Diagnosing and Overcoming Barriers to Agreement

Sometimes negotiations fail for good reasons. There simply isn’t a zone of agreement and the negotiators are better off going with their best alternatives. Often, however, negotiations fail when mutually beneficial agreements were possible. The consequences of failure may be mild—a deal isn’t consummated that could have been done. In other cases lives are lost, valuable resources are irretrievably destroyed, or relationships are damaged beyond repair, all because the negotiators weren’t able to overcome barriers to agreement.¹

The note offers guidelines for diagnosing and overcoming five key types of barriers to negotiated agreement:

- **structural barriers**—impediments that arise because of the way the negotiation is structured—i.e. who participates, what the issues are, what linkages exist with other negotiations. For example, the wrong people (or too many people) may be negotiating, or the agenda may be too narrow or too broad, or communications channels may be nonexistent.

- **strategic barriers**—pernicious interactions among negotiators’ rational strategies for advancing their interests. For example, negotiators’ mutual fears of vulnerability if they reveal their true interests may lead to breakdowns or mediocre deals.

- **psychological barriers**—characteristic biases in negotiators’ perceptions and judgements. For example, negotiators faced with uncertain outcome if they don’t reach agreement (such as litigating a personal injury lawsuit) may be over-confident about their chances of winning, or those enmeshed in bitter conflicts may vilify and depersonalize “the enemy.”

- **institutional barriers**—internal political and organizational dynamics within institutions (businesses, governments) that complicate negotiations between them. For example, a negotiating representative may be so constrained by internal political differences within her side that she can only offer lowest-common-denominator positions to the other side, or one side may be so disorganized that it can’t negotiate effectively.

- **cultural barriers**—differences in communication styles, norms and worldviews, as well as the inherent ethnocentrism of members of different cultures. For example, negotiations may be complicated by differing beliefs about what will create value or who should legitimately make decisions.

¹ The focus on barriers to agreement flows from *Barriers to Conflict Resolution* (1995, New York: W. W. Norton), which was edited by Kenneth Arrow, Robert Mnookin, Lee Ross, Amos Tversky and Robert Wilson. The *Barriers* book is a very important, cross-disciplinary examination of the reasons why conflicts persist.

*Professor Michael D. Watkins prepared this note.*

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These types of barriers arise in a wide array of negotiations ranging from personal disputes to corporate mergers to union-management negotiations to conflicts between ideologically opposed groups. By carefully diagnosing barriers to agreement, negotiators can adjust their strategies to overcome them—and avoid creating them in the first place.

While we develop five categories of barriers, the distinctions among them can never be completely clean. Also, the various types of barriers often interact and reinforce each other. The absence of good channels for communication (a structural barrier) can increase the perceived riskiness of revealing information to counterparts (a strategic barrier) which can in turn contribute to suspicion and stereotyping of the other side (a psychological barrier). The mutually reinforcing nature of barriers to agreement is a theme we develop throughout the rest of the note.

Structural Barriers

Every dimension of negotiation structure—the participating parties, agenda of issues, interests, BATNAs, agreements, linkages to other negotiations, and action-forcing events—can give rise to barriers to agreement. Negotiators should be alert to ways that the existing structure of negotiations could prevent them from advancing their interests. Have blocking coalitions formed to oppose agreement? Are communications channels poor and contributing to misunderstandings?

Assessments of structural barriers help negotiators decide how to shape (or reshape) the structure of their negotiations. Consider the following examples:

- You are negotiating a large industrial supply contract with a new customer. Early on you realize that the representative for the other side doesn't have any real authority to make concessions or commitments, but is just a messenger for his boss. In response, you press to move the negotiations up a level.

- You are representing a small country engaged in a dispute with a neighbor over a border area. Each claims the area exclusively and the negotiations have deadlocked. In response you expand the negotiations agenda to include other outstanding issues of trade and security and work out a package deal that includes a joint economic zone.

- You are an envoy of the US government negotiating with the North Koreans over the latter’s efforts to develop nuclear weapons. The dispute is teetering on the brink of armed conflict. But you lack good channels for communicating with the other side and this is contributing to the escalation. In response, President Clinton sends former President Jimmy Carter as an envoy to meet with the North Korean leadership and he succeeds in mediating a breakthrough.

As summarized below, by working to shape the structure, there often are ways to overcome structural barriers.

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2 The introductory chapter of *Barriers to Conflict Resolution* develops three broad classes of barriers: (1) tactical and strategic, (2) psychological, and (3) institutional, organizational, or structural barriers. See also Mnookin, R. 1995. “Why Negotiations Fail: An Exploration of Barriers to the Resolution of Conflict.” *NIDR Forum*, Summer/Fall 1993 pp. 21-31. Sebenius (1996) developed structural barriers as a distinct category. See “Introduction to Negotiation Analysis: Structure, People, and Context” Harvard Business School note #896-034. The author of this note believes that cultural barriers are a distinct category. Note that these various types of barriers can complicate any negotiation, not just ones involving conflicts.

3 These dimensions of negotiation structure are developed in Watkins M. 2000. “Negotiation Analysis: A Synthesis.” Harvard Business School Note #800-316. See also Chapter 9, “Dealing with Blocking Coalitions and Related Barriers to Agreement” by Jim Sebenius.

