Social skills based approach in the workplace during a union negotiation process: methodological development in an industrial environment: Identifying social skills in union negotiations

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Abstract

The present research focuses on social skills in a workplace. In this article, we propose an elaborate way to identify and collect social skills observed in situ in the innovative context of labor-union negotiations. This methodological system includes the creation of specific tools, observations in real situations, films and some interviews such as self-confrontations. Results demonstrate that the proposed method dynamically integrates various steps designed to expose the existence of social skills in a developmental context with challenging and sometimes conflicting issues. Identifying the essential social skills in labor-union negotiation allows consideration of the place of vocational training in the development of these skills in negotiation situations and, more widely, in the field of social dialogue.

Introduction

The objective of this article is to present a method for identifying and formalizing social skills studied in a labor-union negotiation context, then understanding the links between these two factors.

Today the term "social skills" refers to an imprecise and abstract notion. Research has already been carried out on the subject but there is no common academic consensus regarding how to conceptualize and theorize these skills. However, social skills are *"ubiquitous"* (Phillips, 1980:160). They are associated with an indispensable collective dimension of private and professional life; they refer to the ability to meet *"personal"* or "*professional"* goals (Argyle, 1984:309). All organizations drive social relations and communication as well as relational behavior. The organization of work, along with its structuring of company operations, is supported in its development by social skills facilitating discussions between individuals (Peyré, 2000) and thus, in a certain way, contributing to the global efficiency of the company (Bellier, 2004).

Social skills: communication skills

Communication is central to the register of social skills. It is indicative of a set of relational skills based on the internalization of behavioral and social standards (Riggio, 1986; Olivesi, 2002). Skills relating to communication are inescapable and *"pay many dividends in people's lives"* (Segrin and Flora, 2000:489). They constitute an *"essential human need"* (Bakke, 2010:347) to fulfil objectives in given social situations (Hargie, Saunders and Dickson, 1994; Leduc et Valléry, 2006). These skills correspond to the set of social behaviors enabling adaptation to interactions and the environment (Bellier, 2000). They enable individuals to *"understand the perspectives of others"* (Warnes, Sheridan, Geske and Warnes, 2005:174) and to communicate appropriately (Argyle, 1979; Sarason, 1981; McFall, 1982; Spitzberg and Cupach, 1984; Canary and Spitzberg, 1989; Cavell, 1990; Segrin and Flora, 2000). They fuel discourse, constitute the fundamental tools for the success or failure of interpersonal relations and affect members' decisions. Communication also introduces the context for studying these skills within the framework of our research: that of labor-union negotiations.

Communicating in the professional environment

Over the last fifteen years or so, social skills, which have been drawn from social situations, seem to have taken on a new configuration in the workplace. They are considered in diverse work situations: during the recruitment process as *"many job advertisements stipulate that applicants should have high levels of social, or communication, skill"* (Hargie, 1997:10), in hospital care (Fallowfield and Jenkins, 1999; Back, Arnold, Baile, Fryer-Edwards, Alexander, Barley, Gooley, Tulsky, 2007), in some service relationships and various communications-based activities (Bellier, 1997; 2000; 2004; Dutrénit, Peyré, Latouche, 2000, Mayen, 2005; Persais, 2004; Dubois et Bobillier-Chaumon, 2006; Valléry et Leduc, 2010; Laizé, 2011, etc.). The skills which are distinctive to the relational sphere are a constitutive principle of social activity (Noël-Hureaux, 2006) enabling meaning to be conveyed and action to be taken in a variety of situations (Thiberge, 2007).

Observing social skills in labor-union negotiation

In the research presented, social skills are considered in the context of their implementation in specific situations relating to communication: during labor-union negotiations. These "situations" correspond to a working framework with components that the individual has to deal with, as well as issues and multiple interactions between participants (Zarifian, 2001).

The "NACRE" project: the cornerstone of this research

As we have seen, many researchers focused on the concept and development of social skills in professional contexts and try to define and clarify this notion. However, only few of them deal with the question of their identification. Needless to say that common sense plays an important role in their identification but is insufficient. Among the approaches pertaining to this issue, we find for instance the methods established by

Alexandre-Bailly (2007), Laizé (2007) and Lietard (2007): semi-structured interviews, observations, reflections on oneself and one's practices, interactions, confrontations of points of view and analyzes of skills needs related to the situations or structures studied. In these studies, different social skills are thus retained and developed through kinds of cross-skills benchmarks or portfolios of communication skills.

The "NACRE" project (*Negotiation et Approche des Compétences Relationnelles en Entreprise*: Negotiation and Approach to Business Relationship Skills) was developed in 2007 (Longuet et al), and made it possible to propose a method of approaching the social skills observed during trade union negotiations within a large group of courier transport companies in France. This project is at the origin of the research problem presented and inspired the approach of social skills in real situations. The context of these negotiations is particularly marked by communication, which is dense with multiple interactions aimed at defending disparate interests. Union negotiations are characterized by "*an effective use of dialogue and in particular of the rhetoric which is elevated to the rank of 'negotiating weapon'* "(Longuet et al. 2009:4). To the best of our knowledge, there is no study presenting a method to identify social skills in a trade union context except in this project. An approach to social skills through negotiation contributes to a better understanding of relations in an inconsistent and often conflicting world.

Approach to social skills through labor-union negotiation

With regard to the triad proposed by Thuderoz (2010:15) to define negotiation, it is above all "*a modality of social interaction*", before reflecting a "*decision-making process*" and a "*finalized social practice*". According to this author, the relationship with others makes it difficult because it is a question of entering into reciprocity with participants who have opposing objectives and "*within the framework of a way of life together from which one cannot escape*". To move ahead in this unstable world requires a certain amount of work and the mobilization of certain skills to regulate discussions.

