

## HARDER THAN SAID: GETTING PAST «WAR OF ALL AGAINST ALL» IN THE NEGOTIATION LEARNING

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### Summary

The purpose of the article was to study students' stereotypes regarding the negotiation process. The use of projective methods helped understand whether students taking specialized courses on negotiations tended to adhere to classical economic provisions and how prevalent this mindset was. The study's results confirmed the frequent presence of simplified ideas about the roles of participants in negotiations, the nature of the process itself, and the perception of other participants, among other aspects. Interestingly, even the newest concepts, presented through textual and multimodal representations, often fell victim to traditional logic in students' interpretations. Most notably, negotiations were still predominantly associated with money conversations, rather than considering the interests of all participants. The dynamic visual images chosen by students as representations of real negotiations demonstrated the persistent influence of stereotypes over innovation in the negotiation context. Particularly, the stereotype regarding the rationality of negotiations was clearly evident. Addressing this challenge in specialized teaching and learning, the authors proposed a realistic approach that incorporates practical experience.

**Key words:** negotiations, stereotypes, control, mediation, controllability, rationality, visual analysis, content analysis.

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### 1. Introduction

Due to the growing economic interactions between enterprises, the demand for business negotiations has been steadily increasing. What used to be a narrowly specialized skill for closing big deals or resolving disputes, has now transformed into a process aimed at generating the best possible solutions for achieving mutually beneficial agreements. Consequently, there has been an unprecedented influx of information resulting from the analysis and modeling of

the negotiation process. This spans from simple bilateral one-step decisions on single issues to complex decisions regarding large coalition agreements. To facilitate successful negotiations, it is crucial to synchronize internal and external discussions and give equal consideration to both rational and irrational behavior. New ideas about negotiations are gaining increasing popularity and significance, surpassing previous concepts. Business schools and practical settings alike are flooded with a wealth of guidance and advice, designed to assist in reaching agreements and making informed decisions. However, the challenge lies in selecting the most suitable options from these available suggestions.

What approach do entrepreneurs prefer in business negotiations: a zero-sum deal or a mutual benefit approach, when there is a shift in focus from “a battle to divide the pie” to identifying and reconciling the interests of the parties? moving beyond the simplistic “one-sided vs. mutual benefit” debate, and new guidelines for productively resolving the contradictions between value-creating and value-revealing actions (*Sebenius, 2001*)? common behavioral advice and certain behavioral economics visions on negotiations to remind demanding respect, perceptions of fairness, and limits of acceptable deception (*Ariely, 2013; Tashchenko, Shafaliuk, Yakovenko, 2022*)? mediation “mirror & window” technique (*Carter, 2020*)? “stone logic” of the Western way of thinking (*Bono, 2016*) or “thick face & black heart” of the Eastern way of thinking (*Chu, 1994*)? to be a receiver, a giver, or an equalizer (*Grant, 2013*), etc.? In the new age of business communication, negotiations extend beyond the direct discussion of agreement outcomes. They begin with careful consideration of numerous factors that can influence the final outcome even before the exchange of offers and counter-offers. However, experiments have shown (*Sebenius, 2001*) that, in practice, it is challenging to adopt the social relations perspective suggested by A. Smith (“a game with a positive sum”) and not associate negotiations with bargaining for limited resources, which aligns with T. Hobbes' classical concept of the “war of all against all” (*Reznik, 2015: 183–185, 189–191*).

We decided to examine the initial ideas about negotiations that were prevalent among students enrolled in relevant specialized courses based on their individual choices. According to the findings of J. Sebenius (*Sebenius, 2001*), it becomes evident that the innovative aspects of negotiation practices are often at risk. In experimental settings where participants are typically strangers, it is likely that they do not even possess the status of “weak ties” (*Reznik, 2015: 197–198*) with each other. Consequently, it is quicker and safer for them to think instrumentally about others. Using a simplified version of projective research, our objective was to determine whether a similar underlying issue exists in the context of negotiation education. If such an issue was identified, our aim was to assess the prevalence of classic stereotypes regarding negotiations.

