

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a maroon suit and a white blouse, is speaking on a stage. She has a microphone clipped to her collar and her hands are raised in a gesturing motion. The background is a light-colored wall with a large, stylized 'N' logo and the word 'CONFERENCE' partially visible. The foreground shows the back of a person's head, suggesting an audience.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Executive Summary: N-Conference 2025 – Leading Through the Deadlock

This year, our conference theme, “Leading Through the Deadlock,” reflects the increasingly complex and challenging nature of negotiations in today’s world. With multiple crises unfolding simultaneously, reaching agreements has never been more difficult — or more critical.

Yet, we see deadlocks not as endpoints, but as beginnings: opportunities to rethink, innovate, and lead with resilience and clarity.

Over the course of N-Conference 2025, participants explored strategies to navigate and lead through deadlocks with confidence. Key topics included identifying paths out of deadlocks, building trust, managing reputation, understanding geopolitical risks, and strengthening one’s own negotiation power. Attendees also gained tools and frameworks for approaching complex negotiations in a structured and effective way, equipping them to thrive in even the most challenging scenarios.



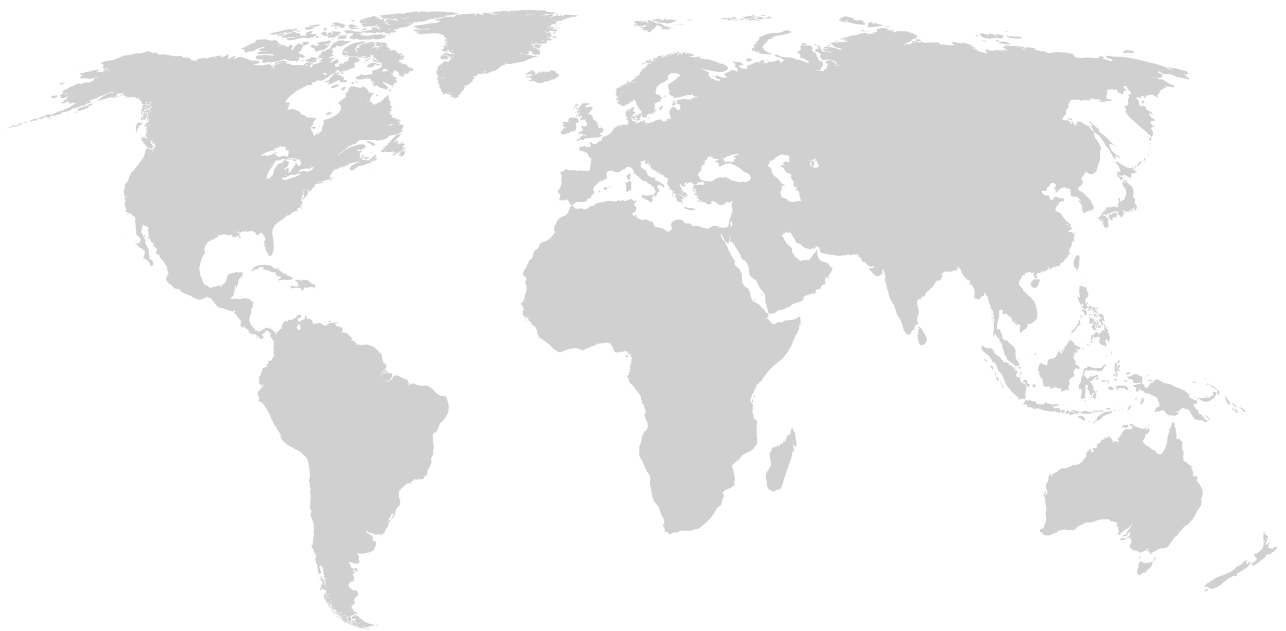
VIP Experiences at N-Conference 2025

This year, our VIP attendees were treated to truly exceptional experiences designed to foster deeper connections and immersive learning.

VIP Dinners with Speakers: In intimate settings, participants shared meals with world-renowned negotiation experts, creating opportunities for meaningful conversations, personalized insights, and lasting professional connections. These dinners went beyond the typical conference experience, allowing attendees to engage directly with thought leaders in a relaxed, inspiring atmosphere.

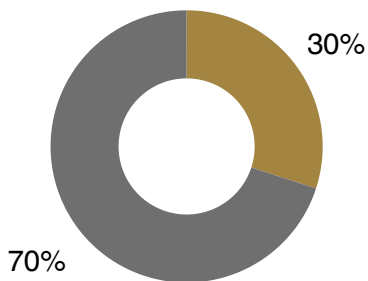
Workshops in St. Moritz: Set against the breathtaking backdrop of St. Moritz, our exclusive workshops offered a luxurious environment for focused, hands-on learning. Attendees explored advanced negotiation strategies, practical tools, and real-world applications, all while enjoying the comfort and elegance of this world-class setting.

These VIP experiences combined knowledge, networking, and luxury, providing a truly memorable and transformative journey for all who attended.



Countries Represented: 15

Germany, Switzerland, UK, Austria, Netherlands, France, UAE, US, Denmark, Australia, Greece, Brazil, Israel, Portugal, Liechtenstein



Female Participants

We are proudly leading the “She’s the Negotiator” initiative an effort aimed at increasing the number of female negotiators at high-stake negotiation tables. Building on this success, we plan to expand this initiative and bring even more female negotiators to next year’s conference.

Seniority Breakdown

Executive Leadership: CEO, Co-CEO, Managing Director, President, VP, CCO

Board and Governance: Board Members

Senior Management: Senior Legal Counsel, Senior Expert in Negotiations, Principal M&A, Head of Procurement, Head of Strategic Sourcing

Professional/Advisory Roles: Lawyer, Management Consultant, Angel Investor





Workshop by Matthias Schraner
“Analyzing language to read your negotiation partner”

Matthias (former hostage negotiator) translates law-enforcement language analysis into a practical negotiation method: don't ask “why” questions; separate facts from assumptions; surface motives by listening for contradictions; lead with clear demands; never prematurely commit. The approach is highly tactical, respectful in tone, and built to extract reliable information, control the frame, and create room for value-creation.

Core principles

- Never use open-ended “why” questions. They push the conversation into the speaker's sandbox (their past, blame, justification) and give you their narrative, not the information you need.
- Separate facts from assumptions. Map “What we know (facts)” vs “What we assume” on paper from the start. Most strategies built on assumptions fail.
- Do not respond to (or comply with) the other side's call-to-action. If they demand something, don't simply do it.
- Power is perceived, not factual. Treat power as an assumption to be tested. High threats usually signal weakness (they lack alternatives).
- Use a respectful tone always. High demands are acceptable; disrespect kills deals.
- Listen much more than you speak. Aim for ~95% listening, 5% speaking. The other side will reveal motives and constraints when allowed to talk.



The three-pillar analysis model

When you analyze language in a negotiation, structure your listening/notes against three pillars:

Information — what was said (facts vs opinions)

- Record concrete facts (dates, quantities, commitments).
- Mark every assumption or inference separately.
- Use a simple two-column sheet: Facts | Assumptions.
- Don't "charge" information emotionally — note it silently to signal respect.

Call to Action — what the speaker wants you to do

- Identify explicit/implicit asks (demands, deadlines, actions).
- Do not perform the requested action on the spot. Reframe, offer alternatives, or test underlying needs.

Power & Self-disclosure — what they believe and what they reveal

- Listen for demand level: large/high demands → they present themselves as powerful (could be real or a posture.)
- Frequent threats/repetition = likely weak / dependent position (they have little else).
- Detect self-disclosure and contradictions (see next section) — those are the keys to motive.

