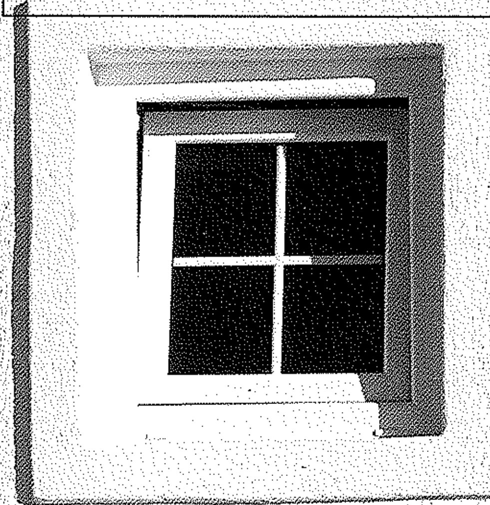
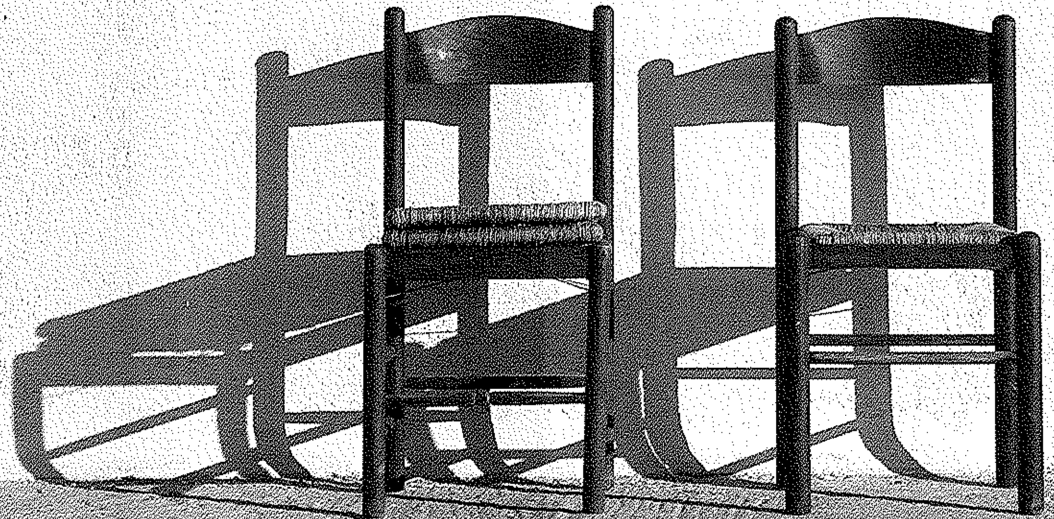
Framing Matters

Perspectives on Negotiation Research and Practice in Communication

EDITED BY WILLIAM A. DONOHUE, RANDALL G. ROGAN, AND SANDA KAUFMAN





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Chapter 12

The Many Faces of Framing in Negotiation

Daniel Druckman
James N. Druckman

The purpose of this book is to present a sampling of perspectives on the way that frames are used in research on negotiation and mediation. The authors have accomplished this purpose. We are treated to a rich menu of approaches that emphasize the concept of frames. The menu makes evident that the concept is elastic. It is used in different ways to provide an opening for the development of perspectives that reflect particular epistemological arguments. A number of the authors confront these differences by offering comparisons between their own and other approaches (see, for example, the contrast between cognitive and interactional approaches in Chapter 1). The comparisons illuminate a major contribution made by this book: to enliven the debate about how negotiation is to be construed. This commentary contributes to the debate by capturing the central themes of each chapter, elucidating dimensions that distinguish among the chapters, raising questions about missing links to similar concepts in the literature, and suggesting new directions for research on framing from relevant social science literatures. We begin with a discussion of the chapter themes in terms of framing metaphors.

Metaphors for Frames

Metaphors are a useful way of thinking about negotiation. They capture the way negotiation is depicted and analyzed by scholars from different disciplines (e.g., see Druckman, 2007). They also highlight the key idea of a philosophical perspective on the way that negotiation processes unfold. Focusing attention on those ideas, we identify the metaphor in concert with the authors' central arguments. The chapters are grouped in terms of their prevailing focus on context, interactions, or cognitive/psychological processes.

