

Initiation Behavior in Negotiations: The Moderating Role of Motivation on the Ability–Intentionality Relationship

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Abstract

This article reports on a study of the effects of recognition of negotiable opportunities (ability) and self-efficacy (motivation) on initiation behavior in negotiations, an often overlooked stage of the negotiation process. Three phases of the initiation process are examined—engaging, requesting, and optimizing—through three negotiation scenarios offering corresponding forced-choice behavioral options. Results suggest that, overall, the recognition of negotiable opportunities and the interaction of recognition and self-efficacy best predict initiation intentionality. More specifically, recognition and the interaction of recognition and self-efficacy were significantly associated with the likelihood of making a request, whereas the interaction of recognition and self-efficacy was significantly associated with the likelihood of optimizing that request. The implications of these findings for practitioners and future research are discussed.

Negotiation is generally considered an essential managerial skill (Greenhalgh, 2001; Lax & Sebenius, 1986; Mintzberg, 1973). As with many decisional processes (Bruner & Pomazal, 1988; Cowan, 1986), the early stages of the negotiation process are critical to the success of succeeding stages and to the ultimate outcome (Buelens & van Poucke, 2004; Curhan & Pentland, 2007; Magee, Galinsky, & Gruenfeld, 2007; Patton & Balakrishnan, 2010; Wheeler, 2004).

To illustrate, a number of scholars have shown that individuals often hesitate to initiate discussions during salary negotiations, even though such discussions usually produce higher salaries (Babcock & Laschever, 2003; Babcock, Laschever, Gelfand, & Small, 2003; Bowles, Babcock, & Lai, 2007; Gerhart & Rynes, 1991; Marks & Harold, 2011). Beyond salaries, employees also fail to recognize or take advantage of opportunities to initiate negotiations regarding supplementary education or training, flexible work hours, special job assignments, etc. (Rousseau, 2005), just as organizations sometimes forego opportunities to pursue new yet promising partnerships (mergers, alliances, franchises, distributorships). And the party failing to take the initiative in a negotiation may not be the only loser in these cases, as when a valuable employee leaves rather than “risking” initiation of a special request, when a potentially profitable market opportunity is not suggested, or when process efficiencies that could produce cost savings go unmentioned.

Although the importance of the initiation stage of negotiation has begun to gain some attention, the steps by which negotiations are initiated remain largely overlooked (Miles, 2010). Just as the negotiation process as a whole has phases or stages (Holmes, 1992; Lewicki, Weiss, & Lewin, 1992; Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993; Shell, 1999), the initiation stage of negotiation has phases as well. Building on research

studies related to consumer complaining (Bodey & Grace, 2007; Sharma, Marshall, Reday, & Na, 2010; Thøgersen, Juhl & Poulsen, 2009) and suggestion-making in companies (cf. Frese, Teng & Wijnen, 1999), Volkema (2012) proposed three phases to initiating a negotiation: engaging (interacting with a prospective counterpart), requesting (asking for something), and optimizing (maximizing the request, rather than settling for less than is truly desired). An individual, for example, could engage a prospective counterpart without making a request (e.g., interact in casual conversation, hoping that the counterpart will raise the issue), engage and make a suboptimal demand or request, or engage a prospective counterpart and make an optimal request.

Managing the initiation process begins with understanding these phases but also involves recognizing the factors or variables that can affect a negotiator's desire to engage, request, and optimize in a given situation. This could help in answering the question of why some individuals choose to initiate negotiations and others do not, a first step in improving initiation performance. The act of human performance has a long history of research, with an individual's ability and his or her motivation often seen as central to understanding intentions and behavior (Adams-Roy & Barling, 1998; Campbell, 1999; Porter & Lawler, 1968; Vroom, 1964). Although these two factors—ability and motivation—have not been applied to the initiation process per se, it is conceivable that they could very well provide insight into this essential stage of negotiation. That is, with respect to initiation, an individual could fail to engage a counterpart, shrink from making a request, or sub-optimize a request because he or she lacks the ability to recognize an opportunity to negotiate or because the individual lacks the motivation to act on recognizable opportunities.

The purpose of this article is to examine the relationship of ability and motivation to the initiation process, with specific focus on the engaging, requesting, and optimizing phases. Using three negotiation scenarios suggested by Ames (2008), participants' intentions to engage, request, and optimize were regressed against their general ability to recognize negotiable situations and their motivation (as measured by self-efficacy), with particular attention to the moderating effect of motivation on the ability–intentionality relationship. The results of these analyses, and their implications for practitioners and future research, are discussed.

Theory and Hypotheses

Negotiation has been described as a discussion between two or more parties to resolve opposing preferences (Carnevale & Pruitt, 1992). Throughout those discussions, the participants are faced with a variety of decisions regarding when and how to exchange information (facts, feelings, positions, offers, alternatives, etc.; Olekalns, Brett, & Weingart, 2003; Thompson, 2009). Indeed, the act of negotiation itself involves a decisional process, as one or more individuals must recognize an opportunity to address unfulfilled goals or objectives through engaging others in discussions.