Negotiation is a social situation based on communication (Beaudichon, 1999) in which the participants carry out tasks of analysis, discernment, consideration and argumentation. It seems to lend itself to the study of social competences because it takes shape "*in a dynamic of complex social and relational interplay between participants (...) and is based on a set of social skills that form it*" (Longuet et al. 2009:3).

Trade union organizations have their own culture. They rarely share common interests between organizations. Differences of opinion are often a source of conflict and make negotiation more difficult. It is a matter of advancing and defending one's interests in a climate of tension. Negotiators need to be familiar with the environment in which they operate. This reflects a certain degree of variability, and negotiation matures from an evolving process of construction and deconstruction.

Analysis of the evolving process of negotiation

The evolving process of collective bargaining is complex. It is dynamic, it involves "*moves and countermoves*" (Rojot, 1991:20). Bellenger (2015) breaks it down into five stages: "*Forging-contact*", "*consultation*", "*confrontation*", "*construction*" and "*conclusion*". These stages have inspired those identified in the NACRE project and used in this current research (see Table 1).

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

These five stages enable us to mark and identify the progress of negotiation. The associated symbols are used in the method.

Research Background and Hypotheses

There is a twofold issue behind this research. On the one hand we wish to demonstrate that an appropriate methodological system may enable social skills to be recognized and identified during labor-union negotiations. On the other hand, we are seeking to understand the relationships between these skills and the

evolving process of labor-union negotiations in order to demonstrate the mobile character of these skills throughout the discussions. The hypotheses associated with these objectives are presented as follows:

- H1: *Social skills are highlighted in the labor-union negotiation and it will be possible to formalize them using a specific identification tool*. This first hypothesis addresses two aspects: the particular setting of labor-union negotiations enables social skills to be studied while implementing a methodology to identify them *in situ*.

- H2a: *There is a dynamic relation (or correlation) between the playing out of social skills and the state of progress of the labor-union negotiation*. In this second hypothesis, it is a question of understanding the possible impacts of the progress in discussions on social skills, and vice versa.

Study Context

The research study was carried out during labor-union negotiations in one of the establishments of the world-renowned steel company, *ArcelorMittal,* Oise, France. The participants are the Human Resources Director (HRD) and the members of the labor-union organizations: CFE-CGC, CFDT, CGT and FO. The targeted negotiations concern the introduction of electronic voting and the pre-electoral protocol agreement.

The introduction of electronic voting

The company proposing electronic voting is subject to strict regulations: it guarantees anonymity, uniformity and confidentiality of the vote as well as data integrity. It provides secure servers that comply with international standards. It promotes the use of a simple, intuitive and rapid ergonomic tool, guaranteeing the display of statements of intent, a reduction in paper voting errors and an increase in the participation rate. It also guarantees a reduction in costs, time saved in counting the votes and the absence of invalid votes while promoting an ecological aspect.

Professional elections

Since 1945, the members of the Works Council (WC) and the employee representatives have been elected by the company's staff during professional elections, respectively from the thresholds of fifty and eleven employees in the company.

The organization of professional elections has been compulsory every four years since the law of the 2nd August 2005. It is the subject of several meetings of negotiations and leads to the conclusion of a pre-electoral agreement ideally signed by all the labor-union organizations within the framework of precise rules. These elections allow for the designation of institutions with a regulatory role in industrial relations. When submitting applications, the unions generally operate a monopoly and are divided into various colleges of a socio-professional nature. These professional elections are an indicator of the representativeness of the labor-union organizations and the characteristics of the respective settlements.

Investigative Methodology

Identifying and raising social skills in a labor-union negotiation situation is an arduous exercise because of the vagueness that encompasses this notion and the lack of existing tools.

Choosing an integrative approach of plural methods

The established methodological process (see Figure 1) encompasses various approaches to psychology and the ergonomics of activity, as well as various tools developed to observe, analyze and understand the abstract notion of social skills.

The method consists of key and intermediate steps. These are concentrated around the creation of a social skills "glossary", "exploratory" observations, interviews with management, discussions with trade unionists, *in situ* observations based on a survey of social skills and film support where the field permits, self-confrontation interviews with management and some trade unionists, as well as various microscopic analyses preceding these different stages.

Detailed presentation of the method

The implementation of the collection methodology presented requires an adaptation to the reality of the field, including confidence-building work by various interested and concerned participants. The methodological architecture established in the study is presented below (with reference to the 11 steps presented in Figure 1).

Step 1: In order to approach the social skills in their context of implementation, it is necessary to determine which items are observed and to define them precisely. For this purpose, theoretical research on social skills is carried out upstream, including the resumption of academic work on this topic, of which the NACRE project described above.

Step 2: The implementation of our project within the framework of labor-union negotiations within *ArcelorMittal* (Oise) is being carried out gradually. The procedure requires several discussions with the HRD in order to define the determining conditions for the implementation of the project. The research, our position and our requirements are presented during these interviews.

Step 3: This "exploratory" observation stage allows us to present both the research and our position, to ask for permission to observe the discussions, to answer any questions and to establish trust and confidence. A written summary and a privacy statement of the content of the one-off meetings in our research project are distributed and testify to its ethical character.

Over a period of two months, we meet with trade unionists during various negotiations. This "progressive" immersion in the field of labor-union negotiations contributes to our understanding of the conduct of labor-union meetings and negotiations. It provides a training basis for identifying and charting social skills with the support of a first survey grid (detailed description in step 4B). These observations are the source of modifications and adaptation of this compiling tool to the field of negotiations. They have also encouraged the creation of a glossary of social skills.