Tactical language moves you can deploy

- Put the "fish" on the table early. State your core demand up front — better to ask high than reveal it late. It gives space for real negotiations.
- Don't answer direct questions. Acknowledge, take notes, and defer: "Thank you — that's important. I'll come back to it." Use follow-ups to extract facts.
- Use "we/both" language to avoid single-party pressure and to force the counterpart to justify or soften their position.
- Mark contradictions with a "C" in your notes. Later, ask for help resolving the contradiction (humble framing.)

How to surface motives: the contradiction technique

People often show behavioural or verbal contradictions (e.g., claiming partnership while making one-sided demands.)

Steps to use:

- Express genuine interest and humility: “I’m really interested and a bit confused — could you help me understand?”
- Point out the contradiction without accusing: “On the one hand X, on the other hand Y — how do you see that?”
- Let them explain; they will reveal motive, constraints, and priorities.
- This is high-yield: it keeps the counterpart talking, forces internal alignment, and uncovers what they actually need.

What NOT to do (quick red flags)

- Asking “why” or broad open-ended questions.
- Committing to answers / approvals before verifying facts.
- Trying humour / icebreakers to de-escalate critical, life-or-death style situations.
- Starting with a fully packaged proposal, expecting an immediate “yes.” Proposals often get rejected.
- Speaking disrespectfully — tone kills more deals than demand levels.

For decision-makers: immediate practical checklist

- Prepare a one-page facts vs assumptions sheet.
- Decide on your fish (top demand) and be ready to state it first.
- Agree on the internal rule: no commitments until a defined verification step.
- Practice contradiction-probing phrases and the “I’m confused — help me understand” opener.
- Keep a “C” marker in notes to collect contradictions for later use.
- After the session, update Facts / Assumptions and plan tests to verify critical assumptions.

Final strategic takeaway for leaders

Treat language as intelligence. Build negotiation decisions on verified facts, not persuasive stories. Use listening, contradiction-probing, disciplined note-taking, and early bold demands to avoid being boxed into others’ narratives. Respectful tone + tactical firmness = the best path to durable agreements.

Workshop by Joe Navarro
“Analyzing your negotiation partner”

The speaker, a behavioral sciences expert with 25 years at the FBI, is a founding member of the FBI Behavioral Assessment Program. His experience spans national security, espionage, and executive coaching. His core expertise lies in assessing human behavior to enhance negotiation outcomes.

Negotiation as Communication with Purpose

Definition: Negotiation is effective communication aimed at achieving a specific purpose.

Core Principle: Success is not solely determined by numbers, strategies, or intellect, but by understanding the human beings involved. Effective negotiators prioritize verbal, non-verbal, and symbolic communication.

Implication for Decision-Makers: Always approach negotiations as exercises in human understanding. Communication effectiveness directly drives negotiation outcomes.

Behavioral Assessment Where “Everything Matters”

- Human behavior is rich with signals: Words used, emphasis, repetition, or omission.
- Body language: Posture and gestures.
- Symbolic cues: Clothing, accessories, seating position, and arrival order.
- Small signals can influence outcomes: Even subtle gestures like touching one’s face, foot vibrations, or pen manipulation reveal cognitive and emotional states.
- Stillness is dangerous: In negotiations, sitting motionless can be interpreted as untrustworthiness.

Takeaway: Every observable behavior conveys information. Effective negotiators must continuously assess and interpret these signals.



Emotional Intelligence and Primacy of Emotions

- Neurobiology matters: Human brains process emotions before rational thought. The limbic system reacts to comfort, threat, or hierarchy instantly.
- Dealing with emotions first: Always address emotional states before discussing content or numbers.
- Allow parties to vent to establish connection and trust.
- Respect the psychological baggage and contextual stress factors (e.g., travel delays, environmental discomfort).
- Cultural and individual variation: Eye contact, personal space, and body language norms vary globally. Awareness of cultural differences is crucial.

Actionable Tip: Identify emotional cues early and manage them before engaging in substantive negotiation topics.

Likability as a Negotiation Multiplier

- Importance: Likability is consistently cited by top business leaders as the single most significant factor in successful negotiation.
- Mechanism: Likable negotiators maintain engagement and increase the willingness of counterparts to collaborate.
- Team composition: Ensure every team member contributes positively; distractions or unpleasant personalities undermine credibility and outcomes.

Strategic Advice: Assess both your own and your team's likability. Replace or coach individuals who detract from negotiation dynamics.

Synchrony and Adaptation

- Principle: Synchrony — the alignment of speech, body language, and gestures with the counterpart — enhances trust and influence.
- Customization: Tailor communication style, speed, and cadence to the individual or group. Analytical, driven, amiable, or emotionally expressive types require different approaches.
- Non-verbal alignment: Mirroring words and behaviors fosters intrapsychic connection, aiding persuasion and rapport.

Recommendation: Study your counterpart and adjust your verbal and non-verbal delivery to optimize synchrony.

Environmental and Contextual Considerations

- Physical environment: Room temperature, seating, and layout influence negotiation effectiveness.
- Movement and multiple venues: Have at least three areas (primary room, outdoor space, food area) to shift dynamics, manage fatigue, and encourage openness.
- Symbolic cues: Accessories, attire, and status symbols transmit signals about authority, confidence, and credibility.

Key Insight: Control and adapt the negotiation environment to maximize engagement and minimize unintentional negative signals.

The Science of Rapid Assessment

- Neuroception: Humans subconsciously process vast amounts of behavioral information in milliseconds, enabling accurate judgments of competence, confidence, and approachability.
- Practical application: Train to notice posture, gestures, and other subtle cues to make rapid, informed assessments.
- Words have weight: Language choice impacts perception; mirror terms used by counterparts to enhance rapport and clarity.

Tip for Decision-Makers: Leverage rapid behavioral assessment to calibrate communication and strategy in real time.

Cultural and Global Considerations

- Cultural variation:
 - Eye contact, seating arrangements, and gestures vary widely.
 - Half the world's cultures process information non-linearly; adapt your sequencing accordingly.
- Hierarchy awareness: Humans instinctively assess authority and status; adjust presentation to respect local norms.
- Contextual research: Prepare by understanding the cultural, social, and historical context of negotiation partners.

Recommendation: Incorporate cultural intelligence into negotiation strategy to avoid miscommunication and build trust.

Key Takeaways for Negotiators and Decision-Makers

- Focus on humans, not just numbers.
- Emotions precede rational thinking. Address them first.
- Likability is a strategic asset.
- Observe and interpret all behavior. Everything conveys information.
- Adjust communication style to the counterpart and context. Synchrony increases influence.
- Control environmental variables. Temperature, seating, and space affect outcomes.
- Prepare for difficult personalities and hidden anchors. Identify obstacles early.
- Use neuroception and thin-slice assessments. Subconscious signals are powerful tools.
- Respect cultural and individual differences. Tailor negotiation tactics accordingly.
- Multiple negotiation areas enhance flexibility. Include primary, secondary, and food-based spaces for dynamic engagement.

Successful negotiation is fundamentally a human-centered process. Understanding the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions of your counterparts, while adapting your environment and communication style, provides a decisive edge. Negotiators who internalize these principles will enhance effectiveness, influence, and the likelihood of reaching favorable outcomes.





Keynote Speech by Matthias Schraner

“Leading Through Deadlock”

The session focused on deadlocks in negotiations, emphasizing their inevitability, strategic value, and the methods to navigate and resolve them effectively. Deadlocks are not failures but tools that reveal power dynamics, test parties' resolve, and clarify interests. Matthias argued that negotiators should not avoid deadlocks; instead, understanding and leveraging them can lead to more favorable outcomes.

Understanding Deadlocks

Deadlocks occur when parties adopt high demands with low willingness to cooperate, often resulting in a power struggle. They serve as a test of strength, patience, and strategy.

