NEGOTIATION AND COALITION BUILDING

Core concepts and application

1. Analyze the situation: Who holds influence, what is the nature and direction of that influence, and who needs influence?

2. What kind of agreements am I out to create? What are the issues, interests, possibilities for joint gain?

3. What kinds of coalitions are possible? Which are essential?

4. How can favorable coalitions be built? How can unfavorable ones be blocked?
Myths and Realities of Influence: “Vulnerable” Need Not Mean “Powerless”

- “Resources” (structural advantages, such as formal authority, land, money) do not ensure “resourcefulness.”

- Likewise, a lack of resources (or a structural disadvantage) calls for extra resourcefulness.

- Keys are: (a) savvy preparation “away from the table,” (b) getting to the table “early” (consider pre-meeting moves, avoid getting shut out by early side deals), (c) heading off or breaking up adverse coalitions while “at” the table, and (d) creating a “blocking” coalition if necessary.
Creating Value through Trades

- Stakeholders often look instinctively for “common ground,” but value is usually created by trading on differences in what parties want.

- Many differences matter and may be exploited creatively, for example differences in: TANGIBLE INTERESTS, TIMING, FORECASTS, RISK AVERSION, SUBSTANCE vs. APPEARANCES.

See Briggs, “We are all negotiators now: An introduction to negotiation in community problem-solving,” The Community Problem-Solving Project @ MIT (June 2003). At www.community-problem-solving.net
Identify and Pursue Favorable Coalitions

There are multiple bases for creating them:

- Shared interests?
- Shared positions (e.g., prefer “no deal”)?
- Valuable trades?
- Common history?
- Common allies or enemies?
- Shared vulnerability? (for example, risk of being locked out of decisionmaking)
Identify and Deal with Adverse Coalitions

- Anticipate them—do your homework.

- **Break them** (divide and weaken them, within ethical bounds): pre-empt when you can; divide/encourage defectors after-the-fact. Look for “holes” in the adverse coalition.

- Discourage processes that might produce them.

- Move the conversation beyond narrow claiming, **immediate interests**—appeal to higher principles, shared goals, notions of fairness (where appropriate), “norm of unanimous action.”
Timing the Approach to Potential Allies
Map influence patterns, then best sequence

- How probable is successful recruitment of Party A now?
- How valuable is successful recruitment of them now (process effects on decisions of others, outcomes)?
- How costly is successful recruitment now (goodies, process effects, for example if others would be less likely to join)?
- How costly is failed recruitment now (process effects)?

*Example of U.S. recruiting both UK and Saudi Arabia early to Gulf War coalition.*
Key Lessons

1. **POWER.** Stakeholders often have more power and coalition potential than they assume. Structure merely sets up possibilities and boundaries—the key is resourcefulness, not just resources.

2. **COALITIONS.** Strong coalitions tend to be based on shared interests and/or values or a shared position.

3. “**EXPANDING THE PIE**” (JOINT GAIN). Most value creation requires trading on differences in what parties want.

4. **PROCESS PLANNING.** Keys to sequencing that let you create and claim value: carefully packaging issues, sequencing meetings to recruit allies and deflect opponents, being proactive about both favorable and “blocking” coalitions.