Step 4 A: In this step, we identify the skills related to negotiators and draw on the structure of certain benchmarks to create a glossary of social skills.

Observing the participants in labor-union negotiations requires information on their activity. (Leplat, 2002) We obtain information on their activity from real observations, analyses of job descriptions and reference documents describing the skills expected in all their functions. There is currently no explicit nomenclature specific to the context of labor-union negotiations nor any written formality on the skills to be used in order to be effective in negotiation situations.

In order to describe social skills, we rely on the behaviorist vision of skills. Van Beirendonck (2006) identifies three key elements specific to skills. They are observable, made up of measurable characteristics that influence performance, and they bring together a range of objective knowledge and behavior. The indicators of these skills are based on external manifestations of behavior, easily identifiable and devoid of value judgment. Overly short or over-developed descriptions are avoided as they limit the scope for action. The terminologies assigned to the items of social skills are associated with the negotiation context.

The glossary developed in our study provides a tool for redefining and indexing the criteria underlying social skills. The appropriation of the work previously carried out on the notion of "social skills", including university research and the first observations in a real-life situation of labor-union negotiations within *ArcelorMittal*

(Oise), led us to create this glossary. It brings together twelve social skills: *Active listening (EA); Self-assertion (A.SOI); Ability to open up discussion (F.ECH); Self-control (G.SOI); Ability to generate sympathy (SYMP); Ability to manage a conflict situation (CONFlle); Cooperation, support and solidarity (COOP S.S); Reformulating (R°); Inquiry (INT°); Convincing-persuading (CONV-PERS); Taking initiative or proposing (I ou PRO); Flexibility (FLEX).*

This glossary is composed of definitions associated with the twelve items of pre-selected and defined social skills (see Table 2). It includes indicators to identify them on the basis of observable characteristics and behaviors. For the different items of social skills, we combine action verbs to describe them (such as "*Convincing-persuading*") and nouns (such as *"Self-assertion"*). The concepts associated with the descriptions of social skills are further developed using theoretical elements, generally derived from work-, social- and cognitive psychology. Social skills can be observed through different forms of manifestation: through verbal, non-verbal and para-verbal communication. The "vocal-acoustic" signs constitute the verbal material and bring together all the arguments; they make it possible to give congruence to the discourse (Cosnier and Brossard, 1984).

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Step 4 B: We then set up a means to jointly identify the social skills and stages of the negotiation process, using a grid provided for this purpose. This is an extrapolation of two grids developed during some university work. A first grid (2007), resulting from the NACRE project, was used in labor-union negotiations in a transport and courier company. It groups together items from the social skills as well as the negotiation stages that we have reused. A second grid (2011), inspired by the NACRE project, was adapted and used in negotiations meetings at Chantilly (Oise, France) town hall and during exploratory meetings in *ArcelorMittal* (Oise). In current research, our objective was to design a tool that would be as simple as possible to overcome the complexity of the elements to be inventoried (Figure 2).

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Each "grid" of social skills (see Figure 2) equals a "sequence". This corresponds to a "time" of negotiation (a few seconds) with a main interaction and a key idea.

We therefore have two tools at our disposal to approach social skills in real situations: the glossary, which allows us to objectively define the observed criteria, and the survey grid used in real situations, which allows us to consider social skills during the evolutionary process of negotiations. The social skills survey grid is used in four steps. Its use is established as follows:

a) The communicator(s) is/are identified.

b) Social skills are identified and listed in the grid. Social skills are implemented individually but are identified within "entities" representing the management and each labor- union organization. Acronyms associated with the management and the four LMOs (D = HRD; 1 = LMO 1; 2 = LMO 2; 3 = LMO 3; 4 = LMO 4) are noted under the implemented skill.

c) The negotiation stage in which the actor mobilizes the social skill(s) is identified, the corresponding symbol is surrounded by: X, ?, <=>, //, ~ (symbols from the NACRE project grid, Table 1)

(d) The main ideas resulting from the discussions are identified and recorded in a space provided for that purpose. They are then completed with the film support.

Step 5: Following the exploratory meetings, interviews conducted with HRD provide feedback on the meetings and encourage the sharing of impressions of how the meetings were conducted. The targeting of the negotiations to be followed in our study is discussed and decided during these interviews. The targeted meetings focus on two negotiations around two agreements: an agreement on electronic voting and a pre-electoral agreement.

Step 6: Short interviews are conducted after the meetings with participants in the negotiations who are willing to participate in the discussion. This pre-conference contact allows us to better understand the "roles" of the actors, their expectations and the general atmosphere. These discussions also allow us to be informed about the content of meetings, the main interests and give us access to elements sometimes not disclosed in negotiation.

Step 7: The central step of the research is direct observation, which is one of the preferred methods for analyzing the activity. This method, oriented towards "acquiring knowledge about a work situation" (Clot and Leplat, 2005:289-316), consists of observing in order to detect facts and actions specific to a situation from a particular angle. In our study, these are "framed observations" carried out with a grid of social skills that has been defined in advance (cf. Step 4 A). These *in situ* observations of skills are ideally "assisted" with the help of a standing camera allowing for continuous audio and video recording of the participants. Video and audio recordings are essential for effective microscopic analysis of social skills and contextual elements.

Step 8: Free interviews are held after the meetings with some trade unionists who are willing to discussion. They encourage the collection of opinions and feelings on the experiences and points of view of individuals during negotiations. These discussions, in which we remain neutral, provide explanations of certain behaviors, choices or interests and allow us to better understand the content of meetings.

