Punctuated Negotiations: Transitions, Interruptions, and Turning Points

Daniel Druckman, George Mason University
Mara Olekalns, Melbourne Business School

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Daniel Druckman
George Mason University

Mara Olekalns
Melbourne Business School
Negotiation is a dynamic process. Outcomes develop from patterned exchanges between negotiating parties and their constituencies. The guiding question for analysts is to explain the relationship between the exchanges or processes and outcomes. The explanation may be found in the decisions made by negotiators and their teams inside and outside the talks. These decisions include concessions, reciprocated concessions, new concepts (re-framing), changed procedures for conducting the talks, changed evaluations of alternatives, policy changes, and external events. These changes are often manifest in the negotiating process as transitions from one stage to another. Of particular interest are the questions: Which changes are sufficiently important to turn the talks in the direction of agreements or impasses? What accounts for the changes? These questions have been the basis for research on turning points in negotiation.

The idea of turning points has captured the imagination of analysts in a variety of fields. It has been a useful concept in studies conducted from a psychoanalytic perspective (e.g., Rothstein, 1997), in analyses of communication in relationships (e.g., Hooper & Drummond, 1990) and divorce counseling (Graham, 1997), in addiction research (Schulenberg et al., 1997), in a variety of analyses of child, adolescent, and life-span development (see Cohen, 2008, for a review of these studies), and in a popular treatment of macro-level social change (see Gladwell, 2000). The concept has been particularly useful in studies of negotiation processes. These studies include the retrospective analysis of cases of U.S. base rights talks (Druckman, 1986), free trade (Tomlin, 1989), international (Chasek, 1997) and domestic (Hall, 2008) environmental negotiations, nuclear arms control (Druckman et al., 1991), the conflict between the Free Aceh Movement and the Republic of Indonesia (Leary, 2004), and in comparative
analyses of multilateral trade talks (Crump & Druckman, 2012) as well as other issue areas (Druckman, 2001). They also include prospective analyses of change in simulated negotiations where attempts are made to predict the occurrence of turning points from prior events inside or outside the talks (Olekalns & Smith, 2005a; Druckman, Olekalns, & Smith, 2009; Druckman & Olekalns, forthcoming). Across these studies there seems to be agreement on a broad conceptual definition of turning points.

**Features of Turning Points**

A challenge for analysts is to define concepts with sufficient precision to be useful in research. A good deal of the writing about turning points and related concepts has been imaginative (e.g., Gladwell, 2000). Many scholars, practitioners, and journalists have been attracted to the idea, often suggesting that it is self evident: For example, the tennis match turned on a particular point; Paul Revere’s ride was a tipping point in the colonists’ rebellion against the red-coats (British); the frame-breaking insight discovered in a conversation was a critical moment in his career or, from a theatre exhibit in Melbourne, Australia, “Hair was a major turning point in Livermore’s career.” These examples suggest that turning points may vary on the amount of change (e.g., the distinction between disturbances and turning points), the abruptness of the change, the duration of change as well as the frequency of changes in an event-history, campaign, or career: These questions are asked also by Cohen (2008) in her analysis of human development. This would seem to be a good place to begin the search for elements of the concept.

Turning points are self evident to the extent that negotiators are aware of these events when they occur or in retrospect, following the talks: Did a turning point occur? If
so, then, negotiator reports provide useful data, particularly when opposing negotiators’ judgments agree. This feature suggests also that the event or experience has an impact in terms of salience and consequences. Salience or intensity refers to the impression made on the experiencing actors; consequences refer to the immediate and longer-term changes that occur following the event and may be construed in terms of the duration of change. The former is experiential and understood at an individual level of analysis. The latter is captured by unfolding events and understood as process dynamics. A third feature of impact is abruptness. Some turning points may be more sudden than others. This element of surprise renders these key events as departures from expectations.

