

FACE Peace Design Brief #4: Negotiation and Consensus Building in Hybrid Environments

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This FACE Peace Design Brief considers negotiation and consensus-building programs using a mix of in-person and distanced elements. Recent advances in technology and cultural shifts brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic have allowed program and event designers to consider a wide variety of tools and practices that allow negotiations and bargaining to happen at a distance or asynchronously. These hybrid processes must attend to two dynamics:

1. Bargaining benefits from trust between parties, and trust is easier to build in person.
2. Bargaining requires that the parties stay organized, attentive, and on-task. Maintaining attention to complex issues is easier in distanced and asynchronous settings.

To maximize the possibility of success given both of these dynamics, the brief argues that negotiation programs should strategically alternate between trust building and detail-oriented phases. A few best practices on how to do this stand out:

- Facilitators can play with socialization by controlling the comfort and discomfort of parties. While the general context should be as comfortable and neutral as possible, facilitators can structure moments in the negotiation that allow for one party to surface their own culture or perspective.
- Facilitators can build trust even at a distance by creating online bargaining environments with the space and time for socialization. Rich communication channels can aid the trust-building process.
- Participants benefit from periods of asynchronous and distanced work on the target of the bargains. Where previous synchronous sessions build proper trust, participants can take time to work through the details of the major agreements they strike in person, or set up negotiation processes for later stages that will benefit a good deal.
- Participants benefit from training in the telecommunications platforms used for bargaining and from facilitators who thoughtfully balance rich distanced environments with the need to streamline processes and maximize attention.

Finally, the Design Brief lays out a generalized template for hybrid consensus building and guidance on how facilitators might modify it given variation in a number of contextual factors. The template can serve as a starting place for structuring negotiations between diverse parties, from distrustful combatants seeking a truce to activists with a common goal creating a solid plan to future cooperation.

I. Introduction

The words “peace negotiation” often evoke a particular image: intransigent foes with red faces at opposite ends of long tables; the mediator at a loss until inspiration strikes. Soon the parties have a miraculous breakthrough on a walk through the forest, where they finally open up and see their common humanity.

This FACE Peace Design Brief considers negotiation and consensus-building programs using a mix of in-person and distanced elements. Recent advances in technology and cultural shifts brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic have allowed program and event designers to consider a wide variety of tools and practices that allow negotiations and bargaining to happen at a distance or asynchronously.

The FACE Peace Design Tool

Each Design Brief in this series explores a more narrow issue in the planning and execution of collaborative events in the peacebuilding field. In conjunction with these Design Briefs, the Kroc IPJ is developing a web-based design tool to aid peacebuilders in the creation of collaborative programs. The interactive tool asks users a series of questions about the goals and constraints of their programs, then provides a customized design brief for the user. The result is clear, concise, evidence-based guidance on how peacebuilders can leverage in-person, online, and hybrid modalities to maximize the impact of their activities.

Readers with the Camp David model of negotiating in mind may doubt that distanced negotiations in peacebuilding can work; how could we recreate the slow strolls in the woods with a grey box on Zoom? Interpersonal trust is best developed in-person.

Interviews with negotiators establishes a clear preference for conducting talks face-to-face. One involved in community mediation said “of course we need to bring people together; that is when they realize that the people they see as opponents have sincere desires and concerns”. Another with experience in formal peace negotiations said “they cannot see their common humanity on Zoom”.

A large body of evidence supports these intuitions. Negotiating¹ virtually tends to leave parties with poorer objective results and feeling less warmth and trust toward one another.² Groups that problem solve and negotiate online tend to reach less effect and satisfying solutions despite

¹ The term “negotiation” may also call to mind adverse parties attempting to settle a conflict, but the Brief instead adopts a much wider definition that includes bargaining between largely friendly parties to build consensus about language for legislation, implementation strategies for complex programs, and other issues that arise frequently in peace-building

² Stuhlmacher, Alice F., and Maryalice Citera. “Hostile behavior and profit in virtual negotiation: A meta-analysis.” *Journal of Business and Psychology* 20 (2005): 69-93.

discussing for longer than their face-to-face peers.³ Literature on commercial negotiation concludes that “negotiators leave less money on the table when they are able to pick up clear social cues” in person.⁴ Parties to online bargaining are less likely to say they want to work with their counterparties in the future.⁵

Yet the promise of hybridizing negotiations is strong. Distanced and asynchronous negotiations are cheaper, more inclusive,⁶ and allow for parties to consider and manage proposals with more detail.⁷ Important issues of logistics and agenda setting are already handled using email or teleconferencing software. Private industry spends billions of dollars a year on software and consulting that hybridizes or even automates many commercial negotiations. What lessons can peacebuilding learn from this progress?

This Design Brief focuses on a narrow issue within the complicated science of negotiating: how can peacebuilders structure hybrid negotiations to encourage durable outcomes that leave parties satisfied and help create a durable peace. The primary audience for this brief is facilitators, not parties themselves. From this perspective, the hybrid structure of a negotiation must attend to two purposes.

1) Bargaining benefits from trust between parties, and trust is easier to build in person.

2) Bargaining requires that the parties stay organized, attentive, and on-task. Maintaining attention to complex issues is easier in distanced and asynchronous settings.

Plainly, negotiations benefit from having in-person phases that emphasize trust-building and asynchronous phases that emphasize trading and evaluating offers and counter-offers. In real negotiations, the separation of these concepts is never so clean. In-person moments offer great opportunities for agreement on big-picture issues, which often requires contemporaneous offers and evaluations. Each communication in the asynchronous, detail-oriented phases is an opportunity to build trust ... or a moment that risks eroding it.

3 Baltes, Boris B., Marcus W. Dickson, Michael P. Sherman, Cara C. Bauer, and Jacqueline S. LaGanke. “Computer-mediated communication and group decision making: A meta-analysis.” *Organizational behavior and human decision processes* 87, no. 1 (2002): 156-179.