Step 9: Several interviews are conducted with the HRD between meetings. The reports are drawn up on both the process and the content of the discussions. They promote understanding of the objectives and functioning of the negotiations.

Step 10: The viewing of film footage is dense (about twelve hours). It is accompanied by selections of video excerpts that seem imprecise and include innuendos. They require explanations of unexpected behaviors or unspoken statements that restrict understanding of the negotiation process.

Step 11: The selected film footage is used to support the interviewees during the self-confrontation interviews. This method is based on the use of the spoken word to deepen knowledge of action. (Van der Maren and Yvon, 2009) The aim is to show the HRD and a representative member of each of the three labor-unions that have agreed to participate in the film selected sequences and ask them to explain them. The video extracts form a common discourse between the interviewer and the interviewee. They encourage the restitution of scenes to be explored and allow interviewees to recall situations. Self-confrontations encourage the collection of relevant data on the impressions of negotiation participants, make it possible to better understand each other's interests and interpretations, to explain the content of certain interactions, whether they are implied or not, and to report on the atmosphere of meetings. These interviews are conducted in order to refine our analyses and avoid misinterpretations.

These eleven steps in the methodology are complementary and all of them are important in the development of the research. The implementation of this method requires an investment by the HRD and trade unionists as well as the availability of some of them to participate in pre- and post-meeting interviews and self-confrontations. These steps, which are based on the ergonomics of the activity, are developed on the basis of observations and tools created in order to approach social skills with "precaution" and in the most "authentic" way.

Main Results

Various statistical methods such as the Wilson method (1949) and the Factorial Correspondence Analysis (FCA) were used in this research to verify whether the context of labor-union negotiation is conducive to the revelation of social skills and to analyze the link between the evolution of negotiation and this type of skill. The results obtained are numerous, only some of them are presented in this article.

Revelation of social skills in labor-union negotiation

Confidence intervals obtained from the Wilson method (Table 3) give an account of the uncertainties in relation to the frequencies observed (Chart 1). This method enables the position of social skills to be predicted within the identified intervals with an error threshold of 95%. It provides a "universal" view of the social skills that can be particularly mobilized in labor-union negotiation. The results obtained allow us to confirm the dominance of *Active listening* social skill (EA) which represents more than 50% of the social skills revealed. *Self-assertion* (A. SOI) is also dominant, representing more than 14% of the social skills mobilized by all participants. We also argue that the social skills *Reformulating* (R°) and *Inquiry* (INT°) are more observed than the other eight social skills. They are followed by the skills *Ability to open up discussion* (F. ECH) and *Convincing-persuading* (CONV-PERS) and then *Cooperation, support and Solidarity* (COOP S. S.). On the other hand, *Ability to manage a conflict situation* (CONFlle), *Self-control* (G.SOI) and *Flexibility* (FLEX) are poorly identified.

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

INSERT CHART 1 ABOUT HERE

Identification and mapping of social skills in situ

The process of identifying and formalizing social skills developed in research is complex. As a reminder, it requires knowledge of a glossary of the various skills likely to be mobilized in labor-union negotiations and the use of a survey grid in real situations.

Glossary of social skills

The glossary contains definitions associated with social skills and provides useful help in identifying them in real situations. However, there are a number of drawbacks to this tool. The lack of consensus among authors on the definitions of social skills makes it difficult to explain and describe them. Moreover, the definitions proposed in the glossary are critical, depending on the meaning and the field of study (psycholinguistic, work -, cognitive -, social-psychology ...) In addition, the observable characteristics associated with skills relate to non-exhaustive descriptions of the set of behaviors that can be observed and described. The difficulty in obtaining a glossary to report the completeness of behaviors describing social skills is likely to lead to complications in identifying them, as is evidenced by the poor identification of certain social skills (*Ability to manage a conflict situation*, *Flexibility*, *Self-control*). This observation also raises questions about the use of the survey grid used.

Social skills survey grid

The survey grid has the advantage of proposing a rapid formalization of social skills and stages marking the evolutionary process of negotiation identified in real-life situations through criteria to be encircled. However, the use of this grid reflects various difficulties. It is based on twelve items previously defined in the glossary of social skills that must be known before employment. In real situations, the "triple survey" of social skills, the evolving process of negotiations and the content of discussions make the task difficult. This dense survey is associated with a concern for "transparency" in the identification of social skills in a context of multiple, abundant and complex discussions. In addition, the use of the camera seems to us to be essential in this approach. However, it is not easy to use such a tool in real-life situations without inciting reluctance or even refusal. Finally, regarding the identification of social skills, we identify similarities in the manifestations of certain skills that may lead to confusion (examples: *Reformulating* and *Inquiry*, *Self-assertion* and *Convincing-persuading*, *Ability to manage a conflict situation* and *Self-control*). It is therefore necessary to refine their definitions and, in particular, their elements of distinction.

Relations between social skills and the progress of negotiations

In order to better understand the use of social skills during the evolving process of labor-union negotiation, we present the main results obtained with regard to the stages marking the progress of negotiations. Different complementary statistical methods were used. We present below the results of the average frequencies of social skills identified by negotiation stage (by sequence) and the FCA between all skills and each stage.

Average social skills frequency per stage

Negotiation stages appear repeatedly and very unevenly during negotiations. For example, the *Forging contact* stage (X) is identified 14 times and the *Discussion* stage (<=>) 235 times (see Table 4).

INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

The observation of the averages of social skills mobilized by negotiation stage (Table 5 an Chart 2) shows that these skills are generally more and more mobilized with regard to the evolution of negotiation stages (from *Forging contact* stage to *Winding down* stage) and mark an increasing linear curve as the stages progress. This can be explained in two different ways. On the one hand, during these stages of the negotiation process, we identify the time necessary for actors to appropriate the context and enter into negotiation. For example, negotiators open up the floor and mobilize more social skills in the *Discussion* stage than in the *Forging-contact* stage. On the other hand, we assume a relationship between social skills and stages according to the context. In this sense, certain stages would be marked by certain contexts and would favor social skills, which is particularly observable for the *Discussion* and *Winding down* stages. The latter is associated with an increase in the frequency of mobilized social skills. It corresponds to the final negotiation stage and may be perceived by the participants as a final opportunity for fine-tuning. Indeed, the actor perceives the limited duration of a situation, within which he has the possibility to act, he often plays on the maximum limits as reference values on which he can organize his activity in shared time (Amalberti, 2001). He allocates his negotiating activity according to this duration and tries to exploit it until the end.

INSERT TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

INSERT CHART 2 ABOUT HERE

FCA between social skills and negotiation stages

We then propose to present the results with a global view on all stages and skills including *Active listening*. From the FCA (Chart 3), we observe correlations between social skills and the most mobilized stages (*Forging-contact*, *Questioning-discussion*, *Discussion*, *Adjusting and Winding down*).

The *Forging-contact* stage (X) is marked by a normative phase. The group agrees on how it will operate to carry out the task it has set itself. At this stage, participants take on responsibilities. It is important in this stage to encourage others to free up the floor in order to know each other's positions and begin negotiation, as demonstrated by the correlation with *Ability to open up discussion* social competence.

The *Questioning* stage (?) is marked by an assault stage (Charles and Williame, 2002). It corresponds to a competition stage: the "conflicts of interest" are updated more explicitly than in the previous stage. Participants may attempt to dominate the group by attacking, retreating or asserting themselves (*Self-assertion*). The latter seems to be a dominant choice for all participants, who also propose changes to the original project (*Taking initiative or proposing*).

INSERT CHART 3 ABOUT HERE

The *Questioning-discussion* (? <=>) and *Discussion* (<=>) stages are marked by cooperation between participants (*Cooperation, support and solidarity*). This competence is mobilized with the aim of cohesion and

reinforcement in order to achieve a common goal within a group. It appears to be indispensable during this stage. *Active listening* punctuates the whole negotiation but is widely present during the *Discussion* stage. This stage is characterized by stimulation: participants reveal ideas on the subject or mode of operation, question each other (*Inquiry*) and compare their points of view. The consultation and implementation phases also punctuate this stage. Participants identify the steps that will be necessary to achieve the objective. They set the work scheduling and settle disagreements. They take action, work towards the goal and try to defend their interests (*Convincing-persuading*).

Finally, the stages of *Adjusting* (//) and *Winding down* (~) are marked by relaxation during which the participants manifest a certain letting go and relief regarding the completion of negotiation. The comments and criticisms of the other members of the group are accepted. More personal matters may be discussed. This stage is particularly marked by the mobilization of *Reformulating* and *Ability to generate sympathy*.

Discussion

This research shows that negotiation is an efficient vector of social skills revelation. These skills are context-dependent and fluctuate according to the progress of the negotiation process.

labor-union negotiations: a framework that reveals social skills

Social skills are present in labor-union negotiations. Some of them are particularly frequent during discussions. Given the high frequency of *Active listening*, we wonder whether it can really be equated with social competence. *Active listening* is associated with each of the social skills identified. Like the faculties of expression, this competence could be considered as a basis for negotiation discussions. However, we can also perceive the predominance of *Active listening* not as a constitutive principle of discussions but as a faculty specific to the participants in observed negotiations (Conquet, 1973) and therefore variable according to individuals and context. This last assumption would require a comparative study to be carried out between various negotiations involving different participants.

Labor-union negotiation is a communication situation that reveals social skills. Discussions between participants are constantly breaking out in an unstable universe, the participants influence each other in order to defend their interests. In this context, knowledge of the rules of social conduct in negotiation and those relating to the topics dealt with in economic, socio-political and legal fields is essential. Beyond this knowledge, the ability of an actor to intervene in negotiation depends on the development of expertise, but also on its ability to interact with other participants (Abecassis-Moedas et al. 2004) and on specific skills. Indeed, having a broad knowledge is not enough to make oneself heard, to understand or influence others or to achieve one's objectives. In particular, it is necessary to demonstrate one's knowledge in the areas addressed, to argue, to grasp hazards, to adapt, to understand the "game" of negotiation and the positions of each person, to grasp the meaning of what others have to say, and then to communicate one's ideas in such a way as to make oneself understood and influence others. So many behaviors that require the mobilization of certain so-called "social" skills, which stimulate, motivate and animate discussions.

Identifying and recording social skills in negotiation

The identification of the participants' social skills within the labor-union negotiations is conceivable as demonstrated by the method established in this research. The proposal for approaching them brings together the following five key steps: *the preliminary definition of the social skills items selected and the identification of the obvious signals associated with the mobilization of these items, the establishment of a grid to record these skills, the testing of this tool, its adaptation and its use in real negotiations*. This is partly due to an ergonomic method. We are indeed seeking to clarify the subjective notion of social skills and to better understand them in negotiation without however positioning ourselves in an action-oriented approach. The direct observations allow us to partially manage to make this notion more concrete in a context revealing these competences.