These features suggest a working definition of turning points: *A clear and self-evident change from earlier events or patterns in the form of an impactful decision taken by one or all parties.* By recognizing the importance of impact, however, the definition may confuse the departure with its consequences. A way to do this consists of distinguishing between impact and type of impact: the former does not specify direction in terms of positive or negative consequences while the latter takes into account direction as escalatory (progression away from agreement) or de-escalatory (progression toward agreement). This distinction suggests a definition of consequences as: *A clear and self-evident impact of a departure in terms of the direction taken by the negotiation process. The direction includes both immediate (minimum lapsed time since the departure) and delayed impacts.*

A key to understanding turning points is to identify the events that precipitated them. These events may occur inside the negotiation as procedural or substantive changes. They may also be events occurring outside the talks, including policy and
leadership changes or third-party intervention. Thus, a decision made to bring experts into deliberations is a procedural precipitant leading to a decision to convene working committees (a departure). A proposal to re-frame the issues, such as Gorbachev’s proposed de-linking of types of weapons systems in the INF talks, is a substantive precipitant leading to a decision to discuss only tactical weapons (a departure). A sudden shift of policy taken by the foreign ministry of one of the negotiating parties is an external precipitant that leads to a decision to suspend the talks (a departure) with short-term escalatory consequences. To satisfy the requirements of a causal analysis, precipitants are those events that occur in close proximity to the decision which signals a departure has occurred. A question raised is: How much time is needed between the precipitant and departure? (see also Cohen, 2008, p. 7). These considerations and examples suggest the following definition of a precipitant:

*An clear and self-evident event occurring inside or outside the negotiation, causing one or more parties to make a decision that departs from earlier events or patterns.*

The three definitions provide a basis for a framework to analyze turning points. The three-part framework consists of a causal chain among precipitants, departures, and consequences. It has been useful in performing analyses of processes that occur in cases and in simulations. For the case analyses, event chronologies provide the material for tracing the negotiation process by, first, identifying turning points and, second, examining events or decisions that occurred prior to and following the departure. For experiments, the turning point consists of a decision made following a manipulated event, such as a crisis, and followed by progress toward or away from agreement. For both types of studies, the three-part sequence consists of proximal events or decisions in order to
bolster the argument for causation. A difference, however, is that the cases are retrospective while the experiments are designed to be prospective. Each approach has advantages and disadvantages.

A key advantage of the retrospective case study is that analyses are performed on the events that occur in actual – often high level – negotiations. The availability of archival information or access to negotiators for interviews often provide a rich data set for capturing a variety of turning points over a long period of time. The known outcome provides the advantage of gauging the direction taken by the various turning points. It also provides an opportunity to select on the outcome for comparative analysis, for example, comparing processes for comprehensive versus partial agreements. Set against these advantages are the disadvantages of interpretive analysis for inferring causality. Opportunities for selection biases occur with regard to choosing the cases and identifying the three-part turning points sequence. Although steps can be taken to reduce these biases, the lack of control over events renders the analysis limited in terms of providing explanations for the occurrence of turning points.

Laboratory experimentation addresses some of the problems of case studies. The opportunity to control the type and timing of precipitating events strengthens arguments for causality. The question addressed by these analyses is: Can we know when a turning point occurs during the course of negotiation? This forward-looking approach facilitates developing explanatory theories. It is however offset by the disadvantages of simulated negotiations, compressed time role plays enacted usually by student negotiators, and considerations of external validity or relevance to comparable real-world negotiations. The relative strengths and weaknesses of cases and experimental analysis suggest that the
approaches are complementary. Both have contributed knowledge about turning points. These contributions are discussed in the section to follow, concluding with a summary of what has been learned to date about turning points.

**Research on Turning Points**

The case and laboratory research on TPs reviewed in this section is organized in terms of several themes. One theme is *transitions* between negotiation stages or phases. TPs have been viewed as departures that move the process forward toward agreements. Another theme emphasizes the importance of *interruptions* during the process. TPs are often seen to evolve from events that disrupt the process, including the occurrence of unanticipated crises. The idea of *framing*, a third theme, has been salient in recent studies. Regarded both as a strategic influence on negotiation and as a creative response to surprising developments, re-framing has been shown to turn a variety of types of negotiation processes in the direction of agreements. A fourth theme in the TP literature is *context*. Such features as the type of conflict (values, interests), the setting (domestic or international), and size of negotiation (bilateral or multilateral) have been shown to influence TPs. Each of these four themes is discussed in the sections to follow.

**Stage Transitions.** Negotiators do not use the same strategy throughout a negotiation. Instead, they cycle through periods of cooperation and periods of competition as they search for a mutually acceptable outcome (Olekalns & Weingart, 2009; Putnam, 1990). Despite the recognition that negotiation is a dynamic process, the mechanisms by which negotiators coordinate – implicitly or explicitly – shifts to new strategies is not well understood. Stage models provide one framework for exploring how such transitions occur. They rest on the assumption that strategic momentum is
maintained through the need to complete a series of tasks. Negotiators match their strategies to the task, and switch strategies as one task is completed and another begins. Negotiators may need to pass through these stages in order to bring the process to a close with an agreement (Donohue & Roberto, 1996; Gulliver, 1979; Holmes, 1992).

