).

For the SINS scale, the factor analysis identified 3 tactics with eigenvalues greater than 1 ('traditional competitive bargaining', 'misrepresentation of information', 'inappropriate information gathering'). These 3 tactics accounted for 57.81% of the total variance. All the items of the three retained tactics loaded on their respective factors. The item loadings ranged from 0.7 to 0.76. The reliability test indicated an acceptable value of Cronbach's alpha (≥ 0.7) for two of the negotiation tactics (Nunally 1978). Tables 2 and 3 present the results of factor analysis and reliability for both scales.

Table 2: "Personality traits" scale: PCA and reliability results

Dimensions and items	F1	F2	F3	F4
Openness to experience				
Is original, comes up with new ideas	.768			
Is curious about many different things	.632			
Has an active imagination	.813			
Is inventive	.758			
Likes to reflect, play with ideas	.737			
Neuroticism				
Can be tense		.781		
Worries a lot		.777		
Gets nervous easily		.814		
Agreeableness				
Is helpful and unselfish with others			.712	
Has a forgiving nature			.668	
Is considerate and kind to almost everyone			.825	
Conscientiousness				
Can be somewhat careless				.614
Tends to be disorganized				.773
Tends to be lazy				.802
Cronbach's alpha	.79	.71	.60	.60
KMO	.74			
Bartlett test	.00			
% explained variance	57.09			

Table 3: "Unethical negotiation tactics" Scale: PCA and Reliability results

Dimensions and items	F1	F2	F3
Traditional competitive bargaining			
Hide your real bottom line from your opponent	.717		
Make an opening demand that is far greater than what one really hopes to settle for	.828		
Gain information about an opponent's negotiating position and strategy by "asking around" in a network of your own friends, associates, and contacts	.598		
Make an opening offer or demand so high (or low) that it seriously undermines your opponent's confidence in his/her own ability to negotiate a satisfactory settlement	.609		
Convey a false impression that you are in absolutely no hurry to come to a negotiation agreement, thereby trying to put more time pressure on your opponent to concede quickly	.754		
Misrepresentation of information			
Intentionally misrepresent factual information to your opponent in order to support your negotiating arguments or position		.577	
Intentionally misrepresent the nature of negotiations to the press or your constituency in order to protect delicate discussions that have occurred		.889	
Intentionally misrepresent the progress of negotiations to the press or your constituency in order to make your own position or point of view look better		.859	
Intentionally misrepresent factual information to your opponent when you know that he/she has already done this to you		.614	
Inappropriate information gathering			
Gain information about an opponent's negotiating position by paying friends, associates, and contacts to get this information for you			.826
Gain information about an opponent's negotiating position by trying to recruit or hire one of your opponent's key subordinates (on the condition that the key subordinate bring confidential information with him/her)			.690
Gain information about an opponent's negotiating position by cultivating his/her friendship through expensive gifts, entertaining, or "personal favors"			.841
Cronbach's alpha	.77	.70	.71
KMO	.74		
Bartlett test	.00		
% explained variance	58.2		

3.2 Hypothesis Testing

Before performing the multiple linear regression, we checked for the assumptions of: 1) the linearity between the dependent variable and the independent ones; 2) the multi-normality of the variables; and 3) the collinearity between the independent variables. The linearity

assumption was tested with scatterplots, which displayed a linear relationship. To check for the normality assumption, we used the Skewness and Kurtosis statistics. The values of these two coefficients ranged from -0.671 to 0.927, and from -0.807 to 0.565, respectively, for Skewness and Kurtosis coefficients, indicating a non-departure of the normality assumption. According to Hair et al. (2016), distributions exhibiting skewness and/or kurtosis greater than +1 or lower than -1 are considered non-normal. The variance inflation factor (VIF) statistic was also computed as a measure of multicollinearity (Williams, Grajales and Kurkiewicz 2013). As a rule of thumb, if the VIF values are greater than 10, then multicollinearity may be a problem (Burns and Bush 2000). In our study, the VIF values range from 1.036 to 1.56, meeting the requirement of non-collinearity.

A Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to test our hypotheses. The results are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Results of the Multiple Regression Analysis between Dependent and Independent Variables

Independent variables	Dependent variables	Beta	T-test	P-value
Openness to experience	Traditional competitive bargaining	.220	3.205**	.002
	Misrepresentation of information	.124	1.840	.067
	Inappropriate information gathering	-.025	-.366	.715
Neuroticism	Traditional competitive bargaining	.096	1.415	.158
	Misrepresentation of information	.089	1.336	.183
	Inappropriate information gathering	.099	1.458	.146
Agreeableness	Traditional competitive bargaining	-.089	-1.308	.192
	Misrepresentation of information	-.229	-3.420**	.001
	Inappropriate information gathering	-.102	-1.496	.136
Conscientiousness	Traditional competitive bargaining	-.044	-.654	.514
	Misrepresentation of information	-.145	-2.183*	.030
	Inappropriate information gathering	-.164	-2.434*	.016

** p < .01 (two-tailed)

* p < .05 (two-tailed)

The findings reveal that ‘openness to experience’ has only a significant effect on the perceived appropriateness of adopting the ‘traditional competitive bargaining’ tactic ($\beta = 0.220$, $p < 0.05$). Consequently, H1 is rejected. The ‘neuroticism’ dimension does not

significantly influence the perceived appropriateness of the three questionable negotiation tactics. Therefore, H2 is also rejected.

The results show that ‘agreeableness’ has a significant effect on the perceived appropriateness of adopting the ‘misrepresentation of information’ as a negotiation tactic ($\beta = -0.229$, $p < 0.05$). ‘Conscientiousness’ is found to have a significant effect on the perceived appropriateness of the ‘misrepresenting of information’ ($\beta = -0.145$, $p < 0.05$) and ‘inappropriate information gathering’ ($\beta = -0.164$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, H3 and H4 are supported.

In order to test the hypotheses relating to the relationship between demographic and socioeconomic variables and the perceptions of the appropriateness of the questionable negotiation tactics, we used the independent sample t test. The results indicate that women score lower on the appropriateness of the ‘misrepresentation of information’ (mean = 2.78, SD = 1.43) than men (mean=3.15, SD=1.51). The t-test result reports a significant difference between males and females regarding their perception of this tactic ($t = 1.81$, $p < 0.1$). Subsequently, H6 is supported.

As to the influence of age on the endorsement of unethical negotiation tactics, the t-test for independent samples between younger (≤ 30 years old) and older (> 30 years old) negotiators indicates a significant difference for the ‘inappropriate information gathering’ tactic ($t=2.51$, $p < 0.05$). No significant differences are found for ‘traditional competitive bargaining’ and ‘misrepresentation of information’, even though older negotiators rated the former as slightly more appropriate on average than younger negotiators ($M=4.9$, $SD=1.48$ vs $M=4.8$, $SD=1.31$). Hence, H7 is partially supported.

The t-test analysis reveals similar results for the work experience variable. Indeed, negotiators with longer experience tend to perceive ‘inappropriate information gathering’ as most unethical ($t=2.13$, $p < 0.05$). This finding offers a partial support to H8.

4. Discussion

The study findings have shown that the negotiator’s personality traits have overall a large explanatory power of the dispositional propensity to endorse unethical negotiation tactics. More specifically, they revealed that negotiators with a high level of ‘openness to experience’ perceive the use of the ‘traditional competitive bargaining’ tactic as appropriate and ethical. Though this undermines our initial statement, it is in line with the noticeable trend in the

collected data to consider this questionable tactic as the most appropriate. Similarly, several studies have shown that negotiators generally consider more ethical the ‘traditional competitive bargaining’ tactic than the other tactics (Ladhari and Skandrani 2014; Liu, Ma and Liang 2019; Lewicki and Robinson 1998; Ma 2010; Ma and Parks; 2012; Volkema 2004). Dees and Cramton (1991) have even pointed out that it is fair to exaggerate an opening offer if the other party assumes that this offer is amplified and expects a concession. Our results offer empirical evidence and contribute to generalize a relatively frequently reported allegation that ‘traditional competitive bargaining’ is largely accepted as an ethical tactic, particularly in B-toB negotiations. Consequently, a refinement of the SNS scale is clearly needed and recommended.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that conscientious negotiators perceive the negotiation tactics consisting of ‘misrepresentation of information’ and ‘inappropriate information gathering’ as unethical. These results are consistent with previous studies (Lodi-Smith and Roberts 2007; McFerran, Aquino and Duffy 2010). It should be noticed that anterior studies have shown that conscientious persons are characterized by rigor, reliability, relevance and transparency; they also respect the rules and adhere to moral obligations (Toegel and Barsoux 2012). These characteristics seem to leverage the ethical sensitivity of conscientious negotiators and consequently their endorsement of these ethically questionable tactics.

