

Usage of Virtual Communication Tools in Business Communication and Negotiation – A Factor of Increased Efficiency

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Abstract – the adaptation of new technologies and their proper usage in business negotiations is essential for further development of this field. With an analysis of face to face and e-negotiations and by utilizing a combination of research methods such as: experiment, survey and interviewing, this paper proves that the usage of virtual communication tools in business negotiations influences the individual perception of the negotiation process, influences the ethics of the negotiators and the mutual trust, but also demonstrates the need of getting these tools professionally closer to the Macedonian business negotiators that lack sufficient interest for investing in such technologies.

Keywords – Business communication, virtual negotiations, traditional negotiations, virtual communication tools.

1. Introduction

Through everyday life and interaction among the people, various situations come up from which we can learn a lot. Of course if we properly examine them. Speech, verbal or nonverbal is used as a tool in that mutual communication. In these diverse situations while communicating, emphasized are those with a goal, structured, focused, planned and represent some kind of a competition. These competitions are actually negotiations on a basic level part of the everyday life of people who negotiate or bargain for buying a car, an apartment, offices etc. If we look at this from an organizational perspective, the good inter-organizational and intra-organizational communication is essential for the success of the organization [8]. Communications between organizations and internal communication presented in a shape of bargaining is area which is highly popular for scientific researches. These business bargains and negotiations are an important segment of every day functioning of organizations and they influence their strategies and activities. Actually, business communications and negotiations are specific area which is the main topic in this paper with special focus on new world trends and their usage in Republic of Macedonia.

Having in mind the increased usage of virtual communication tools in everyday life and more important in the business world, these types of researches are highly important and useful for the practical implementation and following of new trends in Republic of Macedonia. Globalization of the market requires constant changes and upgrades in the ways of communicating, especially having in mind the increasing number of virtual organizations with geography dispersed employees. In that manner, the perfection of systems that facilitate communication is towards improvement of the communication process and more effective and successful organizations, specifically those that work on distance (geographically dispersed).

Finally, the aim is taking the advantages of virtual ways of communication with losing the disadvantages that come up from the physical absence. This furthermore is reviewed with focus on better negotiation outcomes, shorter duration of the process and following established ethical codecs in the business world and all of that supported with the usage of virtual communication tools.

2. Theoretical and hypothesis framework

Negotiations as a process follow the constant changes in the business world and adjust according to the modernization and by adding new elements. As a process which is part of the everyday functioning of the organizations in the business world it represents a challenge on organizational and management level. This challenge for the management team is particular, because the outcomes of the various negotiations influence the organizations itself and its functioning, but also the managers and their position. In both cases the influence is both direct and indirect depending on the situation. With the creation of virtual organizations, virtual teams and the development of technology a need arises for substituting the traditional ways of communication with new and modern in which the physical absence wouldn't be an obstacle [9]. In addition, aside the span of the geographical disparity as an obstacle, with the development of technology, other advantages that virtual way of negotiating and

communicating has, were enforced. The current situation speaks about representation of both negotiation types that are not mutually exclusive (traditional/face to face and virtual/e-negotiations) and which type is used depends on the needs and on the situation. For example the organizations that work virtually most commonly use virtual negotiations regardless of whether the negotiations are inter-organizational or intra-organizational [7]. Despite them, the traditional organizations most commonly negotiate face to face. Having this in mind, it should be noted that both types of organizations don't use exclusively only one type of negotiating. Virtual negotiations unlike face to face negotiations introduce usage of virtual communication tools. Hence, derive the fundamental differences that differentiate virtual from face to face negotiation with implication of the fact that during the virtual negotiations the negotiators communicate electronically and depending of the type of the used virtual communication tools not always look at each other's body language[1].