For many years, the initiation process was largely overlooked by researchers (Miles, 2010; Wheeler, 2004). Much of the early research on conflict management and negotiation was influenced by an interest in individual styles or strategies, such as depicted in the dual concern models (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). The competing and collaborating styles became the primary focus of attention, along with their associated tactics and behaviors (Holmes, 1992; Lewicki et al., 1992; Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993). Avoidance as an approach or strategy, which represents a low concern for one's self as well as the other party or the relationship, was rarely addressed and, consequently, neither was initiation behavior.

Recognizing that women sometimes have difficulties in negotiations (often favoring an avoidance or accommodating approach), Babcock and her colleagues began to investigate the relationship of gender to initiation behavior (cf. Babcock & Laschever, 2003; Babcock et al., 2003; Babcock, Gelfand, Small, & Stayn, 2006). Finding that females often were more reluctant than were males to initiate negotiations, this line of research sought to understand the extent of those differences and their impact on various

outcomes (e.g., salaries). Subsequently, researchers began to focus on a broader array of issues and factors related to initiation behavior, including the negotiator's role definition (Bowles, Babcock, & McGinn, 2005), the negotiation topic (Bear, 2011), anticipated outcomes (Kong, Tuncel, & Parks, 2011), power imbalance (Magee et al., 2007; Small, Gelfand, Babcock, & Gettman, 2007), and culture (Sharma et al., 2010; Volkema & Fleck, 2012).

Although these studies have made important contributions to the study of initiation behavior, they have often viewed the initiation process as a singular act. That is, individuals are seen to either initiate or not initiate a negotiation; the nuances (e.g., phases) of that process, however, have not been assessed. Much like the negotiation process, which has been studied as a multi-stage process (Curhan & Pentland, 2007; Olekalns et al., 2003), phases of the initiation process can be articulated and studied as well. With a better understanding of this cognitive process, the fundamental factors that are likely to predict these phases can be investigated.

In considering whether to pursue an objective with another party, and how to pursue that objective, an individual is likely to call on cognitive scripts stored in memory (Miles, 2010; Schreurs, Derous, van Hoof, Proost, & de Witte, 2009). These include personal and vicarious experiences involving initiation generally as well as specific initiations. That is, an individual might recall general patterns of behavior for self and referent others when it comes to asking for a favor or registering a complaint. Further, one might recall episodes involving a specific counterpart or a particular type of request in deciding how to proceed (O'Connor & Adams, 1999). The anticipated challenges of initiation are likely reflected in the distributive orientation that many individuals have been found to pursue at the beginning of negotiations (Olekalns et al., 2003).

Several theories can be applied to understanding the initiation process. The theory of planned behavior, for example, based on the work of Ajzen and his colleagues (Ajzen, 1988; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1969, 1972), suggests that deliberative action is the result of attitudes and beliefs affecting intentionality, which in turn affects one's behavior. These linkages are influenced by a set of control factors that can inhibit behavioral performance. There have been various applications of the theory of planned behavior to many fields (e.g., advertising, public relations, health care), with general support for the overall theory (for meta-analyses, see Kim & Hunter, 1993, and Sheppard, Hartwick, & Warshaw, 1988) as well as strong correlations between intentions and actual behavior (Kim & Hunter, 1993).

Applied to initiation behavior, an individual's attitude or beliefs about initiation (e.g., whether or not the act of initiation is deemed appropriate behavior, the importance of goal accomplishment) influences the individual's intentions to initiate a negotiation (engage, request, optimize), which in turn affects actual behavior (Volkema, 2012). The linkages from attitude or beliefs to intentions and from intentions to behavior are moderated by various control factors (e.g., the importance of the goal, the availability of alternatives, the venue where the process will take place, the reputation and demeanor of one's counterpart).

This model of planned action is consistent with research on job pursuit behavior (Schreurs et al., 2009) as well as consumer complaining behavior, which has found that behavioral action (in this case, a consumer's decision to complain about poor service or a defective product) is a function of an individual's attitude (Ngai, Heung, Wong, & Chan, 2007; Thøgersen et al., 2009), personality (Bodey & Grace, 2007; Kim & Chen, 2010; Sharma et al., 2010; Thøgersen et al., 2009), and situational factors (Chebat, Davidow, & Codjovi, 2005; Kim & Chen, 2010; Thøgersen et al., 2009). As with planned behavior generally, the likelihood of success plays a key role in an individual's decision to act (Robertson & Shaw, 2009).

The initiation process (engaging, requesting, optimizing) also can be understood through the theory of human performance. Seminal work on leadership and motivation by Vroom (1964) and Porter and Lawler (1968), and subsequent work by Campbell (1999), suggests that performance is a function of three primary factors: an individual's ability and his or her motivation, moderated by support. To maximize the productive potential of an organizational member, for example, a leader or manager should

ensure that the individual has the ability to perform the desired task(s) (i.e., knowledge, aptitude, skills; otherwise motivation is wasted), the motivation to act (otherwise knowledge and skills will be wasted), and the appropriate support (e.g., tools, working conditions, colleagues or teammates).

Within the context of negotiation, the act of initiation (e.g., engaging a counterpart, making a request) also can be seen as a function of one's abilities to engage and request, as well as one's motivation to do so. The former is captured through an individual's capability of recognizing negotiable situations, while the latter is captured through one's willingness to take action based on past personal and vicarious successes (i.e., self-efficacy).