4 Swaab, Roderick I., Adam D. Galinsky, Victoria Medvec, and Daniel A. Diermeier. “The communication orientation model: Explaining the diverse effects of sight, sound, and synchronicity on negotiation and group decision-making outcomes.” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 16, no. 1 (2012): 25-53: 52.

5 Naquin, C. E., & Paulson, G. D. (2003). Online bargaining and interpersonal trust. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88(1), 113–120.

6 See Box 2, below.

7 Harvard School of Law Program on Negotiations. “Making the Most of Online Negotiations.” Special Report. (2022).

Each individual attempt to bargain varies in a number of ways: how emotional are the issues involved? how many stakeholders need a say? how much do the parties trust or distrust each other at the outset? are there power differentials between the parties?

The answers to these questions help determine how much a negotiation's structure needs to build trust and how or when the structure needs to maximize the parties' ability to focus their attention. We understand intuitively that, for example, bilateral peace negotiations between antagonistic parties should have a different structure than multilateral bargaining over international policies and practices intended to improve peacebuilding practice (see Box 2, below).

Negotiation can therefore benefit from a careful analysis of how to build and leverage trust in face-to-face and distanced contexts. This Brief has argued that negotiation programs should strategically alternate between trust-building and detail-oriented phases. We note that these phases can never be fully separated and that facilitators need to feel out the parties and issues to discover the best rhythm for individual negotiations. Still, a few best practices stand out:

Facilitators can play with socialization by controlling the comfort and discomfort of parties. While the general context should be as comfortable and neutral as possible, facilitators can structure moments in the negotiation that allow for one party to surface their own culture or perspective.

Facilitators can build trust even at a distance by creating online bargaining environments with the space and time for socialization. Rich communication channels can aid the trust-building process.

Participants benefit from periods of asynchronous and distanced work on the target of the bargains. Where previous synchronous sessions build proper trust, participants can take time to work through the details of the major agreements they strike in person, or set up negotiation processes for later stages that will benefit a good deal.

Participants benefit from training in the telecommunications platforms used for bargaining and from facilitators who thoughtfully balance rich distanced environments with the need to streamline processes and maximize attention.

This Design Brief tackles these issues in more detail. The overarching goal of the Design Brief is to help negotiation facilitators choose between face-to-face and distanced elements at each moment and to how to structure each to build trust between parties and maximize their attention to the process.

II. Phases of Hybrid Negotiation⁸

Very few negotiations happen entirely in person. Even before the modern revolution in information and communication technology, parties to bargains used asynchronous techniques to set agendas for major in-person meetings and to hammer out the details of agreements.

Considering all the variables required to create a good negotiating framework goes far beyond the scope of this Design Brief. In order to illustrate the principles at play, we consider the outlines of a negotiation that includes all potential steps with maximum formal distinction between them, and tackles complex and emotional issues, substantial distrust, and several diverse stakeholders. Peacebuilders will recognize an idealized negotiation in seven broad stages:⁹

3. **Back-channel negotiations:** the agreeing to discuss period in which parties determine whether other stakeholders are interested in an agreement. Often held out of public eye through intermediaries when stakeholders are parties to a conflict. Can also look like building a coalition of interested parties in multi-lateral legislation.
4. **Announcement of discussions:** Often a high-level announcement used to alert the public and other potential participants and stakeholders that a negotiation will take place. Often defines the scope of the negotiation.
5. **Pre-negotiations:** sets out the structure of negotiations, including when and where any face-to-face talks will take place.
6. **Major issue discussion:** representatives of the parties with high levels of authority generate compromises and agreement about the headline issues for discussion, with strong focus on sticking points.
7. **Ironing out details:** discussions about the implementation of any agreement, including specific timelines, language of announcements, verification structures, and the similar. Often handled by representatives with less authority; issues are only escalated to levels of higher authority when needed.
8. **Public signing:** an often symbolic event in which higher level officials attend and make statements that publicize and clarify the consensus and the parties' commitment to maintaining it.

8 This section draws on lessons from several books on negotiation frameworks and design, and from discussions with members of the peacebuilding field that host negotiations of various kinds. Beyond this, our approach is novel and we therefore proceed without citation. See, e.g., Weiss, J. HBR Guide to Negotiating. Harvard Business Review Press, 2016; Bazerman, Max H., and Margaret Ann Neale. Negotiating rationally. Simon and Schuster, 1993; Odell, John S. Negotiating the world economy. Cornell University Press, 2000.

9 These stages depart from the five stage conception offered in most MBA 9 courses for two reasons. First, we break down the negotiation stages based upon their implications for telework. Second, peacebuilders will recognize the need that highly adverse parties feel for secrecy, security, and symbolism. These needs are less apparent in commercial negotiation.

9. **Maintenance:** parties engage in compliance or performance with the agreed consensus and troubleshoot areas of emerging disagreement or confusion.

Although these stages are set out in a roughly chronological order, they can be combined. For example, parties often define conditions or rules of a negotiation during the back-channel phase, meaning that phases (1) and (3) and phases (2) and (4) are sometimes combined.

Audiences for this Design Brief will inevitably find themselves seeking to build consensus in a wide variety of contexts that re-order these phases or omit some entirely. Still, with some creativity and flexible thinking, we believe that facilitators can take the advice below and recombine or apply it in ways that help structure negotiations better.

We can now consider the trade-offs of each stage from the in-person/distanced perspective.

Back channel negotiation normally takes place at a distance because, at this early stage, parties either distrust each other too much for face-to-face talks or because the inchoate negotiation project does not warrant the attention of the type of senior official that would otherwise travel. Further, back channel phases often address highly detailed agreements about the structure of announcement events or face-to-face phases of the negotiation.

If back channel phases are certain to be distanced, what lessons can facilitators implement here?

Two important opportunities arise. First, facilitators should consider ways to get the individuals involved directly in the back channel negotiations to bond. Having a set of comparatively junior staffers build trust and good cooperation habits is valuable both to facilitate more contentious distanced phases (such as “ironing out the details”) and to provide a web of trusting relationships if relations between leaders of the negotiation parties breaks down.