4 See Rosegrant, S. 1996. *Carrots, sticks and question marks: Negotiating the North Korean nuclear crisis (A) and (B).* Cambridge, Mass.: John F. Kennedy School of Government Case #1297.0 and 1298.0.
Table 1. Diagnosing and Overcoming Structural Barriers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural Barriers</th>
<th>Approaches to overcoming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The wrong parties are at the table.</td>
<td>Invite in allies and attempt to exclude adversaries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too many parties are at the table.</td>
<td>Reduce the number of parties by convincing some to be represented by others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blocking coalitions have formed.</td>
<td>Seek to co-opt the weakest links.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The parties lack good channels for</td>
<td>Develop new channels for communication, perhaps by using third party mediators or facilitators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communicating.</td>
<td>Hold up negotiations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The agenda is too narrow or too broad.</td>
<td>Broaden or narrow the issue-agenda.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sequence in which issues get</td>
<td>Alter the sequence in which issues get negotiated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negotiated is disadvantageous.</td>
<td>Hold up negotiations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parties are locked into incompatible</td>
<td>Focus on interests and identify opportunities to enlarge the pie.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>positions.</td>
<td>Hold up negotiations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No zone of potential agreement seems to</td>
<td>Take actions &quot;away from the table&quot; to transform alternatives to agreement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exist.</td>
<td>Hold up negotiations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linkages with other negotiations - past,</td>
<td>Seek to de-link negotiations to create more flexibility or create new linkages of your own to tap into latent sources of power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>present, or future - cause binding</td>
<td>Hold up negotiations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>constraints.</td>
<td>Hold up negotiations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action-forcing events such as deadlines</td>
<td>Explore ways to relax action-forcing events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>limit flexibility.</td>
<td>Hold up negotiations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is no time pressure to reach</td>
<td>Set up action-forcing events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agreement.</td>
<td>Hold up negotiations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Strategic Barriers

Strategic barriers arise when negotiators’ rational efforts to advance their interests interact in pernicious ways. Barriers of this type are especially likely to create problems when there is uncertainty about the size (or even the existence) of the bargaining range, when parties feel vulnerable and uncertain about each other’s intentions, and when communication between the sides is poor. As a result, negotiators make rational strategic choices that unfortunately lead to impasse or sub-optimal agreements.

Overly Aggressive Demands

Negotiators often have to bargain in the face of substantial informational asymmetries: they know a lot about their own interests, BATNAs, and walk-aways, but much less about their counterparts’. When there are significant asymmetries of this kind, negotiators are susceptible to having their perceptions of the bargaining range influenced by counterparts’ attempts to conceal important information or to actively mislead. One way this can lead to problems is through overly aggressive demands. Negotiators make such demands because they are operating under uncertainty and fear being taken advantage of. But this strategic overreaching can undermine the potential for agreement in at least two ways. First, the apparent distance between the sides may

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5 Chapter 1 of Barriers to Conflict Resolution For more detail, see Wilson, R. B. “Strategic and Informational Barriers to Negotiation” Chapter 6 in Arrow et. al 1995.

convince some or all of the parties that no agreement is possible. Second, negotiators may commit themselves irreversibly to positions which turn out not to be in the bargaining range.\(^7\) Either way, mutually beneficial deals go undone.

**The Negotiator’s Dilemma**

As Lax and Sebenius (1986) noted, negotiators confront the *negotiator’s dilemma* whenever their efforts to create joint value are vulnerable to individual actions to claim value.\(^8\) Suppose, for example, that you are negotiating on behalf of a manufacturing company with a supplier over price and delivery time for an order of key sub-components. You have an opportunity to make a good sale to a new customer, but lack the inventory to meet their needs in time. So you need to get the necessary components from your supplier fast, and are willing to pay somewhat more than usual to do so. You don’t know it, but the supplier actually has some slack capacity and could set things up to produce the order for you as quickly as you need it. But they wouldn’t be willing to do so without getting some additional premium. You are concerned about signaling your need to get the order quickly, fearing they will gouge you. You also are concerned about establishing a bad precedent on pricing. So you represent that timing is not all that crucial and inquire about availability and price. Believing that you are more interested in pushing down prices than in timing, your supplier feigns a lack of capacity and no deal occurs.

In this situation both sides would have been better off if they made a faster-delivery time-for-higher-price trade, but this doesn’t happen because neither knows what the other really cares about. Each faces a key choice is: do I reveal what I really care about to my counterpart? If both negotiators do so, they can make a mutually beneficial trade that “enlarges the pie.” If one is candid and the other misleads, the trade gets made, but on terms that strongly favor the untruthful negotiator. If neither is candid, the trade may not get made at all. Asymmetries in information and mutual vulnerability once again drive out the potential for beneficial cooperation. The negotiator’s dilemma is illustrated below.

**Figure 1. The Negotiator’s Dilemma**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Them</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Be truthful about interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Us</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be truthful about</td>
<td>We make modest gains and so do they.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interests</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek to mislead</td>
<td>We gain a lot, they gain a little.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The Prisoner’s Dilemma**

The negotiators’ dilemma is a variation on a more general social tension between cooperation and conflict known as the *prisoner’s dilemma.*\(^9\) In the classic formulation, two felons commit a crime, are captured and separated. Each is offered a deal. “If you confess and your partner doesn’t, you will get two years in prison and your partner will get seven. If you both confess, you both get five years.” Each knows that if they both refuse to confess, they likely will end up with three years each. But each fears the other will confess, and so both do and both get five years – a lose-lose outcome.

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\(^9\) Luce and Raiffa (1957) attribute the formulation of the prisoner’s dilemma game to A.W. Tucker. See Luce, R. D. and Raiffa, H. 1957. *Games and Decisions.* New York: Dover. p. 94. The literature on one-shot and repeated prisoner’s dilemma games is vast.
Prisoner’s dilemma-like situations frequently arise in conflict situations. Even if all parties believe it to be in their best interests to negotiate a settlement, they may be unable to do so. Negotiators for contending parties often face a core choice: should I risk making myself vulnerable or not? For instance, suppose two countries are on the brink of war and are negotiating to try to avoid it. Each fears the other will launch a devastating first strike. Because each is uncertain about the other’s intentions and both are vulnerable, the incentives to attack preemptively are very high.

The prisoner’s dilemma is illustrated below. If both parties cooperate modest gains can be achieved (or losses prevented). But the risks inherent in cooperating when the other side may not do so are very high; whatever the other side does in this situation, you are better off if you choose to contend. The problem, of course, is that the other player faces the same options. So both contend and both do worse than this could have by cooperating.