Recognition of Negotiable Situations

Recognizing negotiable situations is a special case of problem recognition, where at least one other party is viewed as integral to the process and outcome. Cowan (1986) described problem recognition as a multiphase process, beginning with scanning and arousal, leading to categorization of a condition as problematic (i.e., an unsatisfied need). Immediate familiarity, or a subsequent information search to clarify the condition, leads to a diagnosis or description upon which to act. If this familiarity or subsequent diagnosis or description requires another party, then the situation is viewed as a potential negotiation.

According to Spears and Parker (2009), many individuals do not recognize situations as opportunities to negotiate. They asked graduate and undergraduate students to classify various interpersonal situations involving salaries, retail purchases, work schedules, etc., and found that respondents viewed these situations as negotiations in only about 50% of the cases. Among the situations most frequently viewed as negotiations were home purchases and starting salaries, while department store purchases, marriage proposals, and being stopped for speeding were among the least likely situations to be viewed as negotiations.

Babcock et al. (2006) introduced the concept of recognizing negotiable situations or opportunities as one of three variables in their propensity to initiate negotiations (PIN) questionnaire (along with entitlement of a favorable outcome and apprehension upon initiating a negotiation). The recognition construct included viewing situations as negotiable, as available opportunities, and as means to improving one's circumstances, a capability that Babcock and her colleagues argued can be improved through experiential means (e.g., observation, practice, mentoring). They found that, of the three variables in the PIN questionnaire, the ability to recognize negotiable opportunities was the best predictor of recalled negotiations.

In a separate study, Volkema and Fleck (2012) found that the opportunity recognition construct was correlated significantly with assertiveness. Viewed in a social context, assertiveness typically involves a demonstrated confidence to achieve one's goals or objectives, sometimes requiring accommodations by others. The act of engaging another party in a negotiation is a necessary precursor to achieving one's goals, requiring an ability to recognize negotiable opportunities as well as, ultimately, the physical behavior for overcoming social inertia. Likewise, the subsequent phases of the initiation process—making a request and optimizing a request—may require additional confidence and adjustment (Brett, Northcraft, & Pinkley, 1999), which likely derives from an ability to recognize opportunities.

Kong et al. (2011) examined the relationship between the recognition of negotiation opportunities construct from Babcock et al.'s PIN questionnaire and approach versus avoidance goal orientations. They found that opportunity recognition had a significant positive correlation with attaining goals and a negative (though not significant) correlation with avoiding trouble or negative outcomes. As negotiating involves goal accomplishment through interpersonal means (Thompson, 2009), these findings also suggest a probable relationship between an individual's ability to recognize negotiable opportunities and his or her intentions and actions with respect to engaging another party, making a request, and optimizing that request.

Therefore,

Hypothesis 1: The greater an individual's ability to recognize negotiable opportunities, the more likely his or her intentions to initiate negotiations, including (a) engaging counterparts, (b) making requests, and (c) optimizing requests.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is the belief that one is capable of accomplishing goals or meeting performance standards (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2002). Self-efficacy is closely aligned with expectancy theory, which concerns the extent to which one believes his or her efforts will lead to an expected performance and desired outcome. As such, experience (both personal and vicarious) can increase one's belief in the likelihood of a goal being accomplished (Bandura, 1997, 2001). The stronger this belief, the more motivated an individual will be to undertake a specific task or goal (i.e., the more effort the individual will put forth).

Kanfer (1992) suggested that motivation can be either proximal or distal, according to the time needed to achieve one's goal. More specifically, proximal motivation is concerned with processes close to actual behavior, whereas distal motivation is associated with longer-term patterns of behavior across situations. According to Kanfer, self-efficacy characterizes the former while achievement motivation characterizes the latter. Kirk and Brown (2003) examined these constructs in a study of Australian employees and found that self-efficacy "demonstrated positive loadings on the motivational construct" (p. 46) and explained the most variance in performance.

Negotiations often present themselves as unanticipated opportunities, and the decision to initiate a negotiation would likely be affected by proximal motivation, since performance and its attending consequences would typically be immediate. Thus, the more confident an individual is that a request, even an optimized request, will be approved or supported by a counterpart, the more motivated that individual would be to engage this individual and make the request. In predicting human performance, it is generally believed that ability and motivation are better viewed as multiplicative factors than additive factors (Campbell, 1999). That is, incremental increases in one predictor variable will result in greater increases in performance when the other predictor variable's value is high (an interaction or multiplicative effect) than when it is low. Thus, it might be expected that the interaction of ability to recognize negotiable opportunities and motivation (i.e., self-efficacy) would predict initiation behavior. As Bandura (1977) pinpointed, perceptions of self-efficacy designate individuals' willingness to expend energy and persistence towards goal attainment. Subsequently, individuals would rather avoid initiating negotiations that exceed their coping capabilities while actively participating in negotiations that they find themselves capable of managing.

An interaction effect could arguably be expected for each of the three phases of the initiation process. That is, an individual's intentions and actions with respect to engaging another party would be greatest when the individual is both capable of recognizing negotiable opportunities and motivated (i.e., high self-efficacy). Similarly, this interaction effect would be expected to predict one's intentions to make a request and optimize that request.