Second, facilitators should encourage parties in the back channel phase to agree to in-person protocols at future meetings that facilitate trust-building and socialization between leadership in the negotiation.

Announcements of discussion provide an opportunity for fanfare and create a commitment mechanism for the parties to engage in negotiations in good faith. For public relations reasons, they often happen face-to-face. Facilitators should push for announcement events that last longer and involve opportunities for relationship building and social bonding.

Announcement events also provide opportunities for the parties to define the problems space and their aspirations for an agreement. Such activities allow for the parties to take time to focus on the things that bring them together, enunciating shared values. Agreeing to shared values and taking problem-oriented approaches to issues facilitates trust and social bonding.¹⁰

10 Shan Liu, Wenyi Xiao, Chao Fang, Xing Zhang, and Jiabao Lin, “Social Support, Belongingness, and Value Co-Creation Behaviors in Online Health Communities,” *Telematics and Informatics* 50 (2020): 101398; Gilbert Probst and Stefano Borzillo, “Why Communities of Practice Succeed and Why They Fail,” *European Management Journal* 26, no. 5 (2008): 335-347.

Pre-negotiations involve all agenda-setting discussions for later substantive negotiations. As with the back channel phase, pre-negotiations offer opportunities to get parties to bond among more junior members and to get parties to agree to more pro-social in-person phases of negotiation.

But should this phase happen in-person or at a distance? The answer depends to a great extent on the character of the negotiations themselves. Complex major issue discussion phases or major issue phases that implicate insecurity of the parties will likely require detail oriented and complex pre-negotiations. This requires sustained attention to offers and complex responses, which are best facilitated asynchronously.

Highly emotional negotiations between contentious parties, however, may break down over details if distanced communications come across as cold or untrustworthy. In-person discussions can aid this problem. Facilitators can also use in-person bargaining over benign details as a way to demonstrate consensus and goodwill and promote social bonding.

Main issue discussion seeks agreement between members of negotiating parties on the most central and emotional issues to the overall negotiation. In general, facilitators should prefer to conduct this critical phase of the negotiation in person. In some cases, such as building multi-lateral consensus on highly technical policies, no main emotional issue will emerge.

In Section III below, we lay out some strategies for building social bonds in person and at a distance. Whether a facilitator decides to host this portion of the negotiation face-to-face or distanced, Section III offers a substantial amount of advice on creating a pro-social environment at this stage of the process.

Ironing out the details can involve a number of follow-ons to the main discussion. In peace negotiations, it might involve filling out detailed calendars or lists that lay out the precise logistics of disarmament and re-integration. In multilateral policy groups it may involve drafting the precise text of the law or document at issue.

As with the pre-negotiation phase, whether the details get ironed in-person or at a distance depends on the emotional nature of the details, their complexity, and the extent to which the individuals in charge of agreement on the details have built trust. Trusting parties tasked with generating detailed, rote, and technical plans benefit from distance and time to consider; where parties lack trust and remaining items risk derailing the main agreement, facilitators should emphasize social presence, and potentially get the parties together again.

Public signings or similar events typically put the icing on a negotiation process. Parties may wish to come together to celebrate and reap the public relations reward of a completed agreement. Whether distanced or in-person, facilitators can capitalize on this energy, designing these events to reinforce trusting relationships and focus participant attention on a limited number of issues that may arise in maintaining the agreement.

Maintenance continues over months, years, or decades. Parties will, of course, perform their obligations apart from one another. Facilitators will often lack the authority to shape the ongoing interactions between parties. Where such is not true, facilitators can ask the same questions considered above to determine when and how to get the parties talking. In most cases, however, facilitators will see the fruits of their labor in trust building play out at this stage.

The preceding section aimed to provide facilitators with a framework for making decisions about when during a negotiation process to bring parties together in person and when to allow distance. The next section discusses some strategies to build trust and increase attentiveness in whatever modality the negotiation requires.

The g7+ Secretariat

On September 22, 2023, the g7+ Secretariat hosted a High Level Summit during a meeting of the United Nations General Assembly. At the Summit, member states adopted Agenda 2030 a declaration that includes commitments and calls for achieving Peace, strengthening democracy, pursuing reforms in multilateral organizations.

The g7+ is an inter-governmental organization of twenty conflict and fragility-affected countries. The Secretariat is primarily responsible for coordinating their voices in multi-lateral settings such as the UN. While the members of the group share important experiences with conflict and political development, they are extremely diverse in other ways. For example, some have extremely small populations and economies (such as Timor-Leste and the Comoros Islands) while others are large (such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo).

The group pursues concerted advocacy. Events such as the summit provide a means to reach consensus on collective stances. To get twenty countries to reach consensus on the language of statements required a modern form of shuttle diplomacy: flurries of email drafts and revisions combined and reworded by Secretariat staff until the members agreed.

How did the Secretariat corral a group of states from across Africa, Asia, and the Pacific Islands at a distance? “It did take a lot of work and meetings,” said Habib Mayar, Deputy General Secretary of the g7+ Secretariat, “but given the common yet unique challenges the countries felt like they were coming from a similar place. Founded on the pillar of solidarity and cooperation, there was trust among members.”

The g7+ Secretariat cont.

The model of the g7+ Secretariat, advocating for policy by diverse actors with a common interest, is more common in peacebuilding than direct negotiations between antagonists, and demonstrates some of the possibilities of hybrid negotiations.

The g7+ engages in a mix of distanced and face-to-face negotiating. Often, the highest-level functionaries meet in person to agree on broad outcomes and agendas in principle. For the high level summit, in person sessions focused on developing consensus on the outcome of the summit that include agreeing on the commitment among the members on how best to advocate for peace and stability. Between these sessions staffers at g7+ and the member states ironed out details. Through email, the g7+ passed drafts of statements for mark-ups by each state, then got to work reconciling. “There were sometimes many drafts over small differences,” Mayar recalled, “doing it this way allowed each member to focus on specifics.”