Prisoner’s dilemmas appear in a wide array of negotiating situations ranging from organizational incentive systems that promote internal competition to difficulties keeping the members of OPEC from over-producing and undermining the oil cartel. If the players are playing an on-going game, then the threat of future contention and the desire to maintain relationships may permit them to achieve a cooperation outcome. But if the game is of limited duration, players may begin to defect toward the end, the so-called “end-game effect.”

Insecure Agreements

Some agreements are inherently more sustainable or "secure" than others. Leaving the fox in charge of the hen house is inadvisable, even if you have an agreement that he will care for the chickens. When negotiators believe others may have incentives to abrogate or re-negotiate agreements, this can create a strategic barrier to agreement. Concerns about the sustainability of agreements are even more difficult to manage when there are significant ambiguities or uncertainties about what the future will hold.

Concerns about sustainability effectively shrink the pie, because the parties try to hedge themselves against risk by being conservative and perhaps even overly defensive. If negotiators trust each other, it may be possible to rely on good will to resolve ambiguities or deal with future contingencies. But what if you don’t fully trust your counterparts?

The impact of structure on strategic barriers

The structure of negotiating situations can affect the likelihood that negotiators will face strategic barriers. For example, prisoner’s dilemmas are more likely to cause problems when:

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11 See Chapter 13 of Raiffa (1982) and Chapter 13 of Lax and Sebenius (1986)
Diagnosing and Overcoming Barriers to Agreement

- **Ability to verify compliance with agreements is low.** If the parties can’t perfectly observe each other’s actions, lack of transparency and inability to verify compliance with agreements make them feel more vulnerable.

- **Communication channels are weak.** Inability to communicate and build relationships foments misunderstandings and perceived vulnerability.

- **Reaction time is short.** Narrow windows in which to respond to aggressive actions without suffering serious damage increase the likelihood of preemptive defensive actions, which can trigger an escalatory spiral.

- **Many parties have to cooperate.** If success in creating value requires the cooperation of many parties, the chance that one party will decide to contend rather than cooperate increases with the number of parties.

- **Agreements can’t easily be enforced.** If the negotiators can make binding agreements, enforced by law or by powerful outsiders, vulnerability is reduced.

- **There are no future interactions.** Future negotiations cannot be held hostage to cooperation in current negotiations.

**Overcoming Strategic Barriers**

How do contending parties find ways to increase confidence where they are mutually vulnerable and don’t trust each other? Broadly useful techniques for fostering cooperation—or at least compliance—in the absence of trust include:

- **verification regimes**—arrangements to observe each other’s actions as a way of reducing mutual uncertainty and increasing transparency;

- **incrementalism**—proceeding in a series of small, mutually verifiable steps, making future gains contingent on meeting current obligations and embedding current negotiations in a larger context so as to avoid end-game effects;

- **hostage-taking**—having each side deposit substantial resources (e.g., a large sum of money) into an escrow account supervised by an independent party, with the understanding that the proceeds will be forfeited in the event of noncompliance; and

- **outside guarantors**—involving powerful external parties as guarantors of the agreement with the understanding that they will punish noncompliance.

**Psychological Barriers**

Strategic barriers often are exacerbated by psychological barriers—biases of perception and interpretation that diminish the potential for agreement. Common psychological barriers include rigid mental models, overconfidence, loss aversion, partisan perceptions, and groupthink.

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Rigid Mental Models

People orient themselves in novel or complex situations by using pre-existing interpretative frameworks, or “mental models,” to decide to what they should pay attention.¹³ Mental models provide the crucial link between observation and interpretation allowing us to “make sense” of what is going on. They embody our beliefs about relationships between cause and effect, the intentions of others, and the lessons of history.¹⁴ Think of union leaders negotiating with corporate managers, or husbands negotiating with wives, or the United States negotiating with North Korea. How do these parties’ mental models differ and what implications do these differences have for their negotiations?

Without mental models, negotiators would have to figure out every new situation from scratch, and that would be impossible. But established mental models can also promote rigidity and block learning in new situations. What happens, for example, if people consistently enter negotiations with a zero-sum mindset? The frameworks negotiators use to interpret reality are so deeply embedded in their psyches that they are unaware of their biases. As a result, people block out information that is inconsistent with accepted “truths”– a process known as selective perception. In addition, people tend to actively seek evidence that confirms accepted truths.¹⁵

Overconfidence

Negotiators often are overconfident that future uncertainties will be resolved in their favor.¹⁶ When both sides in a lawsuit believe they will prevail in court, for example, someone (perhaps everyone) is falling prey to overconfidence that may preclude an out-of-court settlement. Overconfidence is a manifestation of a deeper desire on the part of negotiators to make themselves feel competent and secure. Bazerman and Neale (1992) characterized this tendency as “need-based illusions” or “self-serving biases” than can contribute to irrational behavior. They further identified three key categories of need-based illusions: illusion of superiority, illusion of optimism, and illusion of control.¹⁷

Loss Aversion

Research in cognitive psychology has revealed that people tend to be loss-averse—more sensitive to potential losses than to equivalent gains.¹⁸ This conservatism can magnify the impact of strategic barriers to agreement. To illustrate, suppose you are asked to play the two prisoner’s-dilemma games shown below. In both games, you and your counterpart must submit simultaneous decisions about whether to cooperate or contend. You won’t know what your counterpart has decided until after you make your own decision, and you cannot make binding commitments up-front. You will never see each other again. In which game would you be more likely to cooperate if the other player promised to cooperate?

17 See Chapter 8 of Bazerman and Neale (1992)
Figure 3. Loss Aversion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Them</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cooperate</td>
<td>Contend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>You</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cooperate</strong></td>
<td><strong>You lose $1000</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>They lose $1000</strong></td>
<td><strong>They lose nothing.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Defect</strong></td>
<td><strong>You lose nothing.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>They lose $2500</strong></td>
<td><strong>They lose $1500</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The only difference between the two games is that the second involves gains and the first involves losses. But people are more likely to cooperate in the second situation. The implication is that situations that require people to allocate losses—be they financial or have to do with power and status in organizations or land in international disputes—are much more difficult to manage than situations where the issue is how to divide up gains.