Key insights include:

- **Power Analysis:** Assess whether your side is strong or weak relative to your counterpart. High power allows more leverage; perceived weakness requires careful tactical adjustments.
- **Cooperation Assessment:** Identify whether the other party is inclined toward collaboration or purely competitive outcomes. Recognizing this early shapes the negotiation strategy.
- **Consequences of Walk-Away:** Every deadlock scenario requires understanding the costs and benefits of walking away. Walking away is a form of leverage but also means losing control of the negotiation narrative.
- **Testing Intentions:** Deadlocks reveal whether the counterpart is rational (cause-and-effect based) or a gambler (seeking disruption and advantage). Strategies should adapt accordingly.

Defining Negotiation Targets: Clear target definition is critical before entering negotiations:

Maximum Target:

- Ambitious, “bright and shiny” goals that serve as a guiding vision.
- Provides purpose and motivates teams to persevere through deadlocks.

Walk-Away Position:

- The minimum acceptable outcome.
- It should be invisible to the other side; exposing it weakens your position.

License to Negotiate:

- Determines the range within which negotiators can act.
- Adjusted based on the trust and experience of the negotiator.
- Example: A trusted negotiator can operate fully; a new or untrusted negotiator receives a narrower license.

Decision-Maker Alignment:

- Negotiators must consistently report and align with commanders / decision-makers.
- Structured, concise communication ensures decision-makers remain informed without confusion.

Strategies to Break Deadlocks: Matthias highlighted six core strategies for resolving deadlocks effectively:

1. Paraphrasing:

- Avoid repeating “dangerous” terms that may escalate conflict.
- Reframe language to introduce new perspectives without triggering resistance.

2. Betting on the Future:

- Use conditional planning (“if...then”) to create flexible agreements.
- Focus on potential scenarios rather than immediate solutions to manage risks.

3. Simulation:

- Conduct hidden or simulated negotiations to explore options safely.
- Enables creativity and testing of approaches before formal negotiation.

4. Back-Channel Negotiations:

- Conduct informal discussions separate from formal sessions.
- Best handled by the commander, not negotiators, to maintain strategic oversight.
- Ensures trust, information gathering, and risk mitigation without committing prematurely.

5. Walk-Away:

- Identify red lines and consequences in advance.
- Avoid adjusting walk-away positions under pressure; consistency strengthens credibility.

6. Mediation:

- Mediation should occur after walk-away points are reached, not prematurely.
- Provides a structured path to compromise without undermining original positions.

Tactical Insights for Decision-Makers

Deadlock as Power Test:

- Deadlocks are diagnostic tools for assessing counterpart resolve and strategy.

Saving Face:

- Introduce concessions or symbolic “firefighter uniforms” at the final stage to allow the other party to save face without undermining your own objectives.

Information Control:

- Decision-makers must receive prioritized, concise updates to prevent the other side from gaining informational leverage.

Handling Irrational or Gambler Negotiators:

- Rational negotiators should not overreact to irrational tactics; maintain a calm, structured approach to avoid being manipulated.

Language and Cultural Nuances:

- For non-native speakers, always verify understanding through summaries rather than relying on paraphrasing alone. Miscommunication can exacerbate deadlocks.

Key Takeaways for Decision-Makers

- Embrace Deadlocks: They are strategic tests, not failures.
- Define Targets Clearly: Maximum target, walk-away position, and license to negotiate are critical foundations.
- Use Structured Team: Ensure negotiators, commanders, and decision-makers have clearly defined roles.
- Employ Multiple Strategies: Paraphrasing, future-betting, simulations, back-channels, mediation, and controlled concessions.
- Prioritize Information Control: Timely and focused reporting maintains credibility and influence.
- Plan for Face-Saving: Always include mechanisms to allow the counterpart to exit without loss of dignity.
- Understand Negotiator Psychology: Adapt strategy based on rational vs. gambler profiles and cultural / language differences.
- Assess Walk-Away Consequences: Know who gains or loses if negotiations fail, and use it to calibrate pressure.

Deadlocks, while inherently stressful, offer decision-makers a powerful tool to gauge power, test commitments, and negotiate from a position of insight and control. By systematically defining targets, leveraging strategic mechanisms, and maintaining disciplined information flows, negotiators can convert deadlocks into opportunities for controlled, favorable outcomes.



Fireside Chat with Bernhard Meising
“Strategic Communication in Times of Crisis”

Effective communication is a critical tool in negotiations, serving as the bridge between the negotiation table and external stakeholders. This includes employees, unions, investors, competitors, customers, and the broader public. Properly managed, communication can support the negotiation process, enhance corporate reputation, and create leverage. Mismanaged, however, it can derail negotiations or damage trust permanently.

Key Insights:

Integration of Communication and Negotiation

- Negotiators and communication teams must operate as a unified team. Misalignment between internal messaging and negotiation strategy can create confusion, undermine trust, and compromise outcomes.
- Communication is not just about delivering information but strategically shaping stakeholder expectations and perception.

Managing External and Media Attention

- Media and public messaging can apply strategic pressure but must be carefully timed and aligned with negotiation objectives.
- Expectation management is crucial: over-promising can backfire if targets are not met; under-promising can erode credibility.
- Transparency should focus on the process rather than uncertain outcomes, especially when dealing with volatile or unpredictable negotiations.

Internal Communication and Middle Management

- Internal messaging should assume that “internal is external” — information may leak despite safeguards.
- Middle management often serves as the most trusted conduit for communication to employees; enabling them with clear, digestible messages ensures consistency and credibility.
- Operationally, focus on key points (typically three to four) rather than overwhelming staff with exhaustive details. Provide channels for questions and feedback to maintain alignment.

Narrative Ownership and Storytelling

- The negotiation narrative should represent the organization, not a single individual. Consistency across all levels — from executives to front-line managers — is critical.
- Storylines should emphasize shared interests, the rationale behind decisions, and a structured process.

Strategic Use of Silence:

- Silence can be a powerful tool when disclosure could cause harm or confusion. Premature transparency, especially in uncertain situations, may generate unnecessary pressure or misinterpretation.
- Prepare for contingencies with pre-planned responses rather than reactive statements.

Crisis and Reputation Management

- In cases where trust is damaged or reputational risk arises, acknowledge the issue authentically before shifting to forward-looking solutions.
- Delayed communication or ignoring incidents typically exacerbates risks, particularly in the age of social media.
- Trust repair requires demonstrating credibility, reliability, intimacy, and low self-orientation, followed by a consistent, forward-looking narrative.

Practical Recommendations for Negotiators:

- Align negotiation objectives with the communication strategy from the outset.
- Use media selectively to influence external stakeholders without compromising internal credibility.
- Equip middle management with clear guidance, key talking points, and escalation channels.
- Prioritize narrative consistency across internal and external audiences.
- Apply strategic silence and transparency thoughtfully, based on process clarity rather than uncertain outcomes.

Communication is not ancillary to negotiation — it is a core strategic lever. Negotiators who integrate communications into their strategy, manage expectations carefully, and maintain narrative consistency are better positioned to achieve objectives, protect reputation, and build trust with stakeholders. Effective handling of media, internal channels, and crisis scenarios can transform communication from a risk into a decisive advantage.





Keynote speech by Joe Navarro
“Breaking the Deadlock: The Power of Non-Verbal Communication”

At the N-Conference, Joe Navarro, a renowned expert on nonverbal communication and a former FBI agent, delivered a highly engaging keynote on the pivotal role of trust, nonverbal behavior, and influence in negotiations. Drawing on decades of research, spanning from studies in the 1970s to contemporary virtual negotiation practices, Navarro provided evidence-based insights designed to enhance the effectiveness of decision-makers at the negotiation table. His core message: negotiations are not won solely through words and technical knowledge, but through the performance of trust, likability, and controlled nonverbal influence.

