

Communication in Negotiations: Manipulative Techniques, Openness, and the Role of Positive Orientation*

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Abstract

The negotiation process relies on communication, which operates across two main dimensions: open communication and manipulative techniques. While existing literature has examined the impact of positive, negative, and neutral emotions on negotiations, the specific relationship between positive orientation and these two communication dimensions had not been previously investigated. To address this gap, this article investigates how positive orientation relates to the use of both manipulative techniques and open communication during negotiations.

The study gathered data in 2026 from 111 students at the Faculty of Law and Economics at the University of Zielona Góra who had completed a negotiation course consisting of lectures and workshops. Two research tools were used: the TMOK scale (Kleka and Kowalczyk, 2018) to measure negotiation metacompetences regarding open communication and manipulative techniques, and the Polish adaptation of the Positivity Scale (P-scale; Caprara et al., 2012; Laguna et al., 2011) to assess positive orientation.

The study revealed a high level of positive orientation among the respondents, while the TMOK questionnaire analysis showed a clear division in their negotiation preferences. The open communication strategy was dominant, representing a widely accepted standard within the group. In contrast, the use of manipulative techniques showed strong polarization, with some individuals completely rejecting manipulation and others demonstrating a high willingness to use it. Survey findings also indicated that a positive orientation does not demonstrate a strong correlation with a tendency to engage in open dialogue during negotiation processes.

Keywords: negotiations, communication, positive orientation

Introduction

The negotiation process is based on communication (Schoop et al. 2010). The parties communicate with one another in order to reach an agreement: they make offers, counterproposals, justify their positions, etc. (Schoop, 2021; cf.: Weingart, Olekalns, 2004). The model developed by Kleka and Kowalczyk (2018) assumes the existence of two dimensions of communication in negotiations: open communication and communication based on manipulative negotiation techniques. The first dimension features skills such as effective argumentation, active listening, and trust-building, whereas the second involves ethically ambiguous behaviours. Both dimensions can be measured using the Scale for Assessing the Functional Aspect of Negotiation Metacompetences, known in Polish as TMOK.

Kleka and Kowalczyk (2018) correlated TMOK with the Belief in Life as a Zero-Sum Game Scale by Różycka-Tran and Wojciszke (2010), and with the MACH IV scale for measuring Machiavellianism by Christie and Geis (1970). Meanwhile, Seiler et al. (2025) examined the relationship between TMOK and generalized self-efficacy. However, a review of the literature revealed that no studies had examined the relationship between the dimensions of communication in negotiations - as measured by the scale designed to assess the functional aspect of negotiation metacompetences and positive orientation.

The influence of positive affect on the process and outcome of negotiation in an integrative bargaining task was examined by Carnevale and Isen (1986). Barry and Oliver (1996), in turn, sought to advance thinking about affective processes in two-party negotiation. The impact of positive, negative, and neutral emotions in negotiations has also been examined (Van Kleef et al., 2004; Brooks, Schweitzer, 2011; Kopelman et al., 2006; Lelieveld et al., 2012; Rothman, 2011).

Positive orientation is a consistent tendency to focus on the positive aspects of life, oneself, and the future (Caprara 2009; 2012). Individuals with high positive orientation experience joy and satisfaction more frequently, while their negative emotions are milder and less persistent. According to the authors of the article, it seems interesting to examine the relationships between this stable personality trait (rather than momentary emotions) and the dimensions of communication in negotiations.

The purpose of this article is to answer the following research question: what is the relationship between positive orientation and the use of manipulative techniques versus open communication in negotiations?

Literature Review

Open vs. manipulative communication in negotiations

The ability to conduct negotiations requires a wide range of competences. According to Kowalczyk (2013, p. 297; cf. Kozina, 2015), these include: knowledge (e.g., familiarity with negotiation principles, feedback on outcomes achieved during negotiations, sensory observations regarding people, objects, and places relevant to negotiation results), attitudes toward negotiation (how negotiation is perceived - as an exciting game, fair play, or as an unwanted obligation or an attempt at manipulation), characteristics and abilities (e.g., assertive communication, self-confidence, determination in pursuing a goal, personality traits, information management, negotiation styles). As frequently noted in the literature, negotiations are fundamentally dependent on effective communication competence (cf.: Fisher et al., 2011; Putnam, Roloff, 1992; Schoop et al., 2010; Weingart, Olekalns, 2004).