Thus,

Hypothesis 2: Self-efficacy will positively moderate the relationship between an individual's ability to recognize negotiable opportunities and his or her intentions to initiate negotiations, including (a) engaging counterparts, (b) making requests, and (c) optimizing requests. More specifically, for high values of self-efficacy (motivation), the positive effect of recognition of negotiable situations (ability) on initiation intentions will amplify, whereas for low values of self-efficacy its positive effect will be neutralized.

The Study

Participants

The participants in this study were 115 graduate students taking negotiation classes at a European business school (all from the same country, Greece). All students were fluent in English, the language in which the courses were being taught. Seventy-seven (67.0%) of these participants were females, and the final sample had a mean age of 24.8 years ($SD = 2.3$), with a mean of 3.3 years ($SD = 1.6$) of work experience.

Procedure

The study was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, the participants selected behavioral alternatives related to preferred initiation behavior for three scenarios, whereas in the second stage (2 weeks later) each participant completed a set of questionnaires that focused on personality measures that had previously been used in negotiation studies as well as in research on initiation and assertiveness (cf. Bodey & Grace, 2007; Volkema & Fleck, 2012). To assure anonymity, participants were initially assigned a randomly generated number that would serve for identification purposes (which they were instructed to keep until the end of the semester). To increase response rate and motivate active participation in the study, participants were promised a personalized report at the completion of the study that would portray their negotiating profile.

Measures

Initiating Behavior

To measure initiating behavior, participants were asked to rank alternatives involving different levels of initiation behavior for each of three scenarios. The three scenarios were modifications of those employed by Ames (2008) in his study of assertiveness. These scenarios consisted of a salary negotiation (Appendix 1), a request for assistance while under a deadline (Appendix 2), and a disagreement within a team regarding strategic planning (Appendix 3), and therefore were diverse in many respects (e.g., roles, venue, power).

For each scenario, participants were given four behavioral alternatives (see Appendices 1–3), which corresponded to the various degrees of initiation behavior: (a) no engagement of a counterpart (i.e., not making contact with a counterpart), (b) engagement without making a request (i.e., engaging a counterpart in conversation without asking for what one wants), (c) engagement with a suboptimal request (i.e., engaging a counterpart and making a request but asking for less than is desired), and (d) engagement with an optimized request. The order of alternatives was randomized for participants. Participants were asked to rank the four alternatives for each scenario, giving a “1” to the alternative that they would be most likely to use, a “2” to the second most likely alternative, etc. Requesting that participants rank all four alternatives increased the chances that each alternative was considered for the number one (most preferred) ranking rather than the search being truncated when an acceptable alternative was encountered. Based on which alternative was ranked first, a participant was scored for engaging (No engagement = 0, Engaging counterpart = 1), requesting (No request = 0, Request = 1), and optimizing (Suboptimized request = 0, Optimized request = 1). Therefore, for the three scenarios, a participant could receive a score from 0 to 3 for each phase of initiation (e.g., zero for engaging if the participant chose alternatives for the three scenarios that indicated no likelihood of engaging counterparts, and as many as three points if the participant selected alternatives for the three scenarios that involved engaging counterparts). To create an overall measure of initiation intentions, the total score that a participant

received for each scenario was first calculated (the sum of the point values for engaging, requesting, and optimizing). As such, a participant who selected the “no engagement of a counterpart” alternative as the most likely response that they would use received an overall score of zero for that scenario, while the choice of the “engagement with an optimized request” alternative received a score of three (one point for engaging, one point for requesting, and one point for optimizing). Then, these overall scores were averaged for the three scenarios.

Recognition of Negotiable Opportunities

Recognition of negotiable opportunities was measured using questions drawn from the PIN questionnaire initially proposed by Babcock et al. (2006) and later modified by Guthrie, Magyar, Eggert, and Kain (2009). These questionnaires assess three dimensions of PIN: recognition of negotiable situations, entitlement of a favorable outcome, and apprehension upon initiating a negotiation. For each dimension, participants are asked to rate statements on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), with approximately half the statements reverse-coded. In this study, recognition of negotiation situations was employed as a measure of ability, as no action can be taken until a negotiable opportunity is perceived. Four statements were employed (“There are many things available to people, if only people asked for them,” “I often do see chances to improve my circumstances,” “It is possible to make things better for myself by simply asking for what I want,” and “I think a person has to ask for what he or she wants rather than waiting for someone to provide it.”), with an overall Cronbach’s α of .64, which is adequate and comparable to other studies using this fairly recently developed scale (e.g., Ames, 2008).

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy, a measure of motivation, consisted of four statements, two of which were reverse coded (e.g., “Often I am not sure whether the negotiation decisions I’ve made are the right ones”). Each statement was rated on a 1–4 scale (mostly agree to mostly disagree). The statements were adapted from Cho and Lee (2006) to have a negotiation focus and had a Cronbach’s α of .63.