However, identifying and recording social skills during negotiations in real-life situations is a complex exercise. These difficulties can be explained both by the lack of consensus on social skills and their meanings, the controversies surrounding their presence and contributions during the activity, and the absence of an official and validated tool enabling their formalization. In our research, this exercise in the identification of social skills is all the more difficult as we are interested in their "context of implementation" and therefore in a wide range of information revealed almost simultaneously, since it is a question of understanding and filtering. Moreover, the difficulties in identifying social skills refer to the notion of "competence", which is itself imprecise and a source of controversy. Competence refers to a diversity of meanings, there are almost as many definitions of competence as there are professionals who have worked on the subject (Defélix, 2005). It has a dynamic and constructed evolving character. Recognizing and then raising the competence of an individual is therefore not self-evident and does not derive from a universal theoretical model.

Skills associated with complex negotiation dynamics

This study also reports on the interweaving of social skills in the evolutionary negotiation process. These skills are mobilized in a heterogeneous manner in this particular context. They are expressed more through a negotiation that is conducive to communication and are, on the contrary, less frequent when the participants stick to their positions and are resistant to discussion.

Some stages are more favorable than others to certain social skills. *Self-assertion*, *Convincing-persuading*, *Taking initiative or proposing* and *Cooperation, support and solidarity* are associated with the *Questioning* and *Discussion* stages. A greater diversity of the social skills mobilized is associated with this pre-discussion stage. The participants try different approaches to each other before starting the central *Discussion* stage. The increased presence of *Self-control* during the *Adjusting* stage reflects the latent conflicting nature of discussions. It also accounts for the difficulties of participants in finding compromises in the face of antagonistic positions. *Ability to generate sympathy* is particularly dominant in the *Winding down* stages: release stage and taking a step back from the content of negotiations. The social skills *Active listening*, *Inquiry* and *Reformulating* punctuate the process of negotiation from the outset and in the middle of it. They are unavoidable and independent of the stages of the negotiation process. They demonstrate the importance of the ability to promote discussions to initiate and enable discussion.

The causes of these findings are contextual or attitudinal (Fiske, 2008). In the first case, certain stages are associated with contexts that are more conducive to social skills in terms of content and dynamics of discussions. This importance of framework in the implementation of social skills refers to the work of Michelson et al (1983) and is also taken into account by Zarifian (1990) who considers that social skills, implemented individually, depend on the environment. In the second case, individuals would need some time to immerse themselves in the negotiation situation (each stage and more generally through meetings) in order to mobilize more social skills in terms of quantity and diversity. The need for time to adapt to the situation can be explained by the "*situational awareness*" (Endsley, 1995:65) of the participant who needs to understand the situation at all times. However, understanding negotiations is complex and it is easier to manage prototypical situations for which response reflexes are known and effective, than to manage fuzzy situations for which one must first invest in understanding and where the risk of action error is higher (Amalberti, 2001). The negotiation participants must take ownership of the content of the discussions, evaluate it, grasp not only the issues at stake, but also all the topics covered as well as everyone's interests and act accordingly. They take the time to take ownership of the content of the discussions and to have a "situational awareness" before committing themselves more fully to the discussions.

In conclusion

In conclusion of this article, the social skills resulting from the labor-union negotiation are communication resources mobilized by the individual to defend interests. These skills are articulated in a changing context, they testify to each person's ability to adapt, to consider the rules of social behavior and the legal framework

of the issues addressed. They are particularly respectful of employees and opponents, promote mutual understanding and converge towards a fluidization of discussions.

The negotiation context is indicative of these skills. However, these are unevenly distributed throughout the negotiation process. Their mobilization follows patterns that inform us of the entry and progress of the participants in the negotiations, as well as the obstacles or conflict situations. Social skills are thus part of a dynamic and punctuate the evolution of discussions.

This research focuses on human beings and their behavior. In this field, two situations are never totally similar. Negotiation meetings are not repeatable and are of an ephemeral nature. Social skills, although transferable in communication-related situations, are always expressed in the form of action and depend on context. As a result, the results are not representative of collective bargaining as a whole and are specific to the negotiations observed. Thus, the individual cannot be seen in terms of stability but rather in terms of cognitive changes and behavioral changes. It is necessary to observe, listen, analyze and consider on a case-by-case basis. In negotiation, behavioral variations are notably observable by social skills and are in response to a changing context. However, despite variations in negotiations that render the mobilized resources unstable, certain elements relating to meetings are reflected in other negotiations and are therefore repeated or even stabilized in some organizations. By adopting a systemic vision of phenomena in action, we focus on determinants that can justify the emergence of social skills in labor-union negotiations.

Finally, the identification of the essential social skills in a labor-union negotiations context gives us the opportunity to reflect on the implementation of individual and collective support for the use of these skills. The objective of these would be to inspire and improve their mobilization in negotiation and more broadly in the social dialogue by providing concrete benchmarks of communication according to the influence of the economic, political, technical, legal and social environment.

