



## Show Me Your Hands: A Moderator Effect Analysis on Nonverbal Behavior at the Bargaining Table

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### Abstract:

Does the position of the hands interfere with the outcome of a negotiation? In this research, statistical analysis with N=110 business negotiations addressed to what extent nonverbal reinforcement (BL) moderates the relationship between opening value (OpenVal) and deal value (DealVal) of a face-to-face business negotiation requesting budgetary resources between two parties, with a 99 percent confidence interval. The null hypothesis has been rejected, and the results showed that showing hands (BL=1) was not more significant (B = -.015,  $p < .969$ ) than hiding hands (BL=0), highly significant (B = 2,323,  $p < .000$ ), implying that hiding hands produce more adverse results than showing hands at the bargaining table. Finally, the average difference between showing and hiding hands was 20.2

percent in the deal value, suggesting the adoption of nonverbal reinforcement in budgetary negotiations at the bargaining table.

**Keywords:** *Nonverbal reinforcement, negotiation, bargaining table, observable behavior.*

### Introduction

*Nonverbal language* is defined as the behavior beyond words that form a socially shared coding system (Knapp, Hall & Hogan, 2013). People recognize the meaning of these behaviors within a culture (Afifi, 2007). Non-verbal language has been appreciated throughout the ages; for instance, considered an essential virtue to Roman gravitas, qualities of the superior man,

and fundamental to the practice of oratory and rhetoric, according to Quintilian (35-95 AD.), in Ancient Rome (see Quintilian, 2015). Also, Charles Darwin, in *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals*, first observed the study of facial expressions, dominance, and submission amongst mammals (Darwin, 2009), whose findings were corroborated in the following century (Ekman, 1965). Finally, the term nonverbal has been used to describe human



communication that transcends words, whether verbalized or written (Knapp, Hall & Hogan, 2013; Matsumoto, Frank & Hwang, 2012).

The same nonverbal behavior may be interpreted differently according to the context: for example, a person may look at the ground for feeling sad, but in another context, submission and lack of involvement (Knapp, Hall & Hogan, 2013). Mehrabian (1971) identified three uses of nonverbal language: (i) immediacy, or simple reaction of evaluation of positivity or negativity; (ii) status, to indicate superiority or inferiority; (iii) responsiveness, such as the perception of slowness or haste, activity or passivity. Mehrabian (1971) also identified non-verbal language as being responsible for 55% of our language, with the remaining 45% distributed between voice timbre (38%) and verbal language (7%).

Ekman (1965) identified six nonverbal behaviors associated with verbal ones: (i) repeating, that is, nonverbal language repeats what was said verbally (ii) conflicting, that is, contradicting messages, when the body contradicts what is being said verbally; (iii) complementing, that is, the body reaffirms what is being said verbally; (iv) substitution, when simply a non-verbal gesture is understood without the need for

verbalization of the same; (v) accentuating/moderating, when non-verbal language is used to intensify verbal content, such as a confirmation gesture with the head, positively or negatively, to accentuate what was said; finally, (vi) regulating, that is, coordinating our verbal and non-verbal language in the production of our messages.

In this research, we drove our attention to the moderating effect that nonverbal communication could exist between open and deal value in a business negotiation.

## Negotiation and Nonverbal Reinforcement

Fisher & Patton (1981) defined negotiation as "a process of communicating back and forth to reach a joint decision." (p. 20). According to Salacuse (2008), negotiation is defined as "a process of communication by which two or more persons seek to advance their interests through joint action." (p. 7). In this article we followed Dias (2020) typology for business negotiations, investigating a Type I, negotiation, including (i) two-parties, one issue, as illustrated in Figure 1:



**Figure 1. The Four-Type Negotiation Matrix. Source: Dias, 2020. Reprinted under permission**

Illustrators are gestures that accompany speech and are classified in numerous ways as a form of nonverbal reinforcement (Ekman, 1965; Bavelas, 1994; Knapp, Hall & Hogan, 2013). They are gestures that help to establish and

sustain attention and add emphasis to the discourse, also known as gestures of reinforcement, analyzed here.