Keeping the members focused was a key g7+ priority for the distanced phases of the negotiation. According to staff members, following up through emails was usually arduous and long process that required consistent feedback and reminders to the member state contacts. These contacts were typically full time civil servants with multiple priorities competing for attention, and g7+’s facilitation role proved key for progress.

The High-Level Summit itself focused on more relationship building, with member states and g7+ staffers taking the in-person opportunity to celebrate a victory, discuss common goals in greater depth, and generally socialize. From these informal discussions the g7+ will take inspiration for new agendas and identify individuals working in member countries that might make productive partners. In addition to Summits and other special events, g7+ focuses on relationship building at periodic ministerial or senior-level meetings.

In the case of the g7+, as with so many multi-lateral organizations, the cycle of relationship-building and bargaining never really ends.

III. The Disadvantages of Distanced Negotiation and How to Mitigate Them

Why is there such a demand for face-to-face facilitation when we negotiate? As detailed in the sections below, research points to four types of reasons. The first are social. Social bonding between parties tends to lead to better bargains, but distanced parties to negotiations find it harder to bond socially. These deficits tend to play into cognitive biases that result in distrust of others not on “our team” and overconfidence in our own abilities.

A second class of concerns arises from the technologies themselves. Telecommunications technology requires thinking about privacy and infrastructure in new ways, and building new skills required to use the technology itself.

Third, distanced negotiators are often distracted by home environments or similar during key phases of the negotiation. Finally, negotiating at a distance creates new tactical opportunities, such as stalling or cherry-picking, that are less tenable in person.

A. *Socialization, Trust, and Negotiation*

Socialization plays an important role in negotiating. We might at first blush be skeptical of socialization’s role. The common picture of adversarial negotiations leaves little room for socialization between the parties. Yet many of the collaborations peacebuilders facilitate seek a consensus between parties who agree to base objectives.

Even where negotiations do occur between feuding parties dragged to the table, socialization is often the key to success. During a preliminary group interview with FACE Peace, staffers at the g7+ recalled facilitating a negotiation between parties in conflict in East Africa. The respective leaders of the parties learned during set-up for a formal discussion that they had attended the same boarding school a few years apart. They bonded over their shared experience and hugged in front the assistants and the facilitators. “It really changed the whole event and provided the basis for a new peace,” one staffer noted.

Both academic and practitioner sources often cite trust-building as the most important hurdle to creating a bargain that satisfies all parties.¹¹ The lack of trust generates bad faith behavior in self-fulfilling cycles. Parties in online negotiations engage in more anti-social behavior, including exaggeration and bluffing¹² and even outright lies and insults to the other party.¹³

11 Barry, B. and I.S. Fulmer. “The medium and the message: The adaptive use of communication media in dyadic influence.” *Academy of Management Review* 29, no. 2 (2004): 272-292. Katsh, E., & Rifkin, J. (2001). *Online dispute resolution: Resolving conflicts in cyberspace*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass; Keen, P., Ballance, C., Chan, S., & Schrupp, S. (2000). *Electronic commerce relationships: Trust by design*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

12 Belkin, L. Y., C. E. Naquin, and T. R. Kurtzberg. “Being honest: The role of media in the decision to misrepresent information.” *Academy of Management*, Anaheim, CA (2008).

13 Kurtzberg, Terri R., Charles E. Naquin, and Liuba Y. Belkin. “Electronic performance appraisals: The effects of e-mail communication on peer ratings in actual and simulated environments.” *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 98, no. 2 (2005): 216-226.

Socializing between the parties offers one promising route for building a multi-faceted style of trust that increases each party's willingness to compromise and view their counterparties in a positive light. Even simple "schmoozing sessions" can increase this type of trust and cohesion.¹⁴ Negotiators who spend less time interacting with their counterparties tend to over-estimate how well they understand the counterparty's goal in the negotiation.¹⁵

Yet socialization, especially between adversarial parties, does not happen without structure to encourage it. Below, we offer some strategies for socializing participants to the bargain in face-to-face and distanced settings. In many cases, a suggestion in one context can be modified for use in another. To spare the reader repetition, we describe each strategy where it appears most relevant.

Socializing in Person

In both interviews and articles, negotiation professionals opine that most parties to negotiations will socialize naturally. Even where parties need some forcing together, negotiators see the in-person strategies to socialize as intuitive: walks or meals with mediators that prod the discussion toward areas of common interest. Yet the details often matter.

Location, location, location. Where should the parties meet? The location will have an impact on the protocol used and – if it takes more time – on the food served, on the location where to spend the night, and even on the dress codes.¹⁶ Location choice and other contextual decisions allow facilitators to decide when and how much to push parties out of their comfort zone. Familiarity can increase the confidence of parties to the negotiation, and some studies demonstrate that commercial bargains maximize overall value when parties feel at home in the negotiation space.¹⁷

Do we always want parties in peacebuilding to feel comfortable? In some cases, the contexts of the parties are so culturally or economically different that picking a context that feel like home to both is impossible.¹⁸ These cultural differences may also make the parties distrustful of each other. Artful manipulation of these feelings, such as alternating meals between the cuisines of the parties, offers opportunities to get participants to open up to each other and share more about the foundations of their relative perspectives.

Interior Design for Conflict Management. Organizational psychologists believed for a long time that personalizing the places we work was a distraction.¹⁹ Modern evidence suggests instead that

14 Morris, M., Nadler, J., Kurtzberg, T., & Thompson, L. (2002). Schmooze or lose: Social friction and lubrication in e-mail negotiations. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 6(1), 89–100.

15 Kruger J, Epley N, Parker J, Ng ZW. Egocentrism over e-mail: can we communicate as well as we think? *J Pers Soc Psychol*. 2005 Dec;89(6):925–36.