In conflict situations, loss aversion can result in what Ross and Ward (1995) called the problem of intermediate steps. The contending parties may want to settle, but the path to settlement may require them to accept significant short-term losses in return for larger long-term gains. In the early stages of the Oslo peace process, for example, the Israelis had to accept that Arafat would return to Gaza, and territory in the West Bank would be handed over to the Palestinians. In the short run, this increased the potential for terrorist attacks to be organized and launched from Palestinian controlled territory. But this was a necessary first step in moving toward a broader resolution of the conflict. Because of loss aversion, the potential short-term downside looms larger than the long-term benefits.

**Partisan Perceptions**

The experience of conflict irreversibly alters disputants’ attitudes and perceptions in ways that can make conflict self-sustaining. The combatants accumulate psychological “residues”—emotional associations and expectations that irreversibly alter their attitudes toward each other. Their perceptions of the situation and the actions of the other side are strongly shaped by their partisanship.

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19 Ross and Ward (1995) provide this explanation of intermediate steps: “in order to reach a long-term resolution that is satisfactory to both parties, one or even both parties may be obliged to take a step backward—that is, to accept, at least temporarily, changes in the status quo that leave it poorer, weaker, or more vulnerable than before” (p. 257).


Consider, for example, the situation faced by management and workers at the Hormel meatpacking company in the mid-1980’s. The company’s main plant was located in a small midwestern town in which it was the only major employer. The union and the company had a history of good labor relations and the company, which was a leader in its industry, had been quite generous with wages and bonuses in good times. But a new management team was under pressure from Wall Street to get better returns. Also non-union competition in meatpacking was beginning to put pressure on margins. Although the company was still quite profitable, management was seeking wage givebacks. In response, the union leadership hired a high profile outside organizer who attempted to organize a boycott of the company’s products. The organizer’s methods had worked elsewhere, but not here. Seeking to, in his words, “shake U.S. labor into a new vitality,” the organizer continued to whip the workers up to confront the company long after it was obvious that management had the upper hand. The dispute became progressively more and more bitter as the strike dragged on, but the workers stuck together, continuing to believe that they would prevail. Eventually the company started hiring replacement workers. The strike collapsed, many workers lost their jobs and the remainder got far less than if they had accepted the company’s offer in the first place.

In this case, the workers’ perceptions of the situation were dramatically distorted by the bitter partisanship of the dispute. Common psychological biases that arise in such situations include:

**Goal Transformation** Contending parties move from simple wanting to protect themselves to progressively becoming more and more committed to hurting each other. The feelings of victimization and the desire for retribution and revenge sustains conflicts long after the generative factors have ceased to be important. Siblings continue to fight for parents’ attention long after they are adults and nations argue over scraps of land that no longer have strategic importance.

**Naïve Realism** When conflicts become bitter, the contending parties begin to gather and interpret information about each other in ways that are profoundly biased—a phenomenon Robert Robinson and his colleagues (1995) termed naïve realism. According to Robinson, perceptions of contending parties get distorted in three important ways. First, partisans assume that they see things objectively while their opponents have extreme and distorted views. Second, they tend to misjudge the other side’s motivations, overestimating the importance of ideology and underestimating the situational pressures their counterparts face. Third, as illustrated in Robinson’s diagram below, partisans consistently overestimate the extent of the differences between themselves and the other side. At the same time, they tend to see themselves as more moderate than typical members of their own group—the “lone moderate” phenomenon. The result is exaggeration of the actual differences between the sides, which are exacerbated by the breakdown of communications commonly observed when conflicts become more polarized.

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24 Rubin, Pruitt and Kim (1994) provide an overview of these concepts and others related to escalation of conflict in Chapters 6 and 7.

25 Robinson, R. J., Keltner, D., Ward, A., and Ross, L.. 1995. “Actual Versus Assumed Differences in Construal: ‘Naïve Realism’ in Inter-group Perception and Conflict.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 68 (3): 404-417, call this “naïve realism” which is essentially an individual’s unawareness of his own subjectivity in making predictions about himself and others. As Arrow et. al (1995) note: “disputants are bound to have differing recollections and interpretations of the past—of causes and effects, promises and betrayals, conciliatory initiatives and rebuffs. They are also bound to have differing interpretations or construals…of the content of any proposals designed to end that dispute.” (p. 13)

26 In Errors in Social Judgment: Implications for Negotiation and Conflict Resolution, Part 2: Partisan Perceptions, Robinson notes that partisans “exaggerate their own group’s extremism, suggesting that they view themselves as ‘lone moderates’ within their conflict. The lone moderate pattern suggests that people tend to dissociate themselves from partisan groups, perceive ideological extremism with some disdain, and assume that they alone are models of rational, principled judgment,” (p. 5).
As a consequence, the parties experience selective perception—they interpret each other's actions in ways that confirm their pre-existing beliefs and attitudes. They even unconsciously overlook evidence that challenges their stereotypes. They may also adopt a zero-sum mentality that causes them to cast the negotiation in purely distributive terms. Finally, their behavior may contribute to self-fulfilling prophecies.

**Reactive Devaluation** An especially unfortunate consequence of partisan perceptions occurs when gestures intended to be conciliatory are discounted or ignored by the other side—a phenomenon known as reactive devaluation.\(^2\) If one side believes that the other is intent on its destruction, any conciliatory gesture tends to be treated with profound suspicion, as either a trick or a sign of weakness. Any other conclusion would require a fundamental reassessment of the other side. If the conciliatory overture is interpreted as a deception, the response is often counter-deception or rejection. If it is interpreted as a sign of weakness, the response may be to press forward aggressively.

