

# TACTILE SENSATIONS VS. NEGOTIATION

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Three scientists working in the United States have studied the effect of tactile sensations on human judgment and decisions, and on negotiating behavior in particular. Their findings are quite surprising<sup>1</sup>.

They tested how touching things and feeling their weight, texture or hardness unconsciously influences our impressions and decisions *about totally unrelated events and situations*. Their research indicates for instance that we tend to associate weight (heaviness, lightness) with concepts of seriousness and importance. As a result, one of their experiments showed that job candidates who handed over to a reviewer an application file weighting 2 kilos were rated more positively than those whose file weighted only 350 grams!

As far as negotiation is concerned, the scientists designed the following experience: eighty-six participants sat in either a hard wooden chair or a soft cushioned chair; they were asked to imagine shopping for a new car and subsequently place two offers on the car – assuming that the dealer rejected their first offer. Results show that participants who sat in hard chairs judged the car dealer to be more stable and less emotional than did participants who sat in soft chairs. The researchers also calculated the changes between the first and the second offer made by the "buyers". They had assumed that participants seating on hard chairs and considering the car dealer as being more stable and less emotional would increase their offer less than participants who sat on soft chair – which indeed happened.

## Comments

*As confirmed by one of the authors of the article in an email exchange, interpreting the results of this last experiment is not easy.*

*On the one hand, it definitely appears that tactile sensations unconsciously influence both the impressions that we have of another person and our own behavior and decisions regarding that person.*

*On the other hand, one could make different assumptions than the one made in the study – e.g.:*

- *Seating on a hard chair will lead the buyer to be "tougher" (i.e.: less willing to change his or her initial offer) independently of his or her opinion of the car dealer.*
- *Thinking that the car dealer is particularly stable and unemotional will have the opposite effect than the one which was observed in the study – i.e.: the buyer will conclude that he/she needs to increase his/her initial offer significantly in order to incite the car dealer to accept it.*

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<sup>i</sup> Ackermann, J. M., Nocera, C. C. and Bargh, J. A.: [\*Incidental Haptic Sensations Influence Social Judgments and Decisions\*](#), Science, Vol. 328, 25 June 2010