The classic stage progression, described by Morley and Stephenson (1977), proposes that negotiators start with distributive positioning, move to integrative information search and end with integrative searches for settlement options (Pruitt, 1981; Olekalns et al., 2003; Adair & Brett, 2005). Although this progression is evident in dyadic negotiations, in larger-scale negotiations different patterns emerge. For example, in his analysis of the negotiation phases prior to the start of the 1986 North American Free Trade talks, Tomlin (1989) showed that negotiators moved through four discrete stages: problem identification, search for options, commitment to negotiation, agreement to negotiate. A subsequent analysis of the trilateral NAFTA talks (Mexico, Canada, US) again showed that prenegotiation talks pass through a series of identifiable stages (Cameron & Tomlin, 2000). Similarly, Chasek’s analysis of multilateral environmental negotiations showed that the negotiations moved through five clearly identifiable stages: issue definition, statement of initial positions, drafting/formula building, final bargaining, and ratification of the agreement.

The move through different stages suggests that negotiators are able to implicitly coordinate their actions, recognizing when one negotiation task is completed and a new one should be initiated. A shift in process may also be triggered by the growing recognition that impasse is likely. Consistent with this idea, Walton and MacKersie’s (1965) description of differentiation-before-integration implies that negotiators shift from
competition to cooperation at the point where they recognize that an impasse is likely. Druckman’s (1986) analysis of a base rights negotiation illustrates this point. In this negotiation, there was an initial and noticeable difference between the parties in the number of hard statements made, which led to an adjustment by the “softer” party in the direction of the other’s hard behavior consequently increasing the overall level of competition. This adjustment to harder strategies triggered a crisis, the suspension of talks, which in turn led to substantive (a framework agreement) and procedural (high-level consultations) actions that presaged progress. This pattern of convergence to hard tactics followed by movement towards agreement has been shown to occur in a variety of international security negotiations (Druckman & Harris, 1990; Stoll & McAndrew, 1986).

Although Druckman’s analysis illustrates Walton and MacKersie’s (1965) model, it also extends that model by highlighting the role that synchronization plays in generating a turning point and moving negotiations forward. While in the case of base rights negotiations, increasingly synchronized competition progressed negotiations, Taylor and Thomas’s (2009) analysis of hostage negotiations demonstrated that synchronized cooperation may also move negotiations to agreement. Hostage negotiations were more successful when police and hostage takers matched each other’s positive affect, adopted a present (rather than a past) focus, and explored alternatives. In these highly charged negotiations, actions that avoided crises moved the negotiation forward. Avoiding crises was evident as well in Tomlin’s (1989) analysis of the 1986 NAFTA talks. He showed that crises were caused by the parties’ taking different perspectives and holding different agenda priorities (lack of synchronization).
Interestingly, by avoiding discussion of the prospective negotiation agenda, and thus staying in sync, the parties were able to make progress toward a decision to negotiate. Thus, synchronization plays a role in moving negotiations forward, although its effects are not straightforward. We return to this observation in our concluding section.

Shifts in process may also be triggered by specific events that change how negotiators approach their task. This kind of event-driven shift in strategy is evident in Cameron and Tomlin’s (2000) analysis of the trilateral NAFTA talks, which showed that stage transitions were set in motion by specific procedures and resulted in the re-framing of the issues. Based on their interviews with members of the US delegation to the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) talks between the Soviet Union and the US in 1987, Druckman, Husbands, and Johnston (1991) identified ten turning points in the negotiations, starting with Gorbachev’s announcement to remove French and British nuclear forces from the discussion in 1985 to the announcement of an agreement in 1987. Of particular interest was the distinction made between substantive and procedural turning points. The substantive turning points were regarded as frame-breaking changes consisting of such new ideas as delinking issues and the double-zero proposal. The key procedural turning point was the preparation for the summit meeting between Gorbachev and Reagan. This case analysis extends our understanding of stage transitions by demonstrating that they are not necessarily triggered by task completion. Instead, they are triggered by events that address either the substance or the negotiation process. The common feature is that they result in a reconceptualization of the negotiation, with a subsequent change in process. But, perhaps most important were three actions taken away from the talks: the summit meeting as an action-forcing event, the unilateral
reductions taken by Gorbachev, and Reagan’s close involvement serving to galvanize the bureaucracy toward agreement. As external events, these actions could be regarded also as precipitants and are framed as such in the later research reviewed below.