Control Variables

To control for possible alternative explanations, various relevant control variables were included. Specifically, gender and age were included as they have been found to be related to assertiveness and initiation behavior in prior studies (cf. Babcock et al., 2006; Rizzo & Mendez, 1988; Small et al., 2007; Thomas & Thomas, 2008). In addition, Machiavellianism and risk propensity had been found to relate significantly to assertiveness and initiation in prior research (Barbuto & Moss, 2006; Marks & Harold, 2011; Volkema & Fleck, 2012), so they also were included as control variables in this study. To measure Machiavellianism, the Mach IV questionnaire was employed (Christie & Geis, 1970). This questionnaire, which had been used in prior negotiation research (cf. Amanatullah, Morris, & Curhan, 2008), is comprised of twenty statements (e.g., “Never tell anyone the real reason you did something unless it is useful to do so”), each rated on a 1–7 scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree). Cronbach’s α was .72. Finally, as with self efficacy, the risk propensity measure was adapted from Cho and Lee (2006). It consisted of three statements (e.g., “I am willing to take substantial risks to realize substantial financial gains from investments”), with an overall Cronbach’s α of .69.

Analysis

Engaging, requesting, optimizing, and overall initiation for all three scenarios were regressed on recognition of negotiable opportunities (ability) and self-efficacy (motivation) using hierarchical regression analyses. An interaction effect for recognition and self-efficacy also was included. In the first step, the

four control variables were entered, followed by the main effects in the second step, and the interaction term in the third step.

Results

For the three scenarios, the majority of participants indicated that they would at least engage a counterpart. One-hundred and three participants (89.6%) indicated that they would engage in all three scenarios, whereas the remainder indicated that they would engage in at least two scenarios. In terms of making a request, 36 participants (31.3%) chose alternatives for all three scenarios that included making a request, whereas 62 (53.9%) indicated that they would make a request in two of the three scenarios. Finally, only four respondents (3.5%) indicated that they would engage, request, and optimize a request for all three scenarios. Thirty-five participants (30.4%) would do so for two scenarios, 55 (47.8%) for one scenario, and 21 (18.3%) would not optimize for any of the scenarios.

The means, standard deviations, and correlations for the control, independent, and dependent variables in this study are shown in Table 1. The correlations suggest that men, compared to women, were higher in risk propensity ($r = -.34, p < .01$) and Machiavellianism ($r = -.20, p < .05$). In addition, men were more likely than women to optimize a request ($r = -.19, p < .05$). There were no significant correlations for age (perhaps, in part, because of the narrow age range, with almost 90% of participants between the ages of 22 and 27).

Machiavellianism also was positively correlated with the engaging behavior ($r = .23, p < .05$), suggesting that individuals with a tendency towards deceiving and manipulating others for personal gain were more inclined to engage a counterpart. Risk propensity was positively correlated with optimizing ($r = .26, p < .01$) as well as positively correlated with the initiation process overall (i.e., all three phases; $r = .17, p < .10$). Thus, the more risk oriented an individual, the greater the likelihood of optimizing a request and of initiating in general. There was no significant correlation between recognition of opportunities and self-efficacy ($r = .11, p = ns$), suggesting that these were independent constructs.

Hierarchical regression analysis for the engaging phase of initiation revealed no significant findings for recognition of negotiable opportunities or self-efficacy, although there was a significant result for Machiavellianism (Table 2). For requesting, however, recognition of negotiable opportunities ($\beta = .19,$

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Cronbach's Alphas for Variables[§]

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Gender [§]	.67	.47	—									
Age	24.77	2.27	-.09	—								
Machiavellianism	4.07	.65	-.20*	.02	(.72)							
Risk propensity	2.46	.57	-.34**	-.05	-.12	(.69)						
Recognition of opportunities	5.77	.66	-.03	-.01	-.03	.05	(.64)					
Self-efficacy	2.88	.45	-.09	-.02	.06	.07	.11	(.63)				
Engage	2.90	.31	.00	-.04	.23*	-.01	.06	.13	—			
Request	2.15	.70	.02	.13	.00	.04	.11	.23*	.28**	—		
Optimize	1.19	.77	-.19*	.04	.10	.26**	.17†	.17†	.09	.45**	—	
Initiation—all 3 phases	2.08	.45	-.10	.08	.11	.17†	.16†	.25**	.42**	.84**	.83**	—

Note. † $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

[§] $N = 115$.

[§]Male = 0, Female = 1.

Table 2
Hierarchical Regression Results for the Three Steps, and Overall Measure of Initiation Based on the Scenarios[†]

Variables	Engage			Request			Optimize			Initiation (All 3 phases)		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Step 1												
Gender [§]	-.05	-.04	-.04	.05	.06	.04	-.13	-.12	-.14	-.06	-.04	-.07
Age	-.04	-.03	-.04	.14	.14	.16 [†]	.04	.04	.07	.07	.07	.09
Machiavellianism	.23*	.24*	.23*	.00	.00	.02	.16 [†]	.15	.17 [†]	.13	.13	.15
Risk propensity	.01	-.00	-.00	.07	.06	.06	.24*	.23*	.23*	.13	.12	.12
Step 2												
Recognition of opportunities		.13	.14		.22*	.19*		.15	.12		.23*	.20*
Self-efficacy		.02	.02		.09	.07		.12	.11		.13	.11
Step 3												
Recognition × Self-efficacy			-.02			.18 [†]			.19*			.19*
R ²	.05	.07	.07	.02	.08	.11 [†]	.10*	.14**	.18**	.04	.12*	.15*
F	1.27	1.40	1.20	0.77	1.60	1.95 [†]	3.06*	3.03**	3.34**	1.47	2.37*	2.71*

Note. All variables have been centered prior to the creation of the interaction terms. Standardized coefficients reported. Degrees of freedom for Engage, Request, and Optimize: Model 1 = F(4, 110); Model 2 = F(6, 108); Model 3 = F(7, 107). Degrees of freedom for Initiation (All 3 phases): Model 1 = F(4, 111); Model 2 = F(6, 109); Model 3 = F(7, 108).