Trust as the Cornerstone of Negotiation

Navarro emphasized that trust is the most important factor in successful negotiations, echoing the teachings of his mentor, Stephen Covey. Trust is performative, not merely declarative: negotiators are continuously assessed for trustworthiness, often before a single word is spoken. Research demonstrates that this assessment begins in infancy, as shown in the "false cliff" experiments, where babies gauge trustworthiness by observing their caregiver's reactions before crossing a precipice. For negotiators, this underscores the importance of consciously building trust through consistent behavior.

The consequences of failing to establish trust are profound. Navarro highlighted the role of the hippocampus in storing negative experiences. Mistakes, breaches of trust, or poorly performed nonverbal cues are retained for decades, potentially influencing long-term perceptions of an individual's reliability. Decision-makers must recognize that every action, from body posture to attentiveness, contributes to an ongoing trust assessment.

The Role of Likability in Negotiation Success

A recurring theme was the interplay between trust and likability. Navarro cited empirical studies, including the Harvard Grant Study, confirming that likability is often a stronger predictor of career advancement than intelligence or technical expertise. Negotiators who cultivate likable behaviors—friendly demeanor, attentiveness, and respectful engagement—enhance their influence and effectiveness. Examples included historical diplomatic successes, such as Henry Kissinger's favorable reception in China, where personal likability outweighed policy debates.

Nonverbal Influence: Visual, Vocal, and Spatial Cues

Navarro presented nonverbal communication as the primary channel of influence, surpassing verbal content in impact. Key principles for negotiators include:

- **Visual Presence:** Eye contact, gestures, and posture significantly shape perceptions of trust and authority. For example, greeting with the eyes first, orienting the body and feet toward interlocutors, and using open, expansive arm positions conveys engagement and credibility.
- **Vocal Variety:** Skilled negotiators adapt voice cadence, tone, and volume to signal shifts in negotiation dynamics, emphasize points, or de-escalate tension. Mono-tonal delivery reduces persuasive impact.
- **Spatial Awareness:** Sitting or standing at a slight angle rather than directly across from a counterpart increases perceived trust and cooperation. This principle applies both in-person and virtually.

Navarro illustrated these principles with historical examples, including the televised 1960 U.S. presidential debate between Kennedy and Nixon. Despite equivalent qualifications and legal backgrounds, Kennedy's nonverbal presentation—height, grooming, and composure—led television audiences to perceive him as more trustworthy than Nixon, demonstrating the outsized impact of nonverbal cues on decision-making.

Virtual Negotiations: Adapting Nonverbal Skills

Navarro addressed the challenges introduced by virtual negotiations, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Standard face-to-face cues are disrupted in virtual settings, yet trust remains critical. Best practices include:

- Limiting facial framing to approximately one-fourth of the screen to provide contextual cues without distortion.
- Maintaining dynamic movement and head tilts to avoid static “still-face” impressions, which reduce perceived trustworthiness.
- Avoiding digital distractions such as laptops, watches, or phones, as these negatively impact trust perception.

He emphasized that even in a virtual environment, visual and vocal cues continue to dominate initial impressions, which are formed within milliseconds according to Dr. Nalini Ambady's research. Negotiators must adapt these behaviors consciously to maintain credibility and influence.

Performance, Authenticity, and Strategic Adaptation

Navarro challenged the traditional notion of authenticity in negotiations. Authenticity alone is insufficient; negotiators must perform behaviors that are culturally and contextually appropriate to influence outcomes. For example, gestures, posture, and dress must align with the role being performed. Performance does not equate to deception; rather, it is a strategic alignment of natural behavior with situational expectations.

He also highlighted generational differences in attention, behavior, and communication preferences. Younger participants, accustomed to rapid digital feedback, require adapted strategies to maintain engagement, emphasizing attentiveness, varied vocal and visual cues, and culturally sensitive gestures.



Behavioral Details with Strategic Impact

Navarro provided actionable insights for negotiators seeking to refine their nonverbal effectiveness:

- Greeting and Engagement: Prioritize eye contact first, then body orientation and feet placement. Encapsulate openness with arms and use smiles to convey warmth.
- Gestures: Keep hand gestures broad and relaxed to convey confidence; avoid narrow or closed positions.
- Spatial Management: Respect personal space while adjusting angles to facilitate trust and rapport.
- Micro-Behaviors: Small cues, such as head inclination, neck exposure, and subtle shifts in gaze, influence perception of trust and attentiveness.
- Virtual Nuances: Maintain appropriate framing, avoid “still face,” and ensure that digital tools do not distract from presence.

Key Takeaways for Negotiators and Decision-Makers

- Trust is performative: Every action, posture, and gesture communicates reliability.
- Nonverbal cues outweigh verbal content: How something is conveyed is often more influential than what is said.
- Likability drives influence: Friendly, respectful, and engaging behaviors enhance negotiation outcomes.
- Preparation extends to behavior: Consider the sequence of entry, seating arrangements, and visual positioning.
- Virtual negotiation requires adapted skills: Eye contact, framing, and avoidance of distractions are critical.
- Performance is strategic, not deceptive: Align behaviors with situational expectations while maintaining credibility.
- Attention to detail preserves trust: Lapses in nonverbal behavior, technological distractions, or unpreparedness can have long-term reputational consequences.

Navarro’s insights underscore that negotiation success hinges on the integration of trust, likability, and nonverbal intelligence. Decision-makers must recognize that influence begins before verbal engagement, is continuously assessed, and is amplified by deliberate, consistent behaviors. Mastering these elements—visual, vocal, spatial, and behavioral—enables negotiators to achieve superior outcomes, foster enduring relationships, and maintain credibility in increasingly complex negotiation environments.



Keynote Speech by Michael Watkins
“Strategic Negotiation and Structural Engineering”

Michael Watkins emphasized that effective negotiation is not just about tactics or reactive responses, but about understanding and shaping the structure of the negotiation. He presented a seven-element framework that provides a systematic way to analyze complex negotiations and strategically influence outcomes. By considering parties, issues, power, information, relationships, levels, and linkage, negotiators can map the full landscape of a negotiation, anticipate reactions, and design their approach with precision rather than relying on ad hoc decisions.

This framework is important because it transforms negotiation from a reactive exercise into a strategically engineered process. By actively shaping the structure, negotiators can create competitive advantage, manage complexity across multiple parties and issues, and leverage power, information, and relationships dynamically. The approach enables decision-makers to orchestrate internal and external layers, align stakeholders, and maximize value, turning complex negotiations into predictable, manageable, and strategically advantageous outcomes.



The Structural Engineering Framework

1. Parties

Definition: All individuals, groups, or institutions involved directly or indirectly in the negotiation.

Key Insights:

- Identify primary players, secondary stakeholders, and hidden influencers.
- Understand motivations, interests, constraints, and diversity among parties.
- Recognize that parties are not monolithic; aligning with subsets of stakeholders can create leverage.

Action Points:

- Map all parties and their relative influence.
- Assess alignment and potential alliances among stakeholders.
- Consider adding or removing participants strategically to reshape negotiation dynamics.

2. Issues

Definition: The subjects or topics under negotiation.

Key Insights:

- Issues can be single or multi-dimensional, interdependent or independent.
- Complex negotiations often benefit from modularizing or bundling issues to facilitate trade-offs and value creation.
- Structuring issues strategically allows negotiators to manage risk, regulatory constraints, and stakeholder preferences.

Action Points:

- Identify which issues are core versus peripheral.
- Consider modularization, bundling, or sequencing of issues to optimize outcomes.
- Use issue structuring to create flexibility and options for trade-offs.