Transitions are also emphasized in Druckman’s (2001) temporal sequence of events from precipitants, departures, and consequences. Referred to as a process trace, the sequence makes evident the triggers and impacts of TPs (departures). Three types of international negotiations were compared in this study, security, trade and political negotiations. A key finding was that external precipitants were considerably more frequent than internal (procedures and substance) precipitants in the security cases with the reverse occurring for cases in the other areas. In most of the cases across the issue areas the departures paved the way toward agreement. The progression toward agreement was punctuated by departures, each of which can be regarded as a phase transition.

**Interruptions.** Phase models provide an alternative perspective on how negotiations move forward. These models are more fluid, focusing on smaller and less well defined strategic passages within negotiations. Phases are typically identified by using linguistic analyses to determine when strategic shifts have occurred in a negotiation. Research in the spirit of phase models frequently provides descriptive analyses of the ‘frames’ that negotiators use as they move from the beginning to the end of negotiations (e.g., Putnam & Holmer, 1992). Consequently, phase models are less prescriptive in terms of specifying what generates the momentum to redirect the process from phase to the next.

Several theoretical frameworks suggest that the necessary momentum is provided by interruptions. This perspective is grounded in the idea of sense-making, that is, individuals’ attempts to interpret the events around them (Weick, 1995). The most
salient pieces of information are those that stand out from an ongoing process or interaction (e.g., Baxter & Erbert, 1999; Jett & George, 2003). More recently, Ballinger and Rockmann (2010) describe the role played by anchoring events, defined as events that violate expectations. These events stand out from the flow, triggering a search for explanations, redirecting negotiators’ strategies, and shaping anticipated outcomes.

Interruptions may be unintentional, and alter the course of negotiations because they surprise the other party. Unexpected events, because they challenge the dominant process, create uncertainty about either the other negotiator’s intentions or the ability to reach agreement. According to McGinn, Lingo and Ciano (2004) these out-of-keeping acts challenge the dominant dynamic (the logic of the interaction) and trigger transitions to a new dynamic. The central theme in this view is that something about a specific action calls attention to the negotiation process, and transforms it (Druckman, 2004; Stuart, 2004; Putnam, 2004; Winship, 2004). Such interruptions provide motivation for the changes needed to break stalemates or, more importantly, move the talks toward lasting agreements. For example, strategies that are unexpected because they do not conform to the dominant strategic approach, appear to transform the negotiation context and affect the quality of negotiators’ outcomes (Olekalns and Smith, 2000, 2003a, 2003b). The overarching theme, which we return to in our concluding section, is that actions may interrupt a negotiation because one negotiator inadvertently violates the other party’s expectations.

Interruptions may also be intentional: negotiators or third parties may deliberately intervene in the negotiation process in several ways: by redirecting the negotiation back to its substantive issues, by clarifying the other party’s intentions, by explicitly
addressing the process, or by highlighting the need to reach agreement (Kolb, 2004). These kinds of process interruptions can successfully redirect negotiations from a distributive to an integrative phase (Olekalns, Brett & Weingart, 2003). A different kind of interruption occurs when negotiators take timeout from the negotiation. Such temporal breaks provide negotiators with the opportunity to reassess the process so far, and, by disrupting the dynamic, enable them to restart the process anew (Kolb, 2004).

The effectiveness of such disruptions is, however, dependent on how they are used. Negotiators who use this time to ruminate further on their negotiations typically obtain poorer outcomes than those who do not. Subsequent research suggests that this may be because negotiators who ruminate may engage in competitive thinking. If, instead, they use a deliberate break to think about how to build cooperation, they improve their outcomes (Harinck & De Dreu, 2008; Druckman, Druckman, & Arai, 2004). The maximum benefits of cooperative rumination during a deliberate break are reaped if parties take a pro-social orientation to the negotiation, that is, they emphasize benefits for both parties (Harinck & De Dreu, 2011).

These findings suggest that the content of interruptions influences the negotiation process and economic outcomes. Research suggests that the type of interruption is also critical to social outcomes: interruptions have the potential to either build or erode trust. Olekalns and Smith (2005a) distinguished between interruptions that were facilitatory, and likely to move a negotiation forward, or inhibitory, and likely to hold a negotiation back. When negotiators identified interruptions as creating a positive impression or made a positive change in the negotiation, they also reported higher levels of cognitive trust in the other party. When negotiators identified interruptions that triggered negative
impressions, they reported lower levels of cognitive trust. These authors also demonstrated a virtuous cycle in relation to affective trust: when affective was trust was high at the start of negotiations, individuals reported more facilitating interruptions (positive impressions), which in turn increased affective trust at the end of the negotiation. This virtuous cycle may be strengthened as the number of cooperatively-motivated parties to a negotiation increases (Druckman, Olekalns & Smith, 2009).