## 2. Fogs of mediation: decoding the meanings of negotiation posters

As part of “The art of negotiation” course, we presented our extramural students in their fourth year with nine posters derived from A. Carter's influential book on negotiations (*Resources, n.d.*). It was created by a contemporary expert with modern perspectives, informed by her extensive mediation experience. Each poster served as a visual stimulus, either primarily textual (without illustrations – see Table 1) or multimodal (featuring a slogan accompanied by an illustrative background for the text – see Table 2).

The students were assigned the task of interpreting the meaning of the posters based on their own understanding, without prior exposure to the original book. We collected the responses of seven individual students, ensuring that their interpretations were not influenced

Table 1

**Text posters by Alex Carter about negotiations with our working codes**

by group discussions or explanations. Analysis of their interpretations revealed that out of the nine posters, five posters predominantly evoked associations aligned with classical attitudes that A. Carter aimed to challenge and diminish in popularity (see Tables 3 and 4). In cases where an equal number of opposing opinions arose, we considered it as evidence favoring the modern and less popular viewpoint. The associations included: the perception of oneself as central to the negotiation process with a desire for a leading role, viewing negotiation as a fierce battle, attempting to dominate and talk more rather than listening to other negotiators, seeking to change others' positions rather than acknowledging and addressing diverse interests, perceiving other negotiation participants as adversaries, competitors, or passive individuals, prioritizing one's own benefit, focusing solely on the outcome of negotiations as the ultimate value, placing excessive emphasis on rationality (particularly one's own), and situating negotiations within an official context, etc.

Table 2

**Multimodal posters by Alex Carter about negotiations with our working codes**



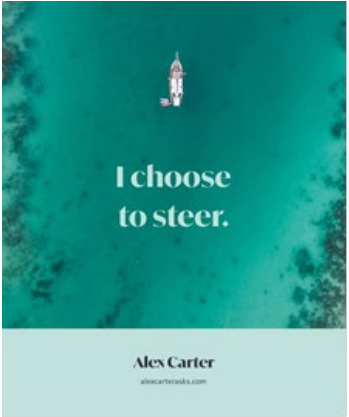
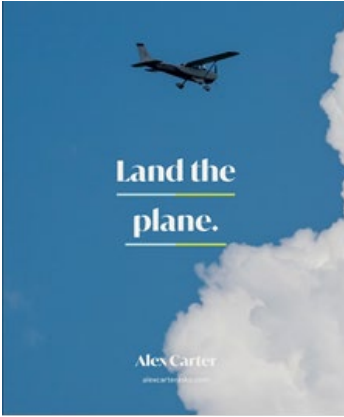
 <p>Negotiation starts at home, with you.</p> <p>Alex Carter alexcarterspk.com</p>	 <p>Transparency creates trust.</p> <p>Alex Carter alexcarterspk.com</p>
 <p>I choose to steer.</p> <p>Alex Carter alexcarterspk.com</p>	 <p>Land the plane.</p> <p>Alex Carter alexcarterspk.com</p>