3. Power

Definition: The capacity to influence outcomes, both through tangible resources and perceived authority.

Key Insights:

- Power is static (resources, BATNA) and dynamic (momentum, commitments, alliances).
- Strategic framing and commitment can alter counterpart perceptions and shape choices in your favor.
- Power is not just held; it can be generated and deployed throughout the negotiation.

Action Points:

- Assess both static and dynamic sources of power.
- Strengthen alternatives while shaping the counterparty's perception of theirs.
- Use strategic commitments to influence choices and deter escalation by competitors.

4. Information

Definition: Knowledge relevant to the negotiation, including market intelligence, counterpart preferences, and regulatory context.

Key Insights:

- Information is both a source of power and a tool for shaping perceptions.
- Strategic disclosure, signaling, and management of ambiguity can shift leverage.
- Continuous learning and selective communication are critical for advantage.

Action Points:

- Map informational asymmetries.
- Decide what, when, and how to disclose or withhold strategically.
- Use information to shape perceptions and anticipate counterparty actions.

5. Relationships

Definition: The ongoing social, professional, and institutional connections that influence negotiation behavior.

Key Insights:

- All negotiations occur within relational contexts; reputational and relational capital are critical.
- Building trust and credibility can facilitate cooperation and alignment.
- Post-deal integration depends on relationships established during negotiation.

Action Points:

- Identify key relationships that influence negotiation success.
- Invest in trust-building and reputation management.
- Consider long-term implications of relationship management on future negotiations.

6. Levels

Definition: The vertical and horizontal layers of decision-making within and across organizations.

Key Insights:

- Negotiations often involve internal and external levels, requiring alignment across all layers.
- Misalignment within an organization or across stakeholders can derail deals.
- Successful negotiators orchestrate internal and external processes to maintain coherence.

Action Points:

- Map internal and external decision-making levels.
- Ensure alignment within your organization before engaging external parties.
- Monitor counterpart internal alignment and anticipate potential friction points.

7. Linkage

Definition: The interconnection between negotiations, whether sequential, competitive, or reciprocal.

Key Insights:

- Negotiations rarely occur in isolation; linked negotiations can amplify or constrain outcomes.
- Strategic linking or de-linking of negotiations can create leverage, shape alternatives, or bootstrap deals.
- Proper management of linkage can influence competitive dynamics and value distribution.

Action Points:

- Identify linked negotiations and interdependencies.
- Plan sequencing strategically to maximize leverage.
- Use competitive or reciprocal linkages to influence counterpart behavior.

Mastering the structural framework of negotiation allows decision-makers to navigate complexity, create value, and secure superior outcomes. The seven-element model—Parties, Issues, Power, Information, Relationships, Levels, and Linkage—provides a systematic approach for analyzing, shaping, and executing complex deals, as illustrated by high-stakes corporate and regulatory negotiations.

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Keynote Speech by Jennifer Jordan
“Harnessing Power and Transforming it into Leadership”

At the N-Conference, the speaker delivered an in-depth exploration of how power operates in organizational and negotiation contexts — and how it can be transformed into true leadership. Rather than viewing power as something to acquire or guard, she framed it as a dynamic, relational resource: built through expertise, relationships, and legitimacy, and ultimately defined by how it is used.

The session challenged decision-makers to move beyond traditional notions of authority and control, toward a more self-aware, benevolent, and disciplined form of influence. It mapped the journey individuals take from possessing power to earning recognition (status) to demonstrating leadership that sustains trust and performance.

Understanding Power as a System

The speaker began by redefining power as interdependence — not dominance. In every negotiation, team, or organization, power arises when others depend on you for resources, expertise, or access. The most influential individuals are those who understand what others need from them and intentionally build those dependencies.

She identified multiple sources of power that leaders and negotiators can harness:

- Knowledge and expertise – being the person who holds critical information or analytical capability.
- Networks and alliances – building relationships that extend reach and credibility.
- Resources and formal authority – managing budgets, assets, or titles that confer decision rights.
- Personal credibility and character – consistency, reliability, and emotional intelligence that make others willing to follow.

However, power is only effective when recognized by others. This recognition, she emphasized, cannot be claimed; it must be conferred. The speaker described how decision-makers often misjudge this — assuming possession of power guarantees influence, when in fact others’ perception determines legitimacy.

Recognition, Visibility, and Uniqueness

To translate power into status — that is, recognized and legitimized influence — individuals must work consciously on three interrelated dimensions: recognition, visibility, and uniqueness.

Recognition

People of status lend legitimacy to others. When respected figures acknowledge your contribution or expertise, your credibility multiplies. The speaker encouraged leaders to cultivate allies who can “speak their name in rooms they’re not in.” Being endorsed by others is more powerful than self-promotion.

Visibility

Achievements need to be seen. She urged participants to “showcase your successes” — share outcomes on platforms like LinkedIn, mention accomplishments in team meetings, and seek out high-visibility projects. Visibility is not vanity; it is how systems learn to associate your name with value. Speaking at conferences, publishing insights, or taking on cross-functional initiatives all increase perceived impact.

Uniqueness

True influence stems from knowing what distinctive value you bring. Leaders must articulate clearly, to themselves and others, what they contribute that others do not. “If you can’t articulate it,” she said, “others won’t see it either.” This applies equally to individuals and negotiation teams — understanding why others depend on you is central to sustained relevance.

Together, recognition, visibility, and uniqueness create the perception of status — the social acknowledgment that converts latent power into recognized authority.



The Transformation from Power to Leadership

The heart of the talk addressed how power can be ethically and effectively exercised. Drawing on the research of McClelland and Burnham, the speaker described two qualities that transform “power wielders” — those who simply hold power — into genuine leaders: benevolence and self-control.

Benevolence

Benevolence is the desire to use one’s resources and influence for the good of others rather than purely for self-advancement. The true test of leadership is whether a person with authority — a CEO, a negotiator, a director — prioritizes the success of the organization and team over personal gain.

Leaders who practice benevolence:

- Use their networks and expertise to support others’ growth.
- Mentor and elevate colleagues.
- Seek mutually beneficial outcomes, not zero-sum wins.
- Publicly credit others for shared achievements.

This orientation, the speaker noted, not only builds loyalty but also strengthens one’s own legitimacy. Influence that uplifts others tends to expand rather than diminish.

Self-Control

The second transformative quality is self-control — the discipline to resist temptation and misuse of power. As power grows, so do opportunities for personal indulgence or coercive behavior. True leaders manage their emotions and impulses wisely.

They:

- Use emotions intentionally, not manipulatively.
- Avoid outbursts, threats, or emotional leverage.
- Maintain integrity even when shortcuts or privileges are available.

Self-control distinguishes leadership from mere authority. The absence of restraint, she warned, often leads to ethical erosion and loss of trust, even among high-performing individuals.

The “Alchemy” of Leadership

Benevolence and self-control together “alchemize” power — turning influence into something morally grounded and sustainable. Without them, leaders may achieve compliance; with them, they earn genuine followership.

The speaker drew contrasts to illustrate this. Visionaries such as Elon Musk wield enormous power and command attention, but often rely on fear, reward, and punishment — the mechanics of control, not leadership. In contrast, figures like Satya Nadella exemplify benevolent, self-disciplined leadership: creating psychological safety, promoting learning, and aligning ambition with care for people.

Reflections on Gender, Generation, and Context

The speaker also discussed how power and leadership expression vary across contexts.

Gender Dynamics:

Women in male-dominated environments often influence differently — through questioning, building deep relationships, and demonstrating empathy. These are not weaknesses but alternate pathways to power. She emphasized authenticity: women who succeed in these settings do not mimic masculine behaviors but integrate assertiveness with their own relational strengths.