The internal interruptions discussed above were created by the actions of the negotiators themselves. Interruptions may also be external, as was demonstrated on our review of case studies. In an experimental extension of the case analyses discussed above, Druckman et al. (2009) showed that when external interruptions changed negotiators’ thoughts about what was possible, they were less likely to anticipate agreement. Negotiators’ interpretations of external interruptions are sensitive to trust. An inhibitory event stimulated movement to agreement when trust was high. However, when negotiators reported low cognitive trust in the other party, they were more likely to revise their thoughts of what was possible following an inhibitory interruption than following a facilitating interruption; this reassessment of what is possible did not, however, affect negotiators willingness to move towards agreement (Druckman et al., 2009).

**Framing.** Interpretations of interruptions are also sensitive to context. In a comparison of three frames (power, shared identity, transaction costs), Druckman and Olekalns (in press) showed that an interruption, when interpreted through a power frame, decreases negotiators willingness to continue the negotiation and increases their willingness to reframe the negotiation. The same event, interpreted through a transaction
cost frame, has the opposite effect. These different frames also affect the role that trust plays in responses to interruptions: when negotiators report low trust in the other party, they are more likely to reframe the negotiation when transaction costs are salient, but to search for immediate settlement when shared identity or power are salient. When trust is high, they are more likely to continue negotiations when the shared identity is salient, but to search reframe the negotiation when power is salient (Druckman & Olekalns, in press).

Framing is emphasized as well in two case studies by Putnam and her colleagues. Putnam and Shoemaker (2007) use turning points to structure an analysis of negotiation stages in the Edwards Aquifer environmental conflict. Focusing primarily on the way that the media framed the issues, the authors described a process that moved from early escalation to later de-escalation. A key insight is that the media were influence agents participating in a de-escalation process in several ways: shifting the naming of the disputes, altering blaming patterns, introducing multiple explanations, and casting the federal government as a common enemy. Overlooked in many other TP studies, the framing performed by the media is often an external precipitant that can trigger key changes within the negotiation.

Further analyses of impacts of media framing were conducted by Putnam and Fuller (2010). Focusing on the 2007-08 conflict between the Writers’ Guild of America (WGA) and the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP), these authors identified six TPs that defined time periods but were not considered as departures. Careful coding of precipitants and consequences allowed them to use these parts of TP framework (Druckman, 2001) to depict the unfolding negotiation process.
An interesting finding is that procedural precipitants (shifts in membership on the union team, interim agreements with independent producers) played a dominant role in the talks. However, they also discovered that strategies combining external and procedural factors precipitated change. Considered by them as a fourth type of precipitant, strategies add other types of communication by influence agents to the framework. More generally, the authors emphasize the importance of depicting the way messages are framed for particular audiences, which they refer to as discursive representation. It would be interesting to explore the distinction between strategic frames that lead to departures and those that do not produce that result.

Framing is emphasized as well in Leary’s (2004) analysis of dialogues about the conflict in Aceh, Indonesia. Frame changes were evident in decisions made about the physical setting, roles played by international experts, the dialogue format, and the transforming of the Indonesian party (GAM). Although not effective in preventing future violence in Aceh, the new ideas that emerged were considered as frame-breaking insights that altered the relational context for the discussions. (See also London [1988] for a similar idea in the area of career change.)

**Context.** Turning points have been analyzed in other contexts. Three features of the context within which negotiation occurs are the primary source of conflict between the parties, domestic or international negotiations, and multilateral negotiation. Key studies in each of these settings are reviewed in this section.