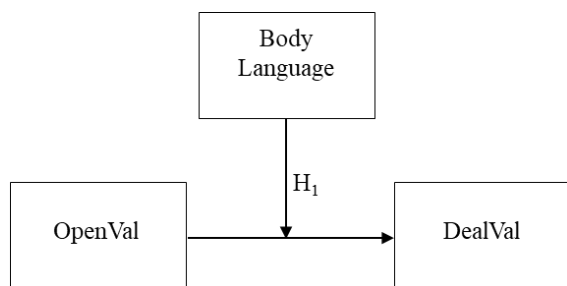
Since the theory points out that a good deal of trust is required to grant resources and deal with

commercial customers (Yoon et al., 2016); also in order to restore trust between patient and service provider (Benbenishty & Hannink, 2015), finally related to dominance (Burgoon et al., 2021), and dealing with clients (Puccinelli, Motyka & Grewal, 2010). Trust is also a sound predictor for business negotiation deals and fundamental to negotiations (Dias, 2016; Dias, 2018; Lopes et al., 2021; Vieira et al., 2021; Dias et al., 2022).

We tested whether the non-verbal language of reinforcement with the hands has any statistically significant relationship with the granting of resources by the supplicant to the supplicant. We are interested in knowing more about how nonverbal language influences the relationship of trust at the negotiating table. The proposition is that the more visible the hands of the supplicant, the better the financial outcome of the agreement.

## Hypothesis

The moderation relationship of the non-verbal language of reinforcement between opening and closing values of a business negotiation is tested in the hypothesis H1. The null hypothesis states that it either makes the negotiators (supplicants) show or hide their hands at the negotiating table, while the alternative hypothesis states that there is a statistically significant relationship between the attitude of the negotiators (supplicants) in showing or hiding their hands at the negotiating table, moderating the relationship between the initial and final values of the negotiation, as shown in Figure 2:

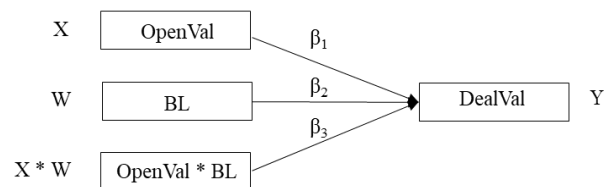


**Figure 2. Hypothesis and Moderation Model**

In a formal statistical model of this nature, the relationship is given between independent variable, moderator and dependent variable, as shown in equation 1:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X + \beta_2 M + \beta_3 XM + e_Y \quad (1)$$

Where  $\beta_0$  is the slope constant of the line, and  $e_Y$  is the error when estimating  $Y$  and  $\beta_1$ ,  $\beta_2$  and  $\beta_3$  correspond to the main effect of the independent variable  $X$  on  $Y$ , main effect of  $M$  on  $Y$ , and effect of the interaction between  $X$  and  $M$  on  $Y$ , respectively.  $\beta_3$  is used to verify the moderation effect of  $M$  on the relationship between  $X$  and  $Y$  (Baron & Kenny, 1986), as illustrated in Figure 3:



**Figure 3 Statistical Model of Simple Moderation**

Sources: Hayes (2013)

## Methods and Materials

In this study, we analyzed  $N=110$  business negotiations to determine to what extent nonverbal reinforcement (BL) moderates the relationship between opening value (OpenVal) and deal value (DealVal) of a face-to-face business negotiation requesting budgetary resources between two parties, with a 99 percent confidence interval.

The philosophy adopted for this study was positivist, that is, when reality is measurable, following deductive logic. The sample ( $N=110$ ) budgetary business Type I negotiations (Dias, 2020a) was randomly selected from 4,000 documented business deals.

We followed Baron & Kenny (1986) regarding the moderation analysis. Thus, Moderation is related to situational conditions that amplify or

attenuate the results of the relationship initially proposed between the predictor and dependent variables (Edwards & Lambert, 2007).

