

EVOLVED NEGOTIATIONS: A NEW, BLENDED AND BROADENED APPROACH TO INFLUENCING CONDITIONS, ADVERSARIES AND OUTCOME

By

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Despite our best efforts as negotiators, we sometimes find ourselves subject to shifting conditions, unable to identify the need to re-prioritize objectives and unable to wrest strategic value from emerging situational complexity.

Very often this is the result of misidentifying the parameters defining a dispute and failing to marry circumstances with an evolved approach to negotiation which could enhance maneuverability to meet and command instability inherent to a particular conflict as well as our process of resolution.

This article identifies evolved negotiations as a specific approach, highlights the increasing need for such an approach toward a range of disputes, and further discusses a short list of unique challenges and opportunities associated with evolved negotiation techniques toward such a task.

Recognizing a case for evolved negotiations

While perennially defined by dispute, negotiations often find themselves additionally confined by a narrow slate of principal participants and a compelling sense of urgency structurally dependent upon existing conditions.

These imposed parameters typically address short-range interests while minimizing costly resource loss associated with lengthy debate.

Narrowly-defined and engaged negotiations further endeavor to make the most of a current situation while strategically avoiding risks associated with future uncertainty.

However, when dispute persists, renews, or proliferates within a failing system giving it rise, the negotiator must widely broaden their perspective of conflict to include deeper analysis of supporting conditions as well as effective strategies to neutralize or harness them.

Addressing the multi-faceted needs of compound conflict requires an equally comprehensive approach to resolution.

Evolved negotiations embrace conflict as both a compass to supporting conditions as well as a transformational path toward solution.

An evolved approach endeavors to orchestrate diverse realms of influence within environmental, social and institutional systems in order to:

- Add value to a lesser enabled bargaining position;
- Secure short-term vital interests; and,
- Evolve conditions together with adversaries toward greater compatibility and therefore, more sustainable solution in order to meet longer-range, priority objectives.

Evolved negotiations as an intractable implication of contemporary conflict

We are at a unique time in human history... a time in which we have successfully generated broad and complex systems of human growth quite apart from nature's cradle and guiding impetus of balance and adaptation.

As such – unto ourselves and emulating other organisms – we have built and managed highly efficient and profitable methods of energy and food production, transportation, distribution, communication, housing, waste management, health care, education, administration and defense.

As successful as our means and measures have been – and perhaps because of our success, these systems have ironically begun to collapse under relentless pressures of technologic innovation, global competition for less expensive and more abundant resources, greater social class division, and adherence to failing status quo.

This has created a highly symbiotic situation in which inevitable conflict such as labor disputes, supply shortages, industrial impacts to human health and environment, political policy, and social conflicts are no longer isolated among principal participants in dispute.

Because our every endeavor is inextricably linked to a multi-dimensional framework of systematized support, the rippling effects of contention can engulf distant stakeholders and breach international borders rattling structures distinguished by competing needs, objectives and priorities.

In this stew of competitive unrest and uncertainty, favorable outcome is now more vested in those who are more fortified; enjoy the widest margin of error and loss; and benefit from robust, political connectivity and influence.

In other words, every human system serving population has transcended a competitively driven and diverse quest to serve growing need, only to become very narrowly driven within very narrow channels by fewer people capable of forcing the narrow steering of civilization... even toward a collision course with self-destruction.

This is not unlike other periods in history in which stagnation has foreshadowed broad social, economic, political and environmental collapse.

This tendency continues to quash diversity in favor of selectively profitable methods and means while actively endangering access to alternatives necessary to innovation and adaptation. This preoccupation, then, seeks to support status quo even when established systems are insufficient in their ability to serve, and, instead, induce social, political and economic distress.

The ability to mitigate the devastating effects of degrading conditions has become rather exclusive to a select few in command of narrowly administered, failing systems.

This, of course, over-burdens a majority of the Earth's seven billion people, and the failing systems to which they feel they must continue to subscribe in order to survive. This further weakens failing systems, contributing to even greater conflict.

As mechanisms of law and justice fall prey to manipulation and corruption, that majority more deeply descend into desperation and despair, seeking ever more efficient ways to secure even basic needs and human rights.

This of course, can and has recently led to violence, cruel competition, and a broad proliferation of humanity's worst tendencies made worse by the advent of destructive technological means driven individually to affect populations globally.

This places us squarely on the cusp of an age in which we must evolve or risk expiration by our own hand.

Our collective society has become so highly structured, selfish pursuits can quickly extend to others and revisit us ever more suddenly and unexpectedly as eroded economic diversity, social and political instability and threats to personal security.