*Sources of conflict*

Sources of conflict, distinguishing among interests, understanding, and values, provide additional insights into the turning points sequence from precipitants through
consequences (Druckman, 2005). For the conflicts of interest, which occurred most frequently in cases of security negotiations, the typical sequence took the following form:

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  external precipitant  non-abrupt departure (turning point)  de-escalatory consequence (towards agreement)
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For the conflicts of understanding (referred to also as cognitive conflicts), which occurred most frequently in trade cases, the typical sequence took the following form:

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  substantive precipitant  abrupt departure  de-escalatory consequence (towards agreement)
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Conflicts over values were the primary source of conflict in political and environmental cases. A typical sequence was as follows:

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  external precipitant  abrupt departure  escalatory consequence (away from agreement)
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The external precipitants that produced departures in value conflicts consisted of third party involvement. These interveners had little success in producing agreements, a finding that coincides with experiments on value conflict (e.g., Druckman, Broome, & Korper, 1988; Harinck & Van Kleef, in press). The abrupt departures that occurred in these cases consisted often of rejections of mediator suggestions, leading to escalations. In contrast, the abrupt or non-abrupt departures typical of the other types of cases moved the talks in the direction of agreement. Thus, departures can lead in either direction depending, at least in part, to the kinds of issues being negotiated.
Domestic and international contexts

In the 29 domestic environmental cases analyzed by Hall (2008), neutral third parties were instrumental in creating procedures that precipitated departures during the early phases of the negotiations. The parties themselves had more influence over the substantive decisions that precipitated agreements during the later phases. This pattern contrasts with the pattern discovered by Chasek (1997) in her analyses of 11 international environmental cases. In those cases, substantive precipitants occurred early and frequently without the help of third parties. This difference may have been due to the domestic vs. international contexts: Unlike the domestic disputes, international environmental talks are managed with prescribed procedures, thereby allowing more time for the parties to focus their attention on substance early in the talks; procedures come into play primarily with regard to ratification processes that follow the negotiations.

Another domestic vs. international compared, performed by Druckman (2001), showed differences in patterns of escalatory and de-escalatory consequences of departures. Unlike the international cases, repeated escalations occurred in 11 cases of negotiation between the mechanics’ union (IAM) and TWA airlines. The differences were attributed to the institutional context within which the domestic talks were conducted. Both parties had incentives to prolong the talks: strike threats are the primary union tool to influence the company; for companies, prolonging the talks is a bargaining strategy for reducing the attractiveness of alternatives to workers. These prerogatives do not have a counterpart in the international system.
**Multilateral negotiations**

The turning points framework was applied in Crump and Druckman’s (2012) analyses of the long chronologies of events on intellectual property issues discussed at the multilateral Uruguay round of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) and at the World Trade Organization (WTO) Doha Ministerial. This comparative analysis of two matched multilateral cases highlighted differences between cases with different outcomes on the same set of issues. More substantive precipitants and escalation consequences occurred in the stalled WTO process and more external or procedural precipitants with de-escalatory consequences occurred in the settled GATT talks.

The analysis highlighted the concepts of reframing, legitimacy, and coalitions: Reframing was regarded as a substantive precipitant, perceived legitimacy was the result of achieving the new frame (a departure), and managing coalitions was the glue that connected precipitants to departures, and consequences. The work done by managing coalitions in the WTO served to reduce complexity and the need for external interventions. The prominence of new ideas (substantive precipitants) generated within the process was helpful but did not resolve the impasse. More generally, the bridge created in this study between organizational processes and negotiation decisions extends the applicability of the TP framework to global conferences. Another concept, contributed by Dougherty’s (2006) turning points analysis of social movements and relevant to multilateral negotiations, is critical mass. As a networked group with a shared goal, these negotiators set in motion the sequence that extends from precipitating actions through consequences. A critical mass adds connection and size as features of effective managing coalitions.
Turning to the Future

In our discussion of turning points in the negotiation process, we identified several theoretical frameworks that both offer further insights into the ways in which discrete events propel negotiations forward, and open new avenues for research. These frameworks helped us to interpret findings from case analyses and experimental work. We now return to these frameworks to identify ways in which existing research and theory about turning points could be expanded. Finally, we consider how we might further expand our understanding how turning points shape the unfolding negotiation by considering two new variables, negotiator resilience and temporal spillover.

Being ‘in sync’. In our discussion of stage transitions, we identified synchronization as a key mechanism in moving negotiations forward. The first example that we gave was of linguistic synchronicity, that is, a convergence in the language and strategies used by negotiators. According to interpersonal adaption theory (Giles et al., 1991), a communication pattern in which the linguistic styles of two individuals converge serves to reduce social distance, confirm a shared perspective, and assists in the development of trust (Burgoon et al., 1998; Giles et al., 1991).