In this study, agreeableness was found to influence the perceived appropriateness of ‘misrepresentation of information’ as a negotiation tactic. This may be explained by the characteristics of people with a high level of ‘agreeableness’. Indeed, they are described as altruistic and seek to form friendly relationships and cooperate with others (Peabody and Goldberg 1989). Costa et al. (1991) contended that sincerity and honesty reflect fair and appropriate behavior, unlike people who seek to manipulate the other party and create short-term relationships. This inclination, for agreeable persons to endorse more moral and long term-oriented intentions, endows them to refrain from advocating unethical tactics. Some studies in contexts such as ethical leadership (Kalshoven, Den Hartog and De Hoogh 2011; Walumbwa and Schaubroeck 2009), workplace relations and professional business relationships (Russell et al. 2017) offer support to our results (Liu, Ma and Liang 2019).

Besides, the results indicated no significant effect of ‘neuroticism’ on the perception of unethical negotiation tactics. This can be explained by the sample composition. Our respondents are real-world negotiators with significant work experience, which predisposes

them to be much more in control of their emotional instability. As mentioned above, ‘neuroticism’ describes persons who score high on some characteristics (e.g., aggression, depression, embarrassment, loss of control, anxiety, low confidence). These characteristics do not generally fit with the negotiation tasks and requirements in business-to-business relationships and could even hinder the negotiation process and outcomes. Consequently, engaging negotiators who possess this trait might be costly for businesses and contrast with their willingness to develop and maintain long-term relationships.

In the present study, women have reported more ethical attitudes than men. They have scored lower on the appropriateness of the ‘misrepresentation of information’ negotiation tactic than men. This result is in line with Kennedy, Kray and Ku (2017) who have shown that women have stronger moral identities than men. They tend to be more emotional and preserve relationships. Thereafter, they are more reluctant to deploy questionable negotiation tactics. However, men are shown to be more self-oriented. They are generally inclined to seek success at the expense of interpersonal relationships, believing that the end justifies the means (Smith and Rogers 2000).

Our study showed that age influences the endorsement of the ‘inappropriate information gathering’ as a questionable negotiation tactic. Such a result suggests that as negotiators get older, their propensity to endorse ethically questionable tactics decreases. It is worth noticing that Serwinek (1992) reported a similar conclusion. He contended that older negotiators are more aware of the consequences of unethical behavior and they are also more concerned about their financial security or their position in the organization. Other studies draw on the widely accepted idea that age brings wisdom to justify the tendency of older negotiators to exhibit more ethical predispositions (Eweje and Brunton 2010; Knotts, Lopez and Mesak 2000). In the same vein, some psychology scholars argue that, in general, people’s moral reasoning for ethical decisions evolves in accordance with their age and maturity (Doyle, Hughes and Summers 2013). Additionally, young people are more likely to engage in unethical behavior as they are under heavy pressure in the workplace and because of the demanding goals imposed too often by their supervisors and employers. This might lead young negotiators to engage in unfair tactics to comply with their managers’ expectations, but also to achieve their career objectives (Weeks et al. 1999; Volkema 2004).

In line with the latter findings in relation to the age variable, negotiators with longer experience are found to perceive the ‘inappropriate information gathering’ negotiation tactic

as unethical. One possible explanation of this link is that the more experienced the negotiators are, the more confident they are with their skills and knowledge, but also the more they are oriented to not deceive their counterparts in business negotiations. This might entail drastic drawbacks and jeopardize the other rounds of negotiations, which is common in real-world negotiations. It might also encompass a reputational risk of the negotiator and his organization.

Conclusion

Theoretical and practical implications

From a theoretical perspective, this study sheds more light on the real-world negotiators' perception of the suitability of unethical negotiation tactics, depending on their personality traits and the socio-demographic variables. It attempted to contribute to fill the gap in literature about the under-researched relationship between these variables and negotiation ethics. For instance, Elfenbein (2015), Liu, Ma and Liang (2019), and Morse and Cohen (2019) called for more research effort in this domain. In this line of thought, Morse and Cohen (2019) conclude that personality science, and especially the study of moral character, has great potential to enhance research and practice in negotiations. Our study is one of the few field studies that explicitly addressed these links in line with the renewed interest in personality as a predictor of ethical attitude and behavior in general and the negotiation domain, particularly. It should be noted that, to our knowledge, research dealing with the negotiator's personality and his unethical attitude and behavior remains limited in marketing. Moreover, Sharma et al. (2018) pointed out that the extensive use of experimental methods and laboratory studies in psychological research on negotiation has not been beneficial, to our knowledge, to the context, contingencies and wider chronology of actual BtoB negotiations.