[†]p < .10. *p < .05. **p < .01.

[‡]N = 115.

[§]Male = 0, Female = 1.

$p < .05$) and the interaction of recognition of opportunities and self-efficacy ($\beta = .18, p < .10$) were significant at the .10 level (Model 3). In addition, age was positively associated with requesting ($\beta = .16, p < .10$). The significant result for recognition of negotiable opportunities was consistent with Hypothesis 1b.

As shown in Figure 1, making a request was most likely when high recognition of negotiable opportunities (ability) was accompanied with high self-efficacy (motivation) ($t[110] = 3.04, p < .01$), whereas the relationship between ability and request remained largely unchanged when motivation was low ($t[110] = 0.15, ns$). This is consistent with what had been hypothesized (H2b).

For optimizing, risk propensity ($\beta = .23, p < .05$) and Machiavellianism ($\beta = .17, p < .10$) were significant at the .10 level, whereas the interaction of recognition of opportunities and self-efficacy ($\beta = .19, p < .05$) was significant (Model 3). The interaction effect is depicted graphically in Figure 2. As with requesting, optimizing was most likely when high recognition of negotiable opportunities (ability) was accompanied with high self-efficacy (motivation) ($t[110] = 2.65, p < .01$), whereas the positive relationship between ability and optimizing was neutralized when motivation was low ($t[110] = -0.47, ns$). This is consistent with what had been hypothesized (H2c).

Finally, combining the three phases of the initiation process revealed that recognition of negotiable opportunities (ability) was significantly related to how many phases of this process a participant would likely employ ($\beta = .20, p < .05$) (Model 3). This result was consistent with Hypothesis 1. In addition, there was a significant interaction effect for recognition of negotiable opportunities and self-efficacy ($\beta = .19, p < .05$). As shown in Figure 3, the degree of initiation increased most significantly when high recognition of negotiable opportunities (ability) was accompanied with high self-efficacy ($t[111] = 3.25, p < .05$), whereas it remained unchanged when motivation was low ($t[111] = 0.20, ns$). This is consistent with Hypothesis 2.

According to Baron and Kenny (1986), a moderating effect is strongest when the moderator variable is not significantly related to the dependent variable. As shown in Table 2, this is the case for self-efficacy and making a request ($\beta = .07, p = ns$), optimizing ($\beta = .11, p = ns$), and initiation overall ($\beta = .11, p = ns$).

Discussion

As with many decisional processes, the initiation of a negotiation is an essential yet often overlooked stage of the negotiation process. As at least one other person is involved in the act of initiating a negotiation, there is a certain level of social inertia that must be overcome to ultimately achieve one’s goals or objectives (Miles, 2010; Wheeler, 2004).

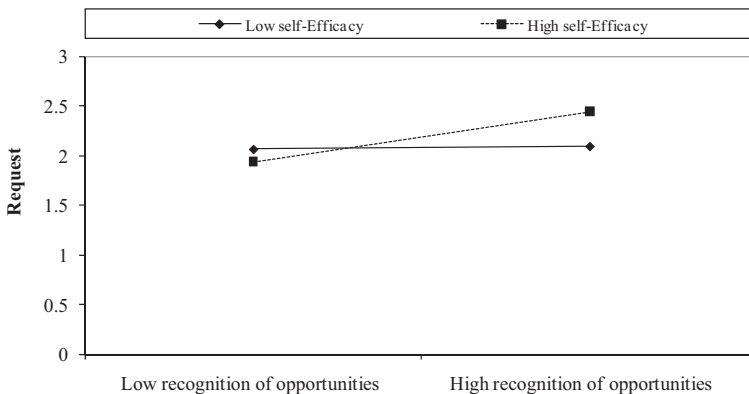


Figure 1. The interactive effects of recognition of negotiable opportunities × self-efficacy on requesting.

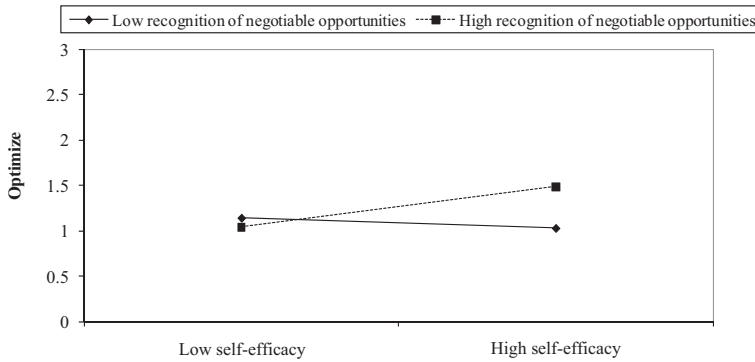


Figure 2. The interactive effects of recognition of negotiable opportunities × self-efficacy on optimizing.