16 See, e.g., van der Wijk, P. J., A. P. C. I. Hong, and D. J. Damen. "Context and Environment in Negotiation." *Handbook of Group Decision and Negotiation* (2021): 291–314.

17 Brown G, Baer M (2011) Location in negotiation: is there a home field advantage? *Organ Behav Hum Decis Process* 114:190–200.

18 Neutral peacebuilders in any bargaining context will wish to avoid affording one party a "home field advantage".

19 Taylor FW (1911) *Principles of scientific management*. Dover Publications, Mineola, New York.

workers in “enriched” offices are more efficient,²⁰ confident,²¹ motivated,²² and feel more respected by those around them.²³ Studies of negotiation and bargaining spaces argue that these feelings invigorate participants and lead to more pro-social relationships and better deals in the end.²⁴

Bargaining spaces in peacebuilding might consider these design choices as having similar trade-offs and opportunities as the choice of location. How can we offer participants ways to personalize the negotiating space that makes them feel more invested? Can we find ways to showcase these enrichments to counterparties to build sympathy? One obvious opportunity involves encouraging the participants to interact with each other’s enrichments and socialize with each other in spaces that emphasize differences in culture or background but reveal common values.

Getting Back to Nature. Sometimes a long walk in the woods is just what we need. Many studies have shown that going outside during long meetings is beneficial for memory and attentiveness,²⁵ reduces stress,²⁶ and lowers physical indicators of anger or intolerance.²⁷ Time in nature increases creativity and the novelty of solutions participants suggest and accept when dealing with interpersonal problems.

These sorts of breaks in nature can have important effects even if the outings are short.²⁸ Still, longer adventures tend to produce greater feelings of in-group bonding and higher levels of creativity, even where the groups involved feel tension.²⁹ Crucially, these reactions to nature appear stable across cultures,³⁰ and the benefits last for a long time after coming back in.³¹

Studies of other types of breaks in the bargaining action, such a time for exercise or viewing art, are less well-studied. Exercise has positive benefits, but those benefits increase when the exercise takes place in nature.

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- 20 Knight C, Haslam SA (2010) “Your place or mine? Organizational identification and comfort as mediators of relationships between the managerial control of workspace and employees’ satisfaction and well-being.” *Br J Manag* 21:717–735.
 - 21 Nieuwenhuis M, Knight C, Postmes T, Haslam SA (2014) The relative benefits of green versus lean office space: three field experiments. *J Exp Psychol Appl* 20:199–214.
 - 22 Greenaway KA, Thai AH, Haslam SA, Murphy SC (2016) Spaces that signal identity improve workplace productivity. *J Pers Psychol* 15:35–43.
 - 23 Knight C, Haslam SA (2010a) The relative merits of lean, enriched, and empowered offices: an experimental examination of the impact of workspace management strategies on well-being and productivity. *J Exp Psychol Appl* 16:158–172.
 - 24 van der Vist, et al., “Context and Environment”.
 - 25 Tabrizian P, Baran PK, Smith WR, Meentemeyer RK (2018) Exploring perceived restoration potential of urban green enclosure through immersive virtual environments. *J Environ Psychol* 55:99–109.
 - 26 Tyrväinen L, Ojala A, Korpela K, Lanki T, Tsunetsugu Y, Kagawa T (2014) The influence of urban green environments on stress relief measures: a field experiment. *J Environ Psychol* 38:1–9.
 - 27 Beukeboom CJ, Langeveld D, Tanja-Dijkstra K (2012) Stress-reducing effects of real and artificial nature in a hospital waiting room. *J Altern Complement Med* 18:329–333.
 - 28 And even if the “nature” is virtual. See the section on “Socializing Online” below, and also: Palanica A, Lyons A, Cooper M, Lee A, Fossat Y (2019) A comparison of nature and urban environments on creative thinking across different levels of reality. *J Environ Psychol* 63:44–51.
 - 29 Atchley RA, Strayer DL, Atchley P (2012) Creativity in the wild: improving creative reasoning through immersion in natural settings. *PLoS One* 7:e51474.
 - 30 Kaplan R, Yang B (1990) The perception of landscape style: a cross-cultural comparison. *Landsc Urban Plan* 19:252–261.
 - 31 Aram, Farshid, Ebrahim Solgi, and Gordon Holden. “The role of green spaces in increasing social interactions in neighborhoods with periodic markets.” *Habitat International* 84 (2019): 24–32.

In sum, face-to-face negotiations offer facilitators two opportunities to generate bonding. The first involves creating a comfortable environment in which the participants can interact, but also includes touchstones that reference the values under negotiation. The second involves opportunities to engage meaningful activities outside the negotiation together.

While these programming elements are plainly easier to implement in person, it bears asking whether and how these lessons could be used if and when substantive bargaining happens online. In office settings, team-building activities include care packages and Zoom cooking courses. Could facilitators take control of the virtual space and distanced schedule to create similar opportunities?

Socializing Online

Distanced communications often mute social context and cues, tempting parties to interpret neutral communications as hostile.³² Social bonding in distanced contexts can help.³³ Parties that enjoy a social bond are resilient against a variety of related challenges associated with distanced negotiation. How might we inject a little of the personal into distanced negotiations?

Repeat After Me. When we meet someone new or navigate a stressful situation, we often “mimic” those around us by repeating their vocabulary and tone. Such mimicry is especially useful when other social cues are sparse.

Evidence shows that mimicry generates bargains that are more creative and satisfying to both participating parties in face-to-face negotiations.³⁴ Can it also work at a distance? Experimental evidence suggests yes.³⁵ In a series of online negotiations between MBA candidates, the authors of one study appearing in the *Journal of Social Psychology* instructed participants in a random set of negotiations to repeat the words and tones of their counterparts. Coders listened to each dialogue and counted the number of times the parties mimicked each other: the number of incidents was strongly correlated with self-reported satisfaction in outcome.