Focus on Context

Context plays a central role in the perspectives put forward in the chapters by van Bommel and Aarts (Chapter 9), Kaufman and Shmueli (Chapter 8), and Aarts et al. (Chapter 11). For Bommel and Aarts, frames are construed as so-

cially embedded cognitive products. The cognitive features of frames are understood in terms of social and historical processes that include power/authority relationships, interests defined by political and economic institutions, and culture. The contextual overlay defines conflicts between frames, contributing to in-group–out-group stereotypes that further exacerbate the conflict. While difficult to resolve, the contending frames can be integrated through a negotiation process. A challenge, illustrated by their case study, is to deal with both the holistic and dynamic features of the conflict during the negotiation conversations.

For Kaufman and Shmueli, frames are regarded as reflections of organizational cultures. Their macro level treatment promotes the idea of collective representations, which include organizational cognitions and values. A question raised is whether these representations or worldviews are relatively stable or changing. Both features are heralded by the authors' treatment. The stable feature of frames is found in ideological coherence (similar to Hoffmann's analysis of argumentation) and profiles of different types of negotiation. The dynamic feature is found in shifting principal-agent relationships and in the reframing that precipitates turning points that resolve impasses. Moving between stable and dynamic aspects of frames and between negotiating process and context, these authors convey conceptual complexity. A result is that elicitation procedures are also complex, leading them to ask whether it is worth the effort.

The chapter by Aarts et al. (Chapter 11) construes frames as identities. Their analysis of public spaces moves between micro (neighborhoods) and macro (societal contexts) levels. At the micro level, they inform us about several functions served by public spaces. This discussion is in the traditions of ecological psychology (Barker, 1968) and behavioral architecture (Rapoport, 1982), where space is shown to influence perceptions and behaviors. The focus of this treatment is on the way space influences the development of group attachments among neighborhood youth. It captures much of what we know about group formation, cohesion, and in-group–out-group perceptions. But, the discussion goes beyond small-group dynamics. The authors also recognize that identities and the attendant conflicts are shaped by societal institutions and other relational contexts that define boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. By highlighting macro-level influences, the authors suggest connections between the levels of analysis. However, the connections are not sufficiently developed to serve as a framework for further analyses. Lacking is a mediating mechanism—such as collective representations—that ties the levels together.

Focus on Interactions

The chapters by Dewulf et al., Donohue, Curşeu, and De Carlo (Chapters 1, 2, 4 and 5) consider frames as emerging from interaction processes at the interpersonal or group levels of analysis. A clear statement of this perspective is found in Donohue's chapter where frames are construed as joint patterns. He situates group/interpersonal processes between earlier notions of a group mind (Allport, 1969) and the modern-day cognitive social psychologist's emphasis on individual thinking that is influenced by others with whom he/she interacts. This middle ground can be construed as the products of interactions, including "developing reciprocities among individuals, organizational structures, and group products, like norms" (Sherif and Sherif, 1956: 342). But, this middle level poses problems for measurement because of uncertainties about how to combine performances of team members: Are they to be combined by using linear or nonlinear algorithms? A clue provided by Donohue is to look at sequences of communications, categorizing communicative acts as either substantive or relational. The joint patterns that emerge from such analyses would capture interactions, and these patterns define the middle ground (e.g., see Donohue and Roberto, 1993).

Continuing along these lines, Dewulf et al. regard frames as constructions that coordinate communication. They connect coordination to outcomes, suggesting that similar (dissimilar) frames increase (decrease) the chances for integrative outcomes. This is consistent with recent findings showing that better negotiation outcomes result from more synchronous conversations (Taylor and Thomas, 2008). Their distinction between framing issues and framing identities captures the substantive and relational aspects of negotiation in a manner similar to Donohue's emphasis. The situation-specific feature of interaction approaches to framing is evident in the importance ascribed to the moment, placing these approaches squarely in the Lewinian tradition of social psychology. Like Lewin, these authors recognize that the moment encapsulates a legacy of past interaction, which they refer to as context. This would suggest that the film metaphor applies: Coordination is analyzed one "frame" at a time.

The focus on frames as emergent processes is evident in Curşeu's chapter as well. A difference however is that his perspective highlights groups as distinct entities. Following a social science tradition initiated by Durkheim (1895) and developed further by Campbell (1958), Curşeu argues persuasively that groups can be regarded as processing agents. Less clear, however, are what is being processed and how groups perform the processing. The author's focus on gains and loss frames suggests that this is the information being processed, and, if so, then research on prospect theory demonstrates relationships be-

tween these frames and negotiation decisions. But, there is more to this chapter. The propositions about group composition and emotional valence are interesting. His attempt to unpack the parts of group composition provide insights about which factors lead toward integrative agreements (expertise, experience, beliefs) and which lead away (power/status disparities). The counterintuitive proposition that negative moods, when expressed as anger rather than fear, encourage integrative outcomes is valuable and supports recent findings about the use of anger in negotiation (e.g., van Kleef, van Dijk, Steinel, Harink, and Van Beest, 2008). Taken together, the factors discussed suggest that power disparity, threat or fear, low diversity among group members, and a gains frame militate against attaining integrative agreements. Missing is the key intervening process highlighted by the group perspective: How are these factors processed by the group during negotiation?