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Conflicts of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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Figure 1: Summary of the implementation process

Negotiation Phase	X		?		<=>		//		~	
Overall description of the sequence										
Social skills observed	EA	A.SOI	G.SOI	F.ECH	SYMP	CONFlle	COOP S.S	R°	INT°	CONV-PERS	FLEX

Figure 2: X: Forging contact; **?**: Questioning; **<=>**: Discussion; **//**: Ajusting; **~**: Winding down.
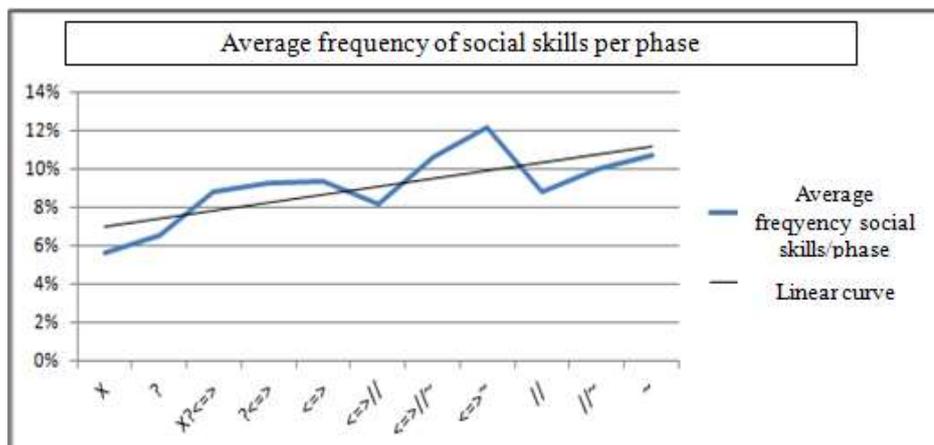
EA: Active listening; **A.SOI**: Self-assertion; **G.SOI**: Self-control; **F.ECH**: Ability to open up discussion; **SYMP**: Ability to generate sympathy; **CONFLLE**: Ability to manage a conflict situation; **COOP S.S**: Co-operation, support and solidarity; **R°**: Reformulating; **INT°**: Inquiry; **I ou PRO**: Taking initiative or proposing; **CONV-PERS**: Convincing-persuading; **FLEX**: Flexibility.

Chart 1: Confidence intervals of social skills frequency
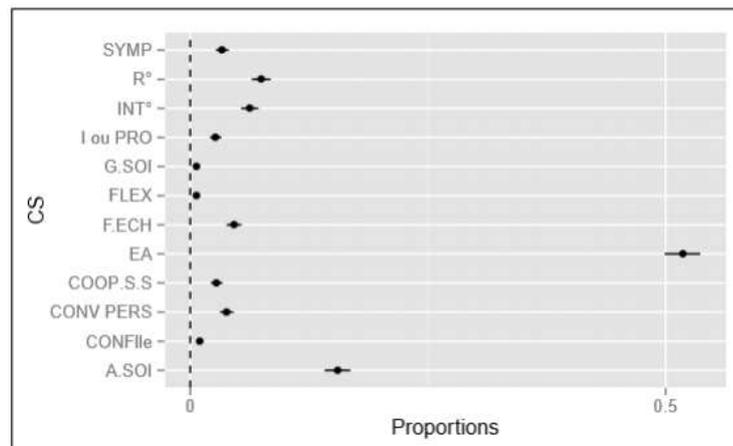
Chart 1: SYMP: Ability to generate sympathy; **R°**: Reformulating; **INT°**: Inquiry; **I ou PRO**: Taking initiative or proposing; **G.SOI**: Self-control; **FLEX:** Flexibility; **F.ECH**: Ability to open up discussion; **EA:** Active listening; **COOP.S.S**: Cooperation, support and solidarity; **CONV PERS**: Convincing - persuading; **CONFlle**: Ability to manage a conflict situation; **A. SOI**: Self-assertion.
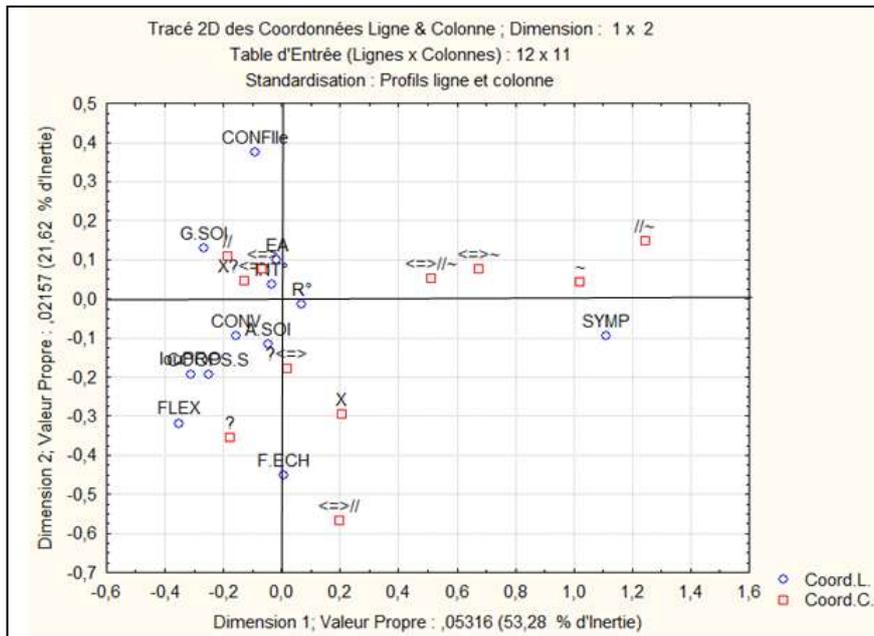
Chart 2: Average frequency of social skills per phase (by sequence)

Chart 2: X: Forging contact; **?**: Questioning; **X?<=>**: Phase composed of Forging contact- questioning - discussion ; **?<=>**: Questioning -discussion; **<=>**: Discussion; **<=>//**: Discussion–adjusting; **<=>//~**: Discussion–adjusting-winding down; **<=>~**: Discussion-winding down; **//**: Adjusting; **//~**: Adjusting-winding down; **~** : Winding down.