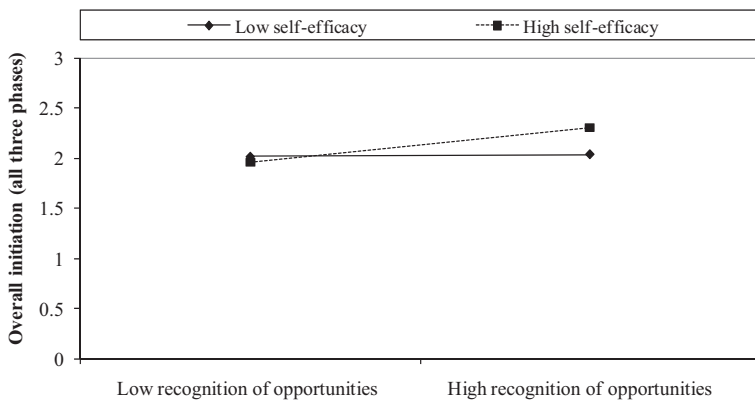


Figure 3. The interactive effects of recognition of negotiable opportunities × self-efficacy on overall initiation (all three phases).

In negotiation, the initiation process can be viewed as potentially involving at least three phases or stages, including engaging one’s counterpart, making a request or demand, and optimizing that request (Volkema, 2012). In this study, it would appear that the participants were generally comfortable with engaging their counterparts: Nearly 90% indicated that they would engage their counterparts in all three scenarios. Only about a third of participants, however, indicated that they would make a request in all three scenarios, with less than 4% overall engaging, requesting, and optimizing for all three scenarios.

Perhaps, because of the minimal variance with respect to engaging, neither the recognition of negotiable opportunities nor self-efficacy (belief in one’s capability of accomplishing goals) was related to this first phase of initiation. There was, however, a significant relationship for Machiavellianism (the tendency towards deceiving and manipulating others for personal gain). Upon further analysis, all participants whose scores for Machiavellianism were relatively high (at least one standard deviation above the mean) chose to engage in all three scenarios.

Recognition of a negotiable opportunity, along with the interaction of recognition and self-efficacy, does appear important during the requesting phase. Although it is conceivable that each phase of the initiation process can vary considerably (e.g., an individual can engage face-to-face or through an electronic medium), the ways in which an individual can make a request are perhaps even more varied. These can include making a demand, asking a question, posing a problem, or labeling a behavior, among others (Volkema, 2009). Recognizing the right moment and approach for a given situation can make the difference between success and failure.

The same might be said for optimizing a request, for which the interaction of recognition and self-efficacy was significant (i.e., optimizing was most likely when both recognition and self-efficacy were high). When does one choose to optimize, and for what issues? As optimizing a request could suggest distributive motives to some counterparts, a negotiator must be both skilled and motivated to undertake this phase of initiation. And, as indicated in Table 2, it helps to have a propensity for risk.

Implications for Practice

The implications of these findings for practitioners are that both recognition and self-efficacy are important, particularly in moving beyond simple engagement. Although the latter—self-efficacy—can be improved by observing others skilled in the initiation process (Nadler, Thompson, & van Boven, 2003) and by undertaking more favorable negotiations to build up confidence and motivation to initiate, the ability to recognize negotiable situations is perhaps more challenging. Some authors have argued that everything is negotiable (Cohen, 1980), and certainly such a change in attitude could help alert an individual to more opportunities. However, this is a skill that might require some time to develop or hone.

Furthermore, practitioners should be aware that skill alone is not a sufficient condition for initiating in negotiations. Unless coupled with motivation, skill will remain inactive. Although recognizing opportunities in negotiations can enhance outcomes, the perceived extent of capabilities will ultimately affect the initiation decision. Even capable individuals that recognize opportunities for maximizing gains by initiating negotiations may not fully capitalize on this benefit unless they are highly motivated. Failing to seize such opportunities in work settings, for example, individuals may experience discomfort and stress, which could result in intrapersonal conflicts and deviant behavior with impact on performance and satisfaction. Recognizing that all parties can sometimes lose if an individual fails to initiate, counterparts might want to explore ways of helping negotiators with this process. As suggested by this study, the requesting phase, in particular, could benefit from a counterpart's attention to a party's lack of motivation to do more than engage his or her counterpart. By asking questions or providing other prompts, for example, a counterpart might be able to coax a negotiator into making a request that could benefit all.

Limitations and Future Research

As with other research of this type, this study has some limitations that might form the basis for future work. First, the scenarios employed in this study, drawn from Ames (2008), presented the diversity necessary for our analysis of ability and motivation: a salary negotiation, a request for assistance while under a deadline, and a disagreement within a strategic planning team. As there are many situational factors that can potentially influence one's motivation to initiate a negotiation (e.g., counterpart's demeanor, time pressure, public-private venue), future research might seek to isolate a subset of these factors. This includes relative power, which can influence initiation intentions and behavior (Magee et al., 2007; Small et al., 2007).

Second, the participants in this study were students in Greece taking graduate negotiation courses. As culture might contribute to the perceived appropriateness or inappropriateness of initiating negotiations (Volkema, 2012), it would be worthwhile expanding the sample to include other cultures. Replication of these findings would increase the external generalizability, whereas the opposite would elevate the role of culture as a significant moderator.

Third, this study reported significant findings generally in line with what had been hypothesized. However, caution needs to be exercised in interpreting these results, particularly as they relate to causal relationships between the variables examined. Future studies might employ other experimental designs to affirm causality.