Interaction processes are highlighted by De Carlo as well. Drawing on insights from psychoanalytic writing, he construes the researcher as a clinician who plays a central role in constructing frames. In this role, the researcher creates an environment that encourages creative thinking. Placed in the context of negotiation, this role is viewed as opening opportunities for new ideas that can lead to integrative agreements. These opportunities may facilitate the sensitive process of exchanging information about interests and needs, particularly with regard to balancing information that encourages coordination against information that reveals further incompatibilities between the parties. Similar to the mediator who encourages problem solving, De Carlo's clinician is a synthesizer of competing frames rather than a strategist who promotes one type of frame over another. Although the mechanics of this role are obscure in the chapter, the "framing" of the role is a useful feature of integrative bargaining processes.

Focus on Cognition

Chapters 3, 6, 7 and 10 consider frames from the standpoint of psychological processes, emphasizing in varying degrees the role of cognition. The concept of mindsets, offered by Olekalns and Smith in Chapter 3, is perhaps the most explicit treatment of negotiators' cognitive processes. Regarded as interpretive filters, mindsets function to reduce uncertainty in negotiation. They do this by directing attention to certain features of the other's negotiating behavior. One feature concerns the other's concessions, considered to be part of an exchange process leading to deals. Another concerns the balance between negative and positive actions as indicated by language and nonverbal expressions. Both these features contribute to judgments about the other party's trustworthiness.

Increased trustworthiness occurs when concessions are reciprocated. It also increases when the other behaves in a cooperative manner. For these authors, frames are interpretive filters that direct the process toward or away from agreements.

A similar metaphor is suggested by Lewicki and Brinsfield's chapter (Chapter 6). They also regard frames as interpretive filters. For them, however, judgments of trust are the filter: Rather than focusing on the mindsets that lead to trust (as is done by Olekalns and Smith), they examine the consequences of having established a certain level of trust. They construe trust as a heuristic that facilitates decision making. It does this in four ways. One is as a spillover from one negotiation to another involving the same parties (representative heuristic). Another is as an accumulation of experiences that increases the availability of trusting feelings. Third is as an anchoring effect where initial interactions bias future interpretations of the other's actions. And, fourth is as an influence on mood. Trust engenders positive feelings toward the other that are likely to be reciprocated. Each of these heuristics creates a halo around the trusted person. This would no doubt facilitate coordination. We learn less, however, about the conditions that would alter trust judgments. Questions of interest are: What kinds of evidence would lead to departures from any of these heuristics? What events would lead to disappointed expectations?

Hoffmann (Chapter 7) provides a more complex treatment of frames. He divides frames into several types. The distinction between semiotic and cognitive frames is similar to the difference between encoding (producing signs) and decoding (interpreting signs). Added to this distinction is the idea of frame neutrality: The processes involved in producing and interpreting are biased. Focusing on argumentation, he develops a system, referred to as LAM, for detecting the rules of inference and assumptions underlying political discourses with examples of application. This approach is similar to earlier efforts in international relations to develop cognitive maps of political leaders (e.g., Axelrod, 1977). It also resembles an even earlier body of work that distinguishes between central and peripheral belief structures (Rokeach, 1960). But, unlike many of the cognitive mapping analysts, Hoffmann recognizes that the analysts also have frames that are likely to influence their interpretations, as noted by his concept of frame neutrality. And, unlike the belief theorists of an earlier era, he develops the idea of mutually reinforcing webs of beliefs, values, and attitudes, which makes his approach particularly relevant to problems of intractable conflicts. Less clear, however, is the value of the approach for comparative analysis. Despite the effort to develop common concepts and procedures for analysis, the applications are labor intensive and come across more in an emic (case specific) than an etic (comparative) tradition of research.