Table 3

## Decodings of textual and multimodal posters, classical attitude is dominant

№	STUDENTS' ANSWERS, CLASSICAL ATTITUDE
1T	“ <i>[F]irst of all, it's a cooperation of people, everyone has his own thoughts, emotions, and negotiations are often a clash of different positions</i> ”; “ <i>[S]ometimes, [...] you have to make difficult decisions that can affect relationships not only with other people, but also with yourself</i> ”; “ <i>[Y]ou are the main one in conversations and negotiations. Because you're pursuing this conversation or negotiation</i> ”
5T	“ <i>[I]f to play, so to speak, a game, then to play with big bets</i> ”; “ <i>[F]or example, when there are negotiations where you need to get \$10,000 investment, but you're not sure if it will work, then ask for \$20,000 so that you will reach the amount of \$10,000 through negotiations [smile]. Or it was meant we always underestimate ourselves, that we're capable of more, and, therefore, we need to set bigger goals [...]</i> ”; “ <i>[T]his is a golden rule of negotiation [...]. By adding a conditional 40% to our demands, we'll have a lot to give, while remaining completely satisfied with the potential result</i> ”; “ <i>If you ask for even more than you really want, then there is a higher [probability] percentage that the interlocutor will like one of the ideas</i> ”
2M	“ <i>Being open to the opponent or interlocutor, showing that calmness and confidence in your intentions, thoughts, and actions, you not only make your interlocutor closer to you, but also generate trust, which is the key to any kind of successful negotiations</i> ”; “ <i>It's necessary to provide all interested parties with the information necessary for making rational decisions in an open, complete, timely, and understandable form</i> ”; “ <i>[I]f you speak the truth during negotiations, it will be well perceived by the interlocutor on the emotions' level, and will lead to greater trust in you. As a result, the negotiations will be more effective</i> ”; “ <i>Willingness to reveal necessary information confirms your confidence in your own position, shows you as a reliable partner, stimulates the opponent to maintain the same atmosphere of openness, and, most importantly, allows the partner to assess your desired outcome of the negotiations, thus, eliminates doubts about possible cheating or buying a pig in a poke</i> ”
3M	“ <i>[I] will lead the negotiations and take responsibility</i> ”; “ <i>[T]he one negotiator only has the most influence on the outcome, so it's more acceptable to lead than to obey</i> ”; “ <i>[In] negotiations, it's important to "steer" in order to be able to achieve your goal in it</i> ”; “ <i>If a person chooses to rule, then he must rule in everything</i> ”
4M	“ <i>[F]inish the matter correctly and successfully, because it's easy to get the plane moving and take off, but the most important thing is to really finish things properly, and land the plane safe, because negotiations are always aimed at achieving the result properly</i> ”; “ <i>[W]hen the negotiations go in the wrong direction, to the negativity, then stop them in time [...]</i> ”; “ <i>[N]egotiations should be brought to an end. Entering into a dialogue with an opponent is one thing, but enduring the opponent's antics, and getting out of the situation with the most pleasant result for yourself – it's a little different thing. [...] here you can trace the responsibility for your own actions</i> ”
STUDENTS' ANSWERS, MODERN ATTITUDE	
1T	“ <i>[I]t's not important to be necessarily attached to the sphere, which we're used to using this concept in</i> ”; “ <i>The problem is that a "conversation", that will "steer someone's relationship somewhere", can also be conducted by an inquisitor with a woman he declared a witch and is going to burn at the stake, so this definition of negotiations lacks such a key element as a consensus of the conversation's participants</i> ”
5T	“ <i>During the negotiations, you should always look for a compromise between different project participants and, accordingly, hear different opinions, ask for every detail</i> ”

Table 3 (continuance)

2M	<p><i>“People want to be confident in their choice, i.e., in the people they work with, so <b>the trust that can be gained</b> by always telling the truth, without hiding any details, etc., plays a very important role”; “In order for trust to be in negotiations, <b>you must be as transparent as possible</b>”; “[I]f a person is transparent, first of all, to himself, then he will <b>be transparent to others</b> as well. This saying <b>applies to everything</b>, including negotiations. When a person is transparent, in negotiations and in life, <b>people will reach out to him</b>, and this is immediately noticeable, and <b>this is already a big plus</b> for a person”</i></p>
3M	<p><i>“Keeping a situation or negotiation in one's own hands is a guarantee of calmness and confidence in managing affairs, but I'd also add to this statement that sometimes <b>it's presumably and possible to give way, if it contributes to collective success</b>”; “[T]o take an active <b>position in life</b>, and not to rely on the good will of mother, boyfriend, and first employer, but to forge your own happiness somehow. In the context of negotiations, this can be interpreted as defending personal boundaries, fighting gaslighting, <b>participating in demonstrations / meetings / other variations of public dialogue</b>”</i></p>
4M	<p><i>“[T]o achieve positive results at the end of negotiations, and <b>every interlocutor has his benefit. Everyone wins</b>”</i></p>