There are two important insights to be gained from the analyses that we described earlier. The first insight is that it is the occurrence of linguistic convergence, rather than the tone of that convergence, that assists negotiators to reach agreement: convergence to both a hard, competitive and a cooperative style appear equally likely to assist agreement. The hard competitive convergence often produces impasses that have been found to precipitate turning points that move the talks forward. The softer cooperative convergence, which occurs less frequently, moves the talks toward agreement when trust
rather than exploitation is sustained. A foundation of trust enables negotiators to withstand competitive convergence, such as that observed in the base rights negotiations. We speculate that the trust that accrues from convergence may also enhance the credibility of cooperative convergence in the more adversarial hostage negotiations. In both cases, it provides the relational base from which agreement can be built. The second, related, insight is that the negotiating context that determines whether competitive convergence that triggers a crisis, or cooperative convergence that inhibits a crisis, will be effective in moving negotiations forward. Together, these insights suggest that we need to link patterns of convergence to interpersonal processes (trust) and context, in order to understand the role of linguistic synchronization in moving negotiations forward.

Drawing on Putnam’s work, we also showed that frame convergence plays an important role in moving negotiations to agreement. It is thus not just the synchronization of communication that facilitates or impedes momentum in negotiations, but also the synchronization of perspectives. This finding fits with research demonstrating that individuals strive to be ‘in sync’ with one another in terms of goals (Adair & Brett, 2002; Blount & Janicik, 2000, 2001; McGinn & Keros, 2003). Being in sync increases the likelihood of reaching agreement (Brodt & Dietz, 1999; Drake & Donohue, 1996) as well as enhancing trust, satisfaction and negotiators’ willingness to engage in future interactions (Burgoon et al., 1998; Giles et al., 1991; Pinkley & Northcraft, 1994; Olekalns & Smith, 2005b). Although frame convergence clearly progresses negotiations, our discussion of linguistic convergence suggests that we need to provide a more nuanced account of how the drive to be in sync triggers stage transitions.
Paralleling our discussion of linguistic convergence, we suggest that to fully understand this process, it is necessary to consider the content of frames within specific contexts. This will help to ascertain whether convergence is likely to inhibit or facilitate stage transitions.

**Expectancy violations.** A second theme in our discussion of turning points is that events move negotiations forward because they violate negotiators’ expectations of how the other party will behave. These expectations can be established in a variety of ways: through direct past experience with a negotiator, through indirect knowledge via a negotiators’ reputation, through the rapid formation of first impressions (thin slicing; Curhan & Pentland, 2007), or derived from broad-based societal stereotypes (e.g., gender, culture, profession; McKnight, Cummings & Chervany, 1998). However negotiators form expectations, these expectations then create a behavioral baseline against which opponents’ actual behavior is assessed.

In our discussion of interruptions, we highlighted the importance of events or actions that ‘stand out from the crowd’. Any action that violates a negotiator’s expectations about how the other party will behave or how the negotiation will unfold increases in salience. It is then interpreted and evaluated against the behavioral baseline that negotiators have set. Departures from baseline can be either better than expected (positive violations) or worse than expected (negative violations). Research shows that in negotiations a switch from cooperation to competition (negative violation) elicits higher levels of competition and more negative emotions from the other party than switch from competition to cooperation (a positive violation; Druckman & Bonoma, 1976; Hilty & Carnevale, 1992; Olekalns et al., 2005).
Expectancy violation theory suggests that the same action, as an interruption to the negotiation process, may have quite different consequences depending on whether it is perceived as a positive or a negative violation. As we highlighted in the section on frames, the lens through which a crisis is interpreted (transaction costs, dependence, shared identity) affects what negotiators choose to do next. From an expectancy violation perspective, these different reactions result from the different behavioral baselines against which the crisis is assessed. It is plausible that each frame creates a different set of behavioral expectations, consequently shaping whether the same event is interpreted as a positive or negative violation.

An unexplored question is whether expectancy violations are an “all-or-none” phenomenon. By this, we mean whether a single expectancy violating event is sufficient to trigger a turning point. Two lines of research suggest that there may be different patterns in how such events accumulate. First, McGinn et al. (2004) discovered that out-of-keeping acts (expectancy violations) may serve the useful function of triggering transitions that reframe the negotiation. They showed that a key distinguishing feature among transitions is the extent to which they are abrupt (surprises) or gradual. Second, trust theory suggests that while individuals react quickly to violations that call competence into question, they require a greater accumulation of evidence before they revise impressions of shared identity (Lewicki & Weithoff, 2001). A third, and related, issue is the scale of expectancy violating events. While Ballinger and Rockmann (2010) argue that violations need to be substantial in order to trigger transitions, it is possible that small violations accumulated over time may also trigger process transitions. Together, these findings suggest that to better understand turning points we need to learn
how individuals accumulate evidence of expectancy violations, as well as how critical thresholds for a transition are set. In exploring these issues, it is important to also consider whether the violations are positive or negative.