The literature identifies two fundamental dimensions of communication in negotiations: open communication and communication based on manipulative techniques (Kowalczyk, 2013; Kleka, Kowalczyk, 2015; Kleka, Kowalczyk, 2018). Kleka and Kowalczyk (2018) further systematized the determinants of the choice between open communication and manipulation-based communication in negotiations, dividing them into three categories. The first category consists of internal factors. Open communication results from a prosocial attitude (expressed as a willingness to cooperate) and requires high communication competences, such as active listening, balanced responses to received messages, and identifying communication errors. In contrast, manipulative tactics are the domain of individuals exhibiting a pro-self-attitude (expressed through individualism and competition) who perceive the world as a zero-sum game and accept ethically ambiguous behaviour in negotiations. The second group encompasses external factors. An organisational culture that promotes fair play and focuses on long-term cooperation with stakeholders fosters openness. Conversely, a culture that prioritizes quantitative results and adopts a 'the end justifies the means' approach - based on competition and high-performance pressure - stimulates manipulative behaviour. The third category includes relational factors. Openness is the foundation of integrative negotiations, which are oriented toward maximizing the gains of both parties. Manipulation, on the other hand, typically emerges in distributive negotiations and is often a reaction to either the opponent's manipulative behaviour or their acquiescence to manipulation.

Positive orientation

The continuous development of positive psychology has enabled researchers to identify numerous variables associated with well-being and optimal functioning. For example, the 'Handbook of Positive Psychology' (Snyder, Lopez, 2002, cited in: Miciuk et al., 2016) brought together nearly 40 concepts from various psychological domains under the broader concept of well-being. In 2009, G.V. Caprara proposed a concept of positive orientation, which 'has been the name given to what life satisfaction, self-esteem and optimism share in common, likely a pervasive mode of facing reality, reflecting upon experience, framing events and processing personal and interpersonal experiences along time and across life circumstances' (Caprara, 2009, p. 48). Positivity is conceptualized as capturing a general positive cognitive orientation toward oneself, one's life, and one's future (Caprara et al., 2017). It is an important predisposition that significantly shapes individuals' view of life and facilitates the realization of their potential (Caprara, 2009). Furthermore, 'positive orientation was a strong predictor of measures tapping depression, positive and negative affectivity, quality of friendship and health, as well as others indicators

of individual optimal functioning at school and at work' (Alessandri, 2008, Caprara et al., 2009, cited in: Caprara, 2009).

Caprara et al. (2012) have developed a dedicated tool for measuring positive orientation. They justified its creation by highlighting that in earlier research, POS has been assessed by estimating the common factor scores of self-esteem, optimism, and life satisfaction using various scales (Caprara et al., 2010; cf.: Diener et al., 1985; Rosenberg, 1965; Scheier et al., 1994). However, that approach presented specific limitations. As Caprara et al. (2012, p.702) noted, 'First, POS was only indirectly measured through other instruments originally conceived to assess other constructs. Second, it required using a larger number of items than an instrument specifically designed to assess POS'.

The positive orientation has been widely utilized in empirical research across various domains, including social, clinical, and educational psychology (cf.: Dymecka et al., 2023; Fredriksson, Wahlstedt Corméry, 2015; Ghanizadeh, 2022; Jin, Dewaele, 2018; Kiński, Kiński, 2024; Kupcewicz et al., 2019; Kupcewicz et al., 2022). In the context of employees and organisations, research has explored the relationship between positive orientation and several factors, including: generalized self-efficacy (Oleś et al., 2013), job performance and organisational citizenship behaviours (Alessandri et al., 2012), job satisfaction (Park et al., 2021), work engagement (Łaguna, Razmus, 2019), job burnout (Kupcewicz, Józwick, 2019) as well as resiliency and perceived social support (Skalski, 2020).

Open vs. Manipulative Communication and Positive Orientation

Available research has examined, among other things, the relationships between personality traits and negotiation behaviours (Liu et al. 2005; Yiu, Lee 2011), as well as the role of effective communication and communication competences (McCroskey et al., 2001; Pilch, 2008; Sims, 2017; Teven et al., 2006).