In general, virtual negotiations in the business world represent *"a process of decision making that requires electronic agreement that satisfies the needs of two or more parties in the presence of limited information and conflicting affinities."*[2] According to this, but taking into consideration the wider theoretical conceptualizations of virtual/electronic business negotiations it can be concluded that *it is an interactive process between two or more parties/individuals who make decisions that affect either side and the process is conducted via usage of virtual communication tools as a medium.* By this the process is facilitated with usage of virtual communication tools that influence the process and the outcomes that derive from it. Basically, with the defining of the virtual negotiations we reveal its core – the usage of medium (technology) in and as a part of the process. The focus of the scientific researches in the negotiations (face to face and virtual) area with the increased usage of IT is mainly on the influence that has inclusion and usage of technology as a medium in the process. Looking at this from a wider technological aspect, electronic communications include usage of mediums and ways of communication like: telephone, e-mail, video and audio conference, web-conference, chatting etc. Each way used in a business context facilitates the communication between individuals that in the moment are not at the same place. The point in inclusion of a medium in the negotiations process is to facilitate the communication so it is extremely important to choose the adequate communication medium for each situation [11]. Practically, this would mean to take into consideration all advantages and disadvantages of each medium as well as what

kind of communication it ensures (synchronous and asynchronous).

Consequently to that, if for example the speed of decision making is essential, the synchronous way of communication (like chatting or video, audio and web conferencing) is adequate. These, synchronous ways of communication and negotiation that include facilitating medium, enable instant exchange of information and faster decision making than the asynchronous way of communication and negotiation (like e-mail). On the other hand, the usage of e-mail for negotiation enables longer period for consideration of the negotiating parties which opens possibilities for longer and extensive negotiations. If the time for agreement is not essential, the e-mail negotiations are adequate, but we need to highlight the possibility of unnecessary delay of the negotiations.

Synchronous negotiations with usage of communication medium, because of its nature are closer to the face to face negotiations. Affinity of these two different negotiation processes is in the alternately exchange of information and arguments which happens both in face to face negotiations and synchronous virtual negotiation regardless of the used medium. This exchange is present also in the negotiations via chat and conference synchronous negotiation. However, if we compare negotiation processes in terms of used medium we can clearly see that video/audio conferencing is closer to face to face negotiations, mostly because the fact that during video conferencing we can observe the body language of the opposite party, which is not the case when we use chatting software.

One of the scientific researches in this field which addressed a comparison of synchronous and asynchronous negotiations proved that synchronous negotiations from a behavioristic point of view shows increased usage of emotion, competitive spirit and not so friendly attitude. On the other hand asynchronous negotiations had more frequency in solving problems. Having this in mind, this research suggests usage of negotiation support systems for asynchronous type of negotiations as tools for facilitation of collaboration and problem solving [3].

In this respect the author Sotillo noted that in asynchronous virtual negotiations a more formal language is used.

In the theory, authors in general as comparison points between synchronous and asynchronous virtual negotiations address language style, complexity, formality, accuracy and functionality discourse. By that, they reveal that in the opportunities for interaction in asynchronous virtual negotiations which are easily recognizable lie characteristic negotiations strategies and structures [4].

In the business world, the most important component of the cooperation between partners is building healthy business relations. Each successful manager thinks strategically and creates long-term cooperation with business partners that grows in a network of traditional partners among which there is mutual trust. Mutual trust between the managers is crucial, especially during the negotiation process for continuing the existing cooperation or starting a new cooperation. The differences in creation of long-term relations among virtual and face to face negotiation are very visible.

The trend of increased usage of technology and disperse business cooperation highlights the possible difficulties in the creation of stable and long-term business partnerships. This shows the psychological moment of the physical presence of business subjects which through usage of formal and non-formal meetings for socializing facilitate the process of gaining trust between the subjects represented by the organization's managers. What is a problematic moment in virtual negotiations is the lack of non-formal socialization among the negotiators, but this can be overcome by non-formal virtual hangouts and online discussions. Of course the level, the way and all in all gaining trust and establishing cooperation among the negotiators depends on the communication medium that is used in the process [10].

In terms of ethical and unethical behavior, the visibility of the body language influences the recognition of these types of behaviors. In face to face negotiations we can see the body language of negotiators, but in virtual negotiations this is only possible when we use video conferencing or similar tool. However, it should be noted that the body language can easily be abused from experienced negotiators, but also the whole discussion and negotiating process for manipulating the opposite negotiating party.

As we can see from the mentioned above, the concept of virtual negotiations was introduced because of the globalization and the increasing need for disperse communication and negotiations. Starting from the first reason for creation of the virtual negotiations concept we acknowledge their first advantage – enabled negotiations process when there is no physical presence of the partners. If we deconstruct this advantage we see obvious derived advantages such as saving financial resources for travel, per diem, food and accommodation. This is not possible without the virtual ways of negotiating. Here we can see also the advantage of shorter overall time for negotiating, because we don't lose time on travelling from one place to another.