**Negotiator resilience.** Many of the actions that disrupt the negotiation process, or create the preconditions for a transition to a new stage, are likely to challenge negotiators’ beliefs that an agreement is possible. Such crises call into question the other party’s intentions, and require a leap of faith to continue with the negotiation. Researchers are yet to consider the conditions under which negotiators are willing to make this leap. However, McGinn and Keros’ (2003) characterization of negotiations as an improvisational process suggests that negotiators who are resilient, that is, who can recover from unexpected and potentially damaging events (Powley, 2009), will be better able to recover from crises.

Behavioral flexibility and adaptability, defined as individuals’ skills to be open to the present moment and to adapt their behaviors as needed (Bond, Flaxman & Bunce, 2008), is a central characteristic of resilience. These skills enable individuals to recognise how best to respond to an adverse event, and to change their behaviors in a way that helps them respond creatively and constructively to those events (Mancini & Bonnano, 2009). We believe that negotiators who are resilient are more likely to use crises as an opportunity to redirect the negotiation to a more constructive process. The more that negotiators perceive a crisis as an opportunity, the more likely that a turning point will follow. These negotiators are oriented toward action and willing to take risks. But, the more they regard the crisis as a threat, the less likely that a turning point will
follow. These negotiators are risk-averse, often preferring outside interventions to help move the talks forward.

Continuing our focus on how the negotiating context affects the interpretation of adverse events, we suggest that the negotiation context itself may affect negotiators resilience. For example, negotiating context influences willingness to take risks. Risk-seeking in the form of new ideas or procedures has been found to occur more often in less sensitive issue areas such as trade or environmental negotiations. Risk-aversion is preferred in more sensitive areas such as security negotiations where negotiators wait for third parties to suggest approaches for moving forward (Druckman 2001). We therefore propose that initial resilience can be amplified or attenuated by the external conditions that impact the negotiation. Continuing our focus on interpersonal processes, we also propose that the quality of the underlying relationship with the other negotiator, specifically the extent to which negotiators trust the other party (Payne & Clarke, 2003; Pratt & Dirks, 2007), will also increase or decrease negotiators’ resilience.

**Temporal horizons and spillover.** Typically, analyses of turning points have focused on events that occur within a negotiation. However, many of our negotiations are one in a series of several with the same negotiator. Negotiation researchers show both that negotiator’s reputations (O’Connor, Burris & Arnold, 2005; Tinsley, O’Connor & Sullivan, 2002) and their experiences from previous negotiations (Keenan & Carnevale, 1989) spill over to affect how subsequent negotiations unfold. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the accumulation of critical events, and how they are managed, within a negotiation will spill over to shape future negotiations among the same parties. Whether negotiators choose to persist with a dysfunctional process or to switch to a more
constructive process, whether they decide to reframe the issues and adopt a completely new approach, or whether they choose to withdraw from the current negotiation will cast a shadow over future negotiations. Yet little is understood about how the experiences in one negotiation, in particular how moments of adversity and transition are managed, influence the ongoing negotiation process or how they shape future negotiations.

Returning to our earlier discussion, we note that central components of resilience are openness to learning and skill in incorporating adverse experiences into behavioral scripts to guide future learning. Resilience researchers argue that individuals who put adverse events into context and learn from them are also better able to deal with adversity in the future. This belief implies that negotiators who do not find constructive responses to adverse events in the moment, but use those events to build a more flexible behavioral repertoire, should establish a stronger foundation for subsequent negotiations. If we accept this proposition, then we also need to understand what kinds of responses position negotiators to bounce back from adverse events, and to strengthen relationships going forward. This understanding could well serve to enhance negotiator resilience through training.

**Conclusion**

The four themes discussed in this section can be regarded as part theories. Each refers to a particular aspect of the negotiation process. Turning points can be understood in relation to each of these parts. But, the parts can also be regarded along a process timeline. Out-of-sync moves lead to impasses that may violate expectations. Negotiators must persevere in the face of these violations, often reframing the issues (a turning point) in order to move the talks forward. A longer-term consequence of these reactions is that
they may spillover to future negotiations. This sequence, which highlights precipitants, departures, and consequences, is captured below. We thus return full cycle to the turning points framework discussed at the beginning of this chapter.
References


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