History has taught us that times of warfare and strife are frequently initiated by a scant handful of contributing factors:

- Self interest;
- Fear and denial of degrading conditions;
- Relentless adherence to failed status quo;
- An active blockade of innovation and access to alternative solutions, and/or, a vacuum of education or enlightenment;
- Competition for resources; and

- A lack of leadership including benevolent vision and skill.

More than any other factor, fear underpins system failure of every variety.

How negotiation, itself, can become a factor of conflict

Fear of embracing the unknown, or a fear of dissent which may challenge an entrenched, failing and indefensible posture can preempt necessary system growth and impose decay.

We have seen this recently exhibited in the U.S. Congress as political factions failed to demonstrate functional consensus over imminently compelling and shared national economic interests.

As negotiators, resistance to dissenting perspectives as well as timidity can cause us to fear conflict, and adopt more adherent and unyielding behaviors, which can frustrate resolution.

Additionally, fear of conflict immediately minimizes our recognition of root cause and drives us toward an artificially narrowed scope of solution. This makes us less effective and efficient.

Operating in a state of fear and denial drives us toward competition rather than cooperation. This is an unnecessarily burdensome state from which to attempt creative solution. Further, it corrupts the impulse to act less selfishly.

Fear and system failure are larger expressions of smaller symptoms often manifest in smaller disputes involving few principal participants. But, when smaller disputes persist or proliferate, it is often helpful to address the larger cause.

Identifying system failure and reforming it are tasks especially suited to an evolved approach; that is, one which evolves conditions and adversaries while simultaneously securing short term vital needs.

Benefits of a broadened, blended, evolved approach to negotiation

When we embrace controversy in the spirit of fair resolve as a provision of broader solution, we switch from a more competitive view to one of greater potential.

Moving beyond fearlessness to actively and productively engage conflict toward necessary reconstruction can quickly pave the way toward compassion, compliance and productive collaboration among participants in conflict.

This type of approach is demanding of an exceedingly high level of intelligence collection, strategic development, coordination and execution. This is because system failure is often comprehensive and inclusive of ineffective but persistent policy as well as inadequate, perhaps archaic infrastructure. As such, it often extends toward many realms

of influence, each acting to support or frustrate the functionality of other realms.

These realms often include institutions of politics and bureaucracies, law, education, media, economics, and social stability.

When successfully orchestrated, an evolved approach can:

- Gradually dissolve barriers;
- Displace conditions underlying conflict with innovative adaptation;
- Stimulate healthy growth and vitality; and,
- Liberate critical resources toward the evolution of other dysfunctional systems and conflicts.

This allows the negotiator who successfully orchestrates an evolved approach to exponentially strengthen and evolve their own skills, more broadly applying them to critical challenges spanning a spectrum of interrelated, affected realms.

The benefits are obvious. Negotiations which fail to benefit from an evolved approach are frequently those which have been unduly minimized in a negotiator's recognition of extended influential factors, sensitive to and inviting of inclusion.

Refining known principals and redirecting them toward broader purpose

Certainly, an evolved approach is far more entailed in its scope than standard methodologies. It is:

- Broadly influential in its reach;
- More inclusive in its consideration of contributing factors;
- Longer-range in its sometimes shifting objectives;
- Stabilizing in its constructive approach to reform; and,
- Transformational in sculpting lasting functional solution from multi-dimensional conflict.

Very often it advances meaningful social, institutional and political reform within a framework of achievable goals met through strategic positioning and skilled negotiation.

It can revitalize degrading systems with a sense of collective benefit, and fortify them with immediately applicable innovation.

Obviously this type of approach requires a slate of effective methodologies and techniques uniquely suited to the task, particularly for those endeavoring to better equalize unbalanced conditions, find resource, and add value to their bargaining position.

Fortunately, common principals of negotiation expand their form when called to such duty. There are, however, special challenges calling for new or creative applications, like those briefly discussed below:

1. Strategy, tactics, intelligence and leverage

In an evolved negotiation, effective strategy must embrace a far more comprehensive scope of fluid, influential factors.

In order to craft better strategy, information gathering and organization takes on greater importance.

This is well worth the required investment. An expanded intelligence network can reveal subtle shifts in the landscape of conflict, enabling more strategic tactical applications.

Thorough recognition of influential factors will enable the negotiator to identify and capitalize on an adversary's long-range objective, manipulate circumstances facilitating attainment and thereby enable a far greater range of suitable leverage.

Such an approach naturally lends a much greater sense of outcome predictability.

2. Coalition building

An evolved approach to negotiation often benefits from the development of a supporting coalition of allies and influencers.