Different scientific researches underline the advantages of virtual negotiations and compare the

similarities and differences between face to face and virtual negotiations. Most common elaborated advantages of virtual negotiations are: more effective outcomes; lower level of conflict behavior and more effective conflict solving; concise, fast and increased focus of the whole process, as well as equal opportunities for experienced and unexperienced negotiators when the communication medium does not enable visual representation of the body language which prevents tricks and unethical behavior from more experienced negotiators [5]. For example the advantages and possible disadvantages coming from the lack of body language are visible and possible only when using e-mail, instant chat software or any kind of text based communication medium.

The absence of the parties and their body language can influence the clearness of the sent messages and their proper interpretation. This is one of the disadvantages of virtual negotiations that can come up when using text based communication medium, but can be overcome with video conferencing in which the body language is visible which leaves only the positive sides of virtual negotiation.*

** This theoretical analysis and scientific-research that are part of this paper are focused on the advantages and disadvantages of these two types of negotiations with a special note to advantages that virtual negotiations have over face to face negotiations and the existing opportunities for their exploitation.*

This paper uses a scientific-research that follows one main (general) hypothesis and three separate (individual) hypotheses. With this framework, the research should confirm or deny the hypothesis and by that to determinate whether usage of virtual communication tools influences the negotiation process and its outcomes. In addition this framework is mainly affirmative and has a structure that provides clear and undoubtable confirmation or denying of the hypothesis.

The **main hypothesis** that this research confirms or denies with the analysis of the data below is: *usage of virtual communication tools in business negotiations enriches the process, outcomes and increases its efficacy.* From this hypothesis derive the three individual ones by whom with usage of independent and dependent variables the main hypothesis is confirmed or denied. These individual hypotheses are:

- **Individual hypothesis 1a** – *With usage of virtual communication tools in business negotiations the needed time for reaching an agreement decreases;*
Independent variable: Usage of virtual communication tools in business negotiations.

Dependent variable: Needed time for reaching an agreement.

- **Individual hypothesis 1b** – *Negotiators are more satisfied with the final outcome while negotiating virtually;*

Independent variable: Usage of virtual communication tools in business negotiations;

Dependent variable: Level of satisfaction from the final outcome of the negotiations.

- **Individual hypothesis 1c** – *Face to face negotiators apply unethical behavior much more than virtual negotiators in the negotiation process.*

Independent variable: Usage of virtual communication tools in business negotiations.

Dependent variable: Level of applied unethical behavior.

3. Problem, subject and final beneficiaries

Starting from the current determined situation in the field of negotiations via usage of virtual communication tools as facilitators, the problems that are addressed with this research are clearly visible. In fact, the general problem addressed in this research was determined by reviewing the current situation in this field in Republic of Macedonia. Bearing this in mind, the research has a focus on the following **problem:** *Pursuing of new trends in business negotiations (communications) and level of usage of virtual communication tools.* With the help of this problem focus, the research represents the reasons for introducing modern communication tools of virtual character in business negotiations as well as the approach of negotiators towards this field in Republic of Macedonia.

On the other hand **subject** of the research is: *The influence of usage of virtual communication tools on efficiency of business negotiations.*

Both the problem and the subject of this research are obtained after a pilot research, analysis and detection of the situation in Republic of Macedonia. All of this is put in the context of the general topic of this paper with a goal of absolving of the needed data, establishment of fact and representation of the real situation which furthermore would give contribution to the process of getting closer the new technologies and trends to the Macedonian businessman.

This research has many goals to fulfill. When combined they create one general goal: *presenting the advantages of virtual negotiations and discovering the reasons for presence or absence of*

this type of negotiations with usage of virtual communication tools. Accordingly, what this paper aims is *getting the new trends in negotiations closer to the Macedonian negotiator, as well as using this paper in the business and scientific sphere in Republic of Macedonia as a resource and tool for future development.* The **final beneficiaries** of this research are *researchers, managers, directors and owners of companies and organizations.*

4. Research methodology and used instruments

From methodological aspect, this scientific-research is classical descriptive-analysis study with limited application of experimentation. In its design includes several phases: recruitment, training, testing and conducting the experiment, survey, interviews and data collection and processing.

In this research 3 methods/approaches are used: experiment, questionnaires and interviews. Each method had his appropriate instrument that was chosen for obtaining detailed and relevant data from which conclusions and recommendations (in line with the topic) can be easily derived.