## Research Design

A sample of 220 business negotiators were grouped into two groups (A and B) in this experiment, as illustrated in Table 1:

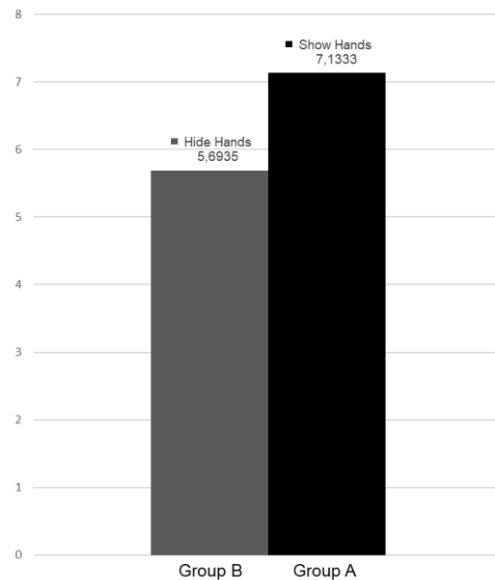
**Table 1. Experiment design**

| Group | Qt. | Role                | Additional Instruction |
|-------|-----|---------------------|------------------------|
| A     | 55  | Financial Director  | -                      |
|       | 55  | Commercial Director | Hide Hands             |
| B     | 55  | Financial Director  | -                      |
|       | 55  | Commercial Director | Show Hands             |
| Total | 220 | participants        | (N=110) Negotiations   |

Note that the commercial directors (supplicants) of Group A were instructed to negotiate without showing their hands, hiding them that is, without illustrators (BL=0). Finally, the commercial directors (supplicants) of Group B were instructed to negotiate by showing their hands, that is, with illustrators (BL=1). The results of the statistical analysis are presented below. Of the 220 participants in the experiment, 60% were men, 40% were women, 75% held middle- to high-level management positions, and 21% held low-level management positions. In this sample, 96% of people are working; 85% are Caucasians; 55% are married; 40% are single, divorced, or other; 70% are between the ages of 25 and 35; and 20% are over 35. At least five years of business negotiation experience were required of the participants. All negotiations took place in controlled environments, all relaxed and without distractions, from August 2022 to April 2023. Finally, IBM SPSS v.26 and Process v.4.3 (Hayes, 2009, 2018) software were used for descriptive and moderation statistical analyses.

## Results

Figure 4 shows that the commercial directors who showed their hands at the negotiating table (Group B) had a financial result 20.2% higher than the commercial directors who hid their hands at the negotiating table (Group A).



**Figure 4 Means Comparison**  
Source: Dataset

**Table 2. Results and Conditional Effects**

|                         | Coefficient | Std Error | t      | p    |
|-------------------------|-------------|-----------|--------|------|
| Constant                | 6.484       | .676      | 95.871 | .000 |
| Open Value (X)          | 1.154       | .384      | 3.003  | .003 |
| Body Language (W)       | 1.301       | .1353     | 9.621  | .000 |
| OpenVal*BL (X*W)        | -2.339      | .769      | -3.043 | .003 |
| Conditional Effects (W) |             |           |        |      |
| -.50                    | 2.323       | .659      | 3.521  | .000 |
| .50                     | -.015       | .394      | -.038  | .969 |

The results indicate the existence of a statistically significant predictive relationship between initial (OpenVal) and final (DealVal) values of the negotiation, moderated by the non-verbal

language of reinforcement (BL) concerning the data analyzed, illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that the phenomenon has statistical relevance and cannot be attributed to chance ( $p < ,000$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, the position of the hands at the negotiating table plays a significant role in the final value of the agreement.

## Implications and Discussion

A moderation analysis investigated how nonverbal communication moderated the relationship between open and deal values in business negotiations. Table 2 illustrates the interaction between open and deal values and a

statistically significant effect, indicating the presence of moderation. The moderating variable was divided into three parts to understand the effect better, adopting the cutoff points: 16% lower, 64% median, and 16% higher (Hayes, 2018).

Regarding the conditional effects of the moderating variable (BL), we first have that when the hands were visible on the part of the supplicant (BL=1), the relationship between the opening and closing value was not significant ( $B = -.015, p < .969$ ).

Second, when the hands were not visible (BL=0), the relationship between the opening and closing value was highly significant ( $B = 2,323, p < ,000$ ), as shown in Figure 5.