Generational Shifts:

For emerging leaders, particularly Gen Z, healthy relationships to power must be cultivated early. This generation’s experience of remote communication during formative years has shaped their approach to connection. The challenge is to develop face-to-face relational skills and empathy — the foundation of influence and trust.

Hybrid and Remote Leadership:

In distributed teams, power is often unevenly visible. Leaders should ensure equitable participation, calling on quieter or remote voices and avoiding the dominance of extroverts. Structural inclusivity in communication strengthens group legitimacy and cohesion.

Executive Teams:

At the collective level, the same transformation applies. Executive teams must ensure that their collective power serves the organization’s purpose, not individual agendas. Benevolence and self-control are as essential for boards as they are for individuals — avoiding favoritism, valuing diverse expertise, and using power to advance the whole system.

Implications for Negotiators and Decision-Makers

For senior negotiators and organizational leaders, the session offered clear takeaways:

- Map your sources of power — understand what others depend on you for and develop those dependencies strategically.
- Cultivate recognition — credibility grows through respected allies and public acknowledgment, not self-assertion.
- Invest in visibility — make your value observable inside and outside the organization.
- Define your uniqueness — articulate clearly what only you (or your team) bring to the table.
- Exercise power with purpose — align influence with collective benefit, not self-protection.
- Practice emotional discipline — power misused through ego or impulse erodes trust instantly.
- Create psychological safety — teams that feel safe to speak and challenge ideas make better decisions and negotiate better outcomes.

The N-Conference session reframed power as a relational currency, not a possession. Leadership, the speaker argued, is not measured by how much power one holds, but by how one uses it — with benevolence, restraint, and clarity of purpose.

For decision-makers and negotiators, the enduring insight is that influence becomes sustainable only when it is recognized, visible, unique, and used responsibly. Power, when shared and exercised ethically, generates the trust, alignment, and legitimacy that define true leadership.

The journey from power to status to leadership is not linear but continual — requiring reflection, humility, and the courage to use influence for the greater good.



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Breakout Session by Jennifer Jordan
“Understanding, Harnessing, and Sustaining Your Power”

This interactive workshop explored the dynamics of power, leadership, and influence in organizational settings, with a focus on how negotiators and decision-makers can leverage these insights for career progression and organizational impact. The discussion highlighted the interplay between expertise, networks, reputation, personality, and status as essential components of effective leadership.

Understanding Power Bases

Key Insight: Power is multi-dimensional and cannot rely solely on personality or likability. Leaders must evaluate and cultivate multiple power bases:

Expertise:

- Core knowledge and skills form the foundation of credibility.
- Expertise alone can earn initial promotion, but in senior or cross-functional roles, leadership depends more on enabling others' expertise rather than being the sole expert.
- Consistently delivering high performance is essential, but visibility and recognition of this expertise are equally important.

Allies and Networks:

- Strategic alliances are critical for exercising influence and gaining support.
- Networks function on reciprocity; consistent giving without immediate expectation of return strengthens relationships and trust.
- Observation: Who gets invited to meetings, whose input is valued, and who others go to for advice reveals influential players in your network.

Reputation and Status:

- Reputation functions as a measurable power base: how others perceive your reliability, capability, and influence.
- Assessing reputation can be done through 360-degree feedback, trusted allies, or reflection on past negotiations.
- Status amplifies power by increasing visibility: extroverts or socially active leaders may have similar expertise to others but gain influence through recognition and exposure.

Personality:

- Personality is a magnifier or detractor, not a primary power base.
- Positive traits (likability, approachability) enhance visibility and influence, while negative traits can diminish the value of expertise and networks.
- Practical consideration: Personality affects first impressions, critical in negotiations and initial interactions, but long-term influence relies on power bases beyond personality.

Likability and Influence

Key Insights:

- Likability is a short-term advantage, particularly in early interactions or negotiations (e.g., first impressions in “three milliseconds”).
- Over time, likability complements other power bases but is rarely sufficient alone to sustain influence.
- Negotiation success often hinges on the ability to connect and collaborate, not just technical expertise or demands.

Leadership Beyond Expertise

Key Insights:

- Progression into leadership roles requires transitioning from being a technical expert to enabling cross-functional teams.
- Leadership is inherently relational: connecting with people, even those who may be difficult or unlikable, is essential.
- Personal biases or preferences should not limit strategic connections; leaders must engage with diverse individuals to maintain organizational effectiveness.

Navigating Organizational Change

Key Insights:

- During transformations, leaders must continuously audit their power bases:
- Current influence: Who listens to you? Who values your input?
- Post-transformation alignment: Do your allies, expertise, and status remain relevant?
- Proactive assessment and adaptation ensure continued relevance in evolving organizational contexts.

Identify Key Gaps:

- Reflect on which power bases are most critical to your objectives and where you currently lack influence.

Strategic Relationship Building:

- Select a few high-value allies and networks; focus on mutual value creation.
- Offer expertise, resources, or support in ways that align with others' goals to establish reciprocity.

Enhance Visibility and Status:

- Share achievements strategically (e.g., LinkedIn, conferences, cross-team collaboration).
- Actively seek opportunities to demonstrate impact to decision-makers.

Leverage Reputation:

- Request honest feedback from peers, mentors, or previous collaborators.
- Understand how your leadership style is perceived and adjust interactions accordingly.

Key Takeaways for Negotiators and Decision-Makers

- Power is multifaceted: Expertise, networks, and reputation outweigh personality in long-term influence.
- Likability matters, but selectively: First impressions and negotiation contexts are enhanced by approachability, yet sustainable influence comes from recognized expertise and strategic alliances.
- Leadership is relational: Connect with allies, even challenging ones, to maintain leverage and credibility.
- Visibility drives impact: Without recognition, even strong capabilities may go unnoticed.
- Transformation requires reassessment: Organizational shifts necessitate evaluating whether your power bases remain relevant and adapting accordingly.
- Network reciprocity is critical: Sustained giving builds trust and ensures future collaboration opportunities.

The workshop underscored that effective leadership and influence are not accidental—they require deliberate cultivation of expertise, networks, and reputation. Likability and personality enhance power but do not replace the foundational bases.

Decision-makers and negotiators must strategically manage relationships, visibility, and reputation to maximize impact in both routine operations and transformational contexts.

Breakout Session by Klaus Lassert
“Artificial Psychology: AI in Negotiations”

This interactive breakout session explored the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in negotiation and communication, emphasizing both the psychological and tactical dimensions. Participants engaged directly in exercises designed to highlight differences between human and AI intelligence, emotional awareness, and practical negotiation strategies. The session combined theory, participant interaction, and hands-on experimentation with AI-based role-playing simulations.

Human vs. Machine Intelligence

Key Insights:

- Human intelligence is strongly linked to willpower, feelings, and emotional awareness. Humans combine abstract reasoning with emotions, shaping actions in complex, context-dependent ways.
- Machine intelligence excels at pattern recognition, large-scale data observation, and consistency. Unlike humans, AI lacks inherent emotional bias, fear, or subjective judgment, which can make it highly efficient but contextually limited in nuanced human interactions.
- Emotional intelligence remains a differentiator. While AI can simulate emotional behavior, genuine human emotional depth influences perception, decisions, and negotiations.

Implications for Negotiators:

- Recognize AI as a tactical partner that can analyze vast data, predict outcomes, and prepare strategies.
- Emotions and perception in human counterparts remain critical; AI should complement, not replace, nuanced judgment.



Practical AI Applications in Negotiation

Preparation and Strategy:

- AI can create demand lists, question lists, and tactical options for negotiation prep.
- Used as a tactical coach, AI can simulate multiple scenarios, giving negotiators real-time feedback on style, sequence, and effectiveness of approaches.
- AI can also conduct opposition research, provide insights into a counterpart's likely behavior, and help strategize based on patterns identified in prior negotiations.