**Group-think**

When conflicts take place between groups, additional psychological transformations occur within the opposing sides. As was the case for the union in the Hormel dispute, internal cohesion increases. A two-sided world-view develops in which “we” represent truth and justice, desire only security and self-respect, and respond reasonably to provocations, while “they” become dehumanized and vilified, their aggressive conduct the result of flawed and evil dispositions.

These attitudes influence communication among the groups. Contact is discouraged and any communication is treated as a concession. The perceived need for solidarity in the face of external threats results in the suppression of internal dissent, in part through pressures to conform, but more perniciously through self-censorship. Moderate leaders get pushed aside by more radical ones. Individual inclinations toward overconfidence get magnified and the illusion of invulnerability takes hold.

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\(^2\) Ross and Ward (1995) define reactive devaluation in the context of conflict resolution as “the fact that the very act of offering a particular proposal or concession may diminish its apparent value or attractiveness in the eyes of the recipient.” (p. 270)
In his studies of the group decision-making that led to President John F. Kennedy to approve the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, Janis (1982) labeled this phenomenon groupthink. Whether in disputes between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, pro- and anti-abortion supporters, environmentalists and developers, or managers and union members, the effects of groupthink are everywhere to see. The symptoms and consequences are summarized below.

**Figure 5. Group-think**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptoms of Groupthink</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overestimation of the Group</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• An illusion of invulnerability, shared by most or all the members, which creates excessive optimism and encourages taking risks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• An unquestioned belief in the group’s inherent morality, inclining members to ignore the ethical or moral consequences of their decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Closed Mindedness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Collective efforts to rationalize in order to discount warnings or other information that might lead members to reconsider their assumptions before they recommit themselves to past policy decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Stereotyped views of the enemy as too evil to warrant genuine attempts to negotiate, or too weak and stupid to counter whatever risky attempts are made to defeat their purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pressures toward Uniformity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Self-censorship of deviations from the apparent group consensus, reflecting each member’s inclination to minimize the importance of his/her doubts and counterarguments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A shared illusion of unanimity concerning judgments conforming to the majority view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Direct pressure on any member who expresses strong arguments against any of the group’s stereotypes, illusions or commitments, making clear this type of dissent is contrary to what is expected of all loyal members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The emergence of self-appointed “mindguards” — members who protect the group from adverse information that might shatter their shared complacency about the effectiveness and morality of their decisions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consequences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete survey of potential alternatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete consideration of objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to examine risks of preferred choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to reapprove initially rejected alternatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor search for potentially relevant information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selective perception in processing available information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Failure to work out contingency plans</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Overcoming Psychological Barriers**

Mediation often can play a useful role in overcoming psychological barriers, in part because the mediator can deal with the parties separately. In addition, mechanisms that help to establish a common basis of “facts” also can be helpful in tempering overconfidence. In legal disputes, for example, process such as fact-finding and mock trials may provide the contending parties with independent assessments of likely outcomes if the case goes to trial.

Partisan perceptions sometimes can be tempered by bringing together representatives of the contending sides for extended periods of time. This approach was employed successfully in the early stages of the Oslo peace process. Likewise, it may be productive to bring respected people (but not

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28 In *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes* (1982. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin), Irving Janus defines groupthink as: “a quick and easy way to refer to a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members’ strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action. Groupthink refers to a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment that results from in-group pressures.” (p. 9)

official representatives) together to engage in “facilitated joint brainstorming” exercises as occurred in the case of the dispute between Ecuador and Peru.³⁰

The potential for groupthink to arise in collective decision-making can be reduced through:

- **legitimizing dissent**—leaders can explicitly authorize and encourage dissenting points of view, perhaps by explicitly appointing a devil’s advocate.

- **involving outsiders**—getting people who are independent, relatively unbiased experts to render their opinions.

- **setting up parallel evaluation processes**—setting up independent evaluation groups to work on the same situation, the so-called “red team-blue team” approach.

- **establishing clear breakpoints**—setting aside time in group decision-making processes explicitly devoted to stepping back and evaluating what is going.

- **reality testing**—inducing reflective evaluation of the weaknesses of one’s own case, and perhaps using role-plays.³²

### Institutional Barriers

When negotiations take place between institutions (groups, organizations, or nations), internal political and organizational factors can act as additional barriers to agreement. Consider, for example, the experience of oil giant Conoco in trying to negotiate permission to develop an oil field in a sensitive rainforest area in Ecuador in the early 1990s.³³ Conoco, a division of Dupont, was pursuing a corporate strategy of being "the developer of choice" in ecologically threatened areas. The company was proposing an environmental management plan for its operations that was a model for mitigating damage. The company was negotiating with the government of Ecuador while at the same time pursuing a dialogue with a broad array of environmental groups, both international and domestic, as well as with groups concerned about the indigenous peoples of the area. The former opposed any development, in part because of the ravages of deforestation, and in part because the area in question was partially designated a national park. Indigenous peoples groups likewise opposed the development because the much of the land was a reserve for the isolated people of the rainforest, whose way of life was threatened by the deforestation and colonization that had accompanied previous oil development.

In seeking to work with environmental groups, Conoco’s proposal fell prey to internal politics within the ecological movement. More radical, primarily international groups opposed any oil development. More moderate domestic groups recognized that development would happen regardless and sought to shape the course of the project hoping to create a precedent for future efforts. But the moderates were discredited when minutes of their discussions with Conoco were leaked and characterized as "getting in bed with the enemy."


³¹ Janus (1982).


³³ This example is drawn from Block 16: Conoco’s “Green” Oil Strategy, Harvard Business School cases 394-001, 394-001 through –007. This case series was written by Susan Hall, under the supervision of Professor Malcolm Salter.
Efforts to engage the indigenous peoples likewise failed, but for a different reason. Conoco had difficulty figuring out who could speak for and make commitments on behalf of these isolated groups. Several groups claimed this right, but none appeared to have the requisite authority. Ultimately the company withdrew from the project and the development concession went to a smaller, less environmentally conscious company—a lose-lose outcome.