Finally, although this study examined three phases of initiating a negotiation, two of these phases—requesting and optimizing—also can occur during the middle and latter stages of a negotiation

(e.g., asking why a deadline is important, proposing a break or timeout from the negotiation, requesting that a settled issue be re-opened). Future research might be conducted to determine how ability and motivation affect requesting and optimizing during later stages of negotiation as well.

Conclusion

The current study is one of the few efforts in the negotiation literature to empirically test the effect of motivation (self-efficacy) in strengthening or attenuating the prediction of initiating in negotiations by the ability to recognize negotiable opportunities. The initiation process is fundamental to bargaining and negotiation, which in turn are essential to one's personal and organizational success. With the globalization of world markets and the introduction of new communication technologies, negotiation is now more important and more complicated than ever. By better understanding the factors that influence the initiation process, practitioners and scholars can improve the likelihood of negotiations both starting and ending favorably.

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Appendix 1

Scenario A: Imagine that you are negotiating with a small, but growing company about the terms of their job offer to you. The human resources department has informed you of your likely salary, based on what the previous person in this position earned. The salary might be acceptable to you, but it is considerably lower than what you know similar people make in similar positions (20–30% lower). The job is your top choice, but you were expecting a much higher salary. If you want to negotiate a higher salary, the human resources representative indicates that you must contact the company's vice president of administration by tomorrow. You don't know if the company is considering other individuals for this position.

Rank the following four responses in terms of how likely you would be to use them. Give a "1" to the response you would be most likely to use, and a "4" for the response you would be least likely to use.

_____ You tell the human resources representative that you will accept the salary, and you do not contact the vice president of administration.

_____ You call the vice president of administration to talk about the position, hoping that he will make a better offer without you raising the issue.

_____ You call the vice president of administration to request a salary that is 20% higher than what the human resources department mentioned.

_____ You call the vice president of administration to request a salary that is 30% higher than what the human resources department mentioned.

Note: Alternatives are listed above in the following order: (a) no engagement of a counterpart, (b) engagement without making a request, (c) engagement with a suboptimal request, and (d) engagement with an optimized request. However, the order of alternatives was randomized for participants.

Appendix 2

Scenario B: Imagine that you are working in a consulting firm and are preparing a series of company profiles for an important client. A freelance graphics artist has been taking the raw text and figures you have been sending by e-mail and creating the presentation-ready profile documents. Each profile takes about an hour to complete. The freelancer sent you what he thought was the final profile and said he was planning to take a few much-needed days off. But you just realized there are 10 more profiles to do. You don't know what happened, or who, if anyone, is to blame, but the e-mail you sent to him with this material didn't get through. You have 24 hr before everything needs to be ready. It is possible that your company's internal graphics artists could help, but they are often slow and unreliable.

Rank the following four responses in terms of how likely you would be to use them. Give a "1" to the response you would be most likely to use, and a "4" for the response you would be least likely to use.

_____ You decide not to contact the freelancer.

_____ You thank the freelancer for his work and wish him a good break. You mention that you may have your internal graphics department complete some additional profiles that need immediate attention.

_____ You thank the freelancer for his work and explain the situation to him. You tell him that you'd like him to help, and you offer to pay 50% extra for the 10 profiles.

_____ You thank the freelancer for his work and explain the situation to him. You tell him that you'd like him to help, and you offer to pay the regular rate for the 10 profiles.

Note: Alternatives are listed above in the following order: (a) no engagement of a counterpart, (b) engagement without making a request, (c) engagement with a suboptimal request, and (d) engagement with an optimized request. However, the order of alternatives was randomized for participants.

Appendix 3

Scenario C: Imagine that you are a member of a five-person strategic planning group. At the first meeting of the group, the discussion is focused on potential new markets to enter. One of the members of the group begins to strongly advocate entering a new country with your current products. He goes on for a few minutes very energetically and then concludes, "This is a huge opportunity just waiting for us. We would be idiots not to pursue this." You remember that you and a subordinate did a quick analysis of this same country's market a year ago. Although the market appeared to be sizable and growing somewhat quickly, you discovered that the regulatory obstacles were significant and that the competitive response would be disastrous. You also saw major challenges in product distribution. Consequently, short-term success would be difficult in your opinion, and a potential waste of considerable resources better invested elsewhere. The group member continues advocating for the market, repeating with intensity, "Seriously, we would be fools to let this slip away."

Rank the following four responses in terms of how likely you would be to use them. Give a "1" to the response you would be most likely to use, and a "4" for the response you would be least likely to use.

_____ You hold back and say nothing, hoping that the truth about the market will come out.

_____ You say, "I can see why this market could look attractive from the outside, especially given its growth. However, there is a lot at stake here."

_____ You say, "A while back I looked into this opportunity. I identified multiple barriers that made this opportunity look unattractive. We need to discuss this a bit more."

_____ You say, "I looked at this a while back, and found multiple barriers. Based on that analysis, this opportunity could be a big mistake. Unless we have a thorough analysis first, I won't sign off on any strategic plan."

Note: Alternatives are listed above in the following order: (a) no engagement of a counterpart, (b) engagement without making a request, (c) engagement with a suboptimal request, and (d) engagement with an optimized request. However, the order of alternatives was randomized for participants.

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