The questionnaire used in this research has a framework of several groups of questions with a basis of previously used questionnaire DEP – 2004 by the author Dragan Gruevski. Combining the groups of questions, the questionnaire ensures comparability and discovering similarities and differences between virtual and face to face negotiations. In terms of perceptions and opinions of virtual negotiators, the group of questions/claims is direct and concrete and measures the level of agreement of each respondent with each of the questions/claims. This measurement is made by using a different scale for respondent's agreement according to the question group. In that manner, in one group measurement is 1 – 7 and in other 1 – 5 (where 1 is totally disagree and 5 is totally agree). Some of the questions also provide a qualitative answer.

For the interview an original protocol was created by the name *Structured interview TVP/2012.* It contains 9 questions and was conducted on interviewees such as managers, owners, directors which negotiate on a daily basis with usage of virtual communication tools. During the interview a recorder was used and when that was not accepted a report was written. The interview as a tool was used for qualitative supplement and analysis.

In terms of the experiment, it consisted two main phases: initial and experimental. For completion, the participants were previously trained and leveled by the degree of knowledge and individual perception in two equal groups (in terms of knowledge, perceptivity and number), control and experimental.

In addition a *protocol for observation P – 3* was used in which participants noted the perception in terms of frequencies of used tactics from the authors Raider & Coleman AEIOU model and the negotiation phases according to the PIANO model from the author Micic. This protocol was fulfilled by the participants (observers) and used to derive data that showed individual perceptions of each participant.

5. Timeframe and research flow

The timeframe of the research was 14 months from the end of 2012 till the end of 2013. As above stated it consisted 7 phases with deadlines for completion that from one side contained recruitment, training and experimenting and on the other side provided relevant feedback from Macedonian negotiators.

Overall, the population consisted people from the business sector in Republic of Macedonia (private, public and civic sector) from which 140 were recruited in the survey, 6 in the interview process and 18 in the experiment.

The sample of conducted questionnaires has two equal parts, one with 70 questionnaires conducted on sample of face to face negotiators and one with 70 questionnaires conducted on virtual negotiators. The sample overall was diverse by gender, city, sector and work experience. With this sample, negotiators from 12 different cities and over 50 organizations from Republic of Macedonia were covered and a relevant comparability was enabled.

Interviews that were used for bigger qualitative contribution to the research covered 6 participants from the high-level management of Macedonian organizations.

The experiment included 18 participants from which two were negotiating and 16 (divided in two equal groups) were observers.

6. Research results

Analysis of the results gained from the experiment follows the initial and the experimental phase. Students were divided into two groups, control and experimental. The control one observed the negotiation process face to face and the experimental one observed the process via communication medium. According to this follows the processing of the gained data.

*Initial phase

Each participant before it was adequately allocated in one of the groups participated in an initial observation process with a goal to level the equality of the groups. This leveling was conducted

to ensure equality between the two groups of participants in terms of statistically equal perceptions about the negotiation process, used strategies and tactics. At the same time for proving the similarities/differences in the assessment of the participants a t-test as a tool for statistical testing (confirm/negate) of hypotheses was used. Usage of this tool was needed for acquiring an answer for the following question: *“Is there a statistically significant difference in the assessment of the control group members (the group that observed the negotiation process face to face) versus the assessment of the experimental group members (the group that observed the negotiation process via usage of IT as communication medium)?”*

On the table 1.1 the results from the cross-sections are shown. Their amount is 0.28 with critical values of 2.36 for significance level 0.05 and 3.50 for significance level 0.01. This practically means that the values don't excel the border value and the differences between the cross-sections are not significant. From these results comes the answer of the previous question: *“There is no statistically significant difference in the assessment of the control group members versus the assessment of the experimental group members.”*

Table 1.1 Significance of differences in arithmetic means in groups – Initial phase – Evaluation of the differences in the participant's assessments

	$\alpha = 0.05$		$\alpha = 0.01$	
	Group I	Group II	Group I	Group II
Mean	17,875	22,125	17,875	22,125
Variance	2,410714	103,5536	2,4107143	103,5536
Observations	8	8	8	8
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0		0	
df	7		7	
t Stat	-1,16776		-1,167762	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0,140567		0,1405672	
t Critical one-tail	1,894579		2,9979516	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0,281134		0,2811343	

With this the composition of the groups was leveled in terms of assessments. This was statistically proven with the above presented t-test.