Conoco’s problems with the environmental groups are an example of barriers caused by internal politics. Its issues with the indigenous peoples’ problems were caused, in part, by organizational weaknesses.

**Internal Politics**

Agreement at the negotiating table calls for a critical mass of support—in other words, a winning coalition—within each side. But as in the case of Conoco and the environmental groups, there may be political factions on either side that prefer no agreement.

In bitter conflicts, moderates’ moves toward a negotiated agreement are often strongly resisted by hard-liners within each side. Opponents of settlement may allege that those in favor of negotiating are selling out. They may also foment internal political turmoil that impedes moves toward compromise. As a result, leaders have to work internally to build support for agreement while negotiating externally. Internal political dynamics of this kind often complicate international diplomatic negotiations. They also arise in negotiations between businesses seeking to merge, labor-management disputes, and a host of other situations.

Synchronizing external negotiations and internal decision-making involves a delicate balancing act, because the two levels can interact in ways that restrict the leader’s tactical flexibility. For example, hard bargaining externally may bolster leaders’ internal political support, but also lock them into untenable positions in the external negotiations. Later retreat from these positions may prove impossible because it would result in an unacceptable loss of face.

Paradoxically, “spoilers” on each side may reinforce each other’s efforts to undermine negotiations. Suppose, for example, that extremists on one side in an ethnic or regional conflict launch a terrorist attack on the other side. The attack provokes pressure on the attacked side’s moderate leaders from their internal opponents to respond aggressively. To avoid political damage, these leaders may demand that their counterparts on the other side crack down on the extremists who launched the attack. But this places the other side’s leaders in a terrible position: if they accede, they are seen as lackeys and lose credibility internally. But if they refuse, the forces opposed to settlement are strengthened. Likewise, public calls for aggressive action by hard-liners on one side may provoke responses from hard-liners on the other side. This vicious cycle is illustrated below.

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36 As an example, consider the impact of Palestinian suicide bombings in Jerusalem on July 30, 1997 on efforts to make peace in the Middle East. The bombings brought predictable crack-downs on the Palestinians, including the collective punishment associated with closing the border between the Gaza and the West Bank and Israel. The Netanyahu government demanded that Arafat round up extremists. But if Arafat had responded, then he would have been viewed internally as doing the Israeli’s bidding and when he didn’t he was seen as promoting terrorism. In either case, the bombers succeeded in undermining the process and strengthening the right wing in Israel.
Organizational Weaknesses

To be effective, the parties to a negotiation must be internally organized and able to devote sufficient resources to the process. Representatives must come to the table ready for the hard work of hammering out an agreement, and they must have the authority to make commitments on behalf of their sides. Lack of focused attention, competing priorities, and internal disorganization all impede agreement as Conoco found out in trying to work with indigenous peoples’ groups. Likewise, efforts by NATO to negotiate an agreement with Serbia over Kosovo at the Rambouillet talks were complicated by the fact that it wasn’t entirely clear who could speak for the Kosovar Albanians.

Principal-agent Problems

Differences in interests between principals and agents are another common type of institutional barrier. When agents represent principals, they act as the bridge between external negotiations and internal decision making. They may have expertise and access to information that is unavailable to those they represent, and this allows them to see the outlines of a deal more clearly and to shape perceptions. But agents may have their own interests that are not perfectly aligned with those of their principals. As a result, they may be able to use their superior expertise and access to information to advance their own interests. In situations where principals on both sides actually have substantial shared interests, principal-agent interest misalignments may act as a barrier to agreement.

Legal and Governance Systems

Differences in legal and governance systems also can create problems. Suppose that you are negotiating on behalf of a construction company bidding for a large contract in a former Soviet republic. You become concerned when you realize that the government’s process for evaluating bids...

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lacks transparency and that they plan to continue negotiating with bidders after the initial tender is made. What might you do in such circumstances?

The absence of a transparent framework for conducting business is one example of a broader set of institutional barriers associated with legal and corporate governance systems. The lack of a functioning legal system, and the consequent uncertainty about whether agreements will be honored, is a barrier to doing business in many parts of the world. But even if established frameworks exist, they may operate by unfamiliar rules, creating pitfalls for the unwary.

**Overcoming Institutional Barriers**

Beyond strong leadership and coalition building skills several tools are useful for overcoming political barriers. Secret diplomacy can be used to short circuit internal politics until an agreement can be presented as a fait accompli, with the attendant risks of further inflaming internal opposition. Likewise, multi-stage negotiation processes, perhaps beginning with principles and proceeding to details, can help to move the internal political process along at a pace that can be sustained.

Managing principal-agent problems involves finding ways to align interests and/or monitor agents’ conduct at a reasonable cost. Barriers associated with legal and governance system often can be avoided if the necessary investment is made in understanding the rules of the game.

**Cultural Barriers**

Cultural differences can seriously impede productive negotiation. In part, this is because members of a culture tend to be ethnocentric—seeing their own group’s values as universal and superior to those of other groups—which can reinforce partisan perceptions. According to Sumner, ethnocentrism is “the view of things in which one’s own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it. Each group nourishes its own pride and vanity, boasts itself superior, exalts its own divinities, and looks with contempt on outsiders.”

Diverse cultures also may have very different patterns of communication and decision-making.

It therefore is important to understand the cultural filters through which one’s counterparts view the world. In doing this, recognize that national culture is just one layer of the onion. Negotiator’s behavior may also be influenced by professional training and the culture it engenders. Organizations also have distinct cultures.

Note that the ultimate goal is to ensure that you and your counterparts are able to create a process of dialogue that makes sense. It is not, however, necessary to understand every nuance of a culture in order to accomplish this. As Weiss (1994) put it, you need to “at least recognize those ideas and behaviors that [counterparts] intentionally put forward as part of the negotiation process. Parties must also be able to interpret these behaviors well enough to distinguish common from conflicting positions, to detect movement from positions, and to respond in ways that maintain communication.”