Table 4

**Decodings of textual and multimodal posters, modern attitude is dominant**

№	STUDENTS' ANSWERS, CLASSICAL ATTITUDE
2T	<p><i>“[T]o prepare for negotiations, <b>you prepare facts and arguments</b> from the past to use during negotiations for improving the future”; “This can happen by analyzing the relationship with the <b>opponent</b>, and by reflecting on <b>your own experience</b>, and by applying the achievements of the art of negotiations in general”</i></p>
3T	<p><i>“[Y]ou build the negotiation process <b>acceptable to you</b>, and where you're comfortable communicating with other participants, <b>while creating the right atmosphere</b> inside the negotiations”; “[I]f you <b>“set a trend”</b> and present it correctly to interlocutors, <b>you have influence over others</b>”; “[T]he one who leads is the boss, and he comes up people to him, according to his ability, this person will be very strong in everyday life and in negotiations. In negotiations [...], people will listen to his <b>opinion</b>, and will <b>support him in his decisions</b>. [...] such people attract others to themselves”</i></p>
4T	<p><i>“[N]egotiations go in the life of every person, from a company director to a 3-year-old child, someone negotiates <b>to attract investment</b>, and someone negotiates <b>to get candy</b> from mom [smile]”; “[N]egotiations can be conducted by anyone, but there are <b>fundamental concepts</b> about it”</i></p>
1M	<p><i>“[T]o negotiate with someone successfully, you need to understand yourself first. You should define your own goals, real ways to achieve them, and make other necessary preparations in general for a conversation with another person. Being not confident in <b>your own position</b> and not aware of your own position, it will be hard <b>to convince others of it</b>”</i></p>
STUDENTS' ANSWERS, MODERN ATTITUDE	
2T	<p><i>“[N]egotiations, like anything in our world, have their <b>relevance and time frame</b>, and in order to keep, let's say, the trendiness and freshness of the negotiations' basics, one should constantly <b>not only be interested in something new, but also improve linguistic and behavioral skills</b>”; “We should <b>learn from our mistakes</b>, focus on <b>what we can do now</b>, and plan for the future”; “[E]ach negotiation affects our future, that is, like the outcome of the negotiations, like <b>the progress in the future</b>. Accordingly, the preparation of negotiations should be treated as responsibly as possible, <b>taking into account all mistakes</b> from past negotiations”;</i></p>

Table 4 (continuance)

2T	<p>“At one time, you think differently, and make some decisions differently. Then [...], when a person becomes <b>more mature</b>, he already understands like “I did this in that way, but <b>it was possible in a different way</b>”, that's why I say <b>experience doesn't come immediately</b>, but only with time. [...] every adult person, who has any dialogues or negotiations in the present or in the future, [...] should prepare in advance. That's why I believe <b>everything comes with time. Everyone learns from his mistakes</b>”</p>
3T	<p>“[W]hen you make a decision, you need to <b>remember about other people</b>, and <b>what benefit you can bring to others</b>”; “Apparently, this is applicable to cases <b>when we speak up for someone weaker, sue a former abuser, and try to enlighten a petty district swindler that feminism is measured not only by dividing the KFS check in half</b>. Thus, by entering into negotiations with a party that can harm others and changing his opinion, <b>we help those people whom the opponent will meet on his path later</b>”; “[I]t's important to understand that when you “steer”, you do it <b>not only for yourself, but also for the sake of other people</b>”</p>
4T	<p>“[T]his term <b>doesn't divide people by gender, nationality, color, or status</b>, negotiations are <b>open to all, without any discrimination against anyone</b>”; “<b>Every situation can be resolved through negotiations</b>”; “In relationships, <b>people often keep silent about some problems</b>, which eventually turn into an avalanche that destroys these relationships. An employee cannot defend personal boundaries at work and is fired, and it's a bit problematic to shut up relatives with conversations about marriage at 18. In fact, most of the problems can be solved through <b>competent dialogue [...]</b>”; “[I]n life, <b>every person faces negotiations</b>, and this applies to <b>absolutely every situation</b>. For example: everyday life, work, business, and so on. [...] it's <b>necessary to be able to talk with people, to find intersection points and compromises</b>”</p>
1M	<p>“Before you go to negotiate something with someone, you should <b>learn to negotiate with yourself first</b>”; “[E]verything starts with you, your head, thoughts, and feelings. For the sake of successful negotiations, one <b>should be in harmony with oneself first of all</b>”; “To begin, you need to direct yourself from the very beginning – <b>ask yourself the right question before you sit down across from another person</b>. Negotiations, relationships, and meetings with clients begin with us through <b>self-discovery process</b>, when we understand who we are and what we want to achieve”; “When I start falling asleep, I think about something, I have a <b>negotiation with myself in my thoughts</b>, I think about <b>how to behave in this or that situation</b>, then I fall asleep. When the morning comes, I also wake up and start <b>morning talks with myself</b>, I start making some plans for today or for the future, <b>if I have some business or need to have a dialogue with a person, I scroll all this in my head, and more than once</b>”</p>