Turning to another application of a cognitive approach to framing, Rogan (Chapter 10) analyzes a well-known case of terrorism. The analysis sheds light on how frames are used to define and justify the self in relation to others, particularly political opponents. Distinguishing between sacred and secular terrorism, Rogan shows how language is used strategically to justify acts of violence. The contrasting frames of good versus evil provide a basis for aggression against the nonbelievers. It also situates the analysis in a larger literature on ethnocentrism and group attachments (Druckman, 2006). That literature has offered a variety of hypothesized explanations for the bias, dealing primarily with motives (self-esteem, threat) and cognitive (categorization, uncertainty) mechanisms. Rogan adds the role of language, which covers both motives (self-justification) and cognitions (belief system). He also makes a recommendation: Respond to the true believer's depiction of "us" nonviolently rather than reciprocally. This advice is compatible with Felson's (1978) situational approach to the way a victim should respond to a perpetrator's violent acts. Noting limitations of his analysis, Rogan recommends extending the study to more cases, documents, and time periods.

Metaphors as Connections

The chapters present many faces on framing. These faces take the form of metaphors that forge connections to related literatures largely ignored by the authors. Key metaphors for the three chapters that emphasize context are socially embedded cognitive products (Bommel and Aarts, chapter 9), organizational cultures (Kaufman and Shmueli, chapter 8), and identities (Aarts et al., chapter 11). The dynamic conflict processes depicted by Bommel and Aarts resemble the way conflicts escalate and de-escalate over time in conjunction with values and interests as described in the literature on the sociology of conflict (Aubert 1963; Druckman and Zechmeister, 1973). Their embedded idea resonates with a conception where context and process are interdependent as discussed in the social-orders (Strauss, 1978) and simulation literatures (Mahoney and Druckman, 1975). The organizational feature highlighted by Kaufman and Shmueli is akin to the principal-agent relationship referred to as representational role obligations in the experimental literature (Druckman, 1994) and the two-level game in international relations (Putnam, 1988). As we noted above, the Aarts et al. emphasis on space connects to earlier writing on ecological psychology. These authors add the idea that space influences the way in-group-out-group identities are formed and change.

Metaphors for the four chapters that emphasize interactions include joint patterns (Donohue, chapter 2), communication coordination (Dewulf et al., chapter 1), emergent processes (Curşeu, chapter 4), and the role of clinician (De Carlo, chapter 5). Donohue's joint patterns are products of interaction. This connects to earlier discussions of emergent processes as an appropriate level of analysis for social psychology. His idea of measuring communication acts may capture this level. Continuing in this tradition, Dewulf and colleagues connect historically to Lewinian social psychology and contemporaneously to research on synchrony. For them, frames are captured in the moment with an implication that frame-by-frame microanalysis would reveal patterns over time that lead toward or away from integrative agreements. Emergent processes are evident in Curşeu's chapter as well. He draws connections with several streams of related research and offers intriguing propositions. An important contribution is the idea of group processing. But, as we note above, this mediating variable is not linked clearly to the factors—group diversity, gains frames, or moods—emphasized in the related research. De Carlo's clinician metaphor connects to the long tradition of interactive conflict resolution with its emphasis on empathy. But the metaphor also connects to the process of exchanging information. Both increase the chances for attaining integrative agreements. The chapter overlooks these important connections.

Metaphors for the four chapters that focus on cognition include frames as mindsets or interpretive filters (Olekalns and Smith), as heuristics (Lewicki and Brinsfield), as encoded and decoded arguments (Hoffmann), and as self-justification (Rogan). For Olekalns and Smith, a function of mindsets is to reduce uncertainty in negotiation. This idea connects with the work of Hogg and Mullin (1999) on group attachments. These researchers argue that a primary function of groups is to reduce uncertainty. Extending the Olekalns and Smith analysis to negotiating representatives would provide additional insights into the way mindsets work. Lewicki and Brinsfield connect to the well-known literature on social judgment (Nisbett and Ross, 1980). By placing trust in this framework, these authors make an original contribution. Research questions are suggested but are yet to be evaluated. Hoffmann's complex analysis of argumentation connects with several earlier streams of research, in communication, international relations, and social psychology. A contribution of this chapter is the recognition that researchers also have frames, and these frames influence their analysis. However, the question of just how this happens remains unanswered. Rogan's analysis also connects to several other bodies of research. The self-justification metaphor is a central theme in experimentation on in-group bias. But Rogan goes beyond seeking motivational and cognitive explanations for the bias: He shows that good versus evil frames can justify acts of aggression, particularly by true believers.