One difference between face-to-face and distanced mimicry appears important: mimicking a partner is important in the early stages of a face-to-face negotiation. After some trust develops, continued matching becomes less important. Not so at a distance, when continued mimicking seems to remind parties of their bond.³⁶

32 Kruger J, Epley N, Parker J, Ng ZW. Egocentrism over e-mail: can we communicate as well as we think? *J Pers Soc Psychol*. 2005 Dec;89(6):925-36

33 In distanced contexts in particular, establishing positive interpersonal capital is crucial because it facilitates trust between parties, thus helping to improve the negotiation climate, and as a result, final negotiation outcomes. R. Fisher, W.L. Ury, B. Patton (1981). *Getting to yes: Negotiating agreement without giving in*; L. Thompson (1991) *Information exchange in negotiation*. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 27, pp. 161-179

34 Chameleons bake bigger pies and take bigger pieces: Strategic behavioral mimicry facilitates negotiation outcomes. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 40 (2008), pp. 461-468

35 Swaab, Roderick I., William W. Maddux, and Marwan Sinaceur. “Early words that work: When and how virtual linguistic mimicry facilitates negotiation outcomes.” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 47, no. 3 (2011): 616-621.

36 Id.

Sustaining direct mimicry in a distanced bargaining setting can be hard, but facilitators can encourage a similar effect by defining key terms and values in ways that get participants using the same terminology and tone. Many studies show that shared vocabularies and shared norms can create a feeling of in-group cohesion that bonds group members together.³⁷ These commonalities lead members to believe “that community members have and will share history, time, places, and experiences.”³⁸

Eye for an Eye. When FACE Peace asked our partners about the differences between face-to-face and distanced bargaining, everyone brought up the issue of social cues and eye contact. Almost all studies of distanced negotiation mention that participants prefer to see body language and feel eye contact. In Section III: When Distanced Negotiation Works, we discuss the stages of bargaining in which in-person presence is most beneficial. How can we manage to make these bonding opportunities as impactful as possible? By assuring that the medium in which they meet during these phases are as ‘rich’ as possible.

Participants should, be able to see, hear, and directly respond to one another as they socialize.³⁹ Negotiators communicating by video performed better than negotiators using email or texting. And those using a large computer screen performed better than those using a small one.⁴⁰ Negotiators rate themselves as more effective and competent after sending emails than after having face-to-face discussion, despite evidence to the contrary.⁴¹ Video conference users rate partners they do not know as colder than partners they do, and emails from those they have not bonded with as more aggressive. Even parties negotiating while they stood back to back generated worse deals than those that simply turned around and faced each other.⁴²

Virtual Nature. In the previous section, we discussed the power of introducing nature breaks into bargaining sessions in person. Even movies of nature can boost creativity!⁴³ (Bigger screens provide more self-reported relaxation and objectively measured creativity.)

When hosting long virtual sessions, consider not only taking frequent breaks, but structuring some of the breaks to provide stimulation or relaxation strategies that help restore the participants’ concentration.

37 Liu, et al., “Social Support, Belongingness, and Value Co-Creation Behaviors,” *supra*, fn. 25; and Bagozzi and Dholakia, “Intentional Social Action,” *supra*, fn. 2.

38 Joon Koh, Young-Gul Kim, and Young-Gul Kim, “Sense of Virtual Community: A Conceptual Framework and Empirical Validation,” *International Journal of Electronic Commerce* 8, no. 2 (2003): 75-94.

39 Schwaab, et al., The communication orientation model, fn 3.

40 Naquin, C. E., & Paulson, G. D. (2003). Online bargaining and interpersonal trust. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88(1), 113-120.

41 Harvard School of Law, “Making the Most of Online Negotiation,” *supra*, fn 6.

42 Drolet, A. L., & Morris, M. W. (2000). Rapport in conflict resolution: Accounting for how face-to-face contact fosters mutual cooperation in mixed-motive conflicts. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 36(1), 26-50.

43 De Kort YW, Meijnders AL, Sponselee AG, IJsselstein WA (2006) What’s wrong with virtual trees? Restoring from stress in a mediated environment. *J Environ Psychol* 26:309-320.

Social Time Suggestions. Distanced social time can encourage individual participants to read each other as more kind and well-intentioned, which leads to better bargains. The suggestions below work best when the participants are generally amicable and will spend a long time hashing out the details of a complicated arrangement at a distance:

- **Networking coffee dates:** Encourage members to sign up to be assigned online coffee dates with random other members.
- **“Ask me anything” spotlights:** Select members willing to answer a broad range of questions about their careers and personal development. (This works especially well when junior members are interested in meeting senior members!)
- **Icebreaking questions:** We know, we know. Everyone rolls their eyes at icebreakers. But they work!⁴⁴ FACE Peace writers participate in “Question of the Week” at staff meetings and can verify that the weirdest questions work best.
- **Gratitude channels:** Allow members to highlight those who have been good partners by offering creative solutions or a willingness to compromise. Gratitude channels on Slack or chatrooms can make use of hashtags, or facilitators can round up shoutouts in periodic emails to members.
- **Synchronized activities:** Many larger companies sponsor cooking or cocktail social hours in which members receive ingredients and then cook together with instruction over Zoom. Other possibilities include photo scavenger hunts and trivia contests.
- **Family involvement:** GitLab, a fully remote tech firm, learns about the hobbies of participating employees’ children and organizes “juice box chats” so that the kids can bond.
- **Humor.** Sharing a humorous moment before bargaining starts results in higher-value bargains and self-reports of higher satisfaction with the other party.⁴⁵ Humor requires care, though, as sarcasm or ‘punching down’ jokes tend to undermine cooperation.⁴⁶

44 Chlup, Dominique T., and Tracy E. Collins. “Breaking the ice: Using ice-breakers and re-energizers with adult learners.” *Adult Learning* 21, no. 3-4 (2010): 34-39; Zwaagstra, Lynn. “Group Dynamics and Initiative Activities with Outdoor Programs.” (1997).