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38 Moran, R.T. and Stripp, W.G. 1991. *Dynamics of Successful International Business Negotiations*, Houston: Gulf Pub. Co., describe a culture’s tendency towards ethnocentrism as a need for a ‘we’ identity in order to successfully navigate within the culture. However, this “we” attitude creates a rift between differing cultures. In an attempt to establish superiority by proving other cultures inferior, most societies resort to ethnic name-calling attributing vices and shortcomings to the “inferior” society, p. 47.


Analyzing Culture

Cultures can be analyzed on four progressively deeper levels—artifacts, communication styles, norms, and assumptions.41

- **Artifacts** are the visible signs and symbols that differentiate one culture from another, including ceremonies and styles of dress.

- **Communication styles** include preferences for directness or indirectness, use of eye contact, and use of nonverbal communication.

- **Social norms** are shared rules that guide “right behavior,” such as what constitutes an “agreement” (formal versus informal, relationships versus contracts) and attitudes toward time and timeliness.

- **Assumptions** are the deeper, often unspoken, beliefs that infuse and underpin social systems. These beliefs are the air that everyone breathes but never sees. Examples include beliefs about what creates “value” and how decisions should be made.

Much of what shapes the behavior of members of a culture is below the surface—neither explicit nor visible to outsiders—as the cultural iceberg below illustrates.

**Figure 7. The Cultural Iceberg**

![Cultural Iceberg Diagram]

**Levels of Culture**
- **Visible**
  - Artifacts
  - Styles
  - Norms

**Invisible**
- Assumptions

**Examples**
- **Artifacts**
  - modes of dress
  - signs and symbols
  - ceremonies

- **Communication styles**
  - directness vs. indirectness
  - eye contact
  - importance of non-verbal

- **Norms**
  - forms of agreement
  - attitudes toward time
  - written vs. tacit agreements

- **Assumptions**
  - what creates value?
  - who should exercise power?
  - how should decisions get made?

**Probing underlying assumptions:**

To truly understand a culture, one must get below the surface to the underlying assumptions that everyone takes for granted. For negotiators, the most pertinent underlying cultural assumptions are those involving “power” and “value.” In the US-North Korea negotiations, decision-makers were operating on the basis of vastly different cultural assumptions. In the political sphere, the conflict

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41 Schein, E.H. 1992. *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, Second Edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, refers to levels in this context as “... the degree to which the cultural phenomenon is visible to the observer ... [which can] range from the very tangible overt manifestations that one can see and feel to the deeply embedded, unconscious basic assumptions ... [which is] the essence of culture.” (p. 16)
was a confrontation between pluralistic democracy and centralized authoritarianism. In the economic sphere, it was a clash between global free-market economics and socialist self-reliance.

“Power” With regard to power, the key question is who can legitimately exercise authority and make decisions. In some cultures, deference is paid to strength, age, or experience, while in others, power is gained through election to office or accumulation of expertise. In some cultures, negotiating representatives are given substantial flexibility and authority, while in others they are mere messengers of their principals.

“Value” Likewise, it is useful to ask: what do each of the sides think creates social “value?” Sociologists have broadly divided cultures into two major groupings: collectivist and individualist. Collectivist cultures place more stress on group harmony and consensus than individualist cultures. Members of collectivist cultures exhibit greater willingness to sacrifice personal gain for the good of the whole than their more individualistic counterparts. Different assumptions about what creates value can complicate efforts to communicate and find bases for agreement as summarized in the table below.

Table 2. Collectivist and Individualist Cultures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Guiding Assumptions</th>
<th>Implications for Negotiation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collectivist</strong></td>
<td>- Members see themselves more as members of their reference groups than as individuals.</td>
<td>- Negotiators focus more on the implications for their groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultures</strong></td>
<td>- Legitimate power is exerted by those with seniority or positional authority.</td>
<td>- Decision-making tends to be more by consensus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>- Value is associated with communal harmony and ordered relationships.</td>
<td>- Representatives are chosen on the basis of seniority or position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individualist</strong></td>
<td>- Members see themselves more as individuals than as members of a reference group.</td>
<td>- Negotiators are more assertive and direct about their own interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultures</strong></td>
<td>- Legitimate power is exerted through democratic means and the rights of individuals are strongly defended.</td>
<td>- Representatives are given more authority to reach agreements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>- Value is associated with individual achievement and independence.</td>
<td>- Negotiators are chosen on the basis of expertise and experience.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

When assumptions about power and value differ substantially, the sides’ internal decision-making processes are likely to be very different. This can lead to serious mismatches and misunderstandings at the negotiation table. The sides may select their representatives using very different criteria, for example, with one selecting for expertise and experience while the other stresses high social standing and connections. Likewise, some groups debate ratification of tentative agreements, while other empower a few key decision-makers.

Another way to examine cultural differences is through their impact on the *substance* of what is negotiated and the *process* through which negotiating takes place. Views may differ on what is negotiable, and the extent to which agreements are binding. One culture may focus more on the issues, another on establishing relationships. In terms of process, different attitudes toward time and modes of expression (such as degree of directness) can make it difficult to communicate effectively.

**Diagnosing Cultural Barriers**

Negotiators should seek to predict how cultural differences are likely to affect the negotiation. The table below lists some diagnostic questions for probing deeper cultural assumptions.

**Table 3. Diagnostic Questions**

**Power**
- What sorts of people will be chosen to represent the side? Will they be chosen on the basis of expertise and experience or personal connections and status?
- How will internal decisions get made? Will it be done by consensus or through the use of authority?
- How important is “face”?

**Value**
- Is the culture more collectivist or more individualistic?
- How much weight is placed on relationships as opposed to formal contracts?
- What is it that causes people to implement agreed terms? Reputation? Fear of reprisal?
- What causes offense and what doesn’t?

**Substance**
- What is negotiable and what is non-negotiable?
- Once made, what kinds of agreements are treated as binding?
- Are agreements reduced to writing or kept more informal?