The chapters in this book present an array of ways of thinking about frames. This smorgasbord approach provides something for any reader. However, it may also create uncertainly about which (or how many) pieces to choose. We take away a somewhat unsettling feeling that frames cover vast territory across the disciplines of social science. That feeling has motivated us to reduce uncertainty by offering a more precise definition of the concept that may apply to many of the authors' approaches. We now turn to a discussion of our approach.

What Is a Frame?

A lack of definitional consistency is evident in these chapters. It also plagues the more general literature on framing. McCombs (2004: 89) explains, "A longstanding difficulty in discussions of framing is the plethora of widely disparate, sometimes contradictory, definitions of the concept." To address this, we offer a more precise way of thinking about frames. We begin with the variable of ultimate interest: The possible outcomes of a negotiation or interaction. For example, a developer and a city official may be bargaining over the size of a new development, with one proposed solution being that the development will occupy four city blocks. Each of the negotiating parties evaluates this and other outcomes; in other words, they develop *attitudes* towards possible outcomes. These attitudes generate a preference ranking that, in turn, determines the negotiation's content and eventual outcome.

A common portrayal of an attitude is the expectancy value model (e.g., Ajzen and Fishbein 1980, Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson, 1997) where an attitude toward an object (e.g., possible outcome) consists of the weighted sum of a series of evaluative beliefs about that object. Specifically, attitude = $\sum v_i * w_i$, where v_i is the evaluation of the object on attribute i and w_i is the salience weight ($\sum w_i = 1$) associated with that attribute. For example, the developer's and city official's overall attitudes toward the proposed new housing development might consist of a combination of negative and positive evaluations, v_i, of the project on different dimensions i. The city official may believe that a four-block solution will favor the economy ($i = 1$) but harm the environment ($i = 2$). Assuming the official places a positive value on both the economy and the environment, then v_1 is positive and v_2 is negative, and her attitude toward the four-block solution will depend on the relative magnitudes of v_1 and v_2 discounted by the relative weights (w_1 and w_2) assigned respectively to each attribute (Nelson and Oxley, 1999).

The assumption that an individual can place different emphases on various considerations about a subject serves as a useful abstraction for discussing framing. This conceptualization applies to any object of evaluation (and, thus, any set of objects over which individuals have preferences). For instance, a citizen's attitude toward a group of immigrant youths—with regard to whether they are responsible for disrupting a neighborhood—might depend on whether the citizen puts greater weight on the adjustment challenges faced by the youth or on the violent events which have been perpetrated (see Chapter 11). Another example is the extent to which an individual views a declaration of war as being justified. Justification may depend on evaluations of the combatant's historical oppression (dimension 1), divine rights (dimension 2), or predilection for violence (dimension 3) (see Chapter 10). Similarly, one's tolerance for a hate group rally may hinge on the perceived collective consequences of the rally for free speech and/or public safety (attentional mindset) or perceived racial motivations of the group (confirmatory mindset) (see Chapter 3). For these examples, if only one dimension matters, the individual places all of the weight ($w_i = 1$) on that dimension, making him/her less flexible.

The dimension or dimensions—the "i's"—that affect an evaluation constitute an individual's *frame in thought*. For example, if an individual believes that historical oppression trumps all other concerns, he/she would be in an "oppression" frame of mind. Or, if divine rights dominate all other considerations in assessing a declaration of war, the individual's frame would be divine rights. However, if he/she gave consideration to oppression, divine rights, and violence, then his/her frame of mind would consist of this mix of considerations. The varying weights placed on the evaluative dimensions often play a decisive role in determining overall attitudes (e.g., more weight to violence leads to greater opposition for the war declaration).[1]

The more attractive one views an outcome (higher evaluation), the more likely, he or she will be to capitulate. Moreover, when various parties interact or negotiate, shared frames facilitate coordination in reaching an outcome (see Chapters 1 and 2); for example, if developers and the city both place priority on economic rather than environmental implications, they will be more likely to find a mutually agreeable solution. Additionally, frames can be referenced to justify an action (see Chapters 10 and 11); or, a party who employs the op-

1 In each of our examples, the various dimensions of evaluation are substantively distinct—that is, one could reasonably give some weight to each consideration such as free speech, public safety, or racism. The dimensions also could be objectively identical such as when the same information is presented in either a positive or negative light (e.g., an economic program can be framed as leading to 95% employment or 5% unemployment) (see Levin, Schneider, and Gaeth 1998; J. Druckman forthcoming. See also the chapter by Curşeu).

position's frame is likely to gain credibility or legitimacy (see Chapters 6 and 9).