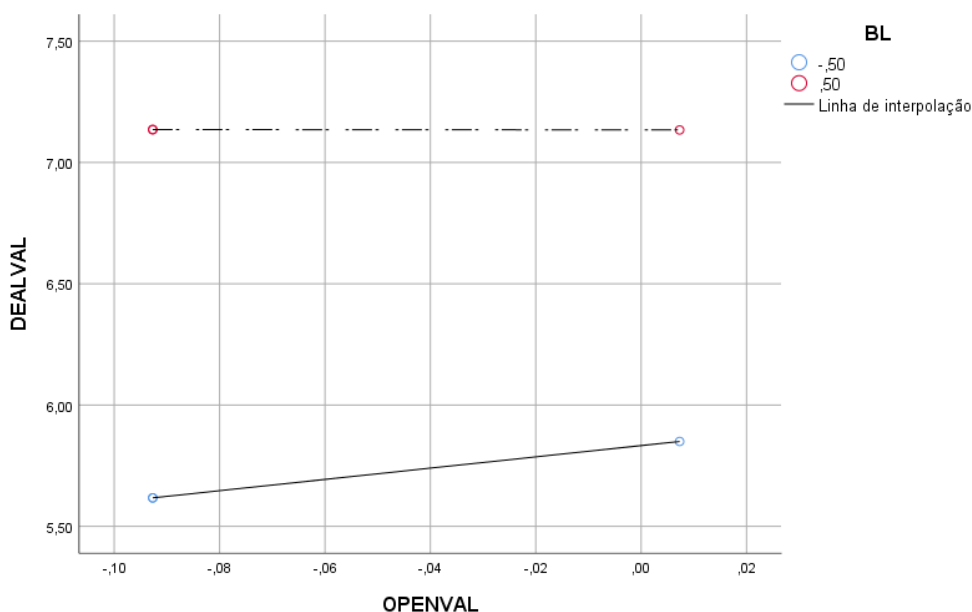


Figure 5. Effects of the Moderation Model

Source: Dataset

Figure 5 shows a moderate relationship between the nonverbal reinforcement between a negotiation's opening and closing values. Moreover, looking at Figure 5, we found that moderation was more significant when the negotiator hid his hands, negatively affecting the result, than when he showed his hands, positively affecting the results at the negotiating

table. That is, hiding one's hands has the effect of making a deal worse. Conversely, showing hands improves the agreement, but not to the same extent that hiding hands makes it worse. In this sense, hiding one's hands at the negotiating table should be avoided.

This article has implications in different fields of research such as (i) business negotiations (ii)

contract negotiations (Dias, 2020b; Dias, 2020c; Dias, Lopes and Teles, 2020); (iii) structured negotiations (Dias, 2020c; Dias, Lopes & Duzert, 2020); (iv) business strategy (Dias & Navarro, 2020); (v) Privatizations (Teles & Dias, 2023); (vi) retail business negotiations (Paradela et al., 2019; Carvalho & Dias, 2019); (vii) family business (Dias et al., 2014; Dias et al., 2015); (viii) business mediation (Aquino & Dias, 2022; Dias, Lopes & Teles, 2020), for instance.

Finally, this research is helpful to scholars, business negotiators, mediators, students, and other practitioners that may be benefitted from the results investigated here.

## Conclusion

We conclude by answering the research question posed: Does the position of the hands interfere with the outcome of a negotiation? The answer is yes, for the sample investigated with 99% of the confidence interval. Nonverbal reinforcement (BL) moderates opening value (OpenVal) in face-to-face business budgetary negotiation. The alternate hypothesis has not been rejected, and the results evidenced that hiding hands ( $B = 2,323$ ,  $p < .000$ ) were more significant regarding adverse results than showing hands ( $B = -.015$ ,  $p < .969$ ), not statistically relevant. Finally, the average difference between showing and hiding hands was 20.2 percent in the deal value, suggesting the adoption of nonverbal reinforcement in budgetary negotiations at the bargaining table.

## Research Limitations

This research is limited to the methods and materials employed and the artificial environment of a business budgetary negotiation simulation. Therefore, the conclusions are limited to the sample investigated. The article is also limited to Brazilian business Type I negotiations. Other business scenarios, negotiation types, and countries are not part of the present scope and should be investigated separately.

## Future Research

Future research is encouraged regarding external validation of the results, expanding to larger samples in different business scenarios and other types of negotiations, for instance, Types II, III, and IV (Dias, 2020).

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## Conflict of interests

No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.

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