As stated above, research into the relationship between personality traits and ethical attitude and behavior in business negotiations is not only controversial, but also remains more often focused on Western countries. To the best of our knowledge, few studies, if not any, have addressed explicitly this issue in North African countries and particularly in Tunisia, a country which has a long history of trade mainly with European countries in terms of imports and exports (France, Italy, Spain, Germany and Belgium), and which continue to attract foreign investment (Signé 2018).

From a methodological perspective, this study tried to overcome the limitations of previous studies - generally involving students- by collecting data on the behalf of professional negotiators and accounting for sex, age and work experience differences.

The results show that older and experienced negotiators tend to be wiser and endorse more ethical negotiation tactics. This might entail meaningful theoretical and empirical insights. Indeed, it offers empirical evidence about the mitigated impact of age and job tenure on the perceived appropriateness of some questionable negotiation tactics. Besides, such a result entails practical implications as firms could design training programs where older negotiators play the role of mentors to promote ethical culture among younger negotiators and to help them adhere to ethical requirements. It is worth noting that businesses and their employees are facing an increasing demand to embrace ethical requirements and growing claims for accountability triggered by a global business system. According to Crane et al. (2019), globalization builds a new place where businesses face ethical questions worldwide.

Limitations and future research avenues

Despite the contributions of this research, some limitations are noteworthy. First, the study was based on reports of the acceptability of questionable negotiation tactics rather than actual behaviors. Nonetheless, a person's attitude is broadly identified as a proxy for his behavioral responses. This too holds for business negotiations (Ma 2008).

Second, our results might have entailed bias of the social desirability response largely recognized in self-reported questionnaires. Some authors go further to expand this bias to respondents' sex. Building on previous findings, Kennedy, Kray and Ku (2017) advocated that women often define themselves as fundamentally interdependent and connected to others, whereas men typically define themselves as independent from others (Cross, Bacon and Morris 2000). They conclude that women tend to describe themselves in more relational terms.

Third, although respondents were assured of anonymity, one could expect some of them to report biased responses to look ethical. As stated by Jaramillo and Marshall (2004), individuals are normally biased when they are asked for a self-assessment, which may lead to an upward bias in the outcome, including social disability response bias and other types of biases. Moreover, given the length of the questionnaire and the large number of questions, worries about the respondent's fatigue and its impact on his responses might be expressed.

Fourth, in order to gain more insights into the addressed relationships in this study, further research taking into account other variables is needed. For instance, considering cultural dimensions will be very insightful in face of the recent turmoil that some countries have witnessed. The Arab Spring countries, including Tunisia, have experienced important political and social changes that have triggered, among others, personality, cultural identity, and religion debates and struggles. Adopting an anthropological approach, Ouannès (2011) argued that personality traits may evolve, insofar as they are rooted in and influenced by the anthropological social relationships and the struggles for the embodiment/rejection of traditional ideas, values and conduct, and overall the culture system. According to Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952), this culture system's constituents may be considered as products of action and as conditioning elements of further action. Digging deeper into these cultural aspects and their influence on moral values and business ethical/unethical practices will be needed. Crane et al. (2019) argued that despite a visible trend towards a greater convergence of business systems' and firms' characteristics in most parts of the world, certain fundamental characteristics and differences remain and continue to have relevance.

Fifth, like the mainstream of negotiation studies (Morse and Cohen 2019), our study focused on the individual level, assuming that a negotiator's personality and his socio-demographic variables have a one-sided impact on his perceptions of unethical negotiation tactics. Addressing both parties' individual characteristics and their interactions provides fruitful avenues for future research. By addressing this issue, scholars echo Neville and Fisk's (2019) and Morse and Cohen's (2019) calls for considering the dyadic nature of business negotiation and for taking into account the dynamic relationship between the character-driven attitudes, motives and behavior of the two (or more) parties.

Finally, despite the use of a sample made up of real-world negotiators, future studies need to adopt a more probabilistic sampling method and/or to draw up a more homogeneous segmentation of negotiators in terms of work status, age and also gender to better refine our sample by categories and improve the generalizability of our results.

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