It may, however, also be the case that negotiators can trade on different frames. This is more likely to occur when they differ on the priority ranking of the dimensions or issues. For example, one party emphasizes costs, the other stresses the importance of environmental protection. This difference allows one party to give more on costs in return for comparable concessions on the environment. Referred to as log-rolling, this strategy has been shown to increase the chances of getting a mutually desirable agreement (Pruitt & Lewis, 1977). When several issues are at stake, multi-attribute decision analysis has been found to provide useful metrics (Raiffa, 1982).

Much of what negotiations are about concern determining how best to frame alternative stakes and outcomes (see Chapters 3 and 8). This leads to the critical questions of: From where do frames emerge and what makes a frame compelling or strong? Several of the chapters (e.g., the ones focusing on context) make clear that social and historical processes help define the frames that parties bring to the negotiating table. Frames can be deeply embedded due to cultural norms, identities, or ideologies, resulting in significant difficulties in finding common ground and reaching agreement. For example, it may be that in the aforementioned housing development negotiation, city officials represent constituents with a deep-seated devotion to environmentalism and, thus, the environmental frame carries substantial weight for them. At an even more fundamental level, when devout Catholics enter debates about how to think about abortion policy, they likely will cling to the right-to-life rather than right-to-privacy frame.

Importantly, however, frames are not always so embedded. Indeed, other chapters—particularly those focusing on interactions—show that frames can emerge from competitive communicative processes that occur over the course of a negotiation (i.e., *frames in communication*; see J. Druckman, forthcoming). Negotiators try to persuade one another to adopt different frames. But why a particular frame embedded in rhetoric is effective in leading a negotiator to adopt that frame is less clear.[2] The existing work on this topic suggests that frame strength has little to do with factors we may find normatively desirable. For example, frames tend to gain strength when they highlight averting losses or out-group threats (Arceneaux, 2009), evoke particular emotions (Aarøe,

2 Even the large persuasion literature offers scant insight; O'Keefe (2002: 147, 156) explains, "Unhappily, this research evidence is not as illuminating as one might suppose. It is not yet known what it is about the 'strong arguments' that makes them persuasive."

2008; Petersen, 2007), include multiple arguments (Baumgartner, De Boef, and Boydstun, 2008), and/or have been used in the past and are thus available (Edy, 2006). Moreover, J. Druckman and Bolsen (2009) found that adding factual content to frames does not enhance strength. These types of features echo those in Chapter 11, showing how individuals attempt to legitimize frames by deploying personal experiences, stereotypes, and so on. When both parties use these strategies, little progress is likely to be made. But, even when one party uses simplifying images, the other is likely to follow suit by defending his/her own frames in a similar manner. More work along these lines is needed.

Going further, it would be useful to link framing processes to structural or situational variables that define the negotiating environment. The situational levers that impact negotiations are documented (Druckman, 1993) and include such factors as public attention, time pressure, the intervention of a mediator, as well as the location of the talks. We suspect that frames are elicited by the presence or absence of these features. Unpacking how frames mediate the impact of these situational levers will contribute to a more precise understanding of how and when particular factors matter. Continuing with our housing development example, it may be that negotiations open to public viewing reduce the flexibility of city officials, discouraging them from moving away from an environmental frame: Public attention strengthens the impact of the environmental frame. But, if the negotiations moved to a private venue, officials may exhibit greater movement by considering the economic benefits of the development. Thus, public attention may be a situational variable that particularly matters when negotiators serve constituents with strongly held perspectives on the issue at hand. Increased time pressure would have similar effects on adhering to the environmental frame while mediation may contribute to frame change.

Conclusion

The chapters in this book illuminate the various ways that the concept of framing is used in negotiation and related processes. We used the idea of metaphors to capture this variety. The metaphors are organized into categories that depict the primary emphasis of each chapter: a focus on context, interactions, or cognitive/psychological processes. The wide-ranging feature of the framing concept reveals both its power and limitations. The power is that the concept is elastic in the sense that it is a referent for many aspects of negotiation or mediation. This elasticity can facilitate analysis and comparison: for example—How do frames change when the process moves from the decision to

negotiate to the construction of an agenda to the way arguments are developed at the table? A key limitation is that, by covering so much, the concept loses analytical specificity. To remedy this limitation, we offer a more precise definition that may capture the interplay among context, interactions, and cognition. This definition suggests that frames as attitudes may mediate the relationship between negotiating structures or situations and outcomes. This would be an interesting next step in research on framing.

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