Chapter 1
Achieving World Peace through International Trade: Can E–Collaboration Technologies Help Make this Happen?

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ABSTRACT

Can e-collaboration technologies help achieve world peace by supporting international trade? At first glance, this seems like an unusual and somewhat nonsensical question. The variables involved, particularly international trade and world peace, may appear to be too broad and socially complex to be meaningfully influenced by e-collaboration technologies. Also, the connection between these variables, if it exists, seems at best counterintuitive. Yet, there is empirical evidence that humans might have evolved what could be called a trading instinct, with the fitness-enhancing goal of either reducing or eliminating the likelihood of violent conflict between trading groups. This would explain why so many people seem compelled to engage in trade interactions, even when they do not need the goods or services that are being traded. This chapter argues that such trading instinct might have evolved, and if it did, that the evolution of the trading instinct happened in the context of face-to-face interactions. Therefore, the same instinct in modern humans would require e-collaboration media of high naturalness (i.e., high face-to-face similarity) to properly play its conflict reduction role. In this sense, e-collaboration media naturalness may act as a moderator of the effect that trade may have on the trading parties’ predispositions to later engage in or support violent conflict, either with each other or with members of the trading parties’ national groups.

INTRODUCTION

Anthropological evidence suggests that the human species has evolved what could be called a “trading instinct” over many years of Darwinian adaptation, where trade acts as a social catalyst and thus as a suppressor of violent conflict among trading groups. Yet, the geographical and cultural separation between modern groups engaged in international trade makes it difficult for the trading instinct to
achieve its evolutionarily adaptive goal. The trading instinct notion implies that trade has social as well as utilitarian purposes. The social purposes include building alliances and curbing violence among trading groups.

Without enough natural, or face-to-face-like, human interaction it is unlikely that the trading instinct will achieve its conflict reduction and other social purposes; even though it may achieve its main utilitarian purpose, namely the economically beneficial international exchange of needed goods or services. The more face-to-face-like a communication medium is the higher is its degree of naturalness. Therefore non-face-to-face international trade interactions may benefit the least from its potential social benefits.

This is arguably a problematic state of affairs, since it appears that the greatest potential for conflict in modern society is between groups that are located in different countries and that have markedly different cultures. It is argued in this chapter that e-collaboration tools that increase the naturalness of electronic trade interactions can play the role of enablers of international trade. As such they can go some way toward solving this problem, and perhaps contribute to world peace. In other words, the argument made here is that individuals who trade through natural electronic media (perhaps media that allow them to interact in a face-to-face-like manner), may be less inclined to engage in violent conflict with one another. As more and more individuals participated in this type of interactions, a national climate would be created that would be less conducive to support for wars between countries. If individual members of a nation A have a favorable predisposition toward individuals in another nation B, it is likely that they will not be inclined to support belligerent actions by the government of nation A (or groups that represent nation A) against nation B.

**THE UTILITARIAN VIEW OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

International trade is more often than not viewed from a utilitarian perspective. One group of individuals, who make up a nation, owns a good or service that is either needed or desired by some other group of individuals in a different nation. The result is trade between the two national groups in one of its many forms, including: the exchange of goods or services for other goods or services, known as bartering; and the more typical exchange of goods or services for cash or a promise of future cash payment, which is the most typical instance of trade.

The utilitarian view of international trade essentially is that trade is necessary so that individuals or groups can acquire goods and services that they are not capable of efficiently producing themselves. This view is indeed consistent with the historic view of trade among nations, and the tremendous growth in international trade that occurred since the 19th century. Arguably that growth has been largely motivated by the notion that certain nations are more efficient producers of specific goods than others. When a nation is a more efficient producer of a certain class of goods (e.g., a type of metal used in manufacturing) than another nation, then trade of that class of goods benefits both nations.

Several theoretical models of international trade have been proposed that are closely related to the utilitarian view. One of these theoretical models is the Ricardian model of international trade, named after the English stockbroker and economist David Ricardo (see Figure 1). Ricardo is seen by many as the creator of the first conceptual frameworks for the systematic study of economics. Along with notable classical economics scholars such as Adam Smith and Thomas Malthus, he was one of the most influential thinkers during the phase that was marked by a major shift in the understanding of economics. The shift was from the ruler’s (e.g., the king’s) interests to
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