45 Kurtzberg, T. R., Naquin, C. E., & Belkin, L. Y. (2009). Humor as a relationship-building tool in online negotiations. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 20(4), 377-397.

46 Kruger, Justin, Nicholas Epley, Jason Parker, and Zhi-Wen Ng. “Egocentrism over e-mail: Can we communicate as well as we think?.” *Journal of personality and social psychology* 89, no. 6 (2005): 925.

Still, some types of humor are shown to work. For example, parties that self-deprecate or gently mock themselves achieve better deals, and the audience of the self-mocking are more likely to report that they ‘should compromise because it’s fair’.⁴⁷

Context-specific humor also works. One study found that when facilitators shared a few comic strips depicting negotiations in which a character undermined themselves in absurd ways, participants reached deals faster and reported higher levels of satisfaction with the deal.⁴⁸

- **Games for remote groups:** <https://www.atlassian.com/blog/teamwork/virtual-team-building-activities-remote-teams>

Screen Fatigue: While video and telephone conferencing are “richer” media than email or text, they are also more cognitively taxing. Human brains are prediction machines, and they must work extra hard to understand gaps, glitches, time lags, and other ambiguities in the interaction. Short, structured video and teleconferences can help keep parties engaged and at their best.⁴⁹

Lessons from Face-to-Face Negotiation: The section on face-to-face socializing emphasized the role of context in creating space for efficient and effective bargaining. In person, facilitators have a number of options available for creating a context that strategically comforts participants and challenges them to consider the position of their negotiation partners. How can facilitators of largely online bargaining imitate these strategies?

Both the science and practice of online bargaining remain in early stages on this question. Over the course of desk and case study research, FACE Peace has heard a number of suggestions that bargaining facilitators might artfully include at appropriate times to create an impression of a shared spacial context.

Some involve enriched onscreen interactions using synched soundtracks, cooking classes facilitated online, and cocktail kits mailed out for the end of long meetings. Others involved engaging in parallel off-line reflections that see participants taking the same yoga class or reading the same poem. One particularly long project invited the children of the participants to meet each other for “juice box lunches”. The goal of each design feature is the same: to invite participants into each others’ contexts in ways that encourage each to see the other as a fully realized person with valid interests.

However facilitators build trust and socialize their participants, it pays off in generating agreements that are more durable and more satisfying to all involved.

47 Hübler, Mike T., and Diana Calhoun Bell. “Computer-mediated humor and ethos: Exploring threads of constitutive laughter in online communities.” *Computers and Composition* 20, no. 3 (2003): 277-294.

48 Kurtzberg, et al., “Humor as a relationship building tool,” fn. X.

49 Harvard School of Law Program on Negotiations. “Making the Most of Online Negotiations.” Special Report. (2022).

Managing Power Imbalances

Many of the patterns discussed so far have assumed that the parties to the bargaining process have equal amounts of power. How might power imbalances affect facilitator decisions about meeting modality? Unsurprisingly, parties with more power in bilateral negotiations tend to make more aggressive offers and win better deals.⁵⁰ Facilitators of negotiations in peacebuilding most often wish to blunt these influences.

Some studies show that more distance and asynchronicity allow parties with less structural power to negotiate better deals.⁵¹ Why this occurs is not well-understood, but the most prevalent theories point to the role of emotion. Parties with higher power increase their effectiveness when they show anger during a negotiation, but lower power parties do not.⁵² Anger from higher power parties makes the powerful party feel focused and confident and the less powerful party fearful.⁵³

As discussed above, distanced and asynchronous bargaining can blunt the effect of emotions, decreasing the influence of emotional momentum in the bargaining process. Facilitators that sense a high-powered party is bowling over a party with less power might suggest a break to review offers and counter-offers in a way that breaks down the dominance.

Corporate negotiators have also noted that some forms of distanced bargaining can also exacerbate power imbalances. For example, in the multi-lateral context of board meetings online, board members will often ignore difficult questions posed by shareholders on chat interfaces, choosing instead to cherry-pick the easy questions until the time runs out. Facilitators will therefore need to be aware of how powerful parties might abuse the spirit of any process design they implement.

B. Managing Technology During Distanced Negotiations

Structuring the overall negotiation process involves longer-term, macro-level questions about trust-building and balancing big-picture phases with detail-oriented ones. But of course facilitators are also expected to make individual sessions of moments in the negotiation work. This section considers two more micro questions. The first considers how to make a distanced but synchronous sessions using telecommunication software run smoothly. The second considers how to approach detail-oriented phases of the bargain.

50 Magee, J. C., Galinsky, A. D., & Gruenfeld, D. H. (2007). Power, propensity to negotiate, and moving first in competitive interactions. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 33, 200–212; Kim, P. H. (1997). Strategic timing in group negotiations: The implications of forced entry and forced exit for negotiators with unequal power. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 71, 263–286.

51 Harvard School of Law. “Making the Most of Online Negotiations.”

52 Lelieveld, G. J., Van Dijk, E., Van Beest, I., & van Kleef, G. A. (2012). Why anger and disappointment affect other’s bargaining behavior differently: The moderating role of power and the mediating role of reciprocal and complementary emotions. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 38, 1209–1221.

53 Overbeck, J. R., Neale, M. A., & Govan, C. L. (2010). I feel, therefore you act: Intrapersonal and interpersonal effects of emotion on negotiation as a function of social power. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 112, 126–139.

1. *“Hey, sorry — you’re frozen ... oh, you’re back”*

By now pretty much everyone with an office job understands the frustrations of video conferencing. When bargaining using these tools, facilitators might keep a few key points on mind:

Technical support: Some basic IT support, including videos about using key software, substantially increases satisfaction with meeting online.⁵⁴ By now, many facilitators will feel that the operations of important web apps for meetings is very intuitive. But the diversity of the peacebuilding field all but guarantees that the facilitator’s assumptions about what is easy will turn out to be wrong for at least some of the participants.