Live Negotiation Support:

- AI can function as a side coach during negotiations, monitoring conversation dynamics and offering guidance without directly participating.
- Real-time AI analysis may include voice, emotion, facial expression, and semantic analysis to detect hidden patterns and inform tactical decisions.

Training and Skill Development:

- AI enables high-frequency, individualized role-play, giving participants 100+ practice hours in compressed timeframes.
- Provides detailed feedback on tactics, timing, and emotional influence, far beyond conventional classroom constraints.

Training can cover language adaptation, different communication styles, and handling difficult personalities.

Psychological Insights in Negotiation

Human Dynamics:

- Perception and emotional reaction are often misattributed to others, rather than recognizing the negotiator's own role in interaction outcomes.
- Participants tend to overestimate their efforts or underestimate others', highlighting the importance of objective feedback.
- Small behavioral cues, such as facial expressions and initial impressions, strongly influence decisions in the first milliseconds of interaction.

AI and Emotional Simulation:

- AI can simulate human-like emotional responses, including personality traits such as narcissism, agreeableness, hostility, or dependence.

- These simulations allow negotiators to experiment with tactics safely, including scenarios they would avoid in real life.
- The dynamic nature of AI personalities provides insights into both strategy effectiveness and self-awareness of negotiators.

Tactical and Strategic Takeaways

Key Negotiation Lessons:

- Order and Timing of Tactics Matter: Correct strategy can fail if applied too early or too late. AI simulations reveal optimal sequencing.
- Empathy vs. Assertiveness: Some individuals respond better to empathy; others respond better to assertiveness. Understanding personality type improves outcomes.
- Role of Self-Awareness: Negotiators must recognize their biases and tendencies; AI feedback can highlight blind spots and improve decision-making.
- Continuous Practice: Frequent micro-roleplays with AI reinforce skills, increase adaptability, and improve crisis handling.

Corporate-Level Implications:

- AI can create performance benchmarks for top performers, allowing companies to train broader teams to higher standards.
- Offers quantitative diagnostics for negotiation style, crisis response, and personality profiling across individuals and departments.
- Enables data-driven training design, improving team-wide negotiation effectiveness.

Ethical and Operational Considerations

- Data privacy and analysis limits are critical; individuals must feel secure that AI observations are not monitored by HR or others.
- AI tools require a balance between analysis speed and quality; practical deployment timelines suggest near-term adoption within six months.
- AI should support human negotiation rather than replace human judgment, particularly in emotionally complex or high-stakes scenarios.

Executive Recommendations for Decision-Makers

- Integrate AI as a Negotiation Partner: Use AI for preparation, simulation, and real-time tactical coaching.
- Invest in AI Training Labs: Enable teams to practice complex scenarios safely and repeatedly, capturing insights on strategy effectiveness.
- Emphasize Emotional Intelligence: Humans remain essential for perception, empathy, and judgment; AI augments but does not replace these skills.
- Leverage Analytics for Continuous Improvement: Track behavior, performance, and tactical responses across teams to design better learning programs.
- Monitor Ethical and Operational Limits: Ensure compliance with data protection and maintain participant trust during AI-based training or analysis.

This breakout session demonstrated that AI has transformative potential in negotiation and tactical training. By combining AI's analytical and predictive capabilities with human emotional intelligence and adaptability, organizations can significantly enhance negotiation performance, self-awareness, and team development. Early adoption allows negotiators to experiment, receive feedback, and refine their approach, ensuring competitive advantage in increasingly complex negotiation environments.



FIRESIDE CHAT

ANA JAKIĆ & MATTHIAS SCHRA



Fireside Chat with Marijana Jakić
“How to Navigate Cultures, Communities, and Complex Negotiations”
Powered by St Moritz

St. Moritz, a world-renowned Alpine destination, is recognized globally for its winter luxury experiences, iconic snow landscapes, and prestigious events. However, the destination’s vision extends beyond its current image, aiming to transform St. Moritz into a dynamic, year-round destination offering meaningful experiences while embracing innovation, heritage, and diversity.

Target Audience

St. Moritz welcomes everyone. The strategy focuses on inclusivity, aiming to appeal not only to traditional luxury travelers but also to a younger, more diverse audience seeking cultural, artistic, and wellness experiences. While the destination remains synonymous with premium luxury — five-star hotels, fine dining, and exclusive events — it increasingly emphasizes authentic and immersive experiences beyond status and opulence.

Vision and Strategic Goals

- **Year-Round Destination:** Historically a summer retreat 3,000 years ago, St. Moritz aims to expand its appeal beyond the winter season, creating opportunities for sports, arts, wellness, and cultural experiences throughout the year.
- **Rejuvenation and Meaningful Experiences:** The destination seeks to balance its heritage of “old-money luxury” with contemporary lifestyle offerings. Activities now focus on health, personal development, arts, and outdoor experiences—enhancing visitors’ holistic well-being.
- **Diversity and Inclusion in Tourism Leadership:** Recognizing the traditionally male-dominated sphere of luxury tourism, St. Moritz prioritizes female leadership and diverse perspectives in shaping events and experiences, fostering a more inclusive and empathetic approach to hospitality.

Strategic Approach

- **Stakeholder Collaboration:** With a local population of 5,500 actively invested in the destination’s brand, the tourism strategy requires a bottom-up, consultative approach. Success depends on collaborative negotiation, careful listening, and inclusive decision-making.

- **Proven Performance:** Credibility was established through delivering tangible results—rising tourism numbers, increased bookings, and successful partnerships with luxury brands (e.g., Prada, Panerai). This approach earned trust and gradually shifted stakeholder perceptions.
- **Marketing Philosophy:** St. Moritz emphasizes premium positioning—promoting five-star hotels and luxury experiences—while allowing broader offerings to naturally benefit from increased destination prestige. Marketing relies on under-promising and over-delivering, reinforcing trust and effectiveness.

Innovation and Partnerships

Strategic collaborations with high-end brands and cultural institutions position St. Moritz not only as a ski resort but as a lifestyle destination. Initiatives include international exposure at fashion weeks and partnerships with institutes such as the Schranert Institute, showcasing the destination in a global luxury context.

Leadership and Negotiation Insights

The approach to leadership in tourism emphasizes authenticity, adaptation, and leveraging individual strengths. Effective negotiation involves understanding diverse stakeholder perspectives, bridging language and cultural gaps, and consistently demonstrating results to build trust.

St. Moritz continues to evolve while honoring its heritage. By combining luxury, authenticity, cultural richness, and year-round offerings, the destination positions itself as a forward-looking Alpine icon. Its inclusive, results-driven strategy ensures sustainable growth, strengthened stakeholder engagement, and enhanced global visibility.





This interactive workshop explored strategic negotiation principles through the lens of game theory, drawing heavily on real-world examples such as the Brexit negotiations, the Trump administration trade strategies, and multilateral EU decision-making. Participants engaged in exercises to apply these principles in complex geopolitical and trade contexts, emphasizing pre-play preparation, commitment mechanisms, sequencing, and structured negotiation design.

Core Principles of Game Theoretic Negotiation

Commitment is Key:

- Public self-binding commitments, as seen in the EU during Brexit, create leverage. By clearly defining red lines and non-negotiables, negotiators prevent opponents from exploiting ambiguity.
- Strong mandates from principals (e.g., EU Commission or national leadership) allow negotiators to act decisively without seeking repeated internal approval.

Sequencing and Structure:

- Strategic sequencing of negotiations alters bargaining power. For example, the EU prioritized the withdrawal agreement before discussing the UK's future relationship, limiting UK leverage on subsequent contentious issues (e.g., financial markets, fishing rights).
- Structuring the negotiation process is as important as the negotiation itself; designing the framework allows one to control timing, options, and leverage.