It is worth noting that the greatest interest and understanding were gained by the multi-modal poster with the secondary idea of transparency and trust, rather than the poster(s) about mutual steering as the main vision. A. Carter herself emphasizes the importance of the latter idea in her teaching on negotiation (Carter, 2020; *Negotiating through uncertainty, n.d.; Negotiating work-life balance..., n.d.*)

### 3. Negotiation code: visual content analysis of movie scenes

For the first practical classes at the beginning of the “Conducting business negotiations” course, second-year full-time students were asked to select video scenes (from films or series) that represent negotiations. In the previous lecture, they were shown a video fragment from the beginning of the film “The Dreamseller” to illustrate the modern understanding of negotiations as any conversation with others to achieve a goal, rather than being limited to official discussions in politics and business with desks, documents, and strict dress codes, etc. However, the choice

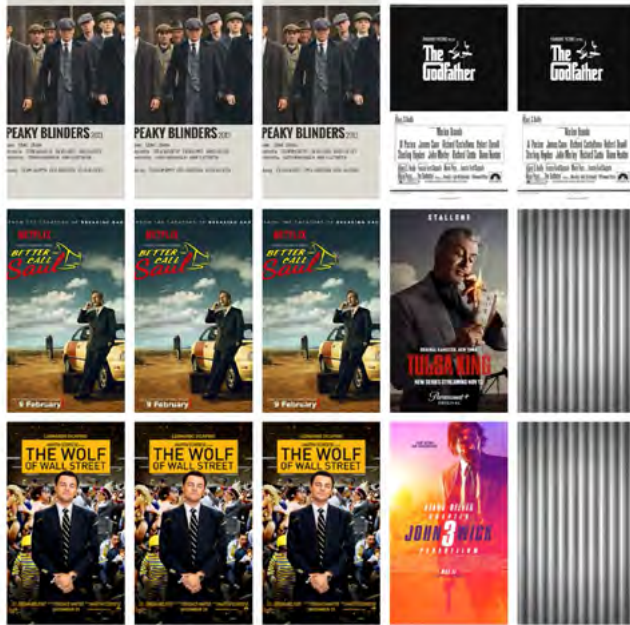
was solely up to the students, and they brought video fragments that aligned with their original ideas about the negotiation process. Fourteen boys and fifteen girls participated in this projective exercise, with some of them selecting several scenes from different sources, and there were instances of repeated video fragments. In total, we watched forty scenes from twenty-nine films and series (see Fig. 1–3), and excluding duplicates, there were thirty-five unique scenes. Two girls were unable to visually demonstrate their video fragments due to technical reasons, so they provided audio representations instead. As a result, thirty-eight scenes with duplicates (thirty-three unique scenes) were included in our analysis. Two scenes from two course participants were filtered out to maintain data uniformity, as we conducted traditional visual content analysis combined with a post-semiological approach (Bataieva, Chumakova-Sierova, 2021: 29) for all video fragments. This approach required an intuitive and holistic reflection of the key contextual features in the available visual data, making audio descriptions insufficient.

When analyzing the films and series selected by the students, it was evident that there were noticeable differences. Specifically, sources that depicted scenes with classical negotiation stereotypes tended to have more individualized / personalized official posters. Stereotypes derived from classical economics were found to be highly prevalent among the students: 40% of all scenes reproduced the widely accepted simplified representation of negotiations, 34% of all scenes presented a combination of normative and deviant representations, and 26% of all scenes demonstrated a positive response from students towards the suggestion of perceiving negotiations in a modern manner.