*Experimental phase

The experiment in general addressed the question: *“Does usage of IT as communication medium influences the individual perception in particular segments of the negotiation process?”* Concretizing this question in the experimental phase, the results from the control group were compared with the results from the experimental group in terms of perceptions of the negotiation process, especially in the strategic approaches and used tactics. It is necessary to note the fact that the experimental factor in the experiment whose influence is examined is the usage of IT for

observation of a negotiation process. From the conducted t-test it can be seen the existence of evidently high statistically significant difference between the assessments and perceptions of the control versus the experimental group. In this direction the gradually processed results showed the following:

- ✓ There is a statistically significant difference in the assessment and individual perception in terms of used negotiation tactics;
- ✓ There is a statistically significant difference in the assessment and individual perception in terms of the strategic approach of negotiators.

Hence, beside the general results in terms of overall assessments and perceptions of control versus experimental group shown on the table 1.2 below. According to this, there is a clear statistically significant difference in which the result of 0.0009 does not exceed the border value of 2.31 (for level of significance 0.05) and 3.36 (for level of significance of 0.01).

Table 1.2 Significance of differences in arithmetic means in groups – Experimental phase – Difference between general perceptions and assessments of the groups

	$\alpha = 0.05$		$\alpha = 0.01$	
	Group I	Group II	Group I	Group II
Mean	45,71428571	22,57142857	45,71428571	22,57142857
Variance	121,9047619	20,95238095	121,9047619	20,95238095
Observations	7	7	7	7
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0		0	
df	8		8	
t Stat	5,122889809		5,122889809	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0,000451983		0,000451983	
t Critical one-tail	1,859548038		2,896459448	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0,000903966		0,000903966	
t Critical two-tail	2,306004135		3,355387331	

With the help of these statistical data, calculations and test we come to the answer of the previous question: “Usage of IT as communication medium influences the individual perception in particular segments of the negotiation process.” Using different words, with usage of the experimental factor (in this case IT) the assessment of the experimental group participants in this experiment was influenced.

After all, this is noted in the raw data that shows higher and clearer assessments (sum of the control group results – 320; sum of the experimental group results – 158) of the group that observed the negotiation process face to face versus the group observing virtually.

Summarizing the results of the experiment, questionnaires and interviews, according to the previously established individual hypothesis and variables the following is shown:

- Individual hypothesis 1a – *With usage of virtual communication tools in business negotiations the needed time for reaching an agreement decreases.* This hypothesis is confirmed with the results gained from the opinions of each management and business level. In that manner the result and the question that was addressed by this hypothesis showed 55% positive and 19% neutral opinion in terms of whether respondents consider usage of virtual communication tools in the negotiation process as a **decreasing factor for needed time for reaching an agreement**. Also the interviewed respondents showed that top level management consider virtual negotiations as **time and resource saving**;

With usage of virtual communication tools (computer, tablet, video conferencing) the time needed for reaching an agreement decreases.

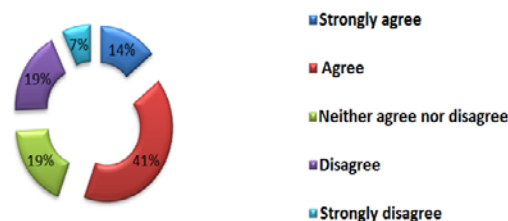


Figure 1 Results concerning time consumption

- Individual hypothesis 1b – *Negotiators are more satisfied with the final outcome while virtually negotiating.* This individual hypothesis cannot be fully confirmed or denied from the gained results of the respondent’s opinions. In these results a high percentage of 36% of the respondents showed neutral opinion with only 4% difference between the positive and the negative opinions (positive opinions were higher) in terms of whether the respondents are more satisfied of the outcomes when they are using virtual communication tools as a medium in the negotiation process.

Negotiating with usage of virtual communication tools (computer, tablet, video conferencing) will allow me (allows me) to be more satisfied from the negotiation's outcome.