Facilitators also often train up participants on the bare functions of software and miss opportunities to let participants increase their own comfort and confidence. For example, many video conferencing software suites offer ways to change the participant’s background, lighting, and appearance.

Practice using the video conferencing tool before key negotiations. Dry runs with key participants that offer opportunities to ask troubleshooting questions can often smooth a process and increase attention by reducing distractions created by the technology itself.

Bandwidth (physical). Make sure all participants have a good internet connection. In extreme cases, facilitators may encourage parties to stipulate where they will be during virtual meetings to decrease the chances of outages or slowdowns. Choose communication software that matches the infrastructure of the parties. Postpone meetings if necessary.

Bandwidth (mental). Check the impulse to add windows, tasks, and functions to synchronous meetings, especially when those meetings are in part designed to build trust. Asking participants to jump back and forth from video feeds to presentations or documents reduces the time participants look at each other. In some cases, the size of the video feed is reduced to the point that participants may as well be on the phone!

Consider a structure for breaks that allows participants to manage screen fatigue. Readers can find concrete suggestions for this purpose in Section A, above.

2. *Maintaining Trust During Detail-Oriented Negotiation*

Assuming that the participants have developed proper levels of trust, the main task of facilitators during distanced and asynchronous periods of detail-oriented bargaining is to keep the parties on-task and prevent them from eroding or spending down their trust capital unnecessarily.

54 Anne Bourhis and Line Dubé, “Structuring Spontaneity”: Investigating the Impact of Management Practices on the Success of Virtual Communities of Practice,” *Journal of Information Science* 36, no. 2 (2010): 176.

The most important threats to the bargaining process at this stage come from emotional miscues that occur frequently in more context-poor forms of communication. As discussed in the introduction to this Design Brief, parties to negotiations tend to overestimate how accurately they can convey their tone and mood over e-mail or text messages, and recipients of these messages tend to read anger or impatience in messages that their senders did not intend. Some suggestions for facilitators to avoid these issues:

Evaluate the Process. Time zones, languages, cultures, and simple personality differences can create differences in preference for communication style. For longer bargaining processes, facilitators should allow for moments or opportunities for parties to communicate in ways that respects all preferences.

Set Expectations. Create a schedule for offers and responses that lays out what portion of the potential agreement is under review and when the responsible party will provide the next offer. Minimize communications between parties off the schedule. Keeping precise expectations will reduce the likelihood that any party sees another as delinquent or under-serious and reduce the anxiety and uncertainty attendant to waiting for the next stage.

Slow Down. Counsel parties to let drafts of communications sit for a period of hours or days. Set up a structure to assure that more than one person reads any email or text communication intended for the other party.⁵⁵

Set Synchronous Check-Ins. Even slow and deliberate communications over text-only channels can lead to temper flare-ups. Aware facilitators and self-aware parties can learn to spot signs of rising impatience and ask for a phone or video call. Often the tone of voice offers a pathway to conciliation.⁵⁶

55 Ebner, Noam. "The Technology of Negotiation." *The Negotiator's Desk Reference 2* (2017).

56 Harvard School of Law. "Making the Most of Online Negotiations."

C. *Distractions*

Even when technology is functioning well, distraction and the urge to multi-task can generate problems when bargaining synchronously but at a distance.⁵⁷ A survey of adults working from home listed social media and family interruptions as the most frequent distractions.⁵⁸

The main techniques for managing these distractions can be straightforward. For example, facilitators can simply ask participants to restrict their own internet access to the meeting software during the synchronous bargaining times.⁵⁹ Facilitators might also consider setting up a local office for participants in each location when participants might be tempted to call in from home.

Where possible and appropriate, facilitators can also increase attentiveness in all synchronous settings by breaking the day into plenary sessions, smaller group activities, presentations or enrichment activities that are not part of the official bargaining task, and individual work time to catch up on emails or other business unrelated to the negotiation.

IV. Conclusion

Negotiations among diverse stakeholders on complex or emotional issues requires a long and well-designed process that builds trust and maximizes participant attention. Facilitators can use changes in modality to build trust and encourage attention, choosing structure that fits the needs of the problem and participants.

This Brief has argued that negotiation programs should strategically alternate between trust-building and detail-oriented phases. We note that these phases can never be fully separated and that facilitators need to feel out the parties and issues to discover the best rhythm for individual negotiations. Still, a few best practices stand out:

- Facilitators can play with socialization by controlling the comfort and discomfort of parties. While the general context should be as comfortable and neutral as possible, facilitators can structure moments in the negotiation that allow for one party to surface their own culture or perspective.
- Facilitators can build trust even at a distance by creating online bargaining environments with the space and time for socialization. Rich communication channels can aid the trust-building process.


57 To be sure, participants can find ways to distract themselves in person. Facilitators have more power in face-to-face contexts, however, to limit participant access to distractions.

58 Statista Research Department. "Leading distractions among employees while working from home during the coronavirus outbreak in the United States as of June 2020". Statistics Report. November 2023. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1139757/us-distractions-while-working-from-home-during-coronavirus/>

59 Applications like Cold Turkey or the use of the internal parental controls can help configure computers to be offline but for the task at hand.

- Participants benefit from periods of asynchronous and distanced work on the target of the bargains. Where previous synchronous sessions build proper trust, participants can take time to work through the details of the major agreements they strike in person, or set up negotiation processes for later stages that will benefit a good deal.
- Participants benefit from training in the telecommunications platforms used for bargaining and from facilitators who thoughtfully balance rich distanced environments with the need to streamline processes and maximize attention.

Past FACE Peace Design Briefs have emphasized that characteristics of the programs and participants often change the decision calculus between the in-person and distanced elements required to meet the facilitator's goals. Nowhere is this sensitivity more important than in consensus building. Facilitators must artfully consider the moments that require trust and attention and create environments that facilitate these needs without providing an advantage to any participant. The guidance above serves to frame rather than make these decisions.





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