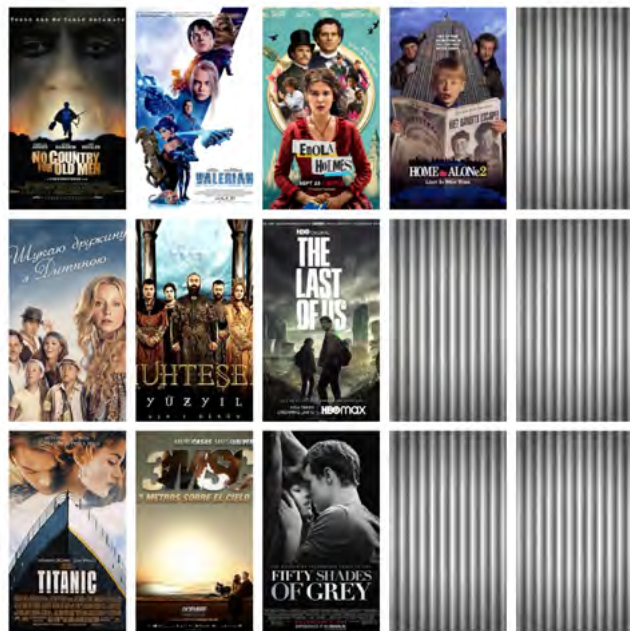


**Fig. 1. Posters for films / series, the negotiation scenes of which had an official normative specificity (the number of unique posters corresponds to the number of choices by students)**





**Fig. 2. Posters for films / series, the negotiation scenes of which had an official deviant specificity (the number of unique posters corresponds to the number of choices by students)**



**Fig. 3. Posters for films / series, the negotiation scenes of which had unofficial specificity (the number of unique posters corresponds to the number of choices by students)**

The negotiation process itself and the skills involved in its conduct were predominantly represented as male competence, and the tendency to make such representations, as well as the general tendency to demonstrate stereotypical classical associations regarding negotiations, was distributed equally among boys and girls (see Table 5). The stereotype about the rationality of negotiations and the expectation of rationality from the participants also influenced students (see Fig. 4). However, the earlier these stereotypes are identified, the greater the chances of questioning them, critically analyzing them, and offering students a different perspective.

Table 5

**Content analysis of movie scenes' examples presented by students**

<b>Film / series (scene source)</b>	<b>Times selected</b>	<b>Scene gender composition</b>	<b>Two leading negotiation features</b>	<b>Presenters' gender (and number)</b>
<b>Scenes of formal and/or desk discussions, business and/or politics</b>				
<i>Arbitrage</i>	3	Men	Intellect, status	M. (2), F. (1)
<i>Two for the Money</i>	1	Men	Intellect, status	M. (1)
<i>The Pursuit of Happyness</i>	1	Men	Intellect, status	F. (1)
<i>jOBS</i>	1	Men	Intellect, emotions	F. (1)
<i>The Man in the High Castle</i>	1	Men	Intellect, moral	M. (1)
<i>The Founder</i>	1	Men	Intellect, moral	F. (1)
<i>Spider-Man (2002)</i>	1	Men	Status, moral	M. (1)
<i>Sweet November</i>	1	Men	Status, moral	M. (1)
<i>Miss Sloane</i>	1	Mixed	Status, moral	F. (1)
<i>The Originals</i>	1	Mixed	Status, emotions	F. (1)
<i>Elvis</i>	1	Mixed	Moral, intellect	F. (1)
<i>The Intern</i>	1	Mixed	Age, intellect	F. (1)
<i>Anna</i>	1	Mixed	Physical power, intellect	F. (1)
<b>Scenes of formal and/or desk discussions of a criminal nature</b>				
<i>Peaky Blinders</i>	3	Men	Intellect, physical power	M. (2), F. (1)
<i>Better Call Saul</i>	3	Men	Intellect, physical power	F. (2), M. (1)
<i>The Wolf of Wall Street</i>	3	Men	Moral, intellect	M. (3)
<i>The Godfather</i>	2	Men	Status, moral	F. (2)
<i>Tulsa King</i>	1	Men	Moral, emotions	M. (1)
<i>John Wick: Chapter 3 – Parabellum</i>	1	Mixed	Status, physical power	M. (1)
<b>Scenes of informal and/or non-desk conversations</b>				
<i>No Country for Old Men</i>	1	Men	Intellect, physical power	M. (1)
<i>Looking for a Wife with a Child</i>	1	Men	Intellect, age	M. (1)
<i>Magnificent Century</i>	1	Women	Moral, age	F. (1)
<i>Titanic</i>	1	Mixed	Moral, intellect	F. (1)
<i>Enola Holmes</i>	1	Mixed	Moral, status	F. (1)