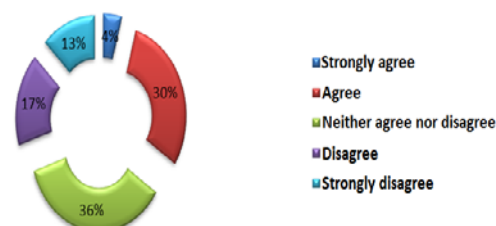


Figure 2. Results concerning outcome's satisfaction

- Individual hypothesis 1c–*Face to face negotiators apply unethical behaviour much more than virtual negotiators in the negotiation process.* This individual hypothesis is confirmed according to the gained results which show positive opinion of 54% and 26% of neutral opinion in terms of whether of the respondents acknowledge that **the face to face negotiators tend towards unethical behavior** in the negotiation process. The interviewed respondents also acknowledged that **unethical behavior is more common with experienced face to face negotiators** which easily recognize and utilize body language in communication, which can be, but doesn't have to be part of virtual negotiations.

With establishing a recording system while negotiating with usage of virtual communication tools (computer, tablet, video conferencing) the risk of unethical behaviour (lying, hiding facts etc.) from the opposite party decreases.

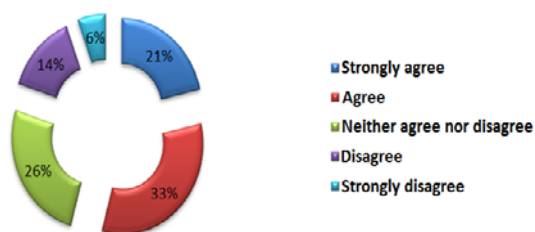


Figure 3 Results concerning usage of unethical behavior

Finally, from the current data it can be concluded that the general hypothesis following the individual ones is partially confirmed in the part of the speed and efficacy of negotiations (decreasing the time needed for reaching an agreement and saving recourses), as well as in terms of satisfaction of the whole process and results (from ethical perspective).

7. Conclusions

The negotiations in the business world in Republic of Macedonia and on global scale are everyday processes that are inevitable and worked on scientifically and pragmatically. This paper derives from the detected need for going deeper in scientific-research context about this topic. Following the gained results from the overall theoretical and research analysis, the partial confirmation of the previously established hypotheses can be concluded. These findings show the following:

- Usage of virtual communication tools in business negotiations influences the individual perception of the process. The previously established influence (backed up with statistical analysis) of IT as experimental factor shows reduced

perception and difficulties in assessments of the experimental group participants. From the previously stated we can conclude that usage of IT negatively influences the individual perception including the observation of the body language of the negotiators. The reasons that lead to this negative influence are mostly because of technical problems (especially problems with the internet connections), usage of non-formal communication tools instead of specialized software, as well as bad hardware solutions like usage of inappropriate microphones or speakers. Also, it is important to note that the results gained from the experiment are relevant having in mind the fact that the groups were preceding the experiment leveled by knowledge, attitudes, motivation and experience and by that leveled in terms of perception and assessments of the negotiation process;

- Usage of virtual communication tools in business negotiations reduces the time needed for reaching an agreement and in the same time saves time and recourses. This research emphasizes the reduced travel and per diem costs, as well as reduced physical absences of negotiators which increases the overall efficacy;
- Virtual negotiators tend to follow more the established ethical norms than face to face negotiators who tend to behave unethically, something that is more noticeable at the more experienced face to face negotiators;
- There is a lack of usage of professional systems/software for virtual negotiations. Mostly non-formal virtual negotiation tools are used which according to the gained research results (derived mainly from the interviews) is one of the factors for decreased efficiency and security in the negotiation process;

Of course, these results enable conclusions that are not exclusive only for Republic of Macedonia and open a space for further consideration of the scientific-research focus in the world. What comes up as a need is prioritization of this field in the scientific-researches in Republic of Macedonia which would enable following the new scientific trends and getting the new technologies closer to the Macedonian businessman with an ultimate goal of increasing the efficiency in business communications and negotiations as part of the whole

technological/technical development of Republic of Macedonia.

Finally, what can be concluded according to the research results is that virtual negotiations because of its lack of physical contact and body language (for example during asynchronous negotiations) is not recommended in the *initial/beginning* and *culminating* negotiation situation, especially having in mind the characteristics of these situations as situations in which collaboration is initiated, the parties are getting to know each other and collaborate for the first time. Most importantly, virtual negotiations are recommended in *true negotiations* which represent a negotiation situation in which parties know each other, already had collaboration and creatively approach to the negotiation subject [6].

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