Meta-analysis of negotiation studies revealed a significant role for individual difference variables (Sharma, Bottom, Elfenbein 2013). A relationship between emotional intelligence and negotiators' ability to create value has also been demonstrated (der Foo et al., 2004; cf. Smithey Fulmer, Barry, 2004; Kelly, Kaminskienė, 2016). In addition, the effects of various types of emotions in negotiations were analysed (Carnevale, Isen, 1986; Barry, Oliver, 1996; Van Kleef et al., 2004; Brooks, Schweitzer, 2011; Kopelman et al. 2006; Lelieveld et al., 2012; Rothman, 2011). For example, N. B. Rothman (2011) demonstrated that expressed emotional ambivalence elicits greater dominance in observers than expressed happiness or anger.

Based on the findings of the literature review, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H₁: There is a strong correlation between open communication in negotiations and a positive orientation.

H₂: There is a strong correlation between communication based on manipulative techniques in negotiations and a positive orientation.

Methods

In the present study, the two scales validated in Poland were used. The first, developed by Kleka and Kowalczyk (2018), is designed to study the functional aspect of negotiation metacompetences (TMOK). It consists of two subscales that measure two types of communicative behaviour occurring in the negotiation process. The first diagnoses the tendency to use open communication (OK) in negotiations, whilst the second assesses the tendency to apply manipulative negotiation techniques (TM). Both contain eight statements. Respondents rated each statement using a 5-point Likert scale (1 – never, 2 – very rarely, 3 – sometimes, 4 – often, 5 – very often). In our own research, we also used the Polish adaptation of the Positivity Scale (P-scale) (Caprara et al. 2012; Łaguna et al. 2011). It consists of 8 statements. Responses are given on a five-point scale (from 1 – strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree). One statement is reverse-coded (no. 4). The score is the sum of the points; The higher the score, the higher the level of positive orientation.

In 2026, both research tools, supplemented with demographic questions, were distributed in paper form along with instructions to 111 students of the Faculty of Law and Economics at the University of Zielona Góra who had completed a course in negotiations, comprising lectures and workshop-style sessions. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous.

Statistical analysis of the data was carried out using Statistica software. Internal consistency was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951). The following values were obtained: $\alpha=0.693563281$ (TMOK) and $\alpha=0.740936676$ (P-scale).

The performed analyses demonstrated that the variables were not distributed close to normal. This was confirmed by the results of the Shapiro-Wilk tests (Shapiro, Wilk, 1965). As a result, subsequent analyses of variables were conducted using non-parametric statistics. The correlation analysis was carried out using Spearman's rho coefficient.

The respondents were students on five master's degree programmes: national security (8.11%), economics (9.01%), finance and accounting (20.72%), logistics (35.14%) and management (12.61%); participants in post-graduate management courses (14.41%) also took part in the survey. They were studying full-time (39.64%) or externally (60.36%). Over half (54.95%) were women (one respondent left the gender question unanswered). The average age of the respondents was 27.9 years.

Results

In the P-scale, the results were analysed to determine the overall level of positive orientation among the study participants. Each respondent could score between 8 and 40 points, with 24 representing the theoretical midpoint of the scale. Statistical analysis revealed that the respondents' mean level of positive orientation was $M = 31.05$ with a standard deviation of $SD = 3.86$. The obtained mean lies significantly above the neutral point, indicating a high level of positive orientation within the analysed group. The low standard deviation indicates relatively low intra-group variability and a high degree of homogeneity (uniformity) within the sample as measured by the P-scale.

The distribution of scores ranged from a minimum of $Min = 20$ to a maximum of $Max = 38$. Notably, the lowest scored result ($Min=20$) lies slightly below the theoretical midpoint, suggesting the presence of a few individuals with a mildly negative (pessimistic) orientation. Furthermore, the majority of the participants (approximately 68%) scored between 27.19 and 34.91 points.