Maintaining the adhesion of a broad coalition over time is particularly challenging, and should be managed through:

- Sound leadership;
- Acute recognition of coalition contribution;
- Appropriate cooperative engagement; and,
- The continually refined identification and alignment of shared objectives.

This, of course, requires even greater insight into the mechanics of a coalition and factors of stability and instability.

3. Public awareness and media

There can be no more influential coalition than an educated, engaged public in support of your priority objective.

Therefore, an evolved negotiation requires skilled development of an educational, publicity and promotional campaign.

This is most readily and effectively achieved when launched as a correlated and persistent effort.

Such a campaign can greatly broaden your influence within targeted channels capable of effectively multiplying your message, thereby enhancing investment in outreach and continually compounding your return.

4. Law, policy and bureaucracy

Many forms of negotiation take shape within confines of applicable law and policy.

Appropriately harnessing influential legal principals ahead of an evolved approach and intended to support and steer it, can:

- Fortify your argument and strengthen you position;
- Guide an adversary toward greater compliance; and,
- Prepare your defense ahead of more formal means of resolution, thereby minimizing reliance upon such methods and expediting informal resolution.

Should principals of law and policy fail your objective, an evolved approach can substantiate and add momentum toward necessary reform.

Conclusion

In our modern, highly systematized society, we frequently find ourselves opposing someone, some thing, or some system far more fortified and influential than ourselves.

Perhaps, as a single parent, we find ourselves working toward better employment policy without benefit of a union.

As a small business owner, we may be competitively disadvantaged and endeavoring to expand within an unfairly manipulated market.

Perhaps we find ourselves part of a community struggling to preserve environmental integrity for benefit of public health.

Each of these situations and untold others affecting individuals as focal points of broader system failure can benefit from an evolved approach, either as a strategic addendum to a conventional approach, or comprising the core of a negotiation campaign.

Because it capitalizes on short- as well as long-term conditions simultaneously, an evolved approach can achieve a suite of benefits enhancing early as well as sustained efforts.

It can:

- Bring disparate perspectives into practical and even tested focus;
- Draw controversial findings into a far more defining context;
- Shape conflict by neutralizing or harnessing an infinite range of conditions;
- Accommodate flexibility in conditional shifts and re-prioritized objectives while preserving leverage or illuminating new opportunities;
- Introduce stability as well as predictability through a broadly receptive, relatively measured, inherently flexible, planned process; and,
- Negotiate justice by fairly and effectively shaping dispute into a final, productive and more sustainable form.

Unfortunately, many negotiation situations can be misidentified as overly-simplistic or short-lived due to grievous miscalculations of influential factors comprising controversy.

While impositions of time can indeed be helpful in constraining demands and narrowing the scope of achievable solution, when too-narrowly conceived, negotiations can haphazardly extend without benefit of broad situational awareness or resultant strategic planning. This frequently results in a more reactive and poorly articulated series of crises-driven responses to degrading conditions.

The landscape of conflict has broadened, and with it, the nature of negotiations and need for an equally broadened, evolved approach.

The inability to discern a negotiation demanding of an evolved approach can easily leave a negotiator acting as an unwitting surrogate, incorporated within the evolved approach of an adversary. Will you recognize the totality of conflict and its need for an evolved solution? Will you recognize your actual role in resolution?

To those unfamiliar and perhaps intimidated by an evolved approach, it may appear unduly restrictive because it targets reform from a fair-minded drive toward solution in order to solicit broad and enduring support.

It may appear cumbersome because it requires a comprehensive, highly coordinated approach to resolution, requiring particular insight and skillful management.

But, an evolved approach need not be awkward or insurmountable in its transformative challenge.

Indeed, for those without access to political or adequate legal representation, such an approach is utterly necessary as a tool of equity.

When introduced to conflict as an appropriate vehicle in service to solution, and when masterfully applied with integrity and persistence, such an orchestration broadens collective awareness of system failures and re-frames them as spring boards of innovative solution.

Possibilities then proliferate which are capable of generating empathetic and collaborative efforts toward shared concerns, developing rich and lasting opportunity for mutual benefit.

Lisa Bracken is a communications consultant, pioneer of evolved negotiations, and author of the ground-breaking negotiation manual on implementing an evolved approach toward achieving effective social and institutional reform, entitled: "You and What Army? How to Neutralize Conflict and Negotiate Justice for the Totally Outgunned, Inwardly Timid, Burnt Out or Socially Defunct" Published by: New Flight Books, August 2011. Find free excerpts at: www.youandwhatarmybook.com.

The information in this article is NOT legal advice. Lisa Bracken is a paralegal, and therefore a non-attorney.

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