Delegation and Authority:

- A fully empowered negotiator can act decisively. Even junior negotiators can secure favorable outcomes if they operate under a clearly defined and credible mandate, as demonstrated in high-stakes business negotiations.

Option Development and Scenario Planning:

- Extensive preparation includes exploring undesirable or less-preferred outcomes to enhance flexibility in negotiation.
- Understanding the consequences of “walk-away” options and predefining automated responses increases credibility and strengthens negotiation positions.

Training Scenario: Preparing for a High-Pressure Trade Negotiation

Context:

- A new administration is expected to impose rapid trade measures targeting key partner countries.
- Aggressive policies, disregard for established protocols, and an emphasis on narrative and public perception are anticipated.
- The scenario challenges participants to prepare proactively, ensuring their organization can respond effectively while maintaining leverage.

Strategic Response (Game-Theoretic Approach):

Internal Alignment:

- Identify a single, credible negotiator with a fully authorized mandate.
- Pre-align all internal positions so the negotiator can act decisively without further consultation.

Coalition Building:

- Form alliances with other organizations facing similar pressure to increase negotiating strength.
- Coordinate policy positions and potential countermeasures to amplify credibility.

Sequenced Negotiation:

- Prioritize engagement with the most pliable targets first to achieve early wins.
- Sequentially engage remaining parties, leveraging early successes to influence subsequent negotiations.

Automated Contingencies:

- Prepare predefined responses to anticipated aggressive actions (e.g., tariffs, regulatory measures).
- Automating responses signals commitment and reliability without constant internal approvals.

Narrative and Signaling:

- Use back-channel communications to allow face-saving solutions for counterparts.
- Ensure alliances and conditional measures are credible, signaling readiness to escalate if necessary.

Concluding Recommendations for Negotiators

Pre-Negotiation Preparation:

- Map internal mandates, decision-making authority, and pre-approved responses.
- Model potential outcomes and develop options even for undesirable scenarios.

Commitment and Credibility:

- Publicly declare positions when appropriate to increase leverage.
- Empower negotiators with clear authority to act within defined boundaries.

Sequencing and Structure:

- Determine the optimal order of negotiations to maximize leverage and limit opponent flexibility.
- Leverage timing, deadlines, and pre-play to strengthen negotiation outcomes.

Coalition and Alliance Management:

- Build pre-negotiation alliances with stakeholders facing similar exposure.
- Coordinate messaging and actions to enhance collective credibility.

Automated and Contingent Strategies:

- Prepare immediate, enforceable responses to counterpart actions to deter opportunistic behavior.
- Maintain narrative flexibility to enable agreements while preserving public messaging.

Game-theoretic negotiation emphasizes preparation, commitment, and structural design. Success depends less on in-the-moment improvisation and more on pre-play, credible delegation, and systematic scenario planning. The workshop demonstrated how these principles can be applied in high-stakes political and economic contexts, providing a robust framework for decision-makers navigating complex negotiations.





Workshop by Klaus Lassert
“Negotiation as Corporate Strategy: A Board Member’s Perspective”

This interactive workshop explored negotiation as a corporate, organizational, and leadership task, emphasizing that effective negotiation is not solely dependent on individual skill but on the alignment, processes, and structures of the negotiating organization. Participants engaged in practical exercises, group reflections, and scenario-based analysis to understand the systemic factors that contribute to negotiation success and avoid common pitfalls.

Key Concepts

Negotiation as an Organizational Task:

- Negotiation is a corporate responsibility: the success of a negotiation depends on the full organization, not just individual negotiators.
- Teams must function as a coherent unit, akin to a Formula One team: each member’s actions and decisions directly impact overall performance.
- Single experts or highly skilled negotiators cannot compensate for misalignment, unclear strategy, or missing mandates.

Team Alignment & Roles (FBI Model):

- Decision Maker: Defines strategy, sets walk-away points, and establishes mandates.
- Commander: Oversees tactical execution and ensures adherence to agreed processes.
- Negotiator: Acts on behalf of the organization within defined boundaries.
- Expert: Contributes specialized knowledge but intervenes only when called upon.
- Role clarity is essential to prevent confusion, override conflicts, or missteps during negotiations.

Strategic and Tactical Framework:

- Negotiation strategy must be explicit, understood, and communicated across the team.

Key preparatory elements:

- Clear walk-away position (minimum acceptable outcome).
- Maximum target (maximum objective).
- Defined negotiation sequence and prioritization of issues.

Tactical profiling helps anticipate team behavior under stress and identifies systemic weaknesses.

Organizational Preparation:

- Scenario Analysis: Participants examined Formula One analogies and real corporate examples to illustrate the importance of preparation, alignment, and systemic efficiency.
- Annual Negotiation Review: Conducting structured annual or semi-annual analysis of past negotiations strengthens anticipation and preparedness for future cases.
- Make-or-Break Moments: Identifying critical negotiation points early allows teams to anticipate challenges and plan interventions proactively.

Handling Uncertainty and Pressure:

- Negotiation often occurs under incomplete information; teams must be trained to operate effectively despite gaps.
- Pressure curves: early meeting anxiety, information saturation, and deadlock frustration are predictable patterns requiring structured response strategies.
- Teams need support during high-pressure phases to avoid self-sabotage or overcompensation.

Decision-Maker Influence:

- Leaders must clarify expectations, provide mandates, and avoid undermining teams during negotiations.
- Empowerment is crucial: negotiators must feel secure to execute the strategy without fear of criticism or interference.
- Side-channel negotiations: decision-makers should allow teams to lead minor interventions while adhering to the overall strategy.

Common Negotiation Pitfalls Identified

- Negotiating Against Oneself: Teams concede too early to avoid conflict, losing leverage.
- Lack of Role Clarity: Experts or additional participants interfere without clear instructions.
- Misalignment of Strategy and Tactics: Ambiguous walk-away points or goals reduce negotiating effectiveness.
- Overcompensation Under Pressure: Frustration during deadlocks can lead to over-concessions or irrational decisions.
- Underestimating Systemic Factors: Perceived opponent irrationality often reflects internal misalignment rather than external incompetence.

Key Takeaways for Decision-Maker Negotiators

Organizational Preparedness:

- Ensure every team member understands their role and the strategic framework.
- Conduct regular post-mortem and forward-looking negotiation reviews.
- Develop contingency protocols for deadlocks, surprises, and crises.

Leadership and Empowerment:

- Clearly define mandates and expectations; communicate walk-away points and goals.
- Support negotiators during high-pressure moments; avoid unsolicited interference.
- Encourage team-led interventions when appropriate; maintain oversight without micromanagement.

Tactical Awareness:

- Identify behavioral patterns within your team and opponents to anticipate responses.
- Monitor concession tendencies and enforce discipline against premature or excessive giving.
- Recognize when perceived opponent irrationality signals internal misalignment or process flaws.

Tools for Success:

- Role definitions and tactical checklists streamline execution and prevent overreach.
- Expert contributions must be structured and controlled to avoid unplanned disclosures.
- Utilize scenario planning, tactical profiling, and structured reflection to continuously improve team performance.

Negotiation is a systemic, organizational challenge requiring preparation, role clarity, process discipline, and leadership support. High-performing negotiation teams rely on alignment across strategy, tactics, and execution. Decision-makers play a critical role in empowering teams, clarifying mandates, and ensuring the organization functions cohesively during negotiation. Success is not solely dependent on individual talent but on the structured integration of the entire organization.

Actionable Recommendation:

Implement structured annual negotiation reviews, define clear roles and mandates, and embed tactical frameworks to ensure your organization negotiates effectively under uncertainty and pressure.







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