An analysis of the data collected using the TMOK questionnaire reveals a clear division in the negotiation preferences of the study group. The dimension of open communication (OK) is dominant in the respondents' strategy ($M = 31.80$; $SD = 3.65$). This score represents nearly 80% of the maximum possible points on this scale, which indicates a relatively strong tendency toward transparent and direct dialogue. The relatively small range of extreme scores ($Min = 22$; $Max = 39$) suggests that openness is treated as a widely accepted standard in this group.

The situation is different in the case of manipulative techniques (TM). Although the mean score falls around the middle of the scale ($M = 20.52$, representing 51.3% of the maximum value), the key indicator here is the elevated standard deviation ($SD = 4.73$) and the significant spread of values ($Min = 10$; $Max = 34$). This indicates a strong polarization within the study group. Some respondents completely dismiss manipulation as a tool for exerting influence, while others show a very high willingness to use it in the negotiation process.

To determine whether gender influences the use of manipulative techniques, open communication, and positive orientation, a Mann-Whitney U test was conducted. The results clearly indicate a lack of statistically significant differences between men and women across all examined variables. Gender does not differentiate the level of positive orientation ($p = .82462$), the preference for open communication ($p = .51751$), or the propensity to use manipulative techniques ($p = .22542$).

A Spearman's rank correlationⁱ analysis showed no strong relationship between positive orientation and either manipulative techniques or open communication. For manipulative techniques (TM), the correlation coefficient was $r_s = .20454$ (weak relationship). This value lies exactly on the lower threshold of a weak correlation. This indicates that a higher level of positive orientation is associated with only a extremely weak tendency to use manipulation more frequently. In relation to the open communication (OK) dimension, the coefficient was $r_s = .19945$. Based on the established criteria, this result falls strictly into the category of no or negligible correlation. This means that a positive orientation does not show a strong correlation with the participants' tendency to engage in open dialogue during negotiations.

Discussion and conclusions

Open and manipulative communication represent two extreme approaches to negotiating. The first promotes cooperation, ethical standards and the stability of relationships, whilst the second focuses on achieving objectives through the strategic use of an advantage. Although open communication demands greater engagement and advanced interpersonal skills, it fosters sustainable relationships. In contrast, manipulative communication, despite its short-term efficacy, poses significant long-term reputational and relational risks. Therefore, it is recommended to integrate open communication strategies within organisations focused on sustainable development and long-term cooperation.

Meta-analysis of negotiation studies revealed a significant role for individual difference variables (Sharma et al., 2013). It is also known that some personality traits can be related to the way we communicate (Sims, 2017). The presented research has shown that, in the context of negotiations, a positive orientation has no significant relationship with the use of manipulative techniques or open communication. Within the surveyed group, positive orientation is not a predictor of the adopted communication style. Preferences for open communication or manipulation develop independently of an individual's level of positive orientation (therefore, both hypotheses were rejected). Nevertheless, while positivity orientation does not prevent negotiators from adopting manipulative strategies, affective states during the interaction remain highly influential. Research by Carnevale and Isen (1986) have demonstrated, that positive affect can overcome the competitive processes and poor outcomes normally observed in face-to-face integrative bargaining. Negative emotions also play a significant role. Negotiators who experience anxiety expect worse outcomes, submit lower offers, and react more quickly to offers (Brooks, Schweitzer, 2011). The mechanism behind this is conceptualized by Barry and Oliver (1996), whose dynamic model highlights 'the role of moods and emotions that bargainers bring to and evolve within the negotiation encounter. The model illustrates how affect states influence (and in some cases are influenced by) one's decision to negotiate, selection of an opponent, formulation of expectations and offers, choice of tactics used within bargaining, economic and social-cognitive outcomes, and proclivity to comply with settlement terms'.

Finally, it should be noted that there are certain limitations to the research conducted. It was exclusively quantitative rather than qualitative and relied solely on respondents' statements. The sample size was small and comprised only students. The use of a questionnaire-based survey may have introduced common method bias. A better understanding of this issue would require more in-depth qualitative research and the use of techniques based on direct contact.

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ⁱ Interpretation of Spearman's rho: ≥ 0.70 (very strong relationship), 0.40-0.69 (strong relationship), 0.30-0.39 (moderate relationship), 0.20-0.29 (weak relationship), 0.01-0.19 (no or negligible relationship) (Dancey, Reidy, 2004).