**Process**
- What are acceptable “moves” in the game?
- How important are protocol and other formalities?
- Is communication direct or indirect?
- What does “yes” mean? What does “no” mean?
- How important are non-verbal cues?
- What are norms concerning truth telling?
- How are disputes about implementation handled?

**Cautions on Culture**

While it is important to be aware of cultural differences, efforts to make adjustments for those differences can be fraught with peril. To illustrate this, consider the following example, which occurred during tense 1993-94 three-way negotiations among the United States, South Korea, and North Korea over the latter’s nuclear weapons program. Just as the negotiations appeared to be making substantial progress, all was thrown into turmoil by the unexpected death of Kim Il Sung, the "great leader" of North Korea. Chief U.S. negotiator Robert Gallucci consulted with his superiors and got permission to express his condolences. Then he sought advice from his cultural experts on the best way to do that:

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43 See Moran and Stripp (1991)
So I got my team together and I asked my Korean folks what do I do? They said you probably have to write something in a condolence book. There is a standard phrase that you use when you express condolences, which translates roughly into “words cannot express the depth of my sympathy for your situation.” I said, “I got it. I can handle that.” So I went the North Korean mission and I’m alone. I’m supposed to go in, bow before the picture of Kim Il Sung and then walk over to the condolence book and sign it. They said, “You don’t speak to anybody. You just bow and sign.” So I walked in. I saw the cameras and an image came to me of David Niven in Fifty-five Days of Peking when he walked in and kicked the emperor’s pillow aside when he went to see him. I walked in and I stared at the picture and I did not bow. I didn’t flinch; I just stared and walked away. Then I wrote in the book, words fail me, etc. I was careful. I wrote for the pain of the North Korean people expressing my sympathy. The next day the South Koreans were very upset because the North Koreans quoted what I put in the book and highlighted that “words failed me.” They were in an upheaval about this. So I got my cultural people together, I said, “what did you do to me?” And they said, “Well it’s what you say when you go to express sorrow.” What I didn’t do was put it through another filter about the politics of what I was dealing, with which was principally the South Korean reaction. I would have been much better off by saying ‘my sincerest sympathies’, than trying to find out what was culturally right. It helped me in North Korea but that isn’t where the political problem was because South Koreans “hawks” were very nervous about the United States doing a deal with the North.  

So cultural assessment can be a minefield for negotiators. It can help negotiators gain insight into the behavior of their counterparts, but generalizations can also contribute to biased perceptions and strategic disadvantages. In addition to being careful about political factors, negotiators should watch out for:

- **stereotyping.** The generalizations that flow from cultural analysis are hypotheses to be tested, not guiding assumptions. It is easy to drift into self-fulfilling prophecies whereby beliefs result in selective perception which confirms prior beliefs.

- **subcultures.** National culture is merely one layer of cultural influence on negotiators’ behavior. Negotiating representatives may also belong to specific subcultures, defined by clan, social class, religion, profession, or organization. It is therefore important to seek to understand the totality of cultural influences on counterparts’ behavior.

- **sophistication.** The people who represent their sides in complex negotiations often are quite sophisticated and experienced in dealing with other cultures. As a result, they may be strategic in their use others’ cultural expectations. They may, for example, play up the importance of relationships if they know their counterparts believes relationships to be culturally valued. Note that the same is true of gender role expectations.

- **standards.** Cultural standards applied to insiders are not necessarily applied to outsiders. It may even be viewed as appropriate to deal with “civilized people” in one way and “barbarians” in another. Assessments of the ways in which cultures characteristically deal with outsiders are therefore a key component of an overall cultural evaluation.

- **self-awareness.** It is difficult to anticipate potential cultural stumbling blocks if one is not self-aware about one’s own culture. Gaining this self-awareness and beginning to appreciate the extent of cultural differences can be is a first step toward gaining greater understanding.

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Overcoming Cultural Barriers

The best way to avoid and overcome cultural barriers is to invest in learning about a culture, keeping the above caveats in mind. The best way to do this, in turn is to live in it for some time and, crucially to learn the language. Language shapes thinking and understanding a language makes a big contribution to understanding the basic world-view of a cultural group.

When this is not possible, it still is worth gaining some familiarity with the culture by learning about geography, history and politics, as well as by reading (cautiously because they can be quite superficial) analyses of the culture. But this should be supplemented by reading translations of the best fiction produced by the culture in question, since this provides deeper insight into the norms and basic assumptions.

Finally it often is useful to engage the services of a “cultural interpreter,” someone who you trust to act as a bridge. As one accomplished international diplomat put it, “you need somebody who really knows the cultural context, because it’s easy to make mistakes.”

Conclusion: The Mutually Reinforcing Nature of Barriers

The different types of barriers to agreement—structural, strategic, psychological, institutional, and cultural—can reinforce each other, contributing to vicious cycles. For example, structural barriers such as poor channels for communication can exacerbate strategic barriers such as the prisoners’ dilemma. Defensive reactions by negotiators grappling with the prisoners’ dilemma may feed the misperceptions that create psychological barriers. Such barriers may in turn reinforce structural barriers by, for example, creating still greater impediments to communication. Cultural barriers too may give rise to misunderstandings that lead to escalation. Escalation in turn creates psychological barriers, and so on.

In the Conoco case, for example, the difficulties the company faced had partially to do with structure because it had to deal with so many interested parties. The number of parties, in turn, contributed to the internal political and organizational barriers discussed previously. A long history of conflict between oil companies and environmental organizations, as well as the legacy of multinational exploitation of developing countries created additional psychological barriers. Beyond that, the people representing Conoco approached the situation with very different cultural assumptions than the Ecuadorian government or the indigenous people.

This is why it is crucially important to anticipate potential barriers and avoid initiating vicious cycles. Careful attention to shaping the structure may help to mitigate the impact of prisoner’s dilemmas. In intercultural negotiations, self-awareness of one’s own culture and insight into the other side’s may help to prevent misperceptions from poisoning relationships.