Chart 3: Correlations between social skills and negotiation phases

Chart 3: EA: Active listening; **F.ECH**: Ability to open up discussion; **A.SOI**: Self-assertion; **G.SOI**: Self-control; **SYMP**: Ability to generate sympathy; **CONFLLE**: Ability to manage a conflict situation; **COOP S.S**: Cooperation, support and solidarity; **R°**: Reformulating; **INT°**: Inquiry; **I ou PRO**: Taking initiative or proposing; **CONV-PERS**: Convincing-persuading; **FLEX**: Flexibility. **X**: Forging contact; **?**: Questioning; **X?<=>**: Phase composed of Forging contact- questioning -discussion ; **?<=>**: Questioning -discussion; **<=>**: Discussion; **<=>//**: Discussion–adjusting; **<=>//~**: Discussion–adjusting-winding down; **<=>~**: Discussion-winding down; **//**: Adjusting; **//~**: Adjusting-winding down; **~** : Winding down.

Table 1: Negotiation Phases based on NACRE Project (Longuet et al, 2007)

Progressive negotiation process		Description of phases marking the evolutionary negotiation process
Phases	**Symbols**	
Forging contact	**X**	Setting objectives, as well as the context and conduct of the negotiations. Presenting the participants' main expectations regarding the issues to be addressed.
Questioning	**?**	Reference to central issues. Consulting the adversary, learning about each other's key expectations.
Discussion	<=>	Argument, objection, proposal

		(high stress risk)
Adjusting	**//**	Conciliating interests.
Winding-down	**~**	Addressing various themes to help individuals overcome an emotionally strong context. Putting the content of the negotiations into perspective.

Table 2: Excerpt from the glossary of social skills: *"Ability to open up discussion"*

Definition: The social skill "*Ability to open up discussion* "corresponds to individual contact easiness: to start, make participate and encourage feedback, to maintain, promote and close contact with the participants. It encompasses the capacity to engage and re-engage participants.

Observed Behaviors:

Alternately positioned as emitter and receiver.

Reaching out to others, encouraging others to express themselves, and taking an interest in their ideas and opinions.

Fostering the other party's expression: "sensing" the exchange, interpreting signs and attitudes of non-verbal communication and reacting accordingly.

Discerning the objectives and constraints, summarizing them and then restating them.

Able to explain technical language to the speaker.

Seeking everyone's opinion: encouraging and multiplying calls for participation, encouraging individuals to adopt a calm and patient attitude towards each other (by adopting this behavior oneself)

Capable of listening to opinions differing from one's own.

Encourage neutral position: avoiding expressing an opinion before obtaining the opinions of other participants.

Considering an opinion as specific to the person expressing it.

Make sure that everyone shares the same idea before considering it as final.

Examples:

Watching the facial expressions accompanying the speech (emphasizing, minimizing)

Monitoring its flow and articulating

Choosing the appropriate language register to suit all parties.

Encouraging the expression of different opinions ("What does such a person think?")

Using expressions such as: "Isn't it?", "We agree on this point" ...

Knowing how to use redundancies: "As we've already mentioned..."

Being clear and concrete: building effective sentences, using accurate words, expressing oneself with precise vocabulary.

Using "evocative" terms, appealing to the senses of sight ("You see", "If we look at...", "Notice that ..."), and of hearing ("I'm listening to you", "I hear what you are saying there"...)

Table 3: Number and frequency of social skills

Variables	Nos.	Frequency
Active listening (EA)	940	51%
Ability to open up discussion (F.ECH)	104	5%
Self-assertion (A.SOI)	292	14%
Self-control (G.SOI)	40	1%
Ability to generate sympathy (SYMP)	71	3%
Ability to manage a conflict situation (CONFlle)	30	1%
Cooperation, support and solidarity (COOP S.S)	109	4%
Reformulating (R°)	197	8%
Inquiry (INT°)	143	5%
Taking initiative or proposing (I ou PRO)	95	3%
Convincing – persuading (CONV-PERS)	87	5%
Flexibility (FLEX)	11	0%

Table 4: Number of each phase during negotiations

Phases	X	?	X ?<=>	?<=>	<=>	<=>//	<=>//~	<=>~	//	//~	~
No. of phase	14	29	1	42	235	4	2	4	5	1	9

Table 4: X: Forging contact; ?: Questioning; **X?<=>**: phase composed of Forging contact- questioning - discussion ; **?<=>**: Questioning -discussion; **<=>**: Discussion; **<=>//**: Discussion- adjusting; **<=>//~**: Discussion-adjusting-winding down; **<=>~**: Discussion-winding down; **//**: Adjusting; **//~**: Adjusting-winding down; **~** : Winding down.

Table 5: Average frequency of social skills per phase (by sequence)

Phases	X	?	X ?<=>	?<=>	<=>	<=>//	<=>//~	<=>~	//	//~	~
No. in each Phase	14	29	1	42	235	4	2	4	5	1	9
No. of Social skills/Phase	63	152	7	310	1755	26	17	39	35	8	77
Averages of Social skills/Phase	4,5	5,2	7,0	7,4	7,5	6,5	8,5	9,8	7,0	8,0	8,6
Average frequencies of Social skills/Phase	6%	7%	9%	9%	9%	8%	11%	12%	9%	10%	11%

Table 5: X: Forging contact; ?: Questioning; **X?<=>**: Phase composed of Forging contact- questioning - discussion ; **?<=>**: Questioning -discussion; **<=>**: Discussion; **<=>//**:Discussion–adjusting; **<=>//~**: Discussion–adjusting-winding down; **<=>~**: Discussion-winding down; **//**: Adjusting; **//~**: Adjusting-winding down; **~** : Winding down.