Table 5 (continuance)

<i>Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets</i>	1	Mixed	Moral, emotions	F. (1)
<i>Three Steps Above Heaven</i>	1	Mixed	Emotions, moral	F. (1)
<i>The Last of Us</i>	1	Mixed	Physical power, moral	M. (1)
<i>Home Alone 2: Lost in New York</i>	1	Mixed	Age, intellect	F. (1)
<i>Fifty Shades of Grey</i>	1	Mixed	Status, emotions	F. (1)

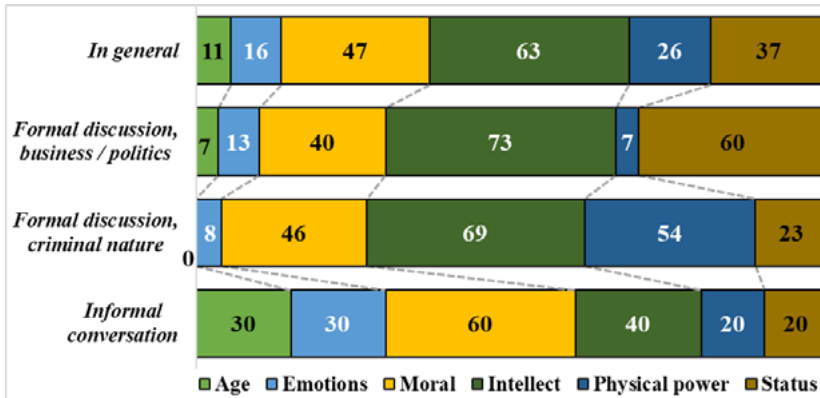


Fig. 4. Proportions of dominant characteristics of negotiations in movie scenes, %

4. Conclusions

While teaching negotiation courses, it should be taken into account that students' spontaneous ideas about negotiations may correspond more closely to the findings of classical economics than to new concepts. Correcting these ideas quickly can be challenging, despite the greater adequacy of new provisions and the simplicity of their textual formulations and visualizations. Specifically, while multimodal posters are expected to be more effective than textual ones in conveying ideas, three out of four multimodal posters by A. Carter evoked associations with classical stereotypes about negotiations. Most notably, the main idea of “asking for more” was subordinated to the completely opposite, old logic of “money conversations”. The poster defining negotiations did not generate much interest (although everything about the concept starts with the definition), nor did the poster about starting negotiations at home and from oneself (despite negotiations being a key aspect for the new generation of entrepreneurs), and nor did the poster about “plane landing” (which conveys a secondary, but important auxiliary idea often used in A. Carter's book). The latter can be considered as partly expected, as the corresponding visual image created dissonance with the main visual image repeated in A. Carter's presentations – the image of a boat sailing and being controlled both by the sailor, water, and wind.

It is also obvious that only in those movie scenes, where negotiations were shown not as a clearly defined official procedure, but as a diffuse life part, one could feel the validity of the latest economic concepts and “predictably irrational” behavior (according to D. Ariely's term). Therefore, in order for course takers to acquire the traits of a new generation of entrepreneurs,

theoretical innovations on negotiations need not only to be systematically repeated in their own experience, but to be done even in spite of internal resistance to the ideas necessary for self-renewal. This works similarly to constant reminders to be honest people – such a tool, as D. Ariely claims, is the only one that really helps, and reduces dishonesty significantly. In turn, auxiliary educational materials for negotiations should be designed in contrast to what is being reinterpreted – in order to avoid a false (i.e., opposite in essence) interpretation of the key instructions. When choosing an academic course, students have already intuitively sorted the topics into “useful” and “useless”. They have expectations regarding competences and their own criteria of usefulness or lack thereof, but the flexibility of these expectations is not guaranteed. So, they can interpret “useless” information in a way servile to “useful” information, and obeys its logic. Therefore, it is important to repeatedly